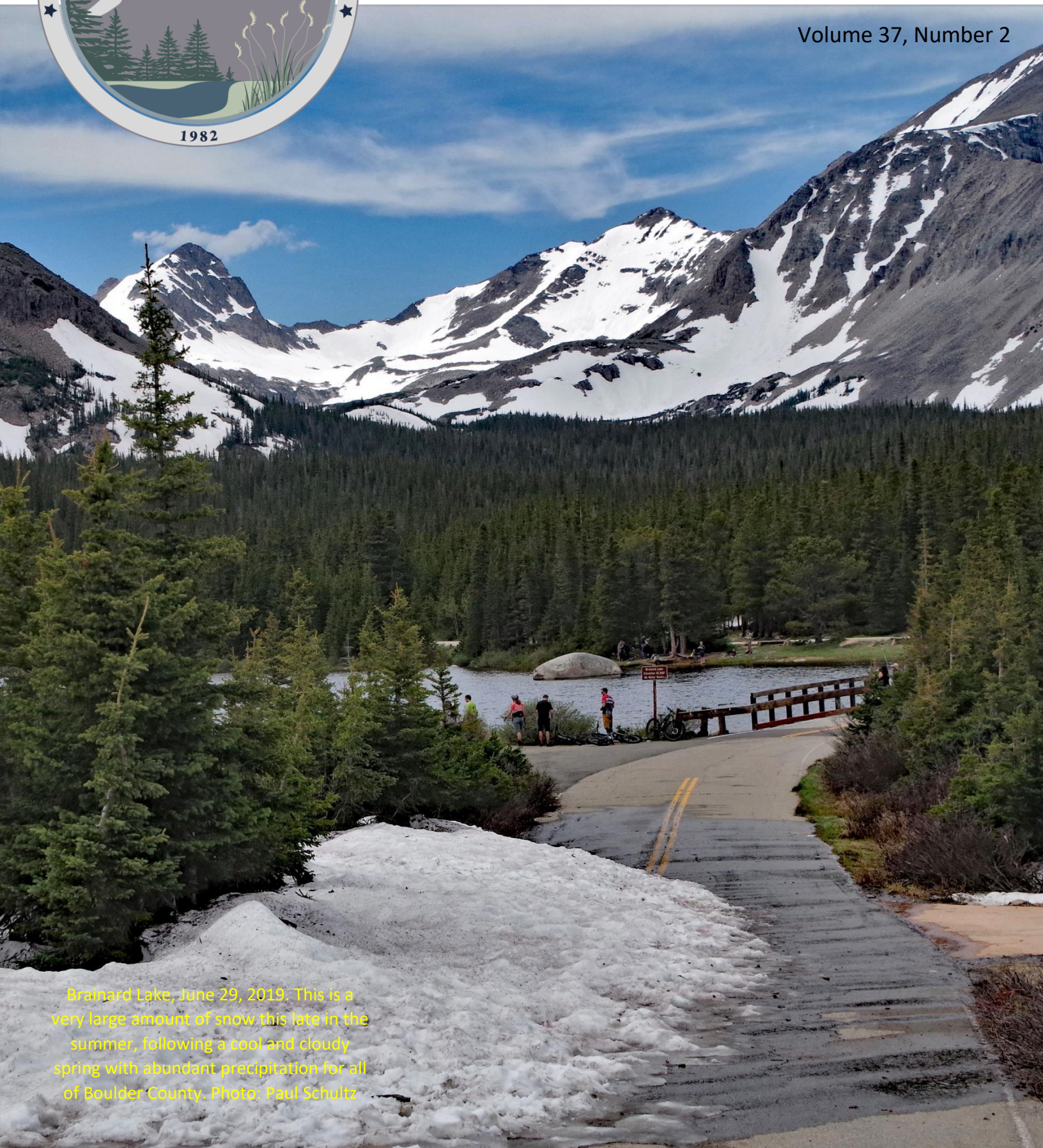




# Summer 2019

Volume 37, Number 2



Brainard Lake, June 29, 2019. This is a very large amount of snow this late in the summer, following a cool and cloudy spring with abundant precipitation for all of Boulder County. Photo: Paul Schultz



## BCNA, hard at work for you and the environment!

By Sue Cass, BCNA President

From the very beginning, the Boulder County Nature Association has understood the relevance and vital importance of its mission to “educate, inform and inspire for the purpose of conserving and promoting resilient natural ecosystems in our region” and has worked tenaciously in support of that most worthy of all undertakings! Today, with unrelenting challenges to the Front Range in the form of surging population, climate change and environmental disconnect in Washington D. C., that work has gotten a little harder, but we flag not!

BCNA’s Issues and Conservation Committee under the leadership of Gerry Kelly closely monitors local issues like the proposed City of Denver’s Gross Reservoir Dam expansion which, if allowed to go forward, would be the largest single construction project in Boulder County to date with similarly sized environmental impacts. Busy committee members routinely attend meetings, planning sessions and “open houses” and, in the process, provide strong comment and direction regarding the environment and conservation thereof related to our species’ supposed benign recreational presence on the land.



Figure 1. Sue Cass explains raptor behavior for BCNA’s raptor survey volunteers. Photo: Paul Schultz

BCNA is grateful for the opportunity to participate in this vital exchange and partner with local agencies like City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) and Boulder County Parks and Open Space (BCPOS) as dedicated staff strive to preserve and protect our open spaces and the wildlife they shelter while providing recreational access to all user groups with limited tax dollars. Recently, BCNA was honored to have been asked to represent local environmental constituency as a member of the Eldorado Canyon State Park Visitor Use Management Plan (VUMP) Task Force Charter by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). The need for this action, long overdue, was made clear during the recent OSMP/BCPOS/CPW Eldorado Canyon/Walker Ranch trail study to which BCNA vigorously contributed. Gerry Kelly will serve as BCNA’s representative to the Task Force and I am honored to serve as his alternate. The first Task Force meeting occurred on June 26th and the process will continue into 2020 with final recommendations expected by next summer.

We will keep you and our sister organizations informed as this important exercise advances toward the common good and, as members of the Boulder County Nature Association, know your hard work is valued and we can and do make a difference!

Please join us on the front-line!

**Our Mission:** *To educate, inform, and inspire for the purpose of conserving and promoting resilient natural ecosystems in our region.*

## The Mammals of Boulder County

The City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks department has released a fascinating new inventory of all the mammals on OSMP properties and a data set of most recent observations.

As lead author Carron Meaney reports, "This checklist provides a snapshot of mammalian faunal presence in 2017 (and since 2000), and a quick reference to where a species was last observed should it fail to be observed or documented in future years."

And it provides the answer to a common question asked by children and visitors: How many different mammals are there around Boulder? (62!)

Meaney and OSMP staff used data held by Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the University of Colorado Museum, and the Denver

Museum of Nature and Science, as well as published research and observations by OSMP staff including trail cameras. The status of each species is described as 1) present and documented, 2) potential, whereby the species may be present on OSMP properties because suitable habitat is available but no records exist to document their presence post-2000 or specifically on OSMP, 3) extirpated, indicating the species occurred in Boulder County historically but is no longer present; or 4) unlikely present due to the lack of suitable habitat or suitable elevation (American pikas, for example).

The article concludes with a discussion of the history of species native but extirpated, of species introduced, and puzzling observations in the record. You'll find it here:

<https://bouldercolorado.gov/open-data/osmp-mammals/>



Photo: Paul Schultz

## Forest Fires and Floods, a Fifty Year Perspective

Photos and story by Viki Lawrence

I lay in bed listening to the thump, bump of boulders tumbling down our little creek. I was 13 years old and had recently moved upstairs, the perfect place to hear, and see (had it been light) the rising creek across the road. My parents had gone out for the evening and left me home alone and I began to wonder if they would be able to get back home. It was May of 1969 in the old gold mining town of Salina west of Boulder. The rain had been coming down for a few days and my mother had a green plastic bucket sitting on the sidewalk out front to measure the rain that had outgrown our rain gauge.

The next day, in the rain, we went out to survey the creek which now had taken over some or all of the road in many places. Wearing my white plastic snow boots I walked over to the barn, where a small stream of muddy water was coming out from under the front of our barn. I decided to splash in it as I like to do and discovered it was only 8 inches wide but 18 inches deep. A canyon in our barnyard! And a boot full of muddy water. The road was completely gone below and above our house so we were stranded (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. From the corner above. (This photo by Robert Lawrence, the author's father.)

I don't remember any serious damage to Salina other than the road. Even the barn, nearly in the creek, fared well as the water just ran under the wooden floor and out the front into the dirt barnyard. Some of the houses in the lower part of Four Mile Canyon did not fare so well, and the road was washed out in many places.

The next day I went to school on the back of my father's motorcycle via the Church Road to Sunshine, an old mining road passable only to 4X4s. Wearing pants! Forbidden attire at my school at that time. The road was repaired fairly quickly although it had only one lane for a while. The green bucket showed we'd had 11 inches of rain over 3 days or so.

When I was growing up my mother would say that we could never have the forest fires like they have in California and we didn't need to worry. In fact since the trees had nearly all been cut in the late 1800's and the regrowth was still relatively small and those years were not dry, we did not have any forest fires close to home. Our Four Mile Fire Department was primarily for house fires-until I went to college.

In the 1970's we began to have forest fires but they were relatively small. In 1974 one near Gold Hill burned 110 acres and then in 1976 the Comforter Mountain Fire burned 230 acres not far from our home. At that time I was home from college on break and I went out along with my mother, who was a member of the Four Mile Fire department, putting out hot spots behind the fire line. Fires were becoming a reality, although they were still considered a rarity.

I don't remember a lot of other fires until 1989 when the Black Tiger Fire burned many houses in the Sugarloaf area and I helped a friend evacuate from her home near Gold Hill. I was living on the plains by this time, and fires were frequent enough that I immediately recognized the color change of the sunlight when forest fire smoke was



present. Also being not far from Jeffco airport I would hear the fire retardant planes lumbering overhead after they took off. A sound that would alert me to a fire. Effort was put into thinning trees and people started thinking seriously about clearing the brush and trees around their mountain houses. Forest fires were here.

During the 90's and into the 2000's fires became more common and much larger, going from a thousand acres or so to tens of thousands of acres. 'Defensible space' became a common term. The house I grew up in was not in the forest, but rather in the bottom of a valley beside a small creek edged with narrow leaf cottonwoods and other deciduous trees. However, the adjacent hillsides were forested with ponderosa pines, junipers and douglas fir. My parents kept a landscaped yard which was watered via an old sketchy 'free water' system that siphoned water from further up the creek and piped it to our property. So it was generally green right around our house.

On September 6, 2010, I saw a plume of smoke west of Boulder while on a walk around Harper Lake in Louisville where I lived. I ran into a friend who told me it was in Four Mile Canyon. I called my father's home and his wife answered by saying "We're leaving!" and hung up. The fire began up Four Mile Canyon above Wallstreet, but quickly moved to the town of Salina, causing a rapid evacuation. My family home did not burn down, nor did my brother's house just down the road, although a few of our outbuildings burned. Several houses and old mining buildings in the town did burn down and all were severely smoke damaged inside and out. The greatest irony is that the Salina fire station burned with the fire truck inside an indication of how fast the fire was upon the town. Even though the fire station was adjacent to the school house, the school did not burn, likely having been defended by firefighters (Fig. 3).

I do not know how long it was before my father knew his house survived, but it was a



Figure 3. The burned-down fire station by the Salina Schoolhouse.

long recovery from the smoke in the house with the insurance paying people to come and clean every object in the house including every silver spoon in the silver drawer. After the fire I walked with my father on the mountainside behind our house which was a stand of blackened tree trunks, everything charred to a crisp. But looking out the windows on the front of the house nothing seemed to have changed. The trees in the creek were alive and green (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. My father looking at the back of his property.

Much of the watershed for Gold Run was burned, so the next summer the rain just ran off the hillsides. Every time there was thunderstorm activity in the area Salina residents received a 'reverse 911' call alerting them to possible flash flooding. One time as the rain poured down and the creek rose, my father headed over to the barn to move the car to higher ground. He was about to get the car when the flash flood, really a debris flow, hit. Dark muddy water full of charred wood, ash and topsoil was suddenly knee deep pouring through the barn and around my father's legs. His wife stood in the yard across the road, now a river, helpless as the water tried to sweep my father's feet out from under him. He was contemplating grabbing the garden hose beside him (attached to a faucet) to use as a lifeline to get to one of the blue spruce trees that edged our barnyard some 30 feet away, and try to climb to safety (he was 85 years old at the time). But before he could carry out his plan, the water was gone, leaving a foot of mud in the barn encasing the great accumulation of junk there including the car.

I went up a day or so later to help dig the car out. This was not a trivial issue as my father had stored, among other things, all his past computer components in the west end of the barn and they had been washed along with the muddy water and some were lodged under the car along with mud to the bottom of the doors. Digging mud out from under a car is tedious in the best of circumstances, but jam a printer or two under there as well and it becomes a nightmare. Cleaning the mud out of the rest of the barn and the workshop took a lot of time and effort.

After the very local flash flood, my father and his wife decided that the multitude of reverse 911 calls were too stressful and in 2012 they found a house on the plains and moved out of Salina, their long time home.

My brother and I agreed to take over getting the house ready for sale and then sell it. We spent the winter clearing out the house and

barn leaving a huge pile of "free" stuff by the road, making trips to recycle, hazardous waste, and the dump. In the summer of 2013, I attempted to sell the house by owner but was unsuccessful. So we sought out a realtor to sell it on September 1 of 2013.

On September 9, 2013, the rain started. Continuous rain for 5 days. Again the creek rose, but none of us were there to see it. I lived in Louisville, my brother was on the western slope and my father and his wife now lived on the plains. On Thursday, September 12, I tried to drive up to see what was happening, but at 6th street and Canyon Boulevard in Boulder the water became so deep in the street that I retreated fearing damage to my car or my life.

I called my brother to alert him to the situation, and once I25 reopened after the flooding, I left Colorado on a planned trip to visit my son in Oregon. Some days later, my brother called me from Salina once his landline phone began to work again. Although the area was still under evacuation and the roads washed out, he had not been deterred and hiked in over Sunshine to get home. He had a small Bobcat and began repairing the road and helping other residents regain access to their homes. The Little Church in the Pines was severely undercut, the entire front third hanging in midair. He shored it up with posts, later garnering an award for doing so (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. The Little Church in the Pines which was undercut by the flooding.



The barn this time was not filled with a foot of mud. It was three feet deep with boulders that washed in through the windows and a large hole in the back wall. The rest of the back wall was nearly caved in from all the rock and gravel that was deposited against it. The stability of the barn was now in question, so one did not go in casually, but my brother cleaned out what he could with his Bobcat (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. The inside of the barn after the flood. Part of the back wall caved in allowing the water to rush through with big boulders. My brother has cleared out part of it using his bobcat.

This flood devastated Salina. The entire road had become a river depositing cars, propane tanks, parts of houses, trees and piles of boulders on its way through town. A number of houses were sitting at odd angles where their foundations had been washed away (Figs 7-9). The remains of those houses were bought out and torn down by the county to remove buildings from the flood plain. Recovery took many years and the face of Salina is now changed; it's 'modernized' by new, but fewer, houses and a 'flood proof' road, and the normally small creek is restrained in massive culverts and rock walls.

Then November 10, 2018. A devastating fire (one of many, but this was the worst one) in northern California burned the entire town of Paradise where my aunt and uncle (deceased) had built a beautiful home in 1960-62 looking over the valley of the North Fork of the Feather River. The house and their forested land burned. The fire came so



Figure 7. Just below the church, cars washed down the creek.



Figure 8. This house just below the school, later bought out and removed by the county.



Figure 9. Two houses at The Junction, bought and removed by the county.

fast that my aunt who was in Paradise at the time, got out with only the clothes on her back having to abandon her car because the Skyway, the only road out of town, became a parking lot. At police orders she and others sheltered for some time in the back of a building defended by firefighters until they could be evacuated by a small bus. I have

visited Paradise many times over my life, loving my aunt and uncle, the house, the woods and the natural swimming hole in the cold, clear North Fork of the Feather River far below. It truly seemed a paradise to me, and my heart grieves the loss for them, but for me too.

Our climate is changing. Faster than scientists have predicted. The devastation is hard to witness as we do little to stop the spiral into a warmer climate and a more chaotic weather world. Although I personally have not been affected by any of these disasters, my family and friends have, and I wait with bated breath for the next one. Will we all live through it? What will we have left? I'm saddened not just by the past losses to my friends and family, but also by the destruction yet to come for us, and the natural environment, and the many animal residents, losses rarely acknowledged but heavy on my heart.

## A Look Back to Spring

Photos and story by Mary Stuber

Ah, the sun is finally shining. April and May brought us lots of cold and rainy weather. No matter. Now migrating birds are on a mission!

Spring warblers have been making their way into our area since at least early May. While the number of Yellow-rumped and Yellow warblers has reached double digits at times, others are usually in the 1 or 2 range, and these have been those we'd expect to see here – Common Yellowthroats, Virginia's, Orange-crowned, and MacGillvray's. More unusual warblers have appeared on the rare bird alert, but they are few. Still, it's always special to see these gorgeous little birds.

This year I had a different experience - an eleven-day romp through Kentucky, Ohio, and Michigan looking for migrating spring warblers with three fellow travelers and our guide, Sue Riffe, of *She Flew Birding Tours*. And did we ever find them!

While I could fill a book about it, I want to tell you about one particular place – Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, just east of Toledo, Ohio. I first heard of this spot on a birding trip to NYC. Someone said Magee Marsh was a great place to see warblers during spring migration. When this trip came up, I jumped on it.



Figure 10. Black-throated Green Warbler

Magee Marsh sits right on the southern shore of Lake Erie. In fact, the beach and the parking lots are the only things between the lake and the marsh, itself. If you have ever seen any of the Great Lakes, you know that the term "lake" doesn't depict the size and power of these 5 bodies of water that hold 20% of all the surface fresh water in the world! An onshore wind can whip up waves large enough to flood the marsh, and some roads. No wonder a little half-ounce bird that's been flying all night stops here to refuel and rest before attempting to cross it!



Figure 11. Cape May Warbler



Most warblers are migratory, wintering in the tropics of Central and South America. These birds probably evolved in the lush forests of northern Central America. All warblers are highly insectivorous, for at least much of the year. Competition for resources may have led many of them to develop migratory life cycles. The seasonal abundance of insect food and greater day-length farther north allowed them to raise more young than their stay-at-home relatives. As their breeding zones moved northward during periods of glacial retreat, the birds returned to their tropical homes when harsh winter weather and declining food supplies made it impossible to stay. They are truly global wanderers that make short visits to our latitude and into Canada to breed. In fact, the greatest warbler habitat of all is the vast boreal forest that blankets much of Canada and the far north. Twenty-seven species breed there, and breeding population estimates range from 300 million to one billion birds!



Figure 12. Veery

An annual festival in early May draws thousands of ardent birders and photographers to Magee Marsh. The second and third weeks of May usually produce the greatest concentration and variety of warbler species. In spring, the brightly colored males sing everywhere. The females, often duller versions of their male counterparts, arrive shortly thereafter. There can be enormous day-to-day variation in the numbers and kinds of birds present. It is best to plan at

least four days at Magee Marsh in hopes of being there for the ideal weather conditions and a big push of birds, but one or two weeks is optimal. In spring, onshore winds keep the birds there, while southerly winds bring more in but also carry others away north. Rainy days can be surprisingly good since they knock the clouds of small insects down lower in the trees and the birds follow. This can be helpful for viewing species that always stay high up in the canopy, creating a bad case of “warbler neck.”

A boardwalk of about a mile spans the swampy woods and tangles of brush. Numbers etched in the rail are a handy way to know where you are, especially when a tweet alerts you that someone has spotted something fun. You can “chase” the bird by hurrying down to that spot, if you wish. In all, our group saw 37 of the 38 eastern warblers somewhere on our trip. At times it seemed like they were everywhere, even brushing your face as they flew past. I was seeing the urgency and scale of migration in a way I have never understood before. This seasonal, topographical, weather-driven concentration of birds with one unyielding drive on their minds – to make it to their breeding grounds and reproduce – is simply astonishing. On two of the four days that we were there, we looked up to see hundreds of Blue Jays flying above us in virtual “rivers” all day long, back and forth along the shoreline, waiting to continue onward.



Figure 13. Palm Warbler

Some warblers like the Palm Warbler, Ovenbird, Hooded Warbler, and the water thrushes stay low and skulk around on the ground. Magnolia Warblers usually forage in the lower parts of trees and shrubs, Black-throated Green Warblers stake out the middle heights, and Cape May Warblers stay high in the canopy. The Veery is not a warbler at all, but a small forest thrush (7"). For the federally endangered Kirtland's Warbler, the rarest warbler in the U.S., we travelled to Michigan to find its highly specialized nesting habitat – it accepts only young (5 to 15-year-old) jack pine forest in large stands (at least 150 acres). In 1987, only 167 birds could be found. Today, with the help of careful habitat management practices, there are about 4000 of these large, stocky warblers.



Figure 14. Magnolia Warbler

There were so many other beautiful warblers. But I could not photograph them. In fact, upon review, most of my pictures are of birdless, leafy tangles moments after the hyperactive fluffballs flitted away or dropped down to the next leaf. When I could find one and zoom in on it in time, the camera's automatic focus would often produce a nice clear picture of one of the many branches between me and the bird, while it remained a blurred smudge just beyond them. My rule of thumb became to get a good look at the bird first and then maybe try to photograph it. But getting any half-decent photo was fun and I hope mine evoke some of what we saw there.



Figure 15. Kirtland's Warbler

### Exciting Opportunity!

If you love BCNA's classes, and you'd like to help us keep them going, this is an opportunity made for YOU!

Our current education coordinator is leaving. Here's your chance to get in on the action, have fun, and let your creative juices flow.

Next year's program will be ready to go. You'll receive complete instructions on what we do now, and we will help guide you.

Please consider lending a hand to this important work. Contact us now and get a head-start on learning all you need to know.

It's fun. It's challenging. And it's rewarding. Another great perk? You can attend all the classes!



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**Wintering Raptor/BUOW Survey**

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*To our readers – This is the first issue of the BCNA Newsletter that will be provided exclusively online. This will save us approximately \$500 per issue in printing and mailing costs. And we believe this practice is consistent with an ethic to use all resources conservatively, which we share with the Audubon Society, the Colorado Native Plants Society, and our other sister organizations. – ed*

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## Support the Boulder County Nature Association

*The easiest and best way to join is to go to <http://bcna.org> and click on "JOIN" at the top of the page. Then just follow the directions. You can pay using your PayPal account or another credit card. Thanks!*

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### Type of Membership:

\_\_\_ Student/Senior (65+) **\$15**

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\_\_\_ Allegra Collister Fund

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\_\_\_ Jim McKee Memorial Fund

\_\_\_ Unrestricted Donation

\_\_\_ Native Cat 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. Please make checks payable to "Boulder County Nature Association" or "BCNA" and mail to:

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P.O. Box 493  
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