

# 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."*

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## President's column - *Research Grants*

In the survey of last autumn, members expressed the most uncertainty over the awarding of research grants. I realize that I have done a very poor job of keeping you informed of this activity which the board sees as an integral part of our mission—"preserving the natural history of the region through research, documentation and public education." While we do a lot of 'citizen science,' it is also important to support professionals in their scientific endeavors that contribute to this preservation.

In 2009, BCNA awarded a total of \$2,750 in three grants. One of these came from the Ken Evenson memorial fund for the study of our native cats. With \$1,000, Will Keeley of the City Open Space and Mountain Parks was able to purchase three infrared-flash motion detecting cameras, and refurbish a fourth camera. These were installed between September and November at various underpasses/culverts on both city and county open space lands. The results will help determine the frequency of use by bobcats and cougars of these 'wildlife corridors.' More box culverts may be installed as a result, which would reduce highway mortality. OSMP will submit a final report this fall, after an entire year's data have been recorded and analyzed.

A grant of \$750 was given to Jeffrey McClenahan, a graduate student at CU, to study the effects of urban habitat fragmentation on grasshopper species richness and diversity. Jeff studied 13 open space fragments along the Front Range last summer. He found urban fragmentation leads to a species-area relationship. In turn, the grasshopper communities that existed within smaller fragments were nested subsets of communities found in larger areas. These nested grasshopper communities may be the result of both selective extinctions due to a reduction in habitat area and selective colonization events associated with differences in landscape permeability and dispersal potential. Jeff's final report is in draft. Finally, in 2009, we gave \$1,000 for the second straight year to Loren Sackett, a doctoral candidate at CU, to help with her on-going study of the influence of plague on the evolution of prairie dog populations.

Both her 2008 and 2009 final reports are posted on the BCNA website (bcna.org), and are first rate.

This year, we've awarded three \$1,000 grants. A faculty member at CU, Carol Kearns, will monitor Boulder County bumblebee populations to begin assessing their conservation status. She will compare the genetic variability of current rare and abundant species, and also, by using older, pinned bumblebee specimens, will compare historical population structure with extant population structure. The use of genetics will provide insight into demographic changes in bumblebee populations that can be applied to conservation management. As one of the grant committee members opined, "you can't overestimate the importance of pollinators."

A second grant went to the Center for Native Ecosystems to help fund a large study of pika populations. The project has three goals: to develop a robust citizen science program involving local residents in the collection of data on pika distribution and change through time; to educate and engage local residents so that they become informed advocates for the conservation of Rocky Mountain species and ecosystems; and to work in coalition to protect remaining American pika populations and their habitat in the Southern Rocky Mountains. Our money will be used to produce training materials.

Finally, we awarded a grant to independent researcher Mysti Martin who will study changes in avian species composition and vegetation structure in a riparian habitat by analyzing bird banding data from the Allegra Collister Nature Preserve. Banding has gone on here for 50 years, the last 20 under the aegis of BCNA. Much of the data is in hand written form. Mysti will produce a searchable data base. She will also, using old aerial photos and a current plant survey, document the change in habitat at Allegra Collister which was closed to cattle grazing in 1990 when a conservation easement was granted jointly to BCNA and Boulder County Parks and Open Space. We are particularly excited about this proposal. We have been involved at Allegra Collister for so long and it is such a rich little area both for breeding and

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migratory stopovers. The data base provides the opportunity to study changes over time and will greatly enhance our ability to demonstrate the importance of undisturbed riparian areas at the plains/foothills interface.

I hope these project convince you that BCNA is contributing in a very positive way to our knowledge about where we live, and alleviates concerns you expressed about the giving of grants. The six projects briefly outlined here, and many others stretching back for more than a decade, are useful to land managers be they private individuals or government agencies. They aid in the 'preservation' that is the core of our organization.

-Michael Delaney



Gulf fritillaries, seldom seen in Colorado, appeared from the south this spring. Photo by Steve Jones.

**A Spring to Cherish**

by Steve Jones

Last year's cool wet spring produced some of the finest local wildflower displays any of us can remember, but this year has been off the charts. Noted for its variable, dry, and often violent weather, Boulder experienced five months of consistently moist and pleasant conditions, beginning in February and extending right through June. As of June 21, we had received 15" of precipitation for the year, about 4" above average. But it was the consistency of the moisture, and the near absence of hot days, strong winds, and arctic cold that seemed to distinguish this spring from all others.

Encouraged by all the blossoms and pleasantly warm days, butterflies came out in force. Jan Chu reports a remarkable influx of southern butterflies, possibly carried north by strong southern breezes. Rare

pipevine swallowtails showed up in many locations, along with dainty sulphurs, lycide sulphurs, sleepy oranges, marine blues, and gulf fritillaries. Jan's group even scared up a dusted skipper and southern dogface along the Anne U. White Trail.

The succession of pleasant days contributed either to a proliferation of migrating birds (unlikely) or a proliferation of birdwatchers (highly likely), leading to a number of unusual sightings. Up to four Carolina wrens were reported in Bear Canyon, along Boulder Creek, and along the Centennial Trail throughout May and early June. A rare Connecticut warbler entertained birders from all over Colorado at Walden Ponds in late May. Ovenbirds warbled in several foothills canyons, including Shanahan Canyon, where Betty Naughton, Sandra Laursen, Linda Andes-Georges, and Christian Nunes have reported a singing male in the same location for three consecutive Junes.

Participants on a Boulder Bird Club field trip found at least four singing orchard orioles along the White Rocks Trail. Christian reports that eastern bluebirds are nesting again on the mesa west of Dowdy Draw, and an OSMP hayfield monitor found three singing dickcissels at Teller Farms. Paula Hansley found several singing rose-breasted grosbeaks in Louisville. Locally threatened northern harriers are nesting in at least two wetlands this year--near Boulder Reservoir and near Lagerman Reservoir--and after a single nested Boulder Reservoir fledged four young last summer, there's hope the species might hang on in Boulder County.

As for mammals, the moose are coming--in force. Up to a dozen have been reported between Nederland and Eldora. It won't be long before they're strolling down the Pearl Street Mall--whoops, I forgot, that happened a few years ago. Tom Van Zandt got a glimpse of what was likely a rare ringtail in his backyard in May.

Creeks were running unusually high in mid-June. I fell in up to my waist (twice) while trying to cross Coal Creek south of Boulder. But it was worth getting a little wet. In a wetland on the south side of the creek, I found singing blue grosbeaks, lazuli buntings, yellow-breasted chats, and common yellowthroats--along with a cow elk and her two yearlings prancing through the chest-high grass.

Later that morning, I noticed that the smooth brome was growing five-feet-high along South Boulder Creek. A new form of tallgrass prairie, perhaps, engendered by a singular season.

**BCNA Summer and Early Fall Calendar**

Saturday, July 17, 7 a.m. to noon. **Crescent Meadows/Walker Ranch.** Ecostewards Karen Swigart (juniper@ecentral.com) and Steve Jones (curlwsj@comcast.net) will host a hike to see breeding birds and blooming flowers. We will walk about 5 miles with lots of stops. Meet at 7 at the Crescent Meadows parking area on Gross Dam Road. From Highway 93 turn west on Highway 72. Go 8.7 miles to Gross Dam Road (United Power). Turn right. Go about 2.5 miles to Crescent Meadows, on the right just down the hill after the railroad tracks. Or meet to carpool at 6:30 at the northeast corner of my eye Highway 93 and Eldorado Springs Drive.

Saturday, July 17, 8 a.m. – 3 p.m. **A Walk into the Alpine Tundra: A Family Field Trip.** Join naturalists Joyce Gellhorn, Jan Chu, and Larry Crowley on a hike up to Niwot Ridge to observe and record activities of plants, butterflies, birds, and mammals that live in the upper subalpine and alpine ecosystems. We will take time to key out plants and butterflies, we will observe pikas as they go about their business, and we will learn about the various components of these high altitude ecosystems. Open to families with children 7 to 15 years old (must be accompanied by an adult). Limited to 12 participants.

Meet at Long Lake Trailhead Parking Area in the Indian Peaks Wilderness Area at 8 am. Be sure to wear proper field clothes, hat and boots, and bring water, lunch, sunscreen, binoculars, field guides, and cameras. We will be hiking a total of 4 to 5 miles round trip. Please contact Joyce Gellhorn at 303-442-8123 or (jggellhorn@mac.com) to sign up for the field trip.

Saturday, September 11, 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.. **Walking tour of Arapaho Ranch.** Lee and Virginia Evans' ranch west of Nederland contains some of the best-preserved willow cars, montane meadows, and aspen groves in Boulder County. For years their ranch has been a focal point of BCNA research and restoration activities, and Lee and Virginia have contributed generously to BCNA land conservation projects. This leisurely hike and picnic lunch by Middle Boulder Creek will offer the opportunity to get to know this beautiful landscape, which is protected by a conservation easement with Colorado Open Lands. Limited to 15 participants. To reserve a space, contact Steve Jones (curlwsj@comcast.net; 303-494-2468)

Tuesday, October 5, 7 p.m. **"Ghost Bird" screening at Lafayette Public Library.** BCNA and Boulder County Audubon are co-sponsoring this free screening of the much acclaimed documentary chronicling the search for the ivory-billed woodpecker. 775 W. Baseline Rd. For details, visit the Boulder County Audubon website: [www.boulderadubon.org](http://www.boulderadubon.org).

**Autumn Colors in Aspens in Western Colorado**  
Joyce Gellhorn & Carol Schott

What causes deciduous trees to turn color? Why does one group of aspens turn gold, another orange, and still another reddish? Join us as we observe and record changes in this tree that grows throughout montane and subalpine ecosystems. We will discuss reproduction of aspen: their clonal nature, habitat requirements, sudden aspen dieback, birds and mammals in aspen groves, and the relationship of aspen to conifer trees.

We will also tour a couple of wineries (including wine tasting), visit an organic farm, and indulge in a farm dinner.

Dates: Wednesday Sept. 22 – Sunday Sept. 25, 2010  
Tuition: \$ 120 (\$ 110 for BCNA members). Limited to 12 participants.  
Participants will camp or stay in a B & B in Paonia. The cost of the farm meal on Friday evening will be an additional \$ 30 or \$35.

Recommended reading: Mutel, C, and Emerick, J, *From Grassland to Glacier*. Chap. 10, Aspen Groves or Benedict, A. *The Naturalist's Guide to the Southern Rockies*. Chap. 22, Leaf Dance

**Joyce Gellhorn** is the author of *Song of the Alpine*, a seasonal guide to Colorado's alpine, and *White-tailed Ptarmigan*, a photographic essay of birds that live in the alpine throughout the year. Joyce has taught field classes in Boulder County for 26 years to students ranging in age from four to eighty-four.

**Carol Schott** joins Joyce Gellhorn in teaching this class. Carol directed Science Discovery for the University of Colorado and designed and directed teacher training programs for the University of Colorado and for the National Center for Atmospheric Research. She now lives and farms in Paonia, CO.

**BCNA Education Courses**

<http://bcna.org/education.html>



F-2 tornado in Comanche Grassland. Photo by Steve Jones

**BCNA Atlasers Hit Comanche "Trifecta"**

Several Boulder County Nature Association members have adopted Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II blocks in and around Comanche National Grassland, and a dozen of us met for a prairie picnic and campout at Picture Canyon during the first week of June. Some of us have worked on both atlases, meaning we've been going down to the Comanche most springs for 25 years, and we've grown to appreciate the solitude and stark beauty even more than the birds. But this year's birding was something special.

At the rendezvous we learned that, collectively, we had bagged the heretofore unheralded but no-doubt coveted Comanche "trifecta": scissor-tailed flycatcher, vermilion flycatcher, and painted bunting. Actually, it was Comanche National Grassland wildlife biologist Stephanie Shively who found the scissor-tail, but we count her as an honorary member, since she has dropped in on several of our picnics. Jean-Pierre Georges and Linda

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BCNA Atlas Volunteers in Comanche National Grassland. Photo courtesy of Jean-Pierre Georges





*(Songbirds. . . Continued from page 4)*

Andes-Georges found the male vermillion in a remote canyon just north of the Oklahoma border. I found a pair of painted buntings in Holt Canyon, just west of Picture Canyon, and Linda witnessed the pair making out at dusk ("C" for courtship) two days later. These observations were particularly exciting since Naseem Munshi and Mike Tupper had seen a painted bunting in the same place two years ago, and the species has never been confirmed nesting in Colorado.

We ran into lots of other interesting things down there, including lesser prairie-chickens, a peregrine falcon, barn owls, burrowing owls, black-billed and yellow-billed cuckoos, rufous-crowned sparrows, horned lizards, some very friendly cows, a magnificent bobcat, and a nice healthy F-2 tornado that swirled through camp one evening.

If you'd like to join us next year, it's pretty easy. Just adopt an Atlas block somewhere in the region (go to the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II site, register, and click on Region 26), and let me know you'd like to participate in next year's rendezvous. There are still 40 or more Atlas blocks in southeastern Colorado in need of adoption. If you're not familiar with all the species down there, don't worry; there are hardly any trees, so you can locate most of the birds and get to know them pretty quickly.

- Steve Jones



Bobcat. Photo courtesy of Jean-Pierre Georges

Comanche area Atlas blocks adopted by BCNA volunteers:

Big Hole Canyon and Bisonte: Dave and Elaine Hill  
 Edler, Pritchett, and Tubs Springs: Steve Jones  
 Furnish Canyon East: Jean-Pierre and Linda Andes-Georges  
 Pintada Canyon: Naseem Munshi, Mike Tucker, and Toto  
 Reader Lake: George and Petrea Mah  
 Uteville: Terry Stuart

BCNA volunteers who have adopted Region 16 (Golden-Boulder-Greeley-North Denver) Atlas blocks: Chris Abrahamson, Linda Andes-Georges, Bev Baker, Sue Cass, A.D. Chesley, Todd Deininger, Dave Hallock, Paula Hansley, Dave and Elaine Hill, Charles Hundertmark, Steve Jones, Tina Jones, Leslie Larson, Petrea Mah, Scott Severs, Jean Sobolik, Karen Swigart, Joyce Takamine, Tom Wilberding. *Note: Many other members have helped out with Atlas surveys.*

**Fox Blog**

Shared by Linda Palmer

O.k., so I don't blog about anything and never will. But consider this my fox blog, which I want to share with a few of my nature loving buddies. So, for the two previous years, a fox couple has denned under the porch across the street and produced about 4 pups each year, very happily and to the entertainment of us and our neighbors.

This year, they are back; but there is one big problem: the house is being torn down to its basic structure for major remodeling, men working (pounding, sawing, drilling) all day, front yard filled with latrines, cement mixers, buzz saws----and the porch under which babes have been born is gone. But that didn't stop the family. This weekend five (or maybe six, hard to tell since they never hold still) pups emerged from a small hole they'd dug under the remaining foundation. They emerge at 7:30 a.m. just before the guys arrive; 3:00 p.m. in the midst of the work; and at 6:15 p.m. just after the guys leave. All very tenuous, and growing more so, as the workers tell me they will be ripping out the cement floor just over where the babies are---so they have been hoping mom and dad would move the pups before that happens (they've been lovely in their care, staying away from the spot as much as possible)

So, tonight, I'm here alone and at 6:15 p.m., as always the fox pups emerge and mom and also there to greet them (first time we've seen him in the week they've been out and about) is dad. The plan, it quickly becomes clear, is to move the babies across the street away from the dangerous house----and perhaps under our porch (which would thrill us but inflame our dog Molly's already inflamed anti-fox passions---actually the only energy she shows these days).

Unfortunately it is 6:15 p.m. and passing by is every car in Boulder (I swear, suddenly all going 80 mph), every bicyclist, every person-mit-dog. So Dad, being brave, goes to the corner and stands at the edge of the sidewalk and slightly in the street warning every offending human and their ridiculous contraptions to CLEAR THE ROAD (but they just don't listen to him yell). Mom, being at least as brave, tries to step into the street every time there is a lull in the traffic action, while (fruitlessly, I fear) trying to herd the 5 or 6 pups together, breaking up their play, calling (I'm sure calling, though somehow I can't hear it) for them to straighten up and get themselves into line to follow

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Full color editions of all BCNA newsletters online at:

[www.bcna.org](http://www.bcna.org)

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her across the momentarily (ONLY momentarily---so HURRY) street.

But alas, they are slow and recalcitrant (they think, I believe, that the latrines and noise and cement mixers and piles of wood and dirt are all part of the fun of being young), and Mom must retreat as more vicious vehicles and 4-legged and 2-legged evil beings thunder toward her (all at 80 mph, now, even the baby buggies and bicycles). Dad now comes to help herd them. Mom and Dad run boldly across the street together, yelling (I am sure) at the babies: COME ON, YOU LITTLE SNOTS! MOVE IT! Two come, three or four more stay behind, running behind the latrine and wrestling one another to the ground. Mom and Dad finally give up. They all go back in the hole, 30 minutes after they first emerged thinking, no doubt that yesterday, when it was 76 degrees and sunny might have been a better day for moving than today, when it was 46 degrees and snowing. Welcome to Colorado.

#### **New Colorado Birding Trail Routes Now on the Internet**

DURANGO, Colo. -- The Colorado Birding Trail has expanded to the west. Colorado's southwestern region, which includes the San Luis Valley, has been incorporated into the Colorado Birding Trail web site at [www.coloradobirdingtrail.com](http://www.coloradobirdingtrail.com).

This trail features 13 new routes and more than 200 sites that provide wildlife viewers and birders with outstanding opportunities to see unique species in Colorado's most spectacular environments. From shorebirds along the edges of Fruitgrower's Reservoir near Eckert to the sandhill cranes in the San Luis Valley, these routes highlight some of the best places for bird watching and wildlife viewing in Colorado.

The web site provides a variety of helpful information, including: species you're likely to see, habitats you'll encounter, location maps, directions, availability of public and private facilities, latitude/longitude coordinates of sites and a general description of each site. The web site also explains techniques and etiquette for watching birds, descriptions of other wildlife you're likely to see, and resources for learning more about birds and the environment of Colorado.

The Colorado Birding Trail was launched in 2007 by the Colorado Division of Wildlife in partnership with Audubon Colorado, Colorado Field Ornithologists, Colorado Scenic Byways, Great Outdoors Colorado,



Red fox in summer. Photo by Scott Severs

Playa Lakes Joint Venture, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and several heritage tourism groups.

"The web site provides valuable information for novice and experienced birders and wildlife watchers," said Jennifer Kleffner, watchable wildlife coordinator for the DOW's southwest region. "Our goals for the Birding Trail are to lead the public to locations where they can enjoy Colorado's natural resources, to economically link funds spent on wildlife watching to rural Colorado communities, and to increase awareness for species and conservation efforts with the general public and private landowners."

Bird watching can contribute significantly to the economies of rural Colorado communities. A formal economic study in 2008 found that birders who traveled more than a mile from home to watch birds spent more than \$700 million on their pastime in Colorado, which supported almost 13,000 jobs in the state.

"Because the habitat is so diverse, from red rock canyons and windswept sage flats to alpine tundra, there are a wide variety of birding opportunities," Kleffner said.

Some of the birds found primarily or only in the southwest region of Colorado include: the Gunnison-Sage grouse, white-tailed ptarmigan, black swift, acorn woodpeckers, Lucy's warbler, and boreal owls.

Free printed guides for southwest and southeast Colorado will be available in July at DOW offices and all Colorado State Welcome Centers.

For the best places to see birds in Colorado, go to: [www.coloradobirdingtrail.com](http://www.coloradobirdingtrail.com).

# Support the Boulder County Nature Association

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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_____ 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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