

## 2005 Spring Benefit Auction & Awards ceremony, April 15

### Environmental Stewardship Awards announced

by Sandy Elliott, ASGD Development & Community Relations Coordinator

The ASGD board of directors selected Fred Griest and Doug Faulkner as the winners of the 2005 Environmental Stewardship Awards. The award is presented annually to individuals who have performed outstanding service in protection of the environment. Fred and Doug receive their awards April 15th at the Spring Benefit Dinner at Pinehurst Country Club.

**FRED GRIEST** has been described as the ultimate volunteer. "Fred never gets tired and is always ready to take on any job," says ASGD Executive Director Susan Smith. "He is an invaluable volunteer who makes everyone's work a little lighter."

Because of his interest in birds, Fred joined Audubon in 1992. After working as a structural engineer for Raytheon Engineers and Constructors and its predecessors for 38 years, Fred retired and found the time to pursue the things he likes to do. Fred says he started volunteering for ASGD in 2000, because he "feels more people need to learn to respect our environment" and thinks ASGD is instrumental in that process.

One of his first projects was supervising the gutting of the stone garage that was later renovated into the first nature center classroom. He was perfect for the job because of his background. But, in his usual modest manner, Fred wanted to give credit to

the other volunteers who worked on the interior demolition. "I had lots of good help," said Fred. "It was a big job and I couldn't have done it by myself."

An avid member of the Colorado Mountain Club, Fred brought a wealth of knowledge to ASGD in the areas of trail building and repair. He has worked with other ASGD volunteers, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado crews and Colorado State Parks to build trails, the boardwalk and dock at our nature center. Besides the heavy work Fred can often be found at the administrative offices preparing *The Warbler* for mailing or making minor repairs.

Always mindful of ASGD needs, Fred spends his "spare time" at home building bird box kits for students to put together in ASGD educational programs. To date, he estimates that he has cut and drilled around 130 boxes. Fred logged over 400 hours of volunteer service to ASGD in 2004.

**DOUG FAULKNER** receives this award for his work on the Important Bird Area (IBA) program in Colorado, while a staff member at the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory. ASGD board member Ann Bonnell nominated Doug primarily because she felt that he should be recognized for establishing the first 47 IBAs in Colorado and Wyoming. Hired by the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory in 1998 as a monitoring biologist, Doug

established the IBA program which highlights areas of extreme importance to migrant species and is crucial to driving conservation of an area and its species. Doug's job involved preparing and presenting criteria, survey data and justification for the designation to community review committees.

Currently, Doug is a monitoring division director at the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory where he oversees eight employees and 25 projects in an eight state region. The Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory is the third largest in the country and the most extensive in the Rocky Mountain and Plains regions.

Monitoring a bird population consists of performing point counts for various government agencies. "We serve as an 'early warning system,' to agencies," says Doug. "We can determine if something is going wrong with a species and warn the agency in order to prevent it from becoming extinct. I think it costs much less to take action early-on, than waiting until it is at a severe point."



### ASGD Spring Benefit & Award Ceremony

Friday, April 15, 2005  
6pm – 10pm  
Pinehurst Country Club

❖ Environmental Stewardship Awards ❖  
❖ Silent & Live Auctions ❖

Watch for your invitation  
in the mail, or contact ASGD  
for more information.

(See Page 11 for 11 Good Reasons to Attend This Event)

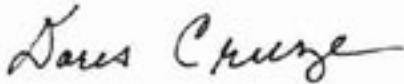
## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE-**

As spring blows in along the front range and winter ducks are replaced by familiar birds returning for the warmer months, Denver Audubon will be a busy place. Staff and volunteers will continue to work on our tremendous Capital Campaign. Members and volunteers will slosh along muddy trails in search of that elusive, wonderful thing called Nature. Hugh and Urling Kingery will brave winds and rains to teach another session of their famous beginning bird watching class. School children visiting the Audubon Center classroom will gaze in wonder at birds in mist nets. Other kids will discover the wonders of pond life and the world beyond their neighborhood.

We have some of the most dedicated volunteers on the planet already involved with leading trips, writing grants, getting newsletters ready for mailing, and helping in countless other ways. As more and more people discover the Audubon Center, volunteers will be more important than ever in getting things done.

At our spring benefit dinner and auction on April 15th, we will honor one Colorado person who has made a significant contribution. One outstanding Denver Audubon member will also be honored. While these two individuals deserve every award and all the praise they will be given, these two really represent all volunteers. With their "can do" roll up your sleeves and help out attitude, volunteers help make this organization run. So, thank you. Thank you for volunteering, for making all those contributions of time, money, and energy. Thank you for caring.

And the beat goes on. Volunteers are always welcome at the office, at the nature center, and for special events such as the dinner and auction in April and the Birdathon in May. Call and get involved!



Doris Cruze

# Thank You!

## **APPLAUSE FOR OUR VOLUNTEERS**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Fall Appeal Mailing: Midge Ball, Mary Ann Brown, Willa Brunkhorst, JoAnn Bushnell, Lynne Forrester, Marc Goodbody, Fred Griest, Helen Hale, Ailene Herranen, Doug Hodous, Ruth Schoening
- Jan/Feb Warbler Mailing: Marc Goodbody, Charlotte Gottlieb, Urling Kingery, Vi Nicholson, Ruth Schoening, Barbara F. Shissler, Frank Shissler
- Art Inspired by Nature: Ann Bonnell, Doris Cruze, Carmine & Carol DeStefanis, Christy Honnen, Ruth Schoening
- Office Angels: Fred Griest, Courtney James, Jeanne McCune, Judith Mitchell, Krista Redlinger, Barb Shissler, Grace Weber
- Legislative Workshop: Polly Reetz, Ann Bonnell, Mel & Elaine Emeigh, Jo Evans, Joyce Schmidt

## **Call for nominations!**

The ASGD Board of Directors is actively seeking dedicated, enthusiastic volunteers to serve on the board for three-year terms. If you are interested, or would like to nominate someone, please contact one of the members of the nominating committee:

Ann Bonnell, 303-303-979-6211, abonnell@juno.com  
Jerry Raskin, 303-660-0033, raskinjerry@qwest.net



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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  
Flowers & Associates, Inc.  
cdale@cdale.com

# 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](http://www.denveraudubon.org/scrapbook.htm)



## FIELD TRIPS

### Walk the Wetlands

**DATE: Sunday, March 6th 9am**

**DATE: Sunday, April 3th 9am**

**LEADERS: Hugh & Urling Kingery, 303-814-2723, Bob Brown & Doris Cruze**

**Pre-Registration NOT required.**

**FEE: None**

**MEETING PLACE:** Audubon Center parking lot. From C-470 & Wadsworth go south on Wadsworth 4.4 miles. Turn left onto Waterton Road. Immediately turn left into the first parking lot at the Audubon Center sign.

**DESCRIPTION:** Everyone welcome—Audubon members and visitors. We can lend you binoculars and field guides. We will hike along the South Platte River looking for winter flocks of chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers, brown creepers, and kinglets, as well as early spring arrivals. Dress in layers for the weather, including mud-proof footwear.

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### Barr Lake Bald Eagles

**DATE: Saturday, March 12th, 9am-Noon**

**LEADER: Dave Rhoades**

**Pre-registration IS required.**

**FEE: \$8/Friends member, \$10/non-member**

**MEETING PLACE:** Barr Lake State Park Nature Center. State parks pass or daily fee required.

**DESCRIPTION:** Walk along a dirt road at the edge of the lake and look for water birds—ducks and geese. As well as seeing eagles on the nest, you may see nesting great horned owls and harriers coursing over the fields. Get familiar with this state park which is known for its large variety of water and land birds. Bring binoculars, field guide, snack, and water.

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### Cherokee Ranch—Sedalia Area

**DATE: Saturday, March 26th 9am to 2pm**

**Leader: Lynn Wilcockson**

**Pre-registration IS required.**

**FEE: \$15/Friends member, \$20/non-member**

**MEETING PLACE:** Sedalia Post Office. From intersection of US Highway 85 and Colorado 105 at Sedalia, take 105 south; Post Office is on right side of the street.

**DESCRIPTION:** Lynn volunteers at the Ranch, and has led trips for Audubon and DFO for many years, so he's a knowledgeable guide. Be prepared to walk 2-3 miles through scrub oak, ponderosa pines, and open meadows. Bluebirds should have arrived, and hawks will be soaring. Bring binoculars, field guide, and lunch.

### Beginning Bird Watching Class

**DATES: Thursday, March 31<sup>st</sup> at 7-9pm**—classroom session at the Audubon Center at Chatfield.

**Saturdays, April 2, 9, 23, 30, May 7, and June 4: 8am-2pm**—field trips to birdwatching sites around Denver including Chatfield, Barr Lake, and Castlewood Canyon state parks, Wheat Ridge greenbelt, and Genesee mountain park.

**LEADERS: Urling & Hugh Kingery**

**FEE: \$120/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 teach the art and science of birding as no-one else can. 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.

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### Raptor Nest Tour of Boulder County

**DATES: Saturday, April 30th 9am**

**LEADERS: Diana and Wayne Johnson**

**Pre-registration IS required.**

**FEE: \$8 per Friends member, Non-members \$10.**

**MEETING PLACE:** Park and ride at Highway 287 and Niwot Road. From I-25 take Exit 235 (Colo. Highway 52, Dacono & Ft. Lupton to the east). Go WEST on Highway 52 for 6.8 miles. Turn right (north) on US 287 and go 0.7 miles. Turn left on Niwot Road.

**DESCRIPTION:** View nests of prairie falcon, golden eagle, red-tailed hawks, osprey and great horned owls. This will be a day trip. Bring binoculars, field guides, water snacks and lunch.

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### Pawnee Grasslands with Kevin Cook

**DATES: Saturday, May 14 8am-4:30pm or**

**Saturday, June 4 8am-4:30pm**

**LEADERS: Kevin Cook**

**Pre-registration IS required.**

**FEE: \$30 per Friends member, Non-members \$35.**

**MEETING PLACE:** Crow Valley Campground near Briggsdale. (Overnight camping may be available for those wishing to drive out on Friday.) Car pools from Denver will be arranged if requested.

**DESCRIPTION:** Enjoy a springtime visit to this fascinating habitat with noted naturalist Kevin Cook and awaken to the wonders of

*Pawnee Grasslands Continued on page 4*

# TRAVEL, FIELD TRIPS, CLASSES & PROGRAMS CONTD.

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



## Pawnee Grasslands continued from page 3

this little understood region. Did you know that shrimp live in this arid area? We'll look for these creatures and seek out the Earth wolf spider, the largest spider in Colorado, in its burrow. Waterferns, kangaroo rats, short-horned lizards, and wildflowers in bloom may all be part of our day's experience. And we'll be looking for mountain plovers, chestnut-collared longspurs, migrating warblers and other bird specialties, too. This trip is great for children as well as adults. Our leader, Kevin Cook, writes nature-related articles for newspapers in Fort Collins and Loveland and also authors a monthly column for Bird Watcher's Digest. He teaches classes for the Rocky Mountain Nature Association. Last year's trip filled up and created a long waiting list, so we are offering a choice of two sessions this year, one on a weekend and the other on a weekday.

## Birding the Czech Republic

May 16-26, 2005

The Audubon Society of Greater Denver has planned a fabulous trip to the Czech Republic from May 16 to May 26, 2005. A small, stable eastern European country, the Czech Republic not only has wonderfully diverse landscapes, but boasts important bird conservation efforts. This Denver Audubon trip will be a unique opportunity to explore and bird in Moravia and Southern Bohemia. Otto Zavalsky, who planned and led our highly successful trip in 2002, will once again be our personal Czech guide. Bill Turner will be our Denver Audubon guide; local birding guides will meet us in each region. In between birding locales we will enjoy visiting historic and cultural sites.

This trip is at the perfect time to catch breeding birds at their best. We can expect to see birds such as black stork, black kite, honey buzzard, Montagu's harrier, marsh harrier, saker falcon, eagle owl, black woodpecker, collared flycatcher, red-breasted flycatcher, bluethroat, great reed warbler, shrikes, penduline tit, golden oriole, and the scarlet rosefinch, among many others. There are 180 breeding bird species and 130 non-breeding species in the Czech Republic.



Group leader Otto Zavalsky holding a kite during 2002 Czech trip.



ASGD birders walk through wetlands on a boardwalk during 2002 Czech trip.

Flights arrive in Ostrava on May 17 and departs from Prague on May 26. Register by calling 303-973-9530. Cost for Denver Audubon members is \$1,400 per person, double occupancy; \$1,500 per person, single occupancy. (Non-members add \$100.) A deposit of \$200 is due at time of registration with the balance due by March 16, 2005. Price includes hotel accommodations and meals while in the Czech Republic. Price does not include air fare, alcoholic drinks or departure taxes. For assistance in booking flights and/or travel insurance, please contact Becky Beckers at 303-766-5266 or [agentbecky@aol.com](mailto:agentbecky@aol.com). (Currently airfares from Denver to Ostrava are around \$870 round trip.)

## Hawks on the Wing—Fall Migration in Duluth, Minnesota

September 10- 17, 2005

A maximum of ten people will have the opportunity to spend a week birding in the beautiful Minnesota fall foliage near Lake Superior. We will be in Duluth during prime-time, as September bird migration brings over one hundred species of hawk, shorebirds, waterfowl, passerines, and other birds to this area.

The centerpiece of this birding oasis is Hawk Ridge, in Duluth, a bird-watchers' paradise that has been rated one of the top five spots in the United States for viewing hawks. The migration there begins in mid-August and continues through mid-December. The "big days," when tens of thousands of broad-winged hawks fly over, generally occur from September 10 to 20.

Our week-long venture around the Duluth area will cover all the local migrant traps and funnels, such as Two Harbors and Stoney Point. We will also venture into the more boreal areas such as Sax-Zim Bog and Gunflint Trail. All types and species of bird are fair game at this point in fall migration in Duluth. Last year, during this time 25 species of warbler were seen. If the weather cooperates (cloudy and foggy), a good fallout could occur.

The guides for this trip will be Nathan Pieplow and Allison Hilf. Nathan, our bird guide, is a popular trip leader for Colorado Field Ornithologists and is intimately familiar with the Duluth region. Allison, our travel guide, has made two trips to Duluth in the past six months and is happy to answer any questions you might have about this area.

The leaders will fly into Minneapolis on September 10. Trip participants have the option of flying into Minneapolis and driving with the leaders to Duluth; flying directly into Duluth; or driving to Duluth. The price will be determined by March 1. Please call or e-mail Allison for more information (home) 303-369-2541; (cell) 303-888-5110; e-mail: [ahilf@aol.com](mailto:ahilf@aol.com). Call ASGD (303) 973-9530 to reserve a spot, as trips have been filling up quickly.



# Eagle Eye

Watching Public Policy for the Environment  
by Polly Reetz

By early March the Colorado legislature is about halfway through its term. The date for introducing bills has passed, and many bills have already had hearings in either the Senate or the House. Some are already dead, and others are on their last legs. However, legislators can also introduce late bills for consideration in the last days of the session – the Republicans' aborted try at redrawing legislative district boundaries was carried out via such a late bill a year or so ago.

The most interesting environmental bills that have been introduced in the legislature so far fall into three major categories: wildlife, water issues, energy efficiency, and property rights.

**Wildlife.** The most important bill directly addressing Colorado's wildlife is the Division of Wildlife's proposal to increase license fees for hunting and fishing. The Division hasn't raised resident license fees in about 12 years and has to deal with the effects of inflation. After the January Wildlife Commission meeting, when ASGD and Audubon Colorado objected to regulations allowing take of wild peregrines, the DOW talked to us about adding a fee for peregrine take - \$200 per bird – that would reflect the enormous amount of time, energy and taxpayer money put into the peregrine recovery program. (Most of the money used in that project came from the federal government via the Endangered Species Act, Section 6 of which authorizes transfer of federal funds to states to conserve endangered and threatened species. Few Game Cash funds were used). The peregrine fee has been added to the Division's bill, but the bill's chances for passage are not clear. Two years ago the NRA opposed the same proposal, claiming that it made hunting and fishing too costly. Considering that the cost of a good rifle or fishing rod runs into the hundreds or even thousands of dollars, this argument holds little water, but the NRA will undoubtedly use it again.

**Water.** Here we have a variety of bills. SB62 attempts to significantly reduce the availability of water rights for recreational in-channel diversions. Bluntly put, this would kill any new kayak/canoe runs such as the ones Golden, Durango and Fort Collins have built. Old-line water providers and users are worried that creation of a right to use water in the river channel for recreation would put a damper on development upstream. Of course the question is, do we need more upstream development and what kind of environmental damage would it do?

Various water conservation bills would revoke existing covenants that require homeowners to plant bluegrass, something that just seems like common sense. Why plant water-guzzling blue grass when so many other alternatives are available? There are certain places where bluegrass is the best material for the job, but most lawns don't fit into that category.

HB 1177 would promote negotiation between river basins to distribute State waters fairly. Though the idea is interesting, no direction is given to the proposed negotiators (a 25-member committee headed by a gubernatorial appointee), who would be free to completely ignore environmental, social, and economic

ramifications of water distribution.

**Energy Efficiency.** HB 1129 creates a tax credit for installation of a renewable energy system in residences; HB 1133 authorizes local governments to require public utilities to collect a surcharge from customers, which could be used to promote energy efficiency; HB 1162 requires that a number of household appliances and commercial equipment meet or exceed new efficiency standards by 2009. Good news here is that no bill has been introduced to limit or emasculate Amendment 37, which requires the big power companies to produce 10% of their energy output from alternative sources.

**Property Rights ("Takings").** Senators McElhany and Massey have introduced a bill that would repeal all state and local land use regulations. It also requires that government compensate landowners for any regulation which potentially reduces the value of property, enacted or enforced after the date of this bill. As long as the property remains in the purchaser's family, he can demand compensation. This would effectively gut any environmental regulations, as well as many others protecting public health and safety. We need everyone's help to let our legislators know how we feel about this bad idea.

The most important task this legislature has, that of solving the state's financial crisis, doesn't really qualify as an environmental issue, but it will have broad impacts on environmental quality. If there are no funds to enforce water quality requirements, for example, the quality of our water will decline. State Parks won't have money for maintenance and management. And so forth. Let your legislators know this, and keep after them about it. Colorado is worth the effort.

**Spring is just around the corner. Mark your calendars for our Open House and celebration of International Migratory Bird Day on April 30. HawkQuest will be there with Eagles, Hawks, Falcons and Owls. See a Harris hawk fly! Many other activities planned. See you there!**



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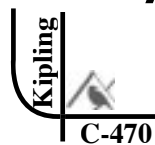
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# Bird Brains

by Michael Lazare

In his preface to *The Mind of the Raven: Investigations and Adventures with Wolf-Birds* (1999), naturalist and writer Bernd Heinrich wrote “... I had occasion to hear reports of ravens behaving in ways that seemed both intelligent and strange, and although much of that could be dismissed as hearsay, there was nevertheless a sampling of observations published in the scientific literature by respected and disciplined observers that hinted otherwise ....

“Having now lived on intimate terms with ravens for many years, I have also seen amazing behavior that I had not read about in the more than 1,400 research reports and articles on ravens in the scientific literature, and that I never could have dreamed were possible. I have become skeptical that the interpretations of all ravens’ behavior can be shoehorned into the same programmed and learned response categories as those of bees. Something else is involved, and I wanted to make sense of it.”

The book – a wonderful read – told of his close study of ravens, carried out in Maine, Germany, California, the Arctic and Yellowstone National Park. Heinrich concluded, and proved, that ravens are individuals, recognize human beings, like and dislike other birds – in short, they have well-developed minds. Their behavior is not instinctive.

Five years after this book was published, there is growing recognition among ornithologists that birds are indeed far more intelligent than had previously been believed. The *New York Times* reported on February 1, “... in the journal *Nature Neuroscience Reviews*, an international group of avian experts is issuing what amounts to a manifesto. Nearly everything written in anatomy textbooks about the brains of birds is wrong, they say. The avian brain is as complex, flexible and inventive as any mammalian brain, they argue.”

The journal reported that scientists disagree about how birds’ brains evolved. That discussion is best left to experts. But there is general agreement that birds are indeed intelligent. For example, the *Times* reports, “Crows not only make hooks and spears of small sticks to carry on foraging expeditions, some have learned to put walnuts on roads for cars to crack. African gray parrots not only talk, they have a sense of humor and make up new words. Baby songbirds babble like human infants, using the left sides of their brains.

“Clark nutcrackers can hide up to 30,000 seeds and recover them up to six months later. Nutcrackers also hide and steal. If they see another bird watching them as they cache food, they return later, alone, to hide the food again. Some scientists believe this shows a rudimentary theory of mind - understanding that another bird has intentions and beliefs....Pigeons can memorize up to 725 different visual patterns, and are capable of what looks

like deception. Pigeons will pretend to have found a food source, lead other birds to it and then sneak back to the true source. Parrots, some researchers report, can converse with humans, invent syntax and teach other parrots what they know. Researchers have claimed that Alex, an African gray, can grasp important aspects of number, color concepts, the difference between presence and absence, and physical properties of objects like their shapes and materials. He can sound out letters the same way a child does.”

One scientist concluded that “... given their range of behaviors, birds are extraordinarily flexible in their intelligence quotients. They’re right up there with hominids.”

Perhaps someday calling someone “bird brain” will come to be looked on as a compliment. After all, birds are beautiful, make gorgeous noises – and now are shown to be intelligent as well. What more could any self-respecting creature possibly want?

## Give Them A Home

The Wild Bird Centers have next boxes for all of the cavity-nesting birds, such as wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, bluebirds, swallows, woodpeckers, flickers, Kestrels and owls. The thrill of helping an avian family successfully raise their young will create many happy memories.



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WHEAT RIDGE  
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# Raptor trips—an exciting January tradition

by Doris Cruze, *President ASGD*

Take one partial albino red-tailed hawk, two highly skilled trip leaders, and January days with temperatures at or above seasonal average and what have you got? It all adds up to some sensational Sunday raptor trips with Harold and Betty Oliver.

Every January Harold and Betty lead raptor trips for the Audubon Society of Greater Denver. The trips are very popular and fill up quickly. (Note for next year: Call and reserve your space as soon as the schedule comes out!)

On January 16, the group traveled roads in Adams County and on north into Weld County. With Harold's amazing recall of all the "hot spots", Betty's sharp identification skills, plus good spotting by members of the group, they counted 14 bald eagles, 54 red-tailed hawks (including the white male and his mate), a rough-legged hawk and others. The totals were 7 species of raptors and 111 individual birds.

One week later, on January 23, the Olivers lead

another group on the same route, traveling highways, side roads, dirt roads, and even into parking lots to count 137 individuals. A highlight for this group was witnessing immature bald eagles flying formation, with an about-face in flight, then tumbling, wrestling, recovering, and flying some more. This group counted 17 bald eagles, 64 red-tailed hawks, 10 ferruginous hawks, and others for a total of 6 species.

A third trip planned for January 30 had to be postponed due to the weather.

As popular and enjoyable as these raptor trips are, Harold and Betty are quick to point out that development in the area has taken its toll. New homes have replaced family farms, shopping centers now dot the landscape, and huge gravel mining operations are spread over acres and acres where prairie dogs once burrowed. Every year brings more changes and more concern for the future of the area and its awe inspiring raptors.

## Celebrate the Lois Webster Fund's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

**Reception & Program – March 3rd at 6pm**

The Lois Webster Fund (LWF) will host its annual reception and program on Thursday, March 3rd in the Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado conference room in Washington Park, Denver. Come join old and new friends beginning with a wine and cheese reception at 6:00pm. The program will follow at 6:30pm and will include brief presentations by last years grant recipients on their research projects conducted during this past summer. This includes information on the 2004 Grasslands BioBlitz in Jefferson and Boulder Counties, the impacts of habitat fragmentation on the breeding ecology of the flammulated owl and a multi-goal research project on bats in the upper-montane, mixed-conifer forests of Pikes Peak region. Additionally, Victoria Dreitz, Ph.D., Colorado Division of Wildlife, will report on the findings in 2004 of the ongoing Mountain Plover research which was supported by the LWF.

Join us in congratulating the recipients of the 2005 LWF grants for research on Colorado wildlife, totaling \$4,700, who will be announced at the conclusion of the program. It will be a fun and an informative evening, and the LWF Committee is looking forward to celebrating with many Audubon members and friends.

For additional information on the Lois Webster Fund and its grant program, please visit the Audubon Society of Greater Denver's website and click on the Lois Webster Fund.

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# John James Audubon: The Making of an American

## A book review

by Michael Lazare

Richard Rhodes is a well-established and well-respected author who has written extensively about death and destruction. He won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* and has written about the H-bomb. His titles also include *Masters of Death*, *Why They Kill*, and *Deadly Feasts*. We can be thankful that he has now turned his talents to a much more pleasant subject in his latest book, *John James Audubon: The Making of an American*.

This is the first full-scale biography of Audubon in 40 years, but it is more. Rhodes uses Audubon's extensive journals to give us insights into Audubon the man as well as Audubon the artist. Audubon was fascinating – charming, gregarious, ambitious, energetic, optimistic, indefatigable. He and his wife Lucy had an unusually happy marriage despite long periods of separation while Audubon was traveling throughout the Mississippi River valley, then the westernmost part of the United States, and later to England, where his monumental *Birds of America* was published. The couple had two sons, to whom Audubon was devoted.

The outlines of John James Audubon's life are generally known. He was born in Haiti as Jean-Jacques Audubon in 1775, the bastard son of a French naval officer, Jean Audubon, and his Créole mistress, Jeanne Rabin. His mother died within a few months, and his father took him back to France, where he was accepted by Mme. Anne Moynet Audubon and raised as her son. At the age of 18 he came to the United States to look after his father's business interests; it was during this period that he first started sketching birds. By 1810, when he was 25, he had attracted the attention of Alexander Wilson, a noted ornithological illustrator, who encouraged him in his work. They shortly became rivals, however, and Audubon's correspondence often pointed out mistakes in Wilson's work.

For the next 14 years Audubon shot, mounted and painted birds. He traveled extensively throughout Pennsylvania, Kentucky and the states bordering the Mississippi River, living alternately in Kentucky and Pennsylvania. Audubon was not successful in business but became engrossed with the idea of publishing the *Birds of America*. He tried to have it published in Philadelphia in 1824 but was met with hostility and rejection. He crossed the Atlantic, found an enthusiastic reception in England and set about working with the engravers William Lizars of Edinburgh, who prepared the first five printing plates by 1827, and then Robert Havell of London, who took over and finished the job. In the meantime, Audubon traveled back to America several times to complete the drawings he needed for the work.

The Elephant Folio (named after the size of paper on which it was printed) set new standards for artistry and beauty. Audubon had long previously hit on the idea of using wires to pose stuffed birds in realistic poses. An artist named Joseph Mason worked on the background of the prints. Audubon was not a good writer, but he worked with William MacGillivray, who prepared the text for a companion set of volumes, *Ornithological Biography*.

I have two quibbles with Rhodes's masterful biography. The long and extensive quotations from Audubon's journals are often not relevant and slow down the narrative. Secondly, I wish Rhodes had dealt in greater detail with Audubon's stay in England and the publication of the *Birds of America*, but the author seemed to run out of steam and covers that period somewhat cursorily.

All in all, however, this is an excellent book, a long-needed biography which tells us not only about the artist but about the young United States. (Audubon met many members of the Lewis and Clark expedition, including Captain William Clark and Toussaint Charbonneau, the husband of Sacagawea.)



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**Wishes to thank our sponsors that generously supported "Art Inspired by Nature"**

*Art Inspired by Nature*, held at the Neuman Center for Performing Arts on January 29th proved to be a wonderful evening of entertainment and inspiration. Participants gazed at prints by Tam O'Neill Fine Art Gallery. Claud Brown interpreted the music of Messiah beautifully and Ballet Noveau Colorado delighted the audience with Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*.



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# backyard birds....

by Hugh Kingery

**FEEDER WATCHERS** on the Denver Urban Christmas Bird Count counted only two-thirds as many birds this year as last year — but there were only two-thirds as many observers. Largest declines came with three of the four most abundant species. Numbers are listed in the table below.

SPECIES	FEEDER COUNTS		TOTAL CHRISTMASCOUNT*	
	JAN 1 2005	JAN 1 2004	JAN 1 2005	JAN 1 2004
CANADA GOOSE	421	1076	18523	17403
HOUSE SPARROW	397	746	1781	183
HOUSE FINCH	202	215	1201	901
STARLING	230	124	4509	6163
JUNCOS	53	54	356	337
FLICKER	43	65	258	248
ROCK PIGEON**	42	102	2838	1913
AMERICAN CROW	38	81	472	851
MAGPIE	20	36	343	250

\*Total from entire count—Feeders and Field Parties

\*\* The American Ornithologists Union this year changed the name of rock dove to rock pigeon, surely more appropriate.

**OTHER SPECIES OF INTEREST:** 18 cedar waxwings (but no Bohemians, which have showed up in large numbers in the northern Front Range from Boulder to Fort Collins), 2 ruby-crowned kinglets, 3 red-breasted and 3 white-breasted nuthatches, 4 spotted towhees, 4 sharp-shinned and 1 Cooper's hawk, and 4 Townsend's solitaires (none last year). Cat Anderson, as she does every year along the Highline Canal, found our only screech-owls, but she found two this year instead of the usual one.

**URLING TOOK** a Christmas count group to the Rocky Mountain Arsenal Wildlife Refuge, and we had a banner time – a 55-owl day! Six great horneds, six barn owls in one roost, and an astonishing 42 long-eared owls from three different roosts. That's the highest count of long-eareds that the Arsenal has ever seen.

**OTHER BACKYARDERS REPORTED** some of those birds, too. Kevin Corwin, in Centennial, saw kinglets several times in December. Barbara Shissler, while "I was watching black-capped chickadees fly back and forth from our feeder, when to my surprise a red-breasted nuthatch flew to the feeder! I saw the plump little bird at the feeder several more times that week (late November) before it disappeared. I didn't know nuthatches ate seed." (In Franktown at our house, they feast with gusto on sunflower chips.)

**MARILYN AND DAVE BRINKLEY**, near Lakewood's Bear Creek Open Space, attracted "some birds new to our feed-

ers this winter. In spite of having no yard, per se, we have 12 feeders on and near our patio. Our 'new birds' are song sparrow (who keeps tapping at his reflection in our window), white-breasted nuthatch, spotted towhee, and as many as 11 mourning doves some days. Due to our close proximity to Bear Creek, we have flyovers by red-tailed and sharp-shinned hawks, as well as lots of waterfowl. A nesting pair of cooper's hawks keep us entertained during the summer."

**LESLIE CONELLY** has "a small back yard in Thornton. We have a pair of red-shafted flickers that have been yearlong visitors for two years. They love our suet. The grackles like the suet, too, so we've caged one of the blocks of suet so the flickers will have something to eat after the grackles devour our other blocks. We also have one, maybe two, blue jays that hang out in our back yard. They like our peanuts. Oh, and of course, we make sure our momma squirrel and young ones have plenty of peanuts. I placed the peanut feeder within one foot of our front screened window. Funny mistake. The squirrel couldn't get past the squirrel baffle on the pole, so she simply jumped up to the screen and leaned over to dine off the feeder. Obviously, I moved the feeder to a less squirrel-friendly spot."

**NAN BREHMER**, on Green Mountain, sent a note in October, "Today I am 75 and was thinking back to my earliest recollections of birds. My grandparents' home had a small grass area by their front porch. They gave me a salt-shaker, telling me that if I could get close enough to shake some salt on their tails, the robin red breasts wouldn't fly away." Nan just came back from "looking at birds and other things along the upper Amazon in Brazil. Or perhaps I should phrase it that the guide pointed at the bird and then showed us its picture. Don't think we would have had any idea of what we were looking at otherwise. It was an interesting journey but I much preferred the northeastern coastal area of Costa Rica. (In both places the travel is more by canoe than by foot, which works much better with my knees that don't like to walk downhill."

**NAN ALWAYS** has interesting and observant comments in her monthly lists. In December she mentioned three *missing* species. She hasn't seen a downy woodpecker in several years, but on Dec. 26<sup>th</sup> one "flew from one trunk to another." She saw only one white-crowned sparrow in fall migration, and it stayed only into early December. Then she observes: "Every winter a small solitary bird appears whose colors don't quite fit with the every-day sparrows and juncos and finches – the breast is too plain dark gray. Then I note its features and the white eye rings the bell says 'solitaire.'" The city this year apparently has more solitaires than last; they set up territories around junipers that provide a good crop of berries (properly, "cones").

**JOY SHIEVING** likewise had a solitaire in December and a white-breasted nuthatch Dec. 12-16. On Dec. 12, and on Nov. 25 Karl Stecher in Cherry Hills each had a merlin — a feisty little falcon that eats small birds and rodents, even in the city sometimes.

**RUSS AND BARBARA ALLEN** have enjoyed their Columbine Valley backyard birds this winter. "On Jan. 25 we were especially surprised when a flock of 30 or more red-winged black-birds suddenly descended on one of our bird feeders. They

# Denver Urban Christmas Count

by Hugh Kingery

**O**n New Year's Day, Denver Urban Count participants tallied 91 species, equal to the highest number of species in the count's 17-year history. This year 115 counters spread out over 14 areas, and 20 feeder watchers added their counts.

This year birders counted 43,277 total individual birds, which ranks fourth in count annals. Most abundant, as usual, was the Canada goose with 18,523; the next three reliable urban birds: 4,509 starlings (a bit below average), 2,838 rock pigeons (a count high) and 2,211 mallards (average). Shovelers, next on the list, set a count high at 2,142. Next came ring-billed gull, house sparrow, common merganser, and house finch. All of them average, sort of, except for house finch at 78% of the average though up by 300 from last year.

We found three new species for the count: an amazing American woodcock that Randy Lentz found in Aurora; Dick Schottler found an orange-crowned warbler in a "mixed flock of warblers" along the South Platte (along with 7 Audubon's and a ruby-crowned kinglet) and a pygmy nuthatch near Kent School that Lynn Willcockson and company discovered.

We set high count records for 12 other species: 175 redheads, 89 buffleheads, 22 northern harriers, 69 red-tailed hawks, 56 American kestrels, 176 herring gulls, 6 barn owls, 42 long-eared owls, 258 northern flickers, 30 Townsend's solitaires,

8 yellow-rumped warblers, and 34 common grackles. The owls – wow! The group at Rocky Mountain Arsenal found the six barn owls in one roost, and counted the **forty-two (42)** long-eared owls in three different roosts!

The count also set a record low for ferruginous hawks, which once came to the Arsenal by the dozens. The number of passerines dropped to 80% of average (at 8,656). It had its second highest number of ducks and of raptors.

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#### Backyard Brds continued from page 9

feasted heartily for five minutes and then departed in a flurry of black and red, as suddenly as they had arrived. This morning I noticed that our resident flock of tree sparrows was not at their usual feeder. The reason soon became apparent – safely perched on one of our birdbaths was a lone Cooper's hawk. The hawk remained for an hour or more, patiently watching the sparrows that were hunkered down in their favorite overgrown honeysuckle bush. Finally, after what appeared to be a half-hearted attempt to flush the sparrows from the bush, the hawk departed . . . not to be seen again."

**EVEN THOUGH** the Denver Christmas counts couldn't come up with any Bohemian waxwings, Merle and Eunice Brenneman did have 50 in their Arvada yard on Dec. 2. Too bad they didn't stay around for the counts. Another species we've followed with interest: bushtits. Mairi Wells in Littleton and Karl have seen small flocks, off and on since late November, and the urban Christmas count tallied flocks of 10 and 20 in Park Hill and the Botanic Gardens though not from Karl's yard. (He lives in the Christmas count circle, but Mairi doesn't.)

**OUT IN ELIZABETH**, Veronica Holt has watched two Eurasian collared-doves regularly for a year, and on Jan. 20 she saw a third one. "The third may be an immature from last year's breeding. One male was definitely courting the female. The third seemed most indifferent!" I don't know what breeding schedule Colorado collared-doves have adopted; rock pigeons breed all year long, and maybe these doves do too. If so that might explain their recent explosion in numbers.

**JEAN WIDMAN** lives on Lookout Mountain, where "we had notably fewer hummers this summer, so perhaps I'll try Tina Jones' suggestions for plants. [I think most of us had fewer hummingbirds in 2004, perhaps because of better wild flower blooms.] The elk love my birdfeeders, so that becomes a problem in the fall. After they knocked off my latest new one from its post (and it survived), I brought it up to the deck right outside the window. The typical juncos, chickadees, and finches are here, but I have particularly enjoyed a little group (5-7) of pygmy nuthatches coming in and out during the last several weeks. Early on we had both red-breasted and white-breasted nuthatches."

**LAST COLUMN I MENTIONED** the dozen or so Steller's jays coming to our yard. In January they tripled: we counted 40 of them on Jan. 17. They seem to pick up the millet that we scatter on the ground and, I think, store them in their gullets before they take off in a noisy chatter. Along with dozens of juncos (up to 60) and pine siskins (up to 40, but missing from the Urban count), we have a lively collection of yard birds. (And as I type this, I'm looking at a solitaire, perched in the top of a juniper flicking its wings.)

**I HAVE THIS NEW OFFICE** with lots of windows looking out at shrubs, oaks, and junipers, and can see the birds better than ever. Yesterday two black-capped chickadees fussed around in a three-leaf sumac 10 feet from the window. Chickadees, nuthatches, and siskins use the scrub oak grove as a staging area before flitting over to the feeder area.

**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.

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Lynne Forrester donated an Epon Printer.

Norma Kamby donated binoculars.

Mary Jane Black donated a bird clock, record, book & figurines.

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