

2006 Environmental Stewardship Awards Shattil and Rozinski honored at ASGD Spring Benefit

by Michael Lazare

Editor's note: The Environmental Stewardship Awards were presented to Lynne Forrester, Wendy Shattil and Bob Rozinski at the Spring Benefit in April. In the May / June issue, we featured Lynne Forrester. In this issue, we take a look at Wendy and Bob's accomplishments.

Sometimes the best photos are unplanned. Most of the time, however, wildlife photography is an exacting, painstaking blend of art and science in which only the very best can participate. This year's Environmental Stewardship Award winners can boast of prize-winning shots that came about by accident shots, but the bulk of their superb work is the result of being at the right moment in exactly the right spot – and then having the talent to know how to take advantage of the confluence of the two.

Wendy Shattil and Bob Rozinski have been working as a team for a quarter of a century. During this span of time they have brought the intimacy and the grandeur, the gentleness and the savagery of nature to millions of viewers through their books and the thousands of photographs they have contributed to hundreds of magazines. Their prime rule is: Never do anything that will endanger the wildlife being photographed. They work only with long-focus lenses so that they can photograph their subjects from long distances, without interfering with their feeding or other activities.

Their formal business name is Shattil/Rozinski Photography of Denver. Their website, however, is called dancingpelican.com, and that's where the unplanned shots come in. Bob was photographing a soft-shelled turtle not too long ago when, as he tells the story, "I'd been sitting in a blind for hours ...

when a flock of white pelicans landed in the pond in front of me. The water was ankle-deep to a pelican, and they



Bob Rozinski and Wendy Shattil, 2006 ASGD Environmental Stewardship Award recipients.

had to feed by tilting their head sideways in the shallow water."

At one point one of the pelicans raised its foot to scrape mud off the side of its head. Its beak was wide open at the time. The result was something that could not conceivably have been planned: A pelican that looks as if it were laughing out loud and performing an exotic dance. Oh, never mind the soft-shelled turtle! Bob entered the "Laughing Pelican" in the international Nature's Best photography contest, where it won first prize.

Wendy was a winner of the Grand Prize in the British Broadcasting Cor-

poration's Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition recently. Her prize shot: a portrait of a young fox, its keenly intelligent eyes looking directly into the camera. Sir David Attenborough, one of the world's most honored broadcasters, had this to say about her picture:

"There is a golden rule in portrait photography, I'm told, which says that above all things, you must focus on the eyes. But the focusing could rarely have been more perfect than in this picture, where the *depth* of focus is exactly correct - from the very tip of the nose back to the tips of the ears. Beyond, the shoulders are out of focus, and the surrounding grass, with magical effect both in front and behind, has become a kind of shading that might have been produced by an artist's crayon creating an exquisite frame - for a superb portrait."

The list of their honors is long. Bob and Wendy have conquered the grueling six-months-long Texas Valley Land Fund photo competition, winning the Grand Prize in their first attempt. They were Artists in Residence at Rocky Mountain National Park and Research Associates at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. Wendy and Bob received the Conservationist of the Year and Business of the Year Awards from the Colorado Wildlife Federation.

Theirs is a field in which few excel. And, among their colleagues, they rank at the top.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE—

Audubon's Spirit Lives On

This summer an exhibition of the four elephant folios of John James Audubon's *The Birds of America* series of engravings is opening at Mill Grove, Pennsylvania, the historic site of Audubon's residence from 1803 to 1806.

The exhibit claims that *The Birds of America* is the single greatest ornithological work ever produced. Audubon traveled through the country and painted 457 different species of native birds in their actual size. His work is truly amazing because of the time in which he lived. He had no motorized vehicles, only rough roads and trails to follow, and none of the "must haves" that eco-tourists and birders take for granted today. No Gore-Tex or Smart Wool. No insect repellent or sunscreen. Not even a zip-up bag of trail mix and a plastic bottle of cold water!

Despite the difficulties facing him and his assistants, Audubon persevered and saw his dream become a reality when Havell of London printed the 435-page double-elfant folios. Audubon became world famous and today he is still celebrated both as an artist and as an inspiration for environmental and conservation issues.

Here in Colorado, the spirit of John James Audubon lives on through our organization and the many others who honor his name. Our mission, and the work we are doing at Chatfield, is certainly not as physically demanding as the challenges Audubon faced so long ago. But, our challenges in developing the Audubon Center at Chatfield are many. We are fortunate to have an outstanding staff, a dedicated Board of Directors, and enthusiastic volunteers. We have long-time members and generous donors who helped finance the re-birth of the stone buildings, the development of the gardens and the wetlands trail, and soon, the outdoor classroom.

Our challenges continue. We are faced with finding the ways and means to keep the dream alive. It will take all of us giving generously and working together to make the Audubon Center the vital and important environmental and educational center it is meant to be. Thank you all.



Volunteer Opportunities

Contact Susan at 303-973-9530 or ssmith@denveraudubon.org if you can help.

Garden Stewards Needed – Help our native wildlife gardens flourish and keep them free of invasive weeds. You can work on your own schedule or we can match you with other volunteers to work as a team.

Day Camp Teaching Assistants – We are presenting a birding day camp at the Audubon Center for 6 – 8 year olds from July 10 – 14 and for 9 – 12 year olds from July 24 – 28. Times are 8am – 12:30pm each day. We need at least one volunteer each day to help with activities and hikes.

Gunnison Sage-Grouse Program – July 29 at 6:30pm at Calvary Baptist Church
We need volunteers to help with set-up, registration, our "gift shop" table and clean-up.

Owls of the World Program – August 18 at 6:30pm at the Audubon Center
We need volunteers to help with set-up, registration, our "gift shop" table and clean-up.

Barr Lake Birding Festival – September 16 at 8:30am – 1pm at Barr Lake State Park
We need volunteers to staff a Denver Audubon booth, including a simple children's craft activity.

Audubon Center Celebration – September 16, evening at the Audubon Center
We will need help with set-up, refreshments, greeting visitors, clean-up, etc.



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MISSION

ASGD is a nonprofit group dedicated to maintaining the health of natural ecosystems through education, political action, scientific research and land preservation, with primary focus on birds, other wildlife and ecosystems of the South Platte River watershed.

MEMBERSHIP

FRIENDS OF ASGD receive the *Warbler* and additional membership benefits. **Members of the National Audubon Society in the Denver Metro Area receive complimentary copies of the *The Warbler*.**

The Warbler is published bimonthly by the Audubon Society of Greater Denver (ASGD).

Editor C. Dale Flowers
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Birding Heaven in South Africa – March 1-13, 2006

by Debra Mallory

What would inspire a group of people to board a plane at 1:20 a.m. and then spend the next 24-hours traveling by air? For those of us who were on that flight, it was the prospect of visiting a part of the world that most of us had previously only dreamed of. Our group left Denver to travel to Johannesburg, South Africa, and though the flight was long, what awaited us once we reached South Africa more than made up for the jet lag we were



Audubon members pose for a group photo on the South African birding trip in March of 2006

plagued with. We spent a few days in the Jo'burg area visiting some of the local attractions and were able to identify several of the more common birds in the area, including the red bishop and hadedah ibis, with a highlight being the breeding pair of Verreaux's eagles at one of the botanic gardens. We also enjoyed a visit to a cheetah reserve and were rewarded with close up views of those beautiful animals.

The "official Audubon trip" started with a lovely couple of days in the Dullstroom area, which enjoys a high elevation. Our intrepid guides, Bruce and Leon, managed to take care of us, entertain us, be patient with us, and educate us as to all the new species we were encountering, which included buff-streaked chat, long-crested eagle, secretary bird, steppe buzzard, long-tailed widowbirds, and malachite sunbird. Mammals included blesbok, springbok, and reedbuck, as well as yellow mongoose.

We moved on to Blyde River Canyon, encountered gale-force winds and rain, but managed to get in some birding en route to several beautiful waterfalls and a hoped-for look off the Drakensberg escarpment at "God's Window," a view which never materialized due to the bad weather.

Moving on to Kruger National Park brought us not only better weather, but views of a world most of us have only seen on the Discovery Channel. Not long after crossing the park boundaries, we were confronted with a mind-boggling assortment of new birds in addition to zebra, giraffe, wildebeest, warthog, baboons, elephants,

and on a night drive, five lionesses. Birds included the wonderful bee-eaters and rollers which are indigenous to that area, in addition to the resident African scops owl which inhabited the Satara camp ground where we stayed in thatch-roof rondavels. Several of their starling and dove species greatly improved our attitudes about the beauty of these birds, and the woodland kingfisher, African wood hoopoe & crested bar-

bet increased the WOW! factor. From Kruger we drove on to Swaziland, a beautiful and fairly mountainous country smack in the middle of eastern South Africa. We spent an afternoon hiking around one of the nature preserves and, the next morning, visited a local market where we exercised our bargaining skills and pocket books. From there we returned to South Africa & stayed in Wakkerstroom, an important birding area in South Africa with many wetlands and special ecological niches. We were able to see ground



Audubon members enjoy a "tailgate picnic" in Swaziland.

woodpeckers, several species of lark, the beautiful but endangered crowned crane and blue crane, Denham's bustard and blue korhaan, in addition to a colony of intermixed yellow mongoose and meerkats.

From Wakkerstrom it was on to Mkuzi Reserve, where we "bagged" several good birds, including African firefinch, red-fronted tinkerbird, purple-crested turaco, gray waxbill and tambourine dove. Our last stop was in Eshowe which also has several endemic species

and where we were again plagued by some inclement weather. We did see the palm nut vulture and the spotted ground thrush, however.

Several people continued on optional post-trip extensions to Zambia and Victoria Falls, but for those of us returning to Denver, it was the end of a wonderful 2 weeks in South Africa with our life-lists greatly expanded—the official final count was 331 species—and some wonderful memories to carry us back home.



Eagle Eye

Watching Public Policy for the Environment
by Polly Reetz

It is recap time, fans – recapping the 2006 Legislative session, that is. So here's a quick, final recounting of bills that were Audubon's top priorities.

HB 1309 - Air Quality. This bill permitted State air quality regulations to maintain the current level of protection for air quality in case the Federal government reduces air quality standards (not an entirely unlikely event, given the current federal administration). Agriculture and scenic railroads received exemptions from the standards. This was really only modest progress in Colorado's ability to protect its air quality, but industry fought it very hard. After passing the House and Senate, the bill was vetoed by Governor Owens.

SB 37. Originally a seriously flawed bill, this one dealt with the establishment of water rights for recreational kayak/boating courses (such as the one in Fort Collins) and had to surmount opposition from traditional water rights users. Eventually all the fatal flaws were addressed by decent compromises and the bill passed both House and Senate; the Governor signed it on May 11. When you hear the term "RICD" you will now know, forever and ever, that it means Recreational In-Channel Diversion. If you raft or kayak the planned courses in Steamboat or Durango, the water you ride on will be due to this bill.

SB 114. Intended to roll back the covering standard set for hog farm lagoons (which hold the liquid excrement from thousands of animals) by public initiative, this bill was finally amended to make it as innocuous as possible. In its final form, there are strict odor standards which must be met both at the hog farm property line and at the nearest place where people live, shop, attend school, etc. The standards can only be met with synthetic covers now, though the industry insists that there are feasible alternatives. There is also a new fee for hog farms that should help with a minimum level of enforcement. The amended bill was signed into law by the Governor on May 25.

Now for something that is coming, not from the Legislature but through the initiative process. **Initiative 86** makes its debut this month in this column, and it is a real corker. It's a proposed constitutional amendment likely to be on the ballot this fall that requires governmental entities to give compensation **for enacting or enforcing any land use regulation** that reduces property values by 20%. The reduction in value can be for the whole property, or for a portion of it. ("Property" is defined as any interest in real property). The initiative is also retroactive to 1970, or the date the owner's family first came into possession of the property. The governmental entity can pay the landowner, exempt him from the regulation, or enter into a binding contract specifying permissible uses of the property.

This initiative strikes right at the heart of the ability of local governments to enact regulations to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. Land use and zoning regulations that protect open space and wildlife habitat, preserve neighborhoods, or curb urban sprawl would be directly affected. The will of the

many, expressed through their elected officials, could be subverted by a few. And do we really want to pay people to obey the law? Audubon can supply examples of how this affects local interests, so if you need them give us a call. The only chance of beating this initiative at the polls is through grass roots work; the proponents will have the big bucks.

Grassland Conservation. ASGD has joined two other chapters to support Audubon's Important Bird Area designation for the Pawnee Grassland. In April our volunteers spent half a day helping to clean up a notoriously littered shooters' site on the Pawnee. Now part of the Comanche Grassland may be considered for addition to the Army's Pinon Canyon testing grounds. The Army has stated that it needs a larger area for weapons testing and is eyeing both private and public lands around the site. The Picketwire Canyon Dinosaur Trackway, a unique area where you can view the paths that sauropod and theropod dinosaurs took millions of years ago, is right next to Pinon Canyon. Adjacent lands also hold archeological, cultural, historical and natural resources – including prairie wildlife habitat. Since the Comanche is already public land, it's probably a prime candidate for conversion to Army use. We need to speak up for the public values on the National Grassland! We certainly need to know what the alternative scenarios are and whether public resources could be protected. Our US Senators both need to hear from you on this question.

Good News: High Country News reports that the proposal to sell National Forest and BLM lands is dead for now – the US House Appropriations Committee decided not to send the measure to the House floor.

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– FIELD TRIPS –

Walk the Wetlands

DATE: Sunday, July 2 8 a.m.

DATE: Sunday, August 6 8 a.m.

LEADERS: Hugh and Urling Kingery (303-814-2723),
Bob Brown, and Doris Cruze

Pre-registration is not required.

FEE: None

MEETING PLACE: Parking lot beside Audubon Center at Chatfield. From C-470 & Wadsworth, go south on Wadsworth 4.4 miles. Turn left onto Waterton Road. Turn left immediately into the first parking lot, at the Audubon Center sign.

DESCRIPTION: Everyone welcome – Audubon members and visitors. We will hike along the South Platte River looking for nesting redstarts and lots of fledgling birds just out of the nest. We always find surprises. Wear long pants because poison ivy is lush. Sunscreen, sun hats and mosquito repellent are a good idea, too. Bring binoculars, field guide, water and a snack.

Training Trip to Loveland Pass for Second Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas

(Official Atlas field work starts in 2007).

DATE: Sunday, July 9 7 a.m. - 4 p.m.

LEADERS: Urling and Hugh Kingery

Pre-registration is required.

FEE: None

MEETING PLACE: NW corner of RTD Park & Ride, east side of Union Blvd. just south of W. 6th Avenue

DESCRIPTION: The second breeding bird atlas will start field work in 2007. On this trip Urling and Hugh will preview atlasing protocol and techniques - how to look for evidence of breeding, abundance estimating, habitat coverage, and other atlasing activities. They atlased the Loveland Pass block for the first Atlas and, this late in the breeding season, you should encounter breeding activity in the high country. The trip will involve some hiking over rough ground in at least four different habitats: spruce/fir, willow carr, coniferous riparian, and alpine tundra. Bring lunch, water binoculars, field guides, layers of clothing (at 11,900 feet we could encounter some chilly temperatures, rain, snow and sun).

Hummingbirds: Buzz Bombers of the Sky

DATE: Monday, July 17 at 7pm at the

Audubon Center at Chatfield

& Sunday, July 23 at 8am –

field trip to mountain feeders.

LEADER: Tina Jones

Pre-registration is required. (20 people max)

FEE: \$20/Friends member \$25/Non-member

DESCRIPTION: Come learn from a hummingbird expert about the life styles of various hummingbirds. This class emphasizes natural history of hummingbirds, including hummingbird metabolism, aggression and territoriality, courtship and nesting, wing sounds and dive displays. Learn the hot-spots in the US, and in Colorado, where you can see lots of hummingbirds. Find out why Colorado has had up to 12 species of hummingbirds.

The date for this class is during the time period when hummingbirds are migrating through Colorado, and when numbers and variety of birds are good. Learn in the field how to try to identify adult males and females, and how to identify immature males and females (although this is a challenge). We will also discuss how to create a hummingbird friendly habitat.

The field trip will be a leisurely three quarter day trip to visit feeders around 9500 feet. Logistics will be discussed in the classroom session and will start at the King Soopers parking lot at Hwy. 285 (W. Hampden) and Sheridan in Bear Valley.

Tina Jones' yard is featured in several books as an example of a bird and hummingbird habitat. Tina contributed to the botany for the DVD "Hummingbirds of North America", which is hosted by John Dunn. She has had up to 6 species of hummingbirds in her yard in Littleton.

Mark your calendars!

Audubon Center Celebration &

Dedication of the Lois Webster Outdoor Classroom

Saturday evening, September 16

Celebrate with us the completion of Phase 2
of the Audubon Center capital campaign.

Watch for your invitation for more details.

TRAVEL, FIELD TRIPS, CLASSES & PROGRAMS

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– FIELD TRIPS –

Can Too Much Sex Cause Extinction? Conservation Challenges for the Gunnison Sage-Grouse

DATE: Saturday, July 29 6:30 p.m.

LEADER: Dr. Jessica Young

Pre-registration is encouraged; tickets will also be available at the door.

FEE: \$5/Friends member; \$7/non-member

MEETING PLACE: Calvary Baptist Church at 6500 East Girard, Denver

DESCRIPTION: Dr. Jessica Young of Western State College of Colorado will present her research and conservation experiences with the Gunnison Sage-Grouse. Jessica researched the behavioral biology and genetics of the Gunnison Sage-grouse in the late 1980's and 1990's. She has been a member of the Gunnison Basin Working Group since 1995 and works locally on sage-grouse issues. Her presentation will focus on how behavior may influence speciation and extinction processes and persistence of this remarkable bird.

Owls of the World

A Live Animal Presentation by HawkQuest

DATE: Friday, August 18 6:30 p.m.

Pre-registration is encouraged; tickets will also be available at the door.

**FEE: Children: \$5/Friends member; \$7/non-member;
Adults: \$7 / Friends member; \$9 / non-member**

MEETING PLACE: Audubon Center at Chatfield

DESCRIPTION: This innovative program will take you on a trip around the world, featuring owls from six continents. The one-hour program focuses on the tools used by owls worldwide and their importance to global ecosystems by controlling the pest animals that threaten our food supply. HawkQuest is a non-profit providing educational opportunities to understand and appreciate the interaction of wild living things in their natural environment, and the importance of preserving the world in which we live. Audubon naturalists will be on hand after the program to lead night hikes for those interested.

Beginning Bird Watching Class

DATES: Thursday, Sept. 21: 7-9pm – classroom session at the Audubon Center at Chatfield
Field trips: Saturdays, September 23, 30, October 7 - 28: 8am-1pm –trips to bird watching sites around Denver: Chatfield, Barr Lake, and Castlewood Canyon state parks, Wheat Ridge greenbelt, and Genesee Mountain.

LEADERS: Urling & Hugh Kingery
Pre-registration is required.

FEE: \$125/Friends member, \$150/non-member

DESCRIPTION: Voted "Best of Denver!" 20 years ago and still going strong. Colorado's premier (and most entertaining) birding couple teaches the art and science of birding like no one else. Learn bird identification, choosing binoculars and field guides, and much more. Visit a variety of habitats and some of the best birding spots in the Denver metro area. Become observant and develop a practiced eye and ear. Make new friends and change the focus of your time outdoors. You can make up any field trips that you miss during future fall or spring class sessions.

Lois Webster Fund Update

by Margot Wynkoop

A big thanks to Scott Menough of Wild Birds Unlimited at 2720 South Wadsworth for his assistance in procuring a telescope for the Burrowing Owl Project on the Pawnee Grasslands. This project is one of the Lois Webster Fund's 2006 grantees. His donation to the Lois Webster Fund is greatly appreciated!

The Lois Webster Fund (LWF) is pleased to welcome Victoria Dreitz, PhD, who currently serves as Grassland Avian Researcher with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, to the Lois Webster Fund Committee. Vicky, a native Coloradoan from the eastern plains is a graduate of Colorado State University and worked with Dr. Fritz Knopf from 2001-2003, well known expert on the mountain plover. Vicky's current research project, investigating potential private agricultural impacts on recruitment rates of mountain plovers, was the recipient of grants from the LWF in 2002-03.

The LWF Committee also announced with regret that Walt Graul, a long time friend of Lois Webster's and one of the leading authorities on the mountain plover has resigned from the committee. Walt served in many capacities with the Colorado Division of Wildlife over the years before his retirement two years ago and was of great assistance to Denver Audubon. His wealth of knowledge about wildlife and avian issues and common sense approach to difficult problems will be greatly missed by the LWF. He made many significant contributions to the LWF during his time on the committee. Our warmest thanks for all of his work!

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Costa Rica Birding Trip

January 25- February 6, 2007

Leader: Ann Bonnell

Participants will be able to experience the thrill of seeing scarlet macaws soaring to their night roosts in the mangroves, or of viewing a resplendent quetzal, arguably the most spectacular bird in the Americas, eating an *aguacatillo* fruit. Costa Rica has more bird species (870+) than the entire North American continent north of the Mexican border. Parrots, toucans, hummingbirds, kingfishers, tanagers, manakins, birds of prey - we'll see all of these and more in some of the best birding spots in the country. As we explore this fascinating country, we will visit diverse ecosystems such as the *paramo* (alpine grasslands similar to those found in the Andes), oak cloud forest, lowland rainforest, and the dry tropical forest of the Northwest. An expert bilingual Costa Rican bird guide will be with us throughout. Maximum group size will be limited to 14. The cost for ASGD Friends members based on a minimum group of 10 is \$2,695 (\$2,745 for non-members) which includes meals, accommodations, park admissions and guide costs. \$2695 is the cash discounted price; the credit card price is \$2790. Roundtrip air fare from Denver to San Jose is currently approximately \$700. To register for the Costa Rica trip, contact ASGD at 303-973-9530. For questions about trip details, contact Ann Bonnell at (303) 979-6211 or e-mail: abonnell@juno.com.

Kayak the Niobrara in Nebraska

August 24 - 27, 2006

TRIP IS FULL - CALL FOR WAITING LIST!

The Niobrara River flows through a unique ecosystem in the sandhill area of the northwest part of Nebraska. The river canyon, with many lovely waterfalls, contains remnants of the eastern deciduous forest and the northern boreal forest. We will stay in two cabins at the Niobrara River Ranch located just north of Smith Falls State Park. Thursday is a travel day in personal cars from Denver to the Niobrara River Ranch, stopping at Buffalo Bill Cody Park in North Platte on the way for lunch and in Valentine for dinner. Friday is a river day of about 12.5 miles from Cornell Bridge put in to the Smith Falls State Park take out. Saturday we will visit The Nature Conservancy Niobrara River Preserve, Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge and Smith Falls. Sunday morning we will float the other 12.5 miles of river taking out at Sunny Brook Camp. By mid afternoon Sunday, folks will head back to Denver. The trip is limited to 13 participants.

The fee is \$495.00 per person for Friends of Audubon Society of Greater Denver, or \$530.00 for non Friends members. (You may join the Friends for only \$25.00!) A \$250.00 non-refundable deposit is due May 10 with the balance due by June 29. After June 29, trip fees are non-refundable. If you find a replacement for yourself the full fee can be refunded. To register call ASGD at 303-973-9530. For other information about the trip please call volunteer trip coordinator Ann Bonnell at 303-979-6211.

Audubon Colorado Rendezvous - August 26

Please mark your calendar and plan to join Audubon members from all around the state for the third annual Audubon Colorado Rendezvous. All chapter members are invited and encouraged to attend. The gathering will take place on Saturday, August 26, with a reception and program planned on Friday evening for participants who arrive early. We'll be getting together at the scenic Mt. Princeton Hot Springs Resort, centrally located in the state near Buena Vista, in the shadow of the Collegiate Peaks. Please check their website www.mtprinceton.com to see the facilities, including their hot springs pools that are accessible to you as part of the affordable lodging fee.

Audubon is planning a full day of programs, workshops, birding and special speakers. As in past years, we will be bringing in speakers from out of state, including National Audubon staff who will want to share ideas with chapter members and other conservation friends. Among the topics that will be covered in workshops and other presentations are Gunnison sage-grouse conservation and the collaborative effort being led by our chapters in 2006, the latest info on avian flu and how Audubon members can head off misinformation about the flu and wild birds, updates on the new Colorado Birding Trail and the planning for the second Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas, and much more. Please check the website www.coloradoaudubon.org for details about speakers and programs, as well as registration forms and information as it becomes available. Register early and make room reservations before you head out on summer vacation. Call 303-415-0130 or email Audubon Colorado rstromp@audubon.org for more information.

New Friends Members

Joseph Benetka, Bonnie Boex, Catharine Brooks, DeAnn Brunts, Heather Carlson, Foresta Jean Davis, Suzanne Fountain, JoAnn Garavaglia, Joyce Haen, Grace Hahn, Memory Lamfers, Mary Ann Lang, Roger Loewi, Martine Matzke, Mary O'Connor, Sylvia Reilly, Elaine Salmento, Ann Sprague, Anita Stewart.

backyard birds....

by Hugh Kingery



NAN BREHMER AND JOY SCHIEVING hold the record as this column's most faithful contributors. Nan always has pungent observations about birds she sees on Green Mountain, and Joy spots an impressive variety of species in her south Denver backyard. Thanks to you both for your persistent backyard gems.

NAN DOESN'T RESTRICT HERSELF TO BIRDS. "There are 8 observable 'from-my-kitchen-window' places where each day I place seed. But until the sunflower seeds are all eaten, 5 of these places are occupied by 5 squirrels. I'm going to not use sunflowers seeds for awhile to see if the squirrels lose interest. (P.S. one week later – they did not lose interest)." Ken Gammon in Franktown also looks at other critters. He says, "one adult red fox caught in ambush from oak scrub, one crow! He plucked him for about 10 minutes."

THE USUAL MIGRANTS moved through metro Denver in April and May, and so did a few unusual ones. Betty Harwood, in the Willow Creek foothills, "shared the fortune of having a male Harris's sparrow in the backyard" May 6-9. She also tallied chipping and white-crowned sparrows, lazuli bunting, and ruby-crowned kinglets. Cat Anderson, in Englewood, wrote about a lazuli bunting, western tanager, and green-tailed towhee on May 20. She also saw two green herons at a pond near the Highline Canal. "And for comedy relief, a pair of mallards under my feeder with the bird bath."

KEVIN CORWIN REPORTED that on May 10, "a male black-headed grosbeak visited my yard in west Centennial for a few minutes. He appeared to be eating the flower buds on a privet bush."

UP ON LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN, Jean Widman reported a yellow-rumped warbler of the Audubon's persuasion in early May. Then on May 15, a "lovely flock of cedar waxwings came in for their supper on the last 'seeds' of the newly-leafed-out aspen trees." By May 27, she says, "We enjoy the house wrens singing."

JEAN ALSO DESCRIBED "a large brown hawk that flew onto a building [in the Cherry Creek shopping center], nearly crashing into a window, but veered aside and then sat on one of the building walls. I thought perhaps it was a young inexperienced hawk to be buzzing one of the busiest streets around." I doubt that any "hatch-year" hawks became mobile by mid May, so I'm guessing that Jean's hawk survived the winter despite its inept navigation of Cherry Creek high-rises. A pair of buteos, red-tail hawks I think, nest nearby at Denver Country Club.

CAROLYN ZWHALEN PUTS "seed out on the ground [in Perry Park] as the spotted towhee likes his meals that

way. The first of this week [mid May] I looked out to see three white-crowned sparrows, two chipping sparrows, a green-tailed and spotted towhee all scratching around at the same time. That was fun, but this morning brought a lazuli bunting checking for seed. That was special!" Shirley and Buzz Bowers also saw a green-tailed towhee in Franktown May 17, and I saw one here May 8-9.

JOY HAD 1-2 WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS all of April, and a brown creeper twice in March and once in April. Ken and Laurie Bender reported white-crowns in early May, along with the typical assortment of chickadees, nuthatches, and towhees. Along with visiting chipping sparrows Elissa McAlear saw some diet-imaginative robins in her Arvada yard: they ate millet for several days.

BACKYARDERS REPORTED two unusual migrants: Gary and Sherry Brown, in Aurora, said, "We just had to tell someone. We saw (unmistakable markings) a male (in breeding attire) rose-breasted grosbeak in our front yard eating dropped seed from under our feeder." And Kirk Huffstater passed on a friend's encounter, in Castle Rock, with a greater roadrunner in his driveway. He described the bird perfectly, with brown-streaked body, long tail, heavy bill, red spot behind eye, and running around on the ground. Cool! Cool indeed – I don't remember another roadrunner report from "metro Denver." They live in southeast Colorado and range occasionally to Pueblo and rarely, I think, to Colorado Springs.

BETTY SAYS A "Cooper's hawk snatched one of a pair of our favorite downy woodpeckers." Paula Breese (east Denver) sent a picture of a sharp-shinned hawk dismantling a grackle, which it caught, killed, and flew off with a minute later. Dale Frey saw two turkey vultures soaring over 6th and Indiana on April 3.

AT LEAST TWO GREEN BELTS harbored pairs of wood ducks. Michele Bloom saw a pair near Cat Anderson's home – they use boxes on Cat's pond. Carol and Clint Flynn on April 3 saw a pair along the Bear Creek trail west of Sheridan.

BARB SHISSLER REPORTED "the strangest bird came to our feeder this morning. It was clearly a common grackle, but it had a very long curved bill, similar to a curve-billed thrasher." With our bird class in April we saw a red-winged blackbird whose upper mandible curved over the lower one, and extended three-four times the length of the lower one. I'm not sure what causes these deformities, but the April dates intimate that these handicapped birds survived over the winter.

FROM PARKER, Laurie Bender on May 6 said, "Our greatest delight right now is our little flock of 10-20 American goldfinches. The 'boys' have been a brilliant yellow for a couple of weeks now – their black foreheads are startling against the yellow. The house finches will sometimes be aggressive against the goldfinches, but we think this is caused by the presence of juveniles – we saw a male house finch feeding young the other day.

Continued on page 10

"WE HAVE BOTH mourning doves and Eurasian collared-doves frequently eating the cracked corn we put on the ground." Bruce McLain, in northwest Denver, says that the collared-doves drove out the mourning doves. And I've lost the note from someone who saw collared-doves gathering nest material in west Centennial about a month ago. Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory wants records of nesting activity of this invading species. If you see any definite nesting activity, let me know and I'll pass it on to Rich Levad.

SPEAKING OF NESTING SPECIES, Ann Bonnell called on May 29 because a hiker in Roxborough State Park had reported a bushtit nest. We followed Ann's directions and found the nest on May 30: about 18 feet up in a giant Douglas-fir. It looked as if the bushtits had young in the nest: the adults would fly in every 2-5 minutes. They moved so fast, and the nest hangs in total shade, that we couldn't really see the birds. Considering its dimensions – a hanging pouch 10-15 inches long – a bushtit nest should stick out conspicuously, but we spent 10 minutes looking before we found the thing.

METRO DENVER HAS only two other confirmed bush-tit nests that I know of: Cat Anderson had one in her horse pasture, and Tina Jones had one in her BowMar yard. Bushtits usually build their nests in conifers – they commonly use pinyon pines, so this one in a Douglas-fir fits the pattern.

JERRY WAGNER CALLED to ask about flickers. It seems that he works in the Galleria, a high-rise office building on Colorado Blvd. A flicker excavated a hole in the side of the building, and got into the insulation part. (Don Wedow, who did some carpentry for us, says that flickers can't penetrate ordinary stucco, but that they can dig holes in a substitute material that looks like stucco.) The building management plugged the hole but the flickers dug it out again, and the building didn't pursue it. Unfortunately for the flickers, starlings did pursue them, because by Apr. 28, starlings used the hole and the flickers disappeared.

JOY ASKED ABOUT bird flu: "will 'someone' decide we can no longer feed wild birds because it's not safe?" If science and reason prevail, No. So far, at least, no credible evidence exists of transmittal from wild birds to humans, or from humans to humans. Almost all incidences arose from contact with poultry kept for commercial or personal use. A column in Audubon magazine said that if you want to catch bird flu, take a week's vacation at a poultry farm. That is: chances of transmittal are remote at best.

I WELCOME YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS to this column. Drop me a note or post card at P.O. Box 584, Franktown 80116, or Email me, ouzels@juno.com.

Aurora's Big Year!

by *MaryAnn Bonnell*

Birding in Aurora is about to get a lot better thanks to local birders, the Lois Webster Fund of the Audubon Society of Greater Denver, Aurora Wild Birds Unlimited, the Open Space and Natural Resources Division, and (hopefully) you!

With everything from prairie to ponderosa pine forest to offer our avian friends, it is no surprise that bird watching has always been a great way to get to know Aurora's Natural Areas and to treat yourself to an inexpensive and rewarding treasure hunt just about any day of the year.

Since the Big Year's official start on Saturday, May 13th, we have compiled a list of 86 species of birds spotted in 13 different locations, including Aurora's natural areas, reservoirs, backyards, and even parking lots. Highlights include western tanager in the Dam West Neighborhood, a veery at Saddle Rock Golf Course, nesting western bluebirds at Ponderosa Preserve, cinnamon teals at Quincy Reservoir, and a black-chinned hummingbird at Cherry Creek Reservoir!

While this amazing and international show of avian diversity has played out for years in Aurora, no one has ever compiled a bird list for public use that is specific to our City. Starting on Saturday, May 13th, 2006 and ending on Saturday, May 12th, 2007, we invite you to share your Aurora bird sightings with us to help us build an observation-based bird list for the City.

Many birders of all ability levels have already contributed lists, data sheets, and sightings records for this project. Please consider sharing what you see and know with us as well.

To participate in Aurora's Big Year, please submit sightings and lists electronically to nature@auroragov.org or stop by the Aurora Wild Birds Unlimited (located at Iliff and Peoria) to drop off sightings and other bird intelligence. Not a birder? Get a taste of what you are missing by joining us for a guided bird walk (offered the second Saturday of each month. Location varies—please see our calendar for specifics). The goal of Aurora's Big Year is not only to create a great Aurora bird list, but also to increase awareness and appreciation for the creatures that connect us to our local natural resources as well as natural places thousands of miles away.



The burrowing owl is the official logo of Aurora's Big Year project

Avian Flu

by Doris Cruze

Lyme disease, West Nile virus, mad cow disease, and avian influenza, all diseases associated with animals and human contact, continue to grab headlines and to be top stories on television news programs.

Are we facing a serious influenza outbreak even worse than the Spanish flu outbreak in 1918 which resulted in more than 20 million deaths world wide? Are we helpless to protect ourselves and our families?

Dr. William Karesh, a veterinarian who monitors avian flu for the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and who has assisted governments and conservation organizations around the world says, "We are in an era of 'one world, one health,' and we must devise adaptive, forward-looking and multidisciplinary solutions to the challenges that undoubtedly lie ahead."

Dr. Karesh, speaking in Rye, New York, noted that avian influenza has various subtypes, and most pose no threat to humans. The threat is the H5N1 strain which may have developed in poultry farms in Asia. It is unclear at this time whether H5N1 spread from poultry to wild birds or vice versa. The World Health Organization, WCS, and other groups are working to create a global surveillance network to track the virus. Government agencies and health care systems are planning and preparing for all possibilities.

At a "flu summit" held in Denver in late March, U. S. Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt stressed that communities need to prepare. He pledged \$1.6 million to Colorado to help communities across Colorado do planning for flu preparedness.

So, what are the facts and what can we do?

1. H5N1 is a bird virus. To date, only people with direct contact with infected birds have become sick and some have died.

2. No H5N1 strain has been found in any birds in North or South America. Extensive monitoring, especially at the most likely gateway in Alaska is being done.

3. So far, no vaccine for the H5N1 strain has been developed. Anti-viral medications are available. These medications, such as Tamiflu, can reduce the severity and duration of illness.

4. Families can get the most current information on avian influenza on the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov/flu/avian.

Despite the alarming headlines and sickening videos of dead birds in Asia, Europe, and Africa, the facts are that, at this time, the birds of Colorado are not infected. There is no reason to kill birds, avoid birding sites, or stay away from wild bird stores. There is no reason to stop feeding backyard birds or to stop birding activities. Of course the feeders need to be cleaned and sanitized regularly. Of course washing hands with soap and water after handling feeders is a must. Of course it is wise to avoid contact with an obviously sick bird or other animal and to report sightings to local authorities.

The most important things birders can do is to get the facts by keeping informed, and to act on facts, not alarming headlines.

Sources:

The Rye Record; Rye, New York; March 9, 2006; p. 1.

The Denver Post; March 25, 2006; pp. 1, 4A, 15A.

Dobbs, David, Field Notes/Avian Flu; Audubon Magazine; New York; March-April 2006; p. 14.

Thank You!

Volunteers!

Spring Benefit & Auction Volunteers - Charles Butcher, Doris Cruze, Jimmy Cruze, Carol DeStefanis, Jeanette Duerksen, Rebecca Duerksen, Kelly Forrester, Courtney James, Barbara Masoner, Rosalie Metzger, Mary O'Connor, Javier Perez, Polly Reetz, Phil Reynolds, Ira Sacks, Janet Sacks, Elaine Salmento, Rhonda Shank, Lori Sharp, Barbara Shissler, Frank Shissler, Dorothy Sutherlin, Kathy Wagner, and especially - Lynne Forrester, chairperson.

May/June Warbler Mailing - Billy Funk, Marc Goodbody, Charlotte Gottlieb, Vi Nicholson, Lori Sharp, Frank Shissler.

Adopt-a-Platte Survey - Ellie Jones, Peter Mulholland, Joyce Quigley, Peggy Roberts, Betsy Weitkamp, Ralph & Emilie Wiersma.

Bird Skin Preparation - Jeanette & Rebecca Duerksen.

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Audubon Center renovations & clean-up - Doris Cruze, Lynne Forrester, Fred Griest, Urling Kingery, Arlene Raskin, Jed Raskin, Carolyn Roark, Elaine Salmento, Frank Shissler.

Garden Crew - Carol DeStefanis, Bill Eden, Fred Griest, Rob-in Marlow.

Birdseed Sale - Ed Butterfield, Javier Perez, Jed Raskin, DJ Reetz, Frank Shissler.

Native Plant Sale - Carol DeStefanis, MaryEllen Sargent.

Gifts to ASGD

Director's Circle (\$500+): Elaine McCoach

Contributor's Circle (\$250+): The Front Range Birding Company, Lois Levinson, Pam Norris, John & Cassie Pazour.

Contributions were also received from: Meredith Anderson, Bonnie Boex, DeAnn Brunts, Doris Cruze, Jan Dees, Maureen Fujii, Peggy O. Gonder, Ann Groshek, Marilyn Hackett, Terri Hoopes, Alan & Dorothy Hopeman, Tina Jones, Avalonne Kosanke, Jerry Kromer, Roger Loewi, Larry & Abby Modesitt, Danielle Okin, Sonya Pennock, Robert & Carla Shaver, Anne Southcott, Joan Sussman, Frank & Jean Watson, Lynn & Fran Yehle

In Memory of Nell Swiers - a gift from Susan H. Rosen.

In-Kind Donations

Lynne Forrester—Auction Supplies

JB Hayes—Collection of bird magazines, assorted books and a Time-Life Audubon Folio

Jon & Elissa McAlear—4 bluebird houses and 1 flicker house

Rhonda Shank—Coffee mugs, baskets, wine bottle opener

Lori Sharp—New Bird Feeder

Bob Turner—Collection of Classic Bird Books



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