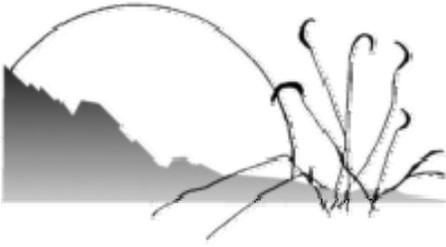


BOULDER COUNTY NATURE ASSOCIATION



Volume 25, Number 1
Winter 2007

BCNA Ecosystem Plan – North and South St. Vrain ECAs

This is the third in a series of articles that explores the evolution of the Ecosystem Plan and the current status of the core preserves and habitat connectors.

The largest foothills to montane Environmental Conservation Areas (ECAs) are centered on the North St. Vrain and South St. Vrain Canyons. At 34,500 acres and 21,800 acres respectively, they represent some of the finest roadless foothill habitat along the Front Range. Both areas contain old-growth ponderosa pine forests, elk winter concentration areas, golden eagle nest sites, and good habitat for mountain lion and black bear. The North St. Vrain is a bighorn sheep concentration area, a designated Wild Trout Stream, and contains a sizeable population of the rare plant Larimer aletes. Both ECAs contain imperiled plant communities comprised of foothill grass and shrub species that have been degraded over much of the West.

During the mid-1980s conservation efforts focused on protecting these areas from additional degradation. A proposal to place a dam and reservoir along the North St. Vrain between North and South Sheep Mountains spearheaded an effort, largely through the work of BCNA's Mike Figgs, to recognize the ecological importance of the canyon and to stop the potential of any new main stem dams on the creek.

With this accomplished, BCNA worked towards protection of private lands within these areas. A major early success was convincing The Nature Conservancy to purchase Sheep Mountain Ranch, located in the heart of the North St. Vrain Canyon, until federal funds were found so the Forest Service could purchase the property. The 700-acre Riverside Ranch, located west of Coffintop Mountain, was deeded to Boulder County Open Space after the property owner transferred the development rights to a more acceptable receiving area. The Boulder County Land Trust was actively talking with a number of the large ranch owners in both of

the canyons. In the end, Boulder County Open Space purchased conservation easements or outright fee title to these lands. Conservation easements were purchased on the Trevarton Ranch, located west of North Foothills Highway, and the Lillian Trevarton Ranch east of Meeker Park. The final pieces were the purchases of the Hall Ranch and Heil Valley Ranch. With these acquisitions, the lower portions of the North St. Vrain and South St. Vrain ECAs were protected. Boulder County has continued to fill in the gaps in these ECAs through the purchase of conservation easements and fee title interest.

The update of the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forest Plan helped increase the protection of these areas. Much of the North St. Vrain ECA was designated as a Research Natural Area, while the Coffintop area of the North St. Vrain and the Central Gulch portion of the South St. Vrain were designated as Core Area. These designations increase the level of protection awarded these special canyons of north-central Boulder County.

-Dave Hallock

Float through the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge at the BCNA Annual Meeting

The BCNA annual meeting, Saturday, February 17, will feature a program by Joyce Gellhorn, Naseem Munshi, Mike Tupper, Carol Schott, and Jim Schott on their float trip down the Kongakut River, near the eastern edge of Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Expect vibrant images of wildflowers, wildlife, and wilderness. An unprogrammed potluck and annual elections will precede the program.

The potluck begins at 6 p.m., at Cher Mathews' house, 1041 Champion Circle, in Longmont. Members and non-members are cordially invited.

Directions: Go north on Airport Road from the Longmont Diagonal to 9th Avenue. At the stoplight, turn right on 9th and make a left at the first turn (Wood Court). Turn left at Doral Drive and right on Champion Circle. As you go around the circle, Cher's house is on the left.

Winter Calendar

Saturday, January 6, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.: Wintering raptor tour with Jim McKee. Meet at the Cottonwood Marsh parking lot at Walden Ponds. Expect to see bald eagles, golden eagles, harriers, hawks, and a falcon or two. Bring binoculars and/or spotting scope, a field guide and FRS radios if you have them; as well as lunch or a snack and water. Be sure to dress for the weather as we will be out of the cars frequently.

Saturday, February 17, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.: Wintering raptor tour with Sue Cass, Jim Eide, and Steve Jones. This trip will originate at the Lefthand trailhead at 39th Street and Neva Road. See January 6 field trip notice for details.

Saturday, March 10, 7:30-11 a.m.: Spring-welcoming breakfast hike at Sawhill Ponds. Join Steve Jones (stephen.jones@earthlink.net) for this annual celebration of spring. Bring something warm, sweet, spicy, or passionate to share at the old cottonwood log beside Boulder Creek. We should see a good number of raptors, along with waterfowl and early-singing passerines. Meet at the Sawhill Ponds parking area, west of 75th St. between Valmont and Jay roads. Dress warmly (it's colder around the ponds).

Sunday, March 18, 5-7 p.m. Ecosystem stewardship project annual meeting and potluck (bring anything edible). We'll share discoveries from last year's field work and plan for the coming year. New volunteers are especially welcome (see related article, page 000). Nancy and Steve's place, 3543 Smuggler Way, in South Boulder (take Greenbriar past Fairview High School, go five more blocks, and turn right). stephen.jones@earthlink.net; 303-494-2468.

Wednesday, April 18, 6:45 p.m. Join Cyndra Dietz for a slide show and talk on the reintroduction of big game onto former ranches that have been converted into private game reserves in South Africa. Cyndra spent the summer of 2006 doing radio-collar tracking of large mammals on one of these reserves, and traveling to other parts of north-east South Africa including Kruger National Park, Swaziland and the Drakensberg Mountains. This presentation will be given on at the George Reynolds Branch library, 3595 Table Mesa Drive in Boulder.

Solstice Sunrise, One Day Late

On December 22 seven of us managed to dig our cars out of the drifts and drive east on Valmont Road, running a slalom course through abandoned vehicles humped over with snow. We skied and snowshoed down to Boulder Creek, where ducks paddled around in the mist and frosty willows glistened like crystal chandeliers. After soaking up the sun while exchanging thoughts and poems, we sang "Light is Returning" to the soothing percussion of the creek's rippling waters. As we headed back, a prairie falcon, improbably white against the cerulean sky, fluttered over our heads.

Here's one of the messages shared that morning:

Winter Solstice 2006
by Bob Wing

*There is a way
When sun and stars and planets align
To see past the here and now
To what was and what will be
And to hold it all.*

*Time is still here for this moment
I am still here.*

*I awaken this day
Do I chance to act with conviction
Like a natural architect
That I might see vast plans unfolding in the
smallest point
Embracing friends, enemies, and strangers
alike?*

*In the in between
Like all shifting events
Is light and life
Continually born*

Here I choose to stand.

Winter Natural Events Calendar

January 3: The full moon rises at 4:52 p.m.
When the Snow Blows like Spirits in the Sun (Arapaho)
Hunger (Lakota)
Strong Cold (Cheyenne)

Mid-January: Look and listen for American dippers along Boulder Creek just west of 75th St. In winter they come down from the mountains to dive for insects in ice-free stretches of water at the base of the foothills. Dippers sing throughout the winter months as they advertise and defend foraging territories. Their rich song, an assortment of whistled or a trilled phrases, has an exuberant, echoing quality.

January 25-31: Venus is prominent in the western sky at dusk. Look for Mercury in the same general location. Saturn is prominent in the southern sky in Leo.

February 2: Candlemas. This festival of lights, 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. The full moon rises on this day at 6 p.m.

Frost Sparkling in the Sun (Arapaho)
Raccoons (Lakota)
When the Geese Come Home (Omaha)

Early-February: Bald eagles have been working on their nests and will soon lay their eggs. Last year five pairs nested in Boulder County. Three of the nests were successful, fledging a total of six young. All of the nests were located in riparian corridors on the plains that are protected from human recreational and commercial activity.

February 10: Saturn is at opposition (closest to Earth), usually the best time to observe the planet and its moons. Look in the southern sky in Leo just to the right of the bright star Regulus.

Late-February: The first good-sized flocks of migrating bluebirds usually arrive about now. However, this year, a few mountain bluebirds, western bluebirds, and even eastern bluebirds showed up on the Boulder Audubon Christmas Bird Count.

March 3: The full moon rises at 5:54 p.m. A total lunar eclipse occurs at 4:20 p.m. (You would need to drive to Omaha to see it).

Sore Eyes (Lakota)
Buffaloes Dropping Their Calves (Arapaho)
Water Stands in Ponds (Ponca)

Mid-March to early April: If you're planning on going to Nebraska to see the sandhill crane spectacle, the best times are March 10 through April 5, when 600,000 cranes gather along the Platte River. Check out the Nebraska Audubon web site for details. For great sandhill crane viewing (along with snow geese, bald eagles, wild turkeys, and river otters) within four hours of Boulder, consider Clear Creek Wildlife Area, on the North Platte River east of Lewellen.

March 20, 6:07 p.m.: Vernal Equinox. A celebration of rebirth, the arrival of spring, and new growth.

This was a time for blessing the fields and animals. Eggs, powerful symbols of fertility, were painted and used in rituals. Flowers were worn, placed on the altars, and mixed into cooked dishes full of seeds, nuts, and leafy vegetables. The Roman Venus Feast and the Greek festival of Aphrodite were held around April 1. *Eoster* is the Saxon fertility goddess.



American Dipper, Boulder Creek.
Photo by Steve Jones

Christmas Bird Counters Find 106 Species

For the second consecutive year, observers found a near-record 106 species on the Boulder Audubon Christmas Bird Count, held on December 17. Uncommon to rare species included Clark's Grebe, Black-crowned Night Heron, Greater Yellowlegs, California Gull, Bushtit, Marsh Wren, Western Bluebird, Eastern Bluebird, and Brown Thrasher.

Numbers have been boosted in recent years by the splitting off of new species (Clark's Grebe and Cackling Goose); invasion of southwestern birds and exotics (Common Grackle, Great-tailed Grackle, Eurasian Collared Dove); and a recent tendency for more species to overwinter in Boulder County (Double-crested Cormorant, Mourning Dove, Yellow-rumped Warbler). So seeing a lot of species isn't necessarily all good news (think global warming and suburban habitat gentrification). But the annual turnout of more than 100 volunteers (and the very useful data they generate) definitely is.

Much thanks to Bill Schmoker for again organizing this year's count.

Fall 2007 Banding at ACNP

Our small band of intrepid banders soldiered on this fall, logging 20 banding days between September 19 and October 16. We put in 1078 net-hours (1 12-meter net open for 1 hour = 1 net-hour) and banded 482 birds.

We added one new species and one new subspecies to the list of birds banded: Cassin's Vireo and Yellow-shafted Flicker. This brings the list of species banded to 120. We also banded the first Ovenbird since 1998. Fall is when we catch Black-capped Chickadees. This year we banded 22 individuals, the most since the fall of 2000. As usual we banded more Wilson's Warblers than any other species, with Gamble's White-crowned Sparrows coming second and Orange-crowned Warblers third.

A highlight came on our last day when we recaptured a partial albino Blue Jay that we had banded in the fall of 2000.

-Maggie Boswell

Monarch

*The larva, curled on a pale green leaf, is so delicate
that even now I sense the presence of wings
the tiny legs are still, the antennae, front and rear, alert
black bands, the width of an eyelash, circle the body
interspersed with stripes of cream and celadon
that shine like silk in the morning mist
not at all like the bird droppings of other evolutions
she is so quiet so still so peaceable living in her world
defined for the moment by the parameters of a Milkweed
she fills her body with its poisonous sap
while she grows and spins her pupa
when her damp wings break open and
temper for the long trek to the mountains of Michoacán
the birds will keep their distance, forewarned of her toxins
it will take three generations for her descendants
to return to the tall grasses of this prairie
to adorn the Big Bluestems waving their reddish tops in the breeze
to flutter through the waxy elegance of the Indian Grass
and
the inflorescence of the piercing Cordgrass
to settle on the soft spikelets of Switchgrass
and dine once more on the leaves of Milkweed
and I ask myself how many generations of mine will it take
to find the magnetic compass that will lead us to this peace
so we may grace the earth as gently as the butterfly*

-Bev Melius

Ecosystem Stewards Getting to Know Bushtits, Bears, and Butterflies

Would you like to have a wild place all your own where you can commune with nature, become intimately acquainted with the resident birds and mammals, and contribute to their future well-being? That's the vision of the Ecosystem Stewardship Initiative, a new volunteer project sponsored by BCNA and Boulder County Audubon.

So far, about 20 volunteers have adopted wild areas and another 30 have helped out with bird, butterfly, and recreation surveys. Since no volunteer is expected to monitor everything (you receive a menu of possible tasks, ranging from counting dogs to mapping weeds), all levels of expertise are welcome. Areas that have yet to be adopted include South Boulder Creek Trail west of Broadway, Bluebell Canyon, Skunk Canyon, Grand Gulch, Stearns Lake, and most of the Indian Peaks Wilderness.

Last year, Paula Hansley (Shadow Canyon) found a Cooper's hawk nest (we actually recorded the begging sounds of the young) and documented the first nesting bushtits in the Boulder Mountain Park since 1955! John and Jan Carnes (Coulson Gulch), aided by butterfly experts Donn and Kathy Cook, developed a list of wildflowers, breeding birds, and butterflies. The birds include dusky grouse, flammulated owl, and common poorwill. A.D. Chesley and Marlene Brunning (Walden and Sawhill Ponds) established permanent bird point-count stations and observed American bitterns and green herons.

Ron Butler and I (Long Canyon) documented and photographed more than 50 species of butterflies, and University of Colorado INVEST intern Laura Stevenson helped us map and GPS locations of Gambel's oak trees and Abert's squirrel territories. One morning we heard a calling saw-whet owl (pitch of b-flat, according to Laura), and during other trips we observed friendly red foxes and a very curious young black bear.

Laura Osborn (Meyers Gulch) compiled a list of almost 60 breeding bird species and observed red crossbills feeding their young. She found a Williamson's sapsucker nest in an aspen near the trail and sat in the forest watching the family activities. Jan Chu, Donn Cook, and Kathy Cook developed a preliminary butterfly list for Laura's adopted area.

If all this sounds like fun--well, it's pure joy. So consider joining us this year. There will be four or five field trips/trainings in May and June, as well as an organizational meeting on March 18. We expect this project to go on for a long time and to contribute to future conservation of Boulder County ecosystems. Most of all, it gives us a chance to connect with nature in a deep and nurturing way.

- Steve Jones



Black Swallowtail Butterfly
Photo By Steve Jones

Two Geese

They stood alone

The setting sun making the stubble of the cut field and

their bodies seem larger than life

They seemed to be muttering quietly to each other, looking around, anxious

Their friends and family had flown

Those they had known their entire lives

Their children, their parents

Gone in the honking, gabbling V

That filled the reddening sky

“Go, leave me, go with them”

“I won’t, I’ll wait for you, I won’t leave you alone”

They both yearned to go, to fly, to sing to each other

As they beat their mighty wings towards the sun

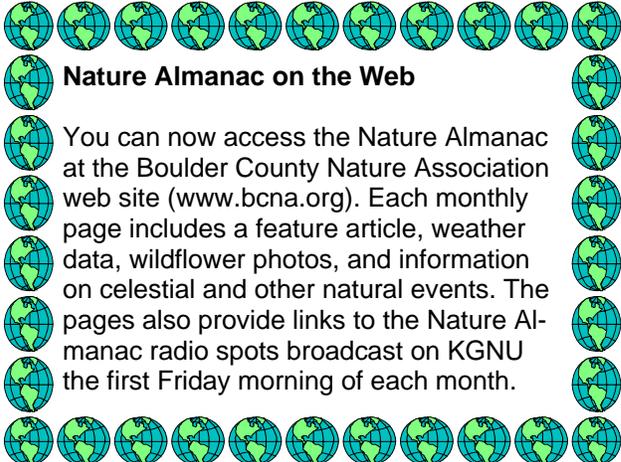
And they were both earthbound

One by lead, the other by love

-Ann Wichmann



Backlit Willow on White Rocks Trail.
Photo by Steve Jones


Nature Almanac on the Web
 You can now access the Nature Almanac at the Boulder County Nature Association web site (www.bcna.org). Each monthly page includes a feature article, weather data, wildflower photos, and information on celestial and other natural events. The pages also provide links to the Nature Almanac radio spots broadcast on KGNU the first Friday morning of each month.

Annual Financial Report

This is written in on December 20, before the end of the year and the end of BCNA's fiscal year, in order to meet the newsletter publication deadline. Nevertheless, nearly all income and expenses for the year are already accounted for. Any member wishing to review the complete financial report may do so after January 10. Please contact the treasurer.

Your association is in good financial shape. All accounts show positive balances. Reported below are only funds which showed activity during the year.

The board established a general fund budget for fiscal year 2006 of \$12,000. We realized general fund income from all sources of \$13,425.80, and have incurred expenses of \$11,801.95, for an excess of revenue over expense of \$1,623.85.

In addition, we had income (donations) of \$280.00 to our education scholarship fund, and now have a balance there of \$1,421.65. We received a donation of \$171.50 to the Evenson Native Cat fund, and incurred expense of \$1,200.00, a research grant to a team at Colorado State University, leaving a balance in this fund of \$981.50.

We have balances in all accounts of \$40,125.21. Of this amount, \$27,642.27 is encumbered. Therefore, our net assets on December 20 are \$12,642.94. The board in January will construct the fiscal year 2007 budget and can plan on having about \$13,000 to spend.

-Michael Delaney

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 Secretary.....Jan Carnes 303-827-3024 (2006)

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 Barbara Hawke 303-527-1819 (2006)
 Jim McKee 303-494-3393 (2007)
(Year indicates expiration of board members term)

Committees and Contacts

- Avian Species of Special Concern:
 Dave Hallock (dheldora@rmi.net) and
 Steve Jones (stephen.jones@earthlink.net)
- Ecosystem Stewardship:
 Steve Jones (303-494-2468)
- *Education:*
 Carol Schott (303-530-9108) and
 Carol Kampert (303-499-3049)
- *Indian Peaks Bird Counts:*
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 Bill Kaempfer (303-939-8005)
- *Newsletter:*
 Rebecca Hill (303-786-0553)
 rebecca.hill@gmail.com
 and Steve Jones (303-494-2468)
- *Publications:*
 Steve Jones (303-494-2468)
- *State and Regional Wildlife Issues:*
 Jim McKee (303-494-3393)
- *Website:*
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- *Wintering Raptor Survey:*
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Visit Our Website

For the calendar, class offerings, research results, publications, and other related information:
www.bcna.org

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Type of Membership:

_____ Student/Senior (65 or over)	\$15
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_____ Corporate	\$500
_____ Donation to General Research Grants	
_____ Donation to Evenson Big Cat Research Grants	
_____ Donation to General Research Fund	

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