

BOULDER COUNTY NATURE ASSOCIATION



NATURE NEWS

Volume 21, Number 1
Winter 2004

Come to the Annual Meeting

*Tuimbe tucheze sote dam,
Let us sing, let us dance (Swahili),*

*Dam bō mon nu bá ta bai.
Give me your hand, and let's go (Cape Verdean).*

This year's annual meeting on Saturday, January 31, will feature West African food, dress, and music. So dust off those manioc and jollof rice recipes (there's a good assortment on the Internet), slip into your dancing sandals, and come to Naseem and Mike's, 2595 N. 119th St., around 6 p.m. This year's speaker is us! Bring 5-15 slides or prints of a recent adventure to share with the group. Everyone, especially children, is most welcome. 303-673-0933.

BCNA Board Elections

We have at least one, possibly two, openings on the BCNA Board. Infusion of new energy from first-time board members keeps the organization alive. If you would like to serve or to nominate someone else to serve, please contact Bruce Bland (bruce_2u@hotmail.com) or Sue Cass (cass@colorado.edu) by January 15.

Support the Bears and Orchids

Upcoming open houses and hearings concerning the City of Boulder Open Space Visitor Plan will affect the future of our wild lands for generations. Will black bears be able to forage in foothills canyons without being harassed by hikers and dogs? Will trail-free areas remain for elk herds and mountain lions? Will rare plant communities receive protection from trampling and erosion?

We ask every BCNA member to attend one meeting or to write one letter: Public meetings are tentatively scheduled for February 11 and 25, time and place to be determined.

Go to www.visitorplan.com to review the plan, submit comments, or access the updated schedule of public hearings and open houses

Help Wanted! Volunteer Opportunities

With the spring field season only a few weeks away, it's the perfect time to get involved with new projects. Here are a few possibilities:

Conservation committee: Help us remain an effective voice for Boulder County's wildlife and wild places. Contact Linda Mahoney (lindaanimalart@aol.com) or Bruce Bland (bruce_2u@hotmail.com).

Education committee: Join us in planning our BCNA field classes and publishing the education brochure. Contact Carol Kampert (303-499-3049) or Carol McLaren Schott (303-530-9108).

Ecosystem stewardship initiative: Serve on the organizing committee for this new ecosystem monitoring project. Contact Steve Jones, 303-494-2468; stephen.jones@earthlink.net.

Ecosystem symposium: Help with registration and hospitality at this year's conference. Contact Bruce Bland: bruce_2u@hotmail.com.

Cliff-nesting raptors: Volunteers are always needed to monitor golden eagle and falcon nests in the foothills. Patience and a willingness to hike up steep slopes are the basic prerequisites. Contact Lisa Dierauf, Boulder OSMP volunteer coordinator: dierauf@ci.boulder.co.us.

Bird banding: We are looking for a certified bird-bander to help organize banding at the Allegra Collier Preserve. Contact Joe Harrison: 303-772-3481.

Newsletter: Help edit and design the quarterly newsletter. Contact Steve Jones: 303-494-2468; stephen.jones@earthlink.net.

BCNA Winter Calendar

December 15-February 15: Count period for Indian Peaks Winter Bird Count. For information call Bill Kaempfer: 303-939-8005; kaempfer@colorado.edu.

Saturday, January 17: Wintering raptor tour with Jim McKee (303-494-3393; jimmmckee@prodigy.net) and Sue Cass. Meet at the Four Mile Creek Open Space parking lot, on Lee Hill Road 0.3 miles west of Broadway, at 10 a.m. Return around 3 p.m. Bring your binoculars and field guides, along with scopes and FRS radios if you have them. Last year, participants on this trip saw 90 raptors, including 30 bald eagles.

Saturday, January 31, 6 p.m.: BCNA annual meeting. Come to Naseem and Mike's for a West African potluck followed by our short annual meeting and an "open carousel" slide program. Bring up to 15 slides or prints of a recent adventure to share with the group. 2595 North 119 St., Lafayette. 303-673-0933.

Sunday, February 8: BCNA board meeting (4-6 p.m.) and potluck. All members are welcome. Steve Jones: 303-494-2468; stephen.jones@earthlink.net.

Saturday, March 13: Spring welcoming walk at Sawhill Ponds. Bring something tropical, sunny, delicious, or passionate to share at a potluck breakfast by Boulder Creek. Meet at Sawhill Ponds Wildlife Area, west of 75th St. between Valmont and Jay Roads, at 7 a.m. Steve Jones: 303-494-2468; stephen.jones@earthlink.net.

Early April: Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium. Look for announcements on the Nature-Net, or visit www.BCNA.org

Sightings

On the night of November 2 Jim Knopf noticed a mule deer doe and her fawn ice-skating on the roof of Kohler Reservoir. They kept peering over the edge, but didn't seem able to summon the courage to make the six-foot jump back down to the ground.

Fifty snow geese flew over Shanahan Ridge on the morning of November 24, heading due south. They made a pure-white "V" against the cerulean sky. Many observers saw or heard flocks of sandhill cranes flying over Boulder in October

Carol Kampert saw an osprey fishing at Teller Lakes on November 8; an American white pelican paddled around nearby.

Dorothy Emerling submitted a striking photo of five trumpeter swans on Barker Reservoir in late November. On the 27th the swans flew down to Boulder Reservoir to get in position for the Christmas Bird Count. Three tundra swans also showed up at Boulder Reservoir that weekend.



Trumpeter Swans on Barker Reservoir
Dorothy Emerling

John Prather reported a female long-tailed duck (Oldsquaw) at Pella Crossing Open Space, south of Hygiene, on November 29.

The Boulder Christmas Bird Count on December 14 turned up a near-record 105 species, including several trumpeter swans, a lesser yellowlegs, a California gull, a band-tailed pigeon, and 6 great-tailed grackles. Foothills bird numbers were down due to a poor ponderosa pine cone crop.

Drought watch: Here's the 365-day percentage of average precipitation for selected regional sites through December 15: Boulder 115, Pueblo 95, Alamosa 90, Grand Junction 80, Goodland 69, Dodge City 99, Amarillo 69, Albuquerque 75, Farmington 90, Winslow (AZ) 40, Cedar City (UT) 90, Salt Lake City 93, Casper 105, Cheyenne 60, Scottsbluff 50, North Platte 94, Rapid City 67. "Extreme" drought conditions persist in northern Arizona, Utah, west-central South Dakota, and western Nebraska. "Exceptional" drought conditions affect much of Idaho and southwestern Montana. www.nws.noaa.gov

Winter Natural Events Calendar

January 1-2: On average the coldest days of the year in Boulder.

January 5: Latest sunrise of the year (7:23 a.m.) .

January 7: Full moon rises at 4:49 p.m.
 When the Snow Blows like Spirits in the Sun (Arapaho)
 Moon of the Strong Cold (Cheyenne)
 Hunger Moon (Lakota)

Early January: Beavers mate and black bear cubs are born. Great horned owls hoot and eastern screech-owls whinny in advance of nesting. As nesting time approaches, screech-owls change their vocalizations, warbling more and whinnying less. Once they lay their eggs in late March or early April, they grow nearly silent.

Late January: Some of Boulder's most dramatic windstorms have occurred during this period, including January 23, 1971 (147 mph) and January 24, 1992 (143 mph). Because our air is relatively thin and maximum gusts usually are of short duration, our windstorms are generally less destructive than even weak hurricanes. From 1967-95, Boulder experienced 100 mph winds on more than 35 occasions. From 1996-2003, no 100 mph wind events were reported.

February 2: Candlemas. This festival, a precursor to Groundhog Day and Valentine's Day, honors the stirrings of new growth and passion that accompany the waxing light of late winter.

February 6: Full moon rises at 5:52 p.m.
 Frost Sparkling in the Sun (Arapaho)
 Moon when Geese Come Home (Omaha)
 Just-Doing-That Moon (Osage)

Early February: Great horned owls begin to nest. Early Easter daisies (*Townsendia exscapa*) bloom on Six-Mile-Fold. Young black-and-yellow orb weavers (also known as garden spiders) hatch in sacks that contain up to 1400 eggs. They molt inside these nests before emerging in spring, when you may see them ballooning through the air on silk parachutes. Mature females build wheel-shaped webs that are often suspended from tallgrasses. Most females eat their web each night and build a new one the following morning.

Late February: Golden eagles refurbish their nests in the foothills. Bald eagles nest along Boulder Creek. Mourning cloak butterflies may begin to emerge from their hibernating nooks beneath aspen bark in Gregory Canyon. Mountain bluebirds return to the plains. Foxes and coyotes mate.

March 6: Full moon rises at 5:53 p.m.
 Buffaloes Dropping Their Calves (Arapaho)
 Water Stands in Ponds Moon (Ponca)
 Sore Eyes Moon (Lakota)

Early March: Blue-winged teal arrive from South America; arrival dates seem to be getting earlier every year (global warming or more birdwatchers?). Chorus frogs begin to sing. A half-million sandhill cranes congregate along the Platte River between Oshkosh and Grand Island (see related article on page 6).

March 19: The Vernal Equinox, 11:49 p.m..

Late March: Pasque flowers (*Pulsatilla patens*), sand lilies (*Leucocrinum montanum*), and yellow violets (*Viola nuttallii*) bloom on the Dakota Hogback. The first Swainson's hawks arrive from Argentina. Snowshoe hares and long-tailed weasels begin their prevernal molt. Black-tailed prairie dogs are born. Greenback cutthroat trout spawn.



Black and Yellow Garden Spider
 Steve Jones

Another Great Season at Lykins Gulch

Fall bird banding was fun, interesting, and productive. From September 1 through October 25, we captured and banded 605 individuals of 48 species. Not many mornings were missed. There is a magnetism, a difficult-to-resist lure that pulls a dedicated bander back to the station. The rewards vary depending on your perspective; but the bird banding really gets under your skin.

Is it the idea that a small but measurable contribution is being made to our understanding and knowledge of birds? Or is it the sense of awe and appreciation you feel when holding that 10-gram feathered creature and you realize it has unerringly traveled thousands of miles with only the aid of its internal GPS? Sure, it's those thoughts plus a personal satisfaction that is private and deeply felt.

Here are some highlights from this past season:

- A first palm warbler. This particular bird was of the western subspecies and did not show extensive yellow in its plumage.
- Our second western scrub-jay, our third and fourth sage thrashers, fourth and fifth rock wrens, and fifth Townsend's warbler.
- Numerical highs for ruby-crowned kinglet (21) and yellow-rumped warbler (142), along with an impressive number of Wilson's warblers (107).
- A red fox eyeing a songbird struggling in a net; a few coyotes skulking around; our familiar and graceful white-tailed deer; the small herd of elk across the road; fresh bear scat steaming in the morning sun; and a yellow-bellied racer swallowing a vole.

One bander among us, Virginia Dionigi, has truly set the standard. She is first to arrive at the station, usually before sunrise, and is often the last to leave after documenting the day's banding effort. We have all enjoyed the baked treats that she prepares and brings each morning. And, as our "data recorder," she is a stickler for accuracy and keeps the rest of us on our toes. Even on non-banding days, she is busy laundering the bird-holding bags, painting the worktable, or attending to other details. Children are her favorite guests at the preserve. She motivates and inspires all of us.

BCNA members are always welcome to join us for a morning of banding and birding. Check with Virginia or me to find out what the schedule might be next spring or simply to learn more about the banding program and the Allegra Collister Nature Preserve.

- Joe Harrison (303-772-3481), for fellow volunteers Virginia Dionigi, Tony Esposito, Maggie Boswell, and Tom Delaney.

Books: Slivers of Light in a Somber World

Small Wonder, by Barbara Kingsolver. HarperCollins, New York, 2002. \$12.95
Reviewed by Ruth Carol Cushman

Biologist Barbara Kingsolver has written many enchanting novels, such as *Prodigal Summer* (my favorite) and *Animal Dreams*. In the aftermath of 9/11, she wrote *Small Wonder* (HarperCollins, 2002), a collection of essays portraying the wrongs humanity is imposing on the earth, on wildlife, on plant life, and on humanity itself and urging us to fight against these abuses. She also writes of the small wonders that help stave off despair and that give us hope, things like scarlet macaws launching like rockets against the blue sky and a line of "dipper gourds hung down from the trellis over our heads in a graduated array, like God's wife's measuring spoons". She ends with this sentence "Maybe life doesn't get any better than this, or any worse, and what we get is just what we're willing to find: small wonders, where they grow."

Dragonflies Made Easy

Dragonflies through Binoculars: a Field Guide to Dragonflies of North America, by Sidney W. Dunkle. Oxford University Press, 2000. \$29.95. Reviewed by Steve Jones.

This neat little field guide offers color photographs, range maps, and descriptions of all 307 dragonfly species found in North America. Since only about 50 species commonly occur in Boulder County, I found it fairly easy to identify my dragonfly photos using this book. The section on mating and reproduction is fascinating.

Conservation: Preble's Jumping Mice Face New Round of Threats

If you remember when the Preble's meadow jumping mouse was a frequent visitor to the front page of local newspapers, you are about to experience *déjà vu*. A host of legal and political developments will soon force this imperiled mammal back into the limelight.

For starters, Mountain States Legal Foundation, a property-rights organization that once employed Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, filed a lawsuit challenging the listing of Preble's under the Endangered Species Act. Mountain States is also suing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for failing to respond to a petition to remove Preble's from the list.

Also, Denver metro counties, including Boulder County, are developing Preble's Habitat Conservation Plans. When done properly, these allow some habitat destruction in exchange for protection of more important habitat. In practice, they rarely provide significant conservation benefits.

Thirdly, results from a study of Preble's genetics are pending. Opponents of Preble's protection argue that the mouse is not a distinct subspecies and does not deserve Endangered Species Act protection. Although studies on the degree of genetic differentiation between subspecies rarely are definitive, the results will have a considerable impact on the debate over Preble's management.

Ultimately, the controversy is about much more than the survival of a single mouse subspecies. New housing developments, highway expansions, gravel mines, and other products of poorly managed growth threaten both Preble's and the important ecosystem of which it is part, not to mention our own drinking water quality.

Center for Native Ecosystems watchdogs the Fish and Wildlife Service and challenges the efforts of organizations like Mountain States Legal Foundation. The coming year will provide important opportunities for residents of Boulder County and other Front Range communities to participate in decisions about Preble's and its habitat. For more information or to join CNE's action alert list, email cne@nativeecosystems.org.

- Jacob Smith

Shrinking Glaciers and Bleaching Reefs: Disturbing Signs of Global Warming

The December, 2003, *Audubon* magazine focuses on the impacts of global warming on glaciers, coral reefs, and wildlife. Here are some of the authors' conclusions:

- In 1850 there were an estimated 150 glaciers in Glacier National Park. Today only 26 remain, and all probably will be gone by 2030.

- Four-fifths of the ice atop Mount Kilimanjaro has vanished during the past 80 years, and all of the remaining ice and snow will likely vanish by 2020.

- The 1990s was the warmest decade in more than a century, and 1998 had the highest global average temperature ever recorded.

- On average the Arctic has warmed nearly 5 degrees Fahrenheit over the past 50 years, compared with only 1 degree Fahrenheit of warming globally. The snow and ice in the Arctic reflect up to eighty percent of solar radiation, so melting the ice pack will lead to accelerated warming. Climate models suggest that the region will warm 7 to 12° F during the next century.

- Caribou endure hordes of mosquitoes, which can leave their pelts bloodied and scabby. Now the mosquitoes are hatching out three to four weeks earlier. Arctic-nesting Brunnich's guillemots have been forced off their nests by these clouds of early-hatching insects.

- Ocean warming has contributed to "bleaching" of coral reefs, which leaves them almost lifeless. Reefs are more than 50 percent gone in Bermuda, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, Jamaica, western Panamá, and the Red Sea. The Great Barrier Reef is one-third of the way toward ecological extinction.

The good news is that all the world's major political leaders, except one, are aware of these conditions, and environmental groups worldwide are calling for action. "The White House may be dragging its heels on the greatest environmental threat facing the planet today. But all across the political spectrum, Republicans, Democrats, Senators, representatives, and industry leaders agree that climate change is for real and that it must be dealt with--now." *Audubon* is available online.

Events: Experiencing the Annual Crane Spectacle

At last a glint of sun reveals the approach of an echelon of birds. On motionless wings they emerge from the lifting mists, sweep a final arc of sky, and settle in clamorous descending spirals to their feeding grounds. A new day has begun on the crane marsh. - Aldo Leopold

Two events in March offer the chance to get very close to thousands of sandhill cranes that are winging south from Siberia, the Arctic, and the northern Rockies to wintering areas in New Mexico, Texas, and the Gulf Coast.

Audubon Rivers and Wildlife Celebration, Kearney, Nebraska (March 19-21). Join conservationists from throughout North America at this popular and inexpensive annual conference in central Nebraska. Field trips to blinds along the Platte River offer the opportunity to see up to 40,000 sandhill cranes taking off at dawn or descending into their island roosts at dusk. Participants also can view dancing prairie-chickens in the sandhills north of the river and hundreds of thousands of snow geese and white-fronted geese in the nearby Rainwater Basin waterfowl production area. This year's featured speakers include Jeb Barzden, of the International Crane Foundation, Audubon Magazine field editor Frank Graham Jr., wildlife photographer Bub Blake, and University of Nebraska ecologist Paul Johnsgard. www.audubon.org/states/ne/rvswlf.htm

Monte Vista Crane Festival (dates not yet announced). This annual festival in Colorado's San Luis Valley celebrates the arrival of 20,000 sandhill cranes from the south. Several hundred thousand ducks and geese also stop at Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge in March. Check the Crane Fest web site for current conditions; last year, drought greatly reduced the amount of water and number of cranes at the refuge. www.cranefest.com

Wildfire Forums

The Southern Rockies Conservation Alliance is working in conjunction with local environmental groups, land management agencies, and the scientific community to organize Community Fire Education Forums. SRCA is an informal alliance of 26 conservation groups committed to protecting and restoring native biological diversity and wilderness quality lands of the greater Southern Rockies.

The first forum will be held in Boulder on January 21, 2004 at 6:30 p.m. at the Boulder City Council Chambers (1777 Broadway). The forum is free and open to the public. For more information or to sign up to help and/or attend, contact Lisa Smith at (303) 534-7066 x 208; lisa@cenviro.org.

- Lisa Smith

Damned By Their Own Words

Back in the early 1960s the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers had grandiose plans to dam the Grand Canyon. I mounted a library display opposing the project and was promptly pilloried by a supporter of the project. Because I had broken the law by pushing a political cause on library time with library resources, I had to mount another display showing the other point of view. I was delighted to do so using a poem from one of their own brochures. This bit of hubris was anonymous, as I remember:

*A deep blue lake
Where no lake was before
Brings man a little closer to God.*

- Ruth Carol Cushman



Cranes Taking off from Platte River before Dawn
Steve Jones

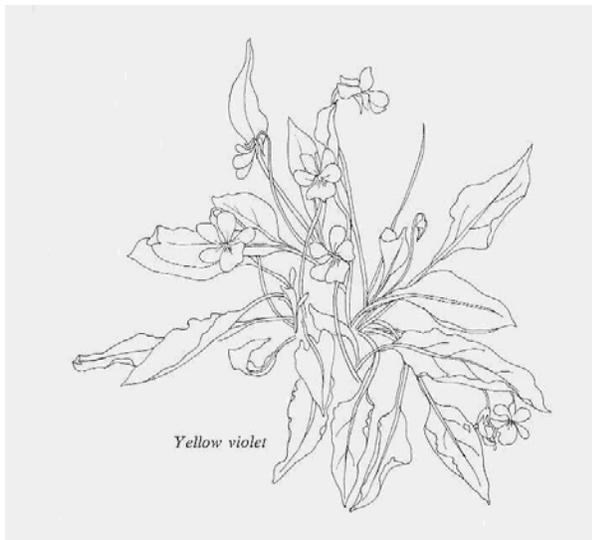
BCNA Research Grants

Two grants are available this year for local natural history research. A general grant of up to \$500 is offered for studies of native ecosystems and their wildlife populations. The Ken Evenson Wild Cat Research Fund offers up to \$2000 for studies contributing to our understanding and protection of mountain lions or bobcats in the northern Front Range area.

To apply, send a short description of your project, including a detailed budget listing other funding sources, to Scott Severs, President, Boulder County Nature Association, P.O. Box 493, Boulder, CO 80306; rostrhamus@aol.com. This year's submission deadline is April 15.

Beverly Berry Memorial Fund

We thank all those who have donated to the Beverly Berry Memorial Fund: Mary Blue, Becky Druger, Joyce Rutter Kaye, Kristine Lyng Nielsen, Marilyn Sheely, Caroline Williams, Patricia Yanchunas. Money from this fund will be used to support BCNA education and research programs.



Yellow Violet (*Viola nuttallii*)
Margy Lanham

BCNA Board of Directors

President.....Scott Severs (303-442-1322)
Vice President....Steve Jones (303-494-2468)
Treasurer.....Vickie Flower (303-684-9030)
Secretary.....Jan Carnes (303-823-5350)

Bruce Bland (303-499-8612)
Sue Cass (303-494-5345)
Joyce Gellhorn (303-442-8123)
Barbara Hawke (303-527-1819)
Jim McKee (303-494-3393)

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).
- *Education*: Carol McLaren (303-530-9108) and Carol Kampert (303-499-3049).
- *Indian Peaks Bird Counts*: Dave Hallock (303-258-3672) and Bill Kaempfer (303-939-8005).
- *National Forest Management*: Tim Hogan (303-444-5577).
- *Newsletter*: Steve Jones and George Oetzel.
- *Website*: George Oetzel (303-543-3712).
- *Parties, Special Events*: Naseem Munshi (303-673-0933).
- *Publications*: Steve Jones (303-494-2468).
- *State and Regional Wildlife Issues*: Jim McKee (303-494-3393).
- *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:
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

Name _____

Address _____

Phone and/or E-mail (optional) _____

Type of Membership:

_____ Student/Senior (65 or over)	\$10
_____ General Member	\$15
_____ Family or Household	\$20
_____ Supporter	\$30
_____ Founder	\$100
_____ Life Member	\$300
_____ Corporate	\$500

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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