President’s Message

The members of BCNA are a wonderful group. You have exceeded our expectations for the return of the recent survey by a great deal. 70% of members responded as of 20 December when I write. Thank you!

One of the results from our analysis is that you would like more information on the board’s activities and discussions, and so, with this issue, the president will write a column in each newsletter to keep you better informed. I’ll talk more about the way the survey has and will guide the Board of Directors in future issues. And I urge you to contact any member of the board if you have particular concerns or suggestions.

With a single exception, the respondents said that they read the newsletter. That puts to rest any discussion of whether the newsletter should be electronic. For as long as we can possibly afford it, we will be printing and mailing the newsletter.

Many respondents suggested that the publications committee do a variety of guidebooks for Boulder county: mammals, reptiles, butterflies, bird migration arrival and nesting dates, wildflowers, grasses, etc. After a good discussion, we decided that while we will occasionally produce guidebooks, there are already a lot of good local guidebooks available. But we will respond to your suggestions by beginning a bibliography of recommended guides appropriate for the county and post this on the web site (www.bcna.org). If you have suggestions, please contact the chair of the publications committee, Steve Jones.

The survey also revealed that we have done a poor job in the past of communicating with you about the research grants that we give each year. So beginning in 2010, the newsletter will have information on the grants awarded, and final reports from the researchers will be posted on the website. You can see there now the two reports from grants given in 2008, and the 2009 grants will appear in the spring.

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Many of you said you would like to see more field trips/outings. We’ve taken this to heart, and we will strive to offer a greater variety of trips from now on. We will continue to offer jointly-sponsored trips with Boulder County Audubon and Boulder Bird Club. Finally (for this issue anyway), you requested that we inform you earlier of the annual Eco-symposium so that you can plan for it. An announcement of the date and theme is elsewhere in this newsletter.

Thank you for responding in such healthy numbers, and for your opinions and suggestions. They will make our organization even better, because the board will try to implement your good suggestions. You really are a wonderful group. Best wishes for a 2010 filled with good works for our local environment.

—Michael Delaney

Symposium to Address Ecosystem Restoration

This year’s Boulder County Ecosystem Symposium on Saturday, April 4, will look at efforts to restore a native ecosystems in Colorado. The event is free and open to all, and will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the University of Colorado Ramaley Auditorium, in the Ecology Department building, just east of Norlin Library. Free registration begins at 8. The annual symposium is sponsored by Boulder County Nature Association, Boulder County Audubon Society, Boulder County Parks and Open Space, Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks, and the Colorado Native Plant Society. Visit www.bcna.org for a list of speakers and topics.

A Tribute to Lee S. Evans
March 1, 1917 – November 7, 2009

Lee Evans, a lifetime resident of Boulder County, was a long-time BCNA member and participant in the Indian Peaks Bird Counts. Born in Superior, Lee began spending summers in Eldora in 1919, and when he grew older helped his mother run a milk and saddle horse business. He went on to college, receiving an undergraduate degree at CU and worked toward a PhD at Northwestern University. He was a full professor at DU and later ran a very successful consulting and seminar businesses with his wife Virginia whom he married in 1969.

In 1946 Lee purchased the Arapaho Ranch, located between Nederland and Eldora, from Public Service Company of Colorado. On December 18, 1987 Lee and his family, in collaboration with the land trust Colorado Open Lands, signed away the right to develop up to 680 houses on Arapaho Ranch. They also gave up all rights for annexation, subdivision and mining. The Arapaho Ranch is a significant refuge for a large herd of elk as well as other native fauna and flora, including 162 species of birds and 365 species of native plants. Lee said, “We think there’s a need for a place for wildlife and not just for people. The concept of a love of the land is a difficult one to convey. It’s been a love of mine since I was a child. I’m trying to encourage others to do the same thing we did here.”

Lee and Virginia participated in the Indian Peaks Bird Counts since its inception, allowing access to the Ranch and counting the birds as well. Lee and Virginia provided a significant donation for the Eldora Environmental Preservation Plan, a joint Eldora Civic Association and BCNA project.

An elk bull with harem at the mouth of Coal Creek Canyon. Photo by Steve Jones.
Research Grants Available

Again this year, BCNA will offer grants for research on nearly any topic to do with the natural history of Boulder County. Grants are available in two categories.

The Evenson Memorial Grant, up to $400, is available specifically for research on our native cats. The General BCNA grants, up to $1,000, fund projects that will add to our understanding of the natural history of Boulder County or will assist in documenting the county’s ecosystems. Past projects include a scientific survey of butterflies, a study of the recolonization by prairie dogs after a plague outbreak, and a study of the effects of urban habitat fragmentation on grasshopper species richness and diversity, among many others.

Proposals should include a detailed methodology and a complete budget, and be limited to five pages. Note that no institutional overhead is allowed. Successful applicants sign a contract specifying that they will complete the project in 2010 and share results with BCNA.

Applications should be submitted by Monday, March 1, 2010 either to the BCNA P.O Box, or electronically to michael.delaney@colorado.edu. Electronic submission of the final report is required.
2009 BCNA Volunteer Projects Summary

More than 160 volunteers devoted nearly 4000 hours to Boulder County Nature Association projects during 2009. Thank you all!! New volunteers are always welcome and appreciated. No prior experience is required, but you must be willing to spend time in the field learning on your own. Contact the project coordinator listed at the end of each description, below.

Allegra Collister Bird Banding. It was a fairly lackluster banding season, but volunteers put in fewer hours than usual for fall. Travel, weddings, and other activities converged this year. We caught no new species for the gulch, but did band our tenth red-eyed vireo, our fourteenth American redstart, and released, unharmed, our third rufous hummingbird since 1991. (We are not licensed to band hummingbirds.) The only species that had a noticeably high count was gray catbird at 24 banded. The previous five years we averaged 11.6 catbirds in fall. A CU student, Mysti Martin, is planning to study environmental impacts on migration and phenology in birds in a master's program. She is using data gathered from banding ACNP in her studies. 7 participants. 497 hours. Maggie Boswell (picab@qwest.net).

Participants: Virginia Dionigi, Deanna Williams, Marcel Such, Joel Such, Renee Haip, Bill Baker (weed cutting), Maggie Boswell.

Birds of Special Concern Monitoring. Northern harriers nested successfully within Boulder County for the first time since 2004, a lone pair fledging four young in the wetlands west of Boulder Reservoir. Bald eagles and ospreys had their most successful nesting years on record. On the downside, no one confirmed nesting for any of the following rare and declining birds: northern bobwhite, Lewis's woodpecker, red-headed woodpecker, loggerhead shrike, and lark bunting. Green heron (occupied nest at Walden Ponds) and rose-breasted grosbeak (adult feeding young on Marshal Mesa) were new nesting confirmations for Boulder County. We've begun preliminary work on a 10-year update of the Boulder County avian species of special concern list. 33 participants, 500 hours. Dave Hallock and Steve Jones (curlewsj@comcast.net).


Coal Creek Riparian Restoration (with Boulder County Audubon). We completed our 12th year (10th year since fencing) of monthly bird point-counts within the Coal Creek riparian corridor grazing exclosure, which extends from Superior westward to the Jefferson County line. Numbers of native shrub-nesters have nearly tripled since fencing was completed in 1999. Numbers of native cavity-nesters and tree canopy-nesters have nearly doubled. The bald eagle pair nested successfully for the fourth consecutive year, and elk continue to migrate down into the riparian corridor. 8 participants, 150 hours. Steve Jones (curlewsj@comcast.net).


Ecosystem Stewardship Initiative. With just over half of the 2009 reports in, we're seeing some interesting trends. Gray catbirds and blue-gray gnatcatchers are moving up into the mountains, hooded warblers appear to be colonizing several foothills canyons, and Cooper's hawks are nesting all over the county, including downtown Louisville and West Boulder. Noteworthy mammal sightings included a pine marten at Buttonrock Preserve, numerous elk on the plains, and black bears with cubs in several locations. To date, 29 wild areas have been adopted. 40 participants, 750 hours. Steve Jones (curlewsj@comcast.net).


Field Classes. Twelve classes were attended by approximately 120 students. The main job of the

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Education Committee is to create two BCNA field class schedules during the year to promote BCNA Winter/Spring and Summer/Fall classes. Printed schedules are sent to BCNA members in January and May; schedules are also posted on the BCNA Website (thanks to Webmaster George Oetzel). A special thanks to Evelyn Leigh for contributing her writing, editing, and computer layout skills to produce especially attractive and accurate schedules in 2009. And thanks to new committee members - Dianne Andrews, Peter Kleinman and Janet McLachlan - for taking on some of our continually expanding projects and tasks. 7 volunteers, 120 hours. Carol Kampert (kampert@comcast.net).

Indian Peaks Bird Counts. During the 28th year of the Indian Peaks Four Season Bird Counts, semipalmated plover, long-eared owl and lesser goldfinch were observed for the first time during the fall count. Rosy-finches were seen for the first time on the fall count since 1998. The breeding count observed willow flycatchers for the first time since 1998. 49 participants, 1152 hours. Dave Hallock (eldoradh@rmi.net)


Wintering Raptor Survey. BCNA's wintering raptor survey has begun its 27th season with 16 new and eager volunteers on board. The data produced from last season's efforts continue to show a downward trend for rough-legged and ferruginous hawks with the number of sightings for all routes at the lowest point since the survey began. The number of wintering bald eagles is also down from recent years due, we believe, to an interesting and not all together adverse dynamic. It seems our neotenic nesting bald eagles who remain on or near their nesting territories year round are predictably intolerant of other Bald Eagles. Hence, migratory balds are forced out of the area by our resident birds whose nesting territories range from Coal Creek in the south to the St. Vrain River in the north. As the BCNA Wintering Raptor Survey continues to gather vital information about our amazing birds of prey we thank each and every volunteer who helps make this possible! Thank you! 66 participants, 500 hours. Sue Cass (suecass@comcast.net).

2009-10 volunteers: Janet McLachlan (co-compiler) Tom and Tineke Van Zandt, George Coffee, Fern Ford, George Young, Maribel Williams, Gary Stevens, Nan Wilson, A.D. Chesley, Paul Culnan, Cheryl Froelich, Jean Sobolik, George and Marti Oetzel, Bev Baker, Linda Andes-Georges, Chris and Deb Abrahamson, Sue and Mark Ponsor, Megan Bowes, Billy Schweiger, George and Patrea Mah, Bill and Becky Eeds, Sue and Alan Cass, Jim McKee, Phyllis Hasheider, John and Jan Carnes, Micheal and Jean Delaney, Maggie Boswell, Deanna Williams, Jim and Darleen Eide, Al Clark, Mort and Lysa Wegman-French, Maureen Blackford, Cyndy Johnson, Ruth Beadman, Steve Jones, Ron Butler, Sallie Greenwood, Mark Pscheid, Rebecca Linn, Bill Gumbart, Sue Cornick, Joan Wolbier, Chuck Hundertmark, Tim Scott, Chris Petrizzo, Bernie Gay, J.D. Birchmeier, David Waltman, Will and Brian Toon, Owen Yager, Paula Hansley, Wendy Sydow, Barbara Willis, Allison Rehor, Joe Lupfer, Karen Clark.
Annual Financial Report, 2009

This report is written on December 20, before the end of BCNA’s fiscal year, in order to meet the newsletter publication deadline. Nevertheless, nearly all income and expenses for the year have been tallied. Any member wishing to review the complete financial report may do so after January 15. Please contact the treasurer.

BCNA is financially healthy, but the slow economy of 2009 had an impact on our organization. The Board of Directors approved a budget for 2009 that projected revenues of $15,650 and expenses of $19,265. Our revenues came in just short of $12,000 (down $3,650 or 23% from the budget) and expenses were $13,200 (down $6,000 or 31% from the budgeted amount).

Income was lower than budgeted primarily in dues and other contributions collected ($2,800 less than budget). The differences in these categories are also primarily responsible for our total income for 2009 being lower by $6,500 than the revenue for 2008 ($18,500). The bright spot in our revenue picture is the sales of our CD, “Dawn Chorus,” which exceeded our expectations by over $400.

The biggest area of savings in expenditures was related to the research grants. We funded $1,750 as compared to the budget of $4,000. We see funding research as a key part of our mission and were disappointed that one of the $1,000 grantees turned down his award so late that it couldn’t be replaced. However, the savings did improve our financial position in a down year. We also had savings compared to budget in insurance and newsletter costs.

Despite these challenges, our balance in all accounts is $42,425 compared to $43,250 last year. Of this amount, $25,735 is encumbered (which is also down slightly from the $26,350 in 2008). So, our net assets are $16,737 for 2009, which compares favorably with $16,880 for 2008.

Please note that because of the nature of BCNA’s activities, we are classified by the IRS as an educational and scientific 501(c)3 organization. For most members all dues are deductible as a charitable contribution, but please check with your tax advisor for deductibility in your specific circumstances.

—Mort Wegman-French, Treasurer
Hummingbird Encounters

In July Steve and Deb Bouricius led a one-day BCNA class on hummingbirds, drawing on years of observations and research at their fruit orchards in Palisades and their cabin in Allenspark. Participants were treated to the sight and sound of hundreds of hummingbirds, and to many insights about the lives of these tiny creatures.

Two species of hummingbird breed in Colorado—broad-tailed in the mountains, and black-chinned in desert and mesa areas. In mid-April, both return to Colorado, feeding on insects and tree nectars until flowers are abundant. Hummingbirds sex-segregate by habitat: females eat mostly insects and will chase males from stream-side feeding areas. Males make greater use of flower nectar and will defend a feeder or gooseberry bush. Rufous and Calliope hummingbirds are common migrants through our state. By Labor Day, nearly all have headed south.

The crooked limbs of apple trees are congenial for nesting, though the birds do not use nectar from apple blossoms or other flat flowers. Spider silk binds the nest and makes it stretchy enough to expand as nestlings grow. An inrolled margin keeps the eggs inside and helps the nest withstand weather and wind. By the time the babies fledge, the nest is stretched out and falling apart, so it is uncommon to find intact nests. A female bird may lay two or even three clutches of eggs a summer, in nests within sight of each other. She incubates the second clutch while still feeding the first set of youngsters—thus explaining why hatchlings typically weigh more than their mother.

Even more fascinating than the birds’ lives is the research Steve and Deb conduct as dedicated amateurs. They band hundreds of birds each year and track their observations with custom software. Deb’s authoritative compilation of field marks is used by other researchers. Hummingbird banders are few and far between, so recapturing a previously banded bird is rare. However, these cases—such as birds caught in Colorado with bands from Louisiana—have revealed new findings about hummers’ migration corridors.

Studying hummingbirds requires ingenuity as well as diligence. To study nesting and territorial habits, Steve and Deb must be able to identify individual birds. Birds will peck away paint daubs, they find, but Sharpie markers are good for color-coding. Steve catches birds in wire cages arranged around a feeder or flower, with a trap door rigged to a fishing-line trigger. When he sees a bird hovering at a feeding station, he tugs the line to close the trap door. He retrieves the bird with a gloved hand and wraps it in a soft bag made of a section of nylon stocking.

Most birds settle down quickly, seemingly little bothered by their capture. Their heads uncovered, they stay alert and bright-eyed. Steve weighs, measures, sexes, checks fat on the breast, and notes markings and condition of the flight feathers. Wearing magnifying glasses, he installs a miniature metal band on the bird’s leg. Imagine using tweezers to wrap a staple around a slightly wiggly toothpick, and you have a good idea of the task.

Steve steers the bird’s beak into a feeder for a good long drink, then places the bird, a female broad-tail, in my open hand. As she rests a moment, I can feel her warm chest and rapid heartbeat. She weighs little more than a penny. It is hard not to interpret her pause on my palm as a form of trust. Suddenly, she realizes she’s not confined any more, and pushes off with a little scrabble of claws. Our brief encounter is over, but it is just as thrilling to see her fly off to resume her journey to Mexico.

—Sandra Laursen

Boulder County Land Awards

Boulder County Parks and Open Space Department is currently accepting 2009 nominations for the County’s annual Land Conservation Awards. Nominations will be accepted until January 31, 2010. Anyone may nominate individuals, families or organizations that have made outstanding contributions in Boulder County in one of the following categories: Land Conservation, Environmental Stewardship, Historic Preservation, Partnership Program and Boulder County Volunteer. Nominating one self or an organization of which one is an officer or director is not permitted. Federal, state, county, special district and municipal government agencies are also not eligible.

The Boulder County Commissioners will present the awards during volunteer week on April 21 at 3pm at the Longmont office of Boulder County Parks and Open Space.

For more information on the Land Conservation awards program or to request nomination forms, please visit http://www.bouldercounty.org/openspace/landaward.htm or contact Vivienne Jannatpour at (303) 678-6277 or vjannatpour@bouldercounty.org
Support the Boulder County Nature Association

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_____ 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
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