

The vision unfolds...

by Susan Smith, ASGD Executive Director

It is an exciting time for the Audubon Society of Greater Denver. This past year we have seen our vision for the Audubon Center at Chatfield begin to unfold.

Last summer, volunteers put hundreds of hours of "sweat equity" into the site by demolishing the interior of one of the stone buildings. Over the winter a new concrete floor was put in, rafters were stabilized, electrical service and water were brought to the building, along with many other much-needed improvements. As part of the project, Colorado State Parks installed latrines near the building and solar parking lot lights. This summer, volunteers again showed their support by building trails around the classroom and creating a children's sensory and wildlife

habitat garden.

The result is a unique classroom with walls that open into nature—a place that inspires new discoveries and fosters a sense of stewardship. While the classroom provides necessary shelter, it is only

a starting place. A few steps outside and you can explore a native garden where children are encouraged to smell, touch and listen to the plants – a garden where wildlife is welcome and treated with respect. Venture a little farther and you will

find yourself on a floating dock searching the banks of Muskrat Pond for frogs and turtles. Stroll along the boardwalk

and eavesdrop on a symphony of bird song and activity in the cattails.

It is time to celebrate our accomplishments! Please join us at the Audubon Center on Saturday, September 20th for a special ribbon cutting ceremony. There will be nature art projects for young and old, volunteer opportunities and more! Watch for your invitation in the mail.

And remember, this is only the beginning. Our vision for the Audubon Center will continue to unfold with your help. We are already charting out the next steps. The stone house is begging to be restored and a new building is desperately

needed to house exhibits, an auditorium, a nature-based preschool and the ASGD offices. If you want to help make the Audubon Center a reality, please contact Susan Smith at 303-973-9530 or ssmith@denveraudubon.org to find out how you can help.



Photos: Upper left, Audubon Center at Chatfield's newly renovated Classroom Building. Upper right, Two-year old toddlers in ADGD's "Nestlings" program get a hands-on nature lesson on the floating dock at Muskrat Pond. Above, ASGD board member Polly Reetz and Coors Corp volunteer Chris Thompson work in the Audubon Center garden in late July.

NEW! ASGD Announcement Listserv

A lot can happen in the two months between each issue of our newsletter, "The Warbler!" Now we have an "announcement-only" e-mail listserv to keep you up-to-date with news, events, action alerts and volunteer opportunities from Audubon Society of Greater Denver. This listserv makes it possible to get current news items to you while they are still current.

There are two ways to subscribe to the listserv: Go to www.denveraudubon.org and follow the directions on the home page OR send a message to ssmith@denveraudubon.org.

SAVE THE DATE!
Audubon Center
Ribbon Cutting & Celebration
Saturday, September 20

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE—"Take Back Audubon"

First the good news—Renovation of our classroom building at the Audubon Center is complete. I hope you will join us for the ribbon cutting on Sept. 20. I want to personally thank all the volunteers whose diligence and perseverance have brought us to this point. And, remember—this is the start of a great thing!

On a more somber note, we take time in this Warbler to remember a truly amazing person—Vim Wright. She was a champion for environmental causes and extraordinary activist. Her life remains an inspiration for those who knew her. Vim will be greatly missed.

Now for the bad news - Many of you already know that ASGD has struggled and failed over the past few years to form a partnership with National Audubon Society (NAS) for the benefit of the Audubon Center. In addition, NAS has threatened the life of many chapters through policy changes (the reduction of membership dues shares is only one example) and an extreme top-down approach to managing the organization. While we hear many eloquent speeches from NAS staff and board members about the importance of empowering local grassroots efforts, their actions speak volumes to the contrary.

As a result, the ASGD Board of Directors voted to support the Take Back Audubon (TBA) campaign at their July meeting. TBA is a coalition of independent Audubon chapters that have organized "to restore a true partnership between the independent Chapters and the NAS." TBA has drafted five "democracy resolutions" that would improve chapter / NAS communication and relations, thus strengthening both chapters and NAS. When TBA representatives presented four of these resolutions at the NAS board meeting in December 2002, they were promptly voted down by NAS leadership.

It will take real change within NAS before we can expect to see positive steps taken to reform NAS. Eight individuals from the TBA coalition have stepped forward to run for seats on the NAS board of directors. TBA is organizing a proxy campaign to elect these candidates at the December 2003 NAS board meeting. A successful campaign will require a hundred signatures from each chapter. We will need your help to make it a success. As the details are worked out, we will be contacting you and asking for your support. In the meantime, I encourage you to read through TBA's website at www.smbas.org/tba and become an informed Audubon member.



Thank You!

WITH GRATITUDE – THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING ASGD

- Gifts to the Lois Webster Fund, in honor of Vim Wright, were made by: BJ Averitt, Lavonne Axford, Ed Butterfield, Bill & Pat Jackson, Elaine McCoach, Sandra Kae McKone, Gene and Polly Reetz, John and Amy Richardson, John Wright, Margot Wynkoop, Margaret Ballentyne.
- Joseph Mahaffy made a gift to ASGD in memory of Mims Stamper.
- Betty McGinnis donated a pry bar to attack the rocky soil in the Audubon Center gardens.
- Rhonda Shank donated a vacuum cleaner to help keep our offices clean.

APPLAUSE FOR OUR VOLUNTEERS!

- Thanks to our office angels that help us stay organized: Allison Hilf, Courtney James, Betty McGinnis, Grace Weber, Naomi Pequette, Marie Eggen and JoAnn Bushnell.
- Many, many thanks to the volunteers that endured the summer heat to work on the native gardens and trails: Evie Brame, Jonathan Chesser, Ben Cooper, Tom Gibbons, Charlotte Gottlieb, Fred Griest, Glenn Jameson, Betty McGinnis, Patricia Palm, Polly Reetz, Sue Schulman, Emily Steigers, John Steigers, Tyson Steigers, Kathleen Sullivan, Karen von Saltza, Carole Walker, Joan Whiting and The YMCA Boulder Garden Crew.
- Thanks to our always dependable and efficient Warbler mailing crew: Ben Cooper, Kevin Corwin, Marc Goodbody, Fred Griest, Jan Hodous, Betty McGinnis, Ruth Schoening, Barbara Shissler, Frank Shissler.

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MISSION

ASGD is a nonprofit group, with over 3000 members, 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

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

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

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TRAVEL, FIELD TRIPS, CLASSES & PROGRAMS

To Register for Trips & Classes Call the ASGD Office at 303.973.9530

Join FRIENDS of ASGD and Receive Discounts on Field Trips and Classes

View Photos and Read Reviews from Trip Participants in Our Trip Scrapbook Online at www.denveraudubon.org/scrapbook.htm



FIELD TRIPS

Walk the Wetlands

Sunday, Sept. 7 8 am

Sunday, Oct. 5 9 am (new winter time)

Leaders: Doris Cruze (Sept.) 303-798-8072

Hugh and Urling Kingery (Oct.) 303-814-2723

Pre-Registration NOT required.

Fee: None

Meeting place: Audubon Center at Chatfield State Park (contact ASGD for directions).

Description: We will hike along the South Platte River looking for migrants and winter residents. There are always surprises. Bring binoculars, field guides, water, snack, and lunch if you 'd like to stay. Wear long pants as poison ivy is lush. Mosquito repellent is a good idea, too.

Night Hike—For the whole family!

Saturday, September 20 7:30pm-9:30pm

Leader: Susan Smith

Pre-Registration IS required.

Fee: Children under 16—\$3/Friends members \$5/Non-member Adults - \$5/Friends member \$7/Non-member

Meeting Place: Audubon Center at Chatfield State Park

Description: Experience the nightlife at the Audubon Center, sharpen your observation skills while learning how nocturnal creatures hunt and forage in the dark. See and hear wildlife that most people miss.

South Platte Park

Saturday, September 27 8:00am (Half Day)

Leader: Doris Cruze 303-798-8072

Pre-Registration IS required.

Fee: \$5/Friends members \$7/Non-member

Meeting Place: Carson Nature Center, South Platte Park (west on Mineral from Santa Fe: right at 1st traffic light: Between 2 RTD parking lots: Meet in parking lots north of 2-story log building)

Description: Join Doris to explore this amazingly rich habitat along the South Platte River. This will be an easy hike and is wheel chair accessible. You'll see water birds as well as a variety of land birds in the cottonwood groves. Bring binoculars and water.

Roxborough State Park

Sunday, October 19 8:00am-11:30am

Leader: Doris Cruze 303-798-8072

Pre-Registration NOT required.

Fee: State Parks Pass or \$5 Daily Fee required

Meeting Place: Visitor's Center at Roxborough State Park

Description: Hike spectacular trails through the red rocks formations for two miles. Look for golden eagles as well as local foothills and scrub-oak birds such as scrub-jays, towhees and chickadees. If you like, bring lunch to eat on the patio as well as binoculars and water.

THE BIG SIT!

Sunday, October 12 6:00am to Sunset

Fee: None

Pre-Registration NOT required

Big Sit! Audubon of Greater Denver

Leaders: Bob and Lee Ann Brown (303-791-6204)

Meeting place: Audubon Center at Chatfield State Park (contact ASGD for directions).

Big Sit! Denver Field Ornithologists

Leaders: Joey Kellner (303-978-1748)

Meeting place: Chatfield State Park heron overlook (either the old or the new one; contact leader for directions).

The Big Sit!, an international birding event, has exacting, loose and frivolous rules. Big Sitters! count all the birds they see or hear as long as the Sitters! remain in a circle with a 17-foot diameter. Counting Sitters! may send out scouts and beaters to find other birds and identify them, as long as a Sitter! sees the bird from the circle. All around the world, on this date, people will Big Sit!. these two Sits! described below double the number of Colorado Big Sits! over last year.

Come and join Bob Lee and Leanne Brown and other recruits or Joey and other recruits, for an hour, a morning or all day. Drop by whenever you like or volunteer to substitute Sit! for the leaders for an hour or two. Bring chairs, breakfast, lunch or dinner picnics, coffee, etc. Also binoculars, scopes, field guides and other essential birding equipment.

CLASSES

Beginning Bird-Watching Class

Thursday, September 18 , 7:00-9:00pm

Saturdays, September 20, October 4, 11, 18, 25, and November 1 8:00am-2:00pm

Leaders: Hugh and Urling Kingery (303-814-2723)

Pre-Registration IS required.

Fee: \$120/Friends member, \$150/non-member

Meeting Place: Gather for first class on September 18, at the Audubon Center at Chatfield State Park. (class details and directions will be sent when you register).

Description: Voted Westword's *Best of Denver!* Ever want to learn how to identify birds like the experts? Now you can! Experience bird-watching basics from two of the state's best and most entertaining birders. You'll practice your skills over the course of six field trips during the fall season. Saturday field trips sample a variety of habitats during the height of fall migration, insuring many kinds of birds and plenty of opportunity to learn new skills and practice them. The first evening class session will include suggestions for selecting birding binoculars and usable field guides. You can make up any missed classes in future spring and fall sessions. Phone in your reservation right away to make sure you reserve a space.

Travel Adventures

Reef, 'Roos and Rainforest Australian Wildlife Tour Led by Bill Turner

October 10-28, 2003

This experience features a visit to Heron Island on the Great Barrier Reef, the exceptional Aboriginal art and wildlife of Carnarvon Gorge in the outback of central Queensland, outstanding birding at renowned O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse, a stay on Bruny Island where all 12 of Tasmania's endemic bird species occur plus a stop in Sydney. Among the birds and mammals we should see are emus, little penguins, wedge-tailed eagles, bowerbirds, parrots, koalas, platypus, and echidnas, to name just a few. Enjoy Australia's unique wildlife in a small group (12 maximum) with excellent local guides. The tour price of \$6598 includes airfare from Denver and almost all

meals. For more information and a color brochure, contact Bill Turner at 303-795-5128 or e-mail at SMUparent@aol.com.

Birds of Paradise An Hawaiian EDventure

November 1-8, 2003

Are you passionate about adding "lif-ers" to your list? Sightings of Hawaii's "winged-jewels" abound on this University of Hawaii's 2-island journey to Kauai and the Big Island of Hawaii. Join expert birding guides, field interpreters, naturalists and photographers as you discover Hawaii's anchialine ponds, and shoreline habitats that offer awe-some encounters. Our price of \$1,325 (single occupancy) and \$1425 (double) for Friend's members, includes 7 nights, 8 days (starting from Lihue, Kauai), inter-island air travel from Kauai to Hilo, oceanfront hotels, all ground transportation, park entrance fees and meals.

(Non-members add \$100 each.) Pre- and post-trip extensions are available. Space is limited to 12 per group. For more information, contact Becky Beckers, Travel For the Birds at 303-766-5266 or email at AgentBecky@aol.com.

Welcome to our new Friends of ASGD

Pat Brodbent, Diane Brown, Charles Butcher, Carol DeStefanis, C. Dale & Karen Flowers, Barbara Foster, Bryan Gieszl, Julie Guzzetta, Mary Hafner, Charlie Jordan, Scott & Sandy Menough, Rhonda Shank, Claudette St. Pierce, Dorothy Thomas, De De Williams

**Thanks you for choosing to
support Audubon Society
of Greater Denver!**

FALL COUNT SCHEDULE 2003

Registration: Not required, except as indicated

Fee: None

Thursday, Sept. 11

Cherry Creek Reservoir

Leaders: J. B. Hayes, 303-798-9683.
Meet at 7:00am at Marina, inside west gate near Cherry Creek High School.
State Parks Pass required.

Saturday, Sept. 13

Waterton Downstream

4-5 mile hike. Wear long pants (not shorts) due to bare-leg-unfriendly plants such as poison ivy, thistles, and knapweed.
Leader: Hugh Kingery, 303-814-2723
Meet at 0630 at Audubon Center at Chatfield (left turn immediately after turning onto Waterton Road and before the DOW parking lot for Waterton Canyon).

Barr Lake State Park

This is a ten-mile, all-day hike around the lake (or equivalent).
Leader: Dick Schottler, 303-278-8035.
Meet at 0630 at RMBO, 14500 Lark Bunting Lane. South off Bromley Lane; from I-76, first road east of railroad track.

Chatfield State Park

Leader, Joey Kellner, 303-978-1748.
Meet at 0600 at West (Deer Creek) entrance to park. State Parks Pass required.

Sunday Sept. 14

Castlewood Canyon State Park

Leader: Randy Lentz, 303-680-3381.
Meet at 0630 at the Homestead. From CO 86, 0.5 miles west of Franktown, turn south on Castlewood Canyon Road, go two miles to old entrance; Homestead is first parking lot on the left. State Parks pass required.

Barr Lake Periphery

This trip does not involve much walking and will be good for people with limited mobility or stamina.
Leader: Jackie King, 303-287-1644.
Meet at 0700 at intersection of Piccadilly Road and Bromley Lane.

Rocky Mountain Arsenal

Leader: Urling Kingery, 303-814-2723.
Call leader to sign up, either before Aug. 20 or after Sept. 9.

Monday, Sept. 15

Lower Bear Creek

Leader: Tamie Bulow, 303-462-1238.
Meet at 0700 at northwest corner of Hampden (US 285) and So. Sheridan Blvd., in front of Albertson's. Please call leader if you plan to go.

Vim Wright lived life on behalf of her critters

by her son John Wright

No one could ever accuse Denver Audubon of not having a nest full of colorful “characters.” This chapter has been blessed with an abundance of such people who see problems and accomplish much in defense of their beloved birds and other wildlife. Over the years, our chapter has benefited greatly from these dedicated characters. Certainly, in the earlier years, one such person was V. Crane “Vim” Wright who passed away on June 1 in Seattle, WA. Vim, born to Greek parents in Istanbul, Turkey, on June 4, 1926, was adopted by an American military family and moved to Baltimore when she was 11. She moved to Colorado with her two sons in 1960.

Many years have passed since Vim moved from Denver to Seattle in 1977 but there are numerous current ASGD members that easily remember the work and dedication she fostered for Colorado’s “critters” (as she called them). In the late 1960’s, with her youngest son off to college, Vim picked up bird-watching to occupy some of her free time. Field trips with the Kingerys’ and Lois Webster quickly forged a life-long love for “her” birds. As a new member of Denver Audubon and with the mentoring guidance of Lois, that free time was quickly absorbed as her love of birds blossomed into actions in behalf of wildlife and the environment.

Even before she served as Denver Audubon’s fourth president in 1971, she helped spearhead a local television program “Environmental Hotline.” Soon she was appointed to the National Audubon Board. “We’re not removed from nature in the city,” she once reported during an interview “We just don’t pay attention to her. Nature’s not 50 miles away, it’s in our back yards. We just don’t look. If we’re not observant, we’re not going to see anything.” In the mid-70s she served as president of the Colorado Open Space Council (now the Colorado Environmental Coalition.)

Teaming with Dr. Estella Leopold and others, she joined the effort to save Florissant Fossil Beds (outside of Manitou Springs, CO) from development destruction. In what became the subject of a Pat Oliphant editorial cartoon, she bet that a bulldozer driver would never run over a woman fashionably dressed in high heels and a pearl necklace. Fortunately, she never really had to test her conviction for on noon of the day that she was carry through on her threat, the Federal District Court accepted an appeal which protected the land until final Senate approval weeks later with funds for the establishment of Florissant National Park.

Vim led the effort in Colorado and Wyoming to ban poisons used for predator control. To protect their sheep, ranchers used “Compound 1080” poison to inhumanely kill

coyotes. But, it also killed eagles and other animals in nature’s food chain. Eventually, President Nixon banned the poison in 1972. This effort earned Vim the title as the “most hated woman in Colorado” by the sheep ranching community. Her other accomplishments include playing an instrumental role in stopping oil shale mining in environmentally sensitive parts of western Colorado as an environmental representative to the National Oil Shale Advisory Committee; assisting in the formation of Roxborough State Park; and helping to lead the campaign to place the Non-Game Wildlife Check-Off, the first of its kind in the nation, on Colorado’s income tax form.

In 1977, after turning down the job offer three times, Vim moved to Seattle to be the assistant director of the Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Washington, a post she held for 15 years. Not content to have her activist life constrained, she served on the Board of the Washington Environmental Council and co-founded what is now Washington Conservation Voters. Vim was also involved in establishing the People for Puget Sound, the Puget Soundkeeper Alliance, and Earth Share (a workplace environmental “United Way”) and was a Washington Audubon Steward. Appointed in 1995 by Governor Mike Lowry to the Washington State Conservation Commission, she served as a member (the first non-farmer) and

eventually was elected Chair– twice!

She received numerous awards including the Feinstone Award (1976), Washington State Environmental Excellence (1987), Southwest Parks & Monument’s Edward Danson Award (2000). Most recently in November 2002, she received the Washington Environmental Council’s Environmental Hero award for her pioneer role in launching Farming and the Environment, a non-profit program helping farmers and environmentalists reach their common goal to improve land stewardship to benefit wildlife. Of her many accomplishments, she was most proud of building bridges between farmers and environmentalists. “She spent a lot of time building trust so farmers and environmentalists will understand they have more in common than they don’t,” her son, John Wright said. “It summed up all of her skills and passions.”

Vim’s advice to anyone who asked her about an issue was “Do the right thing.” At a recent Memorial Celebration for Vim here in Denver, numerous testimonials confirmed that she followed that credo faithfully and in abundance. She was a valued “character” indeed.

The family requests contributions in her honor to the ASGD’s Lois Webster Fund, 9308 South Wadsworth Boulevard, Littleton, CO 80128.



Vim Wright , June 4, 1926–June 1, 2003



Eagle Eye

Watching Public Policy for the Environment

by Polly Reetz

The US Congress is considering giving the Department of Defense (DOD) an exemption from certain environmental laws, namely the Endangered Species Act and the National Marine Fisheries Act. The DOD already got a partial exemption from the Migratory Bird Treaty Act last year, in spite of the fact that our military forces seem to have had no problem becoming "combat ready" without the exemption. The DOD can already get a Presidential exemption from such laws for specific actions by request, so a blanket exemption is not needed.

Senator Wayne Allard is on the conference committee made up of both House and Senate members that will decide whether or not the DOD gets the exemption in the final version of the Defense Authorization Bill. The House consented to it, the Senate did not. You should call Senator Allard at 970-351-7582 here in Colorado or 202-224-5941 in Washington, D.C. to tell him the DOD does not NEED this exemption.

For those of you interested in the blackbird issue, the staff of the Colorado Division of Wildlife, and the Colorado Wildlife Commission, decided not to consider issuing blanket permits to kill Red-winged, Brewer's, Yellow-headed, and Rusty blackbirds and grackles at will. The present system, under which a landowner has to get an incident-specific permit, will continue. Blackbirds can damage agricultural crops such as sunflower seeds, but non-lethal methods are available and preferable.

Referendum A is a bad idea. \$4 billion dollars for what?

by Jo Evans, ASGD Board Member

This November voters will be asked "shall the state of Colorado debt be increased \$2,000,000,000 with a repayment of \$4,000,000,000 for the purpose of addressing the water infrastructure needs of the state through the issuance of revenue bonds?"

Projects less than \$5 million are not eligible for funding. A state agency will recommend projects to the governor who must choose at least 1 project with a start date of 2005.

Although a small portion of the dollars may, ostensibly, be spent for species protection or conservation measures, Referendum A is not about conservation. It is about building dams. Revenue bonds are based on the premise that when you loan me dollars for a new project, I will make money, new dollars, and pay you back from the money I make. Species protection projects do not create a revenue stream. Conservation saves money but it does not generate dollars that can be pledged against revenue bonds. For example, pricing that reflects usage is widely recognized as one of the most effective ways to conserve existing developed supplies. If it costs more, people use less. Rebates for water efficient landscapes and appliances are also commonly accepted and sound urban conservation practices. We know these measures work to save water, but they do not make money. Revenue bonds simply won't work to inde-

pendently fund conservation or species protection programs.

A major problem with the proposal is that the voters are being asked in essence to approve a blank check. We do not know what will be built or where. Consequently the impacts, whether ecological or economic, are impossible to assess.

All dams have environmental impacts. Streams are the building blocks of riparian ecosystems. Less water in a stream changes the stream. The ability of the stream to dilute pollutants is reduced, affecting water quality. The flow is altered. Temperature may change. Fish and wildlife habitats are often harmed. When the natural cycles are altered by diversions the change in river habitat may be dramatic. Sandbars critical to the nesting of cranes and plovers may disappear. Migration routes may be affected. We need to know what will be built before we agree to sign the check.

As the state deliberates over water policy options to address the drought and long-run need for water, it is essential that it take into account the impacts of its choices on the ecological health of our rivers and streams. Water conservation and other efficiency improvements are environmentally sound ways of meeting our urban water needs, but are they realistic? In a word, Yes. A 1999 state financed study identified the unmet needs for the metro area in 2045 ranges between 75,000 and 114,000 additional acre-feet of water. A recent report by the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies estimated that potential efficiency improvements could save 390,000 to 730,000 acre-feet of water per year. The report noted that we could meet Denver Metro water needs several times over through improved efficiency.

Referendum A is not risk free economically. Proponents argue that there is no liability for the taxpayers because the bonds will be repaid from the revenue the projects generate. What if the project is never finished? Dollars are spent but there is nothing to sell? Some years ago a series of nuclear power plants were proposed in the state of Washington with a similar funding mechanism. After the Three Mile Island fiasco occurred, nuclear power plants were not favored and the projects were never completed. When the dust cleared and the judgements were issued, everyone lost money, including the taxpayers. Additionally, for the first time, Referendum A would allow the state itself to be a project proponent. If the state partners with private project proponents there is clearly a state taxpayer liability.

The ultimate irony is that we do not need this measure. Referendum A is based on the premise that funding is the central issue in water policy. It is not. Other funding mechanisms exist. Cities and other public water providers may issue general obligation bonds already. In addition 2 state agencies already provide funding for water projects. No credible project in Colorado has failed due to lack of funding. Two Forks was not built because it failed to get a federal permit. Homestake II was not built because it failed to meet the local mitigation requirements. Narrows never got off the ground because of engineering problems. The courts dismissed Union Park because they ruled that there was not sufficient water available to build it. In the last 2 decades Windy Gap, Wolford Mountain, Dillon, and Spinney Mountain were all paid for by the project proponents. In Colorado, for many years, the project beneficiaries funded their own projects.

Referendum A is simply a bad idea. It tries to solve issues of water policy with a blank check creating some level of liability for us all. Unless we know what is proposed we cannot possibly identify the merits and risks either to us or to the environment we treasure.

backyard birds....

by Hugh Kingery



IN OUR EXUBERANCE to see special birds, sometimes we birders do dumb and dangerous things. Last spring in the Pawnee Grassland a van with ten people (not an Audubon group) stopped to look at a Burrowing Owl. The driver stopped in the middle of the road, below the crest of a small hill that created a blind spot for drivers coming from the other side. Sure enough, a pickup truck came along and clobbered it, injuring everyone in the van (broken bones mostly). The upshot: treat dirt roads like any other road—watch where you stop when you watch for a bird.

BACK TO BACKYARDS, and Jill and Mark Holden's description of Lesser Goldfinches at their home in Roxborough. "I saw a pair yesterday that had a female that was really good at hanging upside down at the thistle feeder and the male had a lot of trouble with it. She even allowed him to take thistle from her beak as he stood on a perch below her. Today the male of a pair of Lessers was doing a great job of hanging upside down and the female was the one having trouble and eventually just started eating sunflower seeds. Then another pair of Lessers today where both male and female seemed to be expert at hanging upside down, so that's a third pair unless one of the birds from one of the other two pairs drastically improved its skills.

"A FEMALE AMERICAN GOLDFINCH showed up with something that looked like fishing line. I'm hoping that it was nesting material and that she wasn't having trouble with being tangled in it. She was one of the expert acrobats that could hang upside down well and it didn't seem to be hampering her any."

HOUSE FINCHES present a common urban phenomenon: they nest on porches on light fixtures, left-over Christmas wreaths, mailboxes, plus shelves, eaves, and crannies, etc. Megan Behnke reported that 3-4 babies hatched July 3 in a nest on her front porch light. She wondered if she should turn off the light (it's fluorescent) during the duration of their nestling-hood—the babies were within 1-2 inches of the bulb. I'd say probably—they fledge within two weeks anyway.

LAST YEAR, according to Nan Brehmer on Green Mountain, "A bull snake climbed the small tree, hung down from a branch, stuck his head in the wren house, and the chirping babies chirped no more. This year we have a new wren house under the garage roof." By June 30, "the wrens in my new bird house appear to be feeding a second crop of wrenlings."

IN FRANKTOWN, Shirley and Buzz Bowers saw "a male Black-headed Grosbeak feeding a young Brown-headed Cowbird for quite a while." Cowbirds, of course, lay their eggs in the nests of other birds, who often incubate and feed the result. Urling marvels at how, at some stage after fledging, cowbirds know they are cowbirds and not grosbeaks or warblers or whoever raised them, and flock together with other cowbirds.

GEORGE AND CAROL KIRWIN have more birds in 2003 than in the ten years they've lived in Elizabeth. Their list of 21 species, include a nesting bonanza: 10-15 pairs of Red Crossbills with young, four nest boxes with Western Bluebirds, a robin, Tree Swallows, hairy and downy woodpeckers. They admit that a friend counted in their yard 18 feeders plus four baths. Also in Elizabeth, Ed Case reports (a little late because he saw it after a winter snowstorm) a Lewis's Woodpecker that stayed for two

days. "I thought only flamingos had hot pink breasts."

RAY STANFORD writes that "with only one eye, Kit still spots birds better than I can! She was standing at the kitchen sink (June 1) and said that there was a large woodpecker on top of the utility pole outside. So I got the binocs; the bird was still there [for once], and it was clearly a male Hairy Woodpecker. This was the first we have ever identified here in 31 years."

KIRK BARNHART emailed about a Bullock's Oriole chick that fell out of its nest. We told him to leave it alone – the parents can take care of it better than we can. "After hopping around my backyard for a couple of days and an adult tending to it religiously, I believe the chick finally learned to fly and is well."

SUZANNE SNIDER, who teaches at Regis University, emailed a pre-election prelude to the new mayor's environmental fundraiser. "Imagine my surprise to see a hawk perched on my 'Hick-enlooper for Mayor' sign in the front yard by our bird feeder. Before I could grab my camera to photograph the 'high-flying endorsement,' the hawk flew up into our dense fir tree. I believe the hawk was an immature Cooper's. In any case, the more spectacular sight was the next day when a flock of fearless crows cawed loudly while circling and pecking at the hawk right above my backyard. I watched them until they became tiny black moving dots high in the sky."

ART AND ROSEMARY BECK, taking a Metro State class to Red Rocks, had a surprise when a student pointed out two birds, three feet away: Cedar Waxwings. The cooperative birds "continued to sit there while the whole group came over to see and look them up in their guides." At the trading post, they saw many waxwings "feeding in several hackberry trees." The Becks just finished our beginning bird class, and have taken to heart the "Look it up in the Field Guide" technique of bird watching.

DURING MIGRATION, on May 19, Eve and Earl Denton identified a Blue-winged Warbler in their yard south of Aurora. The same week they saw a Blue Jay and Bullock's Oriole. Eve "wondered if the current lack of construction work on either side of the open space is a factor. We would certainly vote for a moratorium on further construction." Flo de Cesare, in Greenwood Village, hosted a singing Canyon Wren for several days in mid July. "Gorgeous song." Celia Greenman, had the most bizarre sighting: "On 8th Avenue, just west of Sheridan, was a Peacock! Just ambling in the roadway, then walked into a vacant lot. A motorist who stopped when I did (we picked our jaws up) called animal control and the Lakewood PD said that they knew about the peacock(s), they were wild, and they just let them alone."

HAROLD AND NANCY PAPASIAN watched a grackle with a white head in their Littleton yard from May 23-June 4. I always wonder how long these aberrant birds with partial albinism (or leucism) can survive.

"OUR EATING AREA," writes Stefan Kazmierski from Centennial, "looks over a small fish pond. My daughter went out to check the fish and surprised an unusual looking bird, who flew off squawking. I suspected a kingfisher, but didn't think one would waste its time on an 8x4 fish pond with 15 fish. The next morning a glimpse confirmed a Belted Kingfisher with a goldfish in its beak. I told the kids at breakfast and showed them where it perched. The kingfisher was there again, with a fresh goldfish in its beak! My son exclaimed, 'It's alive and he's whacking it against the branch!' I'm going to get a net to cover the pond, I think."

I WELCOME your contributions to Backyard Birds. Drop me a note or post card at PO Box 584, Franktown 80116, or Email me, ouzels@juno.com.



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We have taken on the responsibility of keeping our little corner of the world litter-free! Won't you help us out? We have adopted the section of Hwy. 121 that leads to the Audubon Center. Contact De De Williams at 303-894-5045 or dededel@aol.com if you can help.



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