

the Warbler



AUDUBON
SOCIETY
of GREATER DENVER

since 1969

START PLANNING FOR THE 2013 ASGD BIRDATHON

by Doug Kibbe & Mackenzie Goldthwait



Bushtit by Bill Eden

For some it is a “walk in the park”, for others it may be their 24 hour marathon “Big Day”, but no matter how you approach it, the day you select to do your ASGD Birdathon is a red letter day for the Audubon Society of Greater Denver. Birdathon is a major fundraising event for ASGD and it is imperative that as many

people as possible participate by either 1) soliciting sponsors and then going afield to see as many species as you can, or 2) by pledging your support to one of the teams who will be afield.

Either way, you will benefit ASGD and the environmental programs that they offer. As a past participant on many birdathons, I can assure you that the most fun is lining up pledges and then going out in the field to see how many species you can find. Your supporters then “owe” ASGD their pledged amount times the number of species you see. If you feel you are not a great birder and are unlikely to see a huge number of species, convince your supporters to give a little more per species. The event is to be enjoyed by all participants, and the greatest pleasure is derived by those who actively participate. We encourage all members of ASGD to seek out pledges and spend a few hours searching for birds high and low. How could you not enjoy our favorite outdoor activity – birding - while benefitting your favorite nonprofit organization.

Mission Statement: *Audubon Society of Greater Denver advocates for the environment, connecting people with nature through education, conservation and research*

The rules are straightforward and simple:

- 1) Get your pledges lined up before the date you conduct your outing (these may be either as \$ / species, \$\$ per species, or as a lump sum).
- 2) Plan your outing to encompass the best weather and the habitats you like to bird.
- 3) Conduct your tally within any 24 hour period in May in Colorado.
- 4) Then let your supporters know how you did; thereby letting them share in your excitement while collecting the pledged amount.
- 5) All pledges are tax deductible and will, upon request, be given a receipt.

Last years' teams plan to improve on their performance in 2013. We hope that they will be joined by many other ASGD members forming teams of their own with equally catchy names or they will support one of our teams (visit <http://www.denveraudubon.org/getinvolved/birdathon-2013/>) for team information. Regardless of how much money you raise or how many species you see, everyone has fun and we appreciate the effort which translates directly into benefits to school children, families, and adults who participate in the Audubon Society of Greater Denver programs.

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Lois Webster Fund

Lois Webster Fund Announces Grants for 2013

In 2013 Audubon's Lois Webster Fund will be giving out grants for a total of \$6,270 for 4 research and education projects. In addition, we will be donating two high-quality spotting scopes to the University of Colorado/Denver for use in field projects.

The projects, and their sponsoring organizations, are:

- A compilation of descriptions of the type, size and numbers of prey items taken by Black Swifts in Colorado, that will identify habitats important for foraging by this species and threats to those habitats. US Forest Service.
- A study to determine the effects of various habitat manipulation strategies on the behaviors of songbird and small mammal communities in a landscape dominated by energy development. Colorado State University.
- A program to recruit and train volunteers to collect data that will determine whether pika distribution is declining and evaluate factors that may drive changes in that distribution through the Front Range. Denver Zoo.
- A study of rock wren nesting behaviors that will seek to understand why this species has been declining in northern Colorado, whether from human disturbances or predation. University of Northern Colorado.
- A study to measure the response of mountain plover, McCowan's longspur, and burrowing owl to changes in habitat management



Black Swift courtesy Wikipedia



Mountain Plover courtesy Wikipedia



Rock Wren courtesy Wikipedia

on agricultural lands, and to identify techniques that will improve breeding conditions (Best Management Practices) for these species. University of Colorado/Denver.

All the recipients of Lois Webster Fund grants are required to give a presentation on their research results to our members, so if you are really intrigued by the titles of these studies, watch for an announcement of the LWF annual spring program in 2014. These presentations have been uniformly excellent in the past!

Conservation Report by Polly Reetz

Audubon members “put the pedal to the metal.”

In early March Auduboners from all over Colorado contacted their State representatives to express opposition to SB 41, which would classify the mere storage of water as a “beneficial use.” Responding to an alert put together by National Audubon, our members sent their legislators more than 1,000 emails and phone calls!!!! Because of Audubon’s actions, a bill which we thought impossible to amend actually WAS amended, not as much as we would like but enough to make legal challenges to the final statute possible.

Under existing law, storing water is in itself NOT a beneficial use except when flood control, fire or drought protection are stated uses of the water. Only when the water is released from a reservoir for a specific use such as irrigation, can the storage right be considered beneficial and absolute (the water law term is “perfected”). Until then the storage right is only conditional. (another legal term).

Audubon and other environmental groups argued that a water provider should have to show a need for the water as well as indicate how the water will be put to use. With YOUR help, we were able to add a “Declaration of Intent” to the bill that states that: 1) SB 41 doesn’t affect the current laws outlawing water speculation; and 2) If a provider plans to use the water in its reservoir for drought prevention, they have to show a need for the water.

SB 41 passed the House Agriculture Committee on March 11 and headed to the House floor. It was still a bad bill, but the good part of this is, National Audubon staff and local chapters flexed a lot of muscle, and legislators learned to take us seriously!



Six-Lined Race Runner by Joe Farah

Prairie Dogs

A bill by Rep. Sonnenberg and Sen. Tochtrop, HB 1250 sounded innocuous enough: “A bill concerning the administration of county powers to maintain landscapes.” What this title hid was an attack on whole ecosystems. The

bill added “rodents” to the list of pests that counties could require landowners to remove; if they didn’t do so, the county would remove them and charge the landowner for the service. One translation: eliminate prairie dogs. But it could also authorize removal of any rodent, impacting the hawks, coyotes, foxes and other species that depend on them. Fortunately the bill was amended to remove the “rodents” language.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife has spent considerable time and money to encourage landowners to foster prairie dog towns on their land, partly to stave off a listing of the black-tailed prairie dog under the Endangered Species Act, partly to encourage re-introduction of black-footed ferrets. In fact SB169, a bill moving through the legislature, encourages ferret reintroduction.

Audubon anticipates no trouble with this bill.

Oil and Gas

Rep. Mike Foote introduced HB 1269, which would redefine the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission’s mandate, to focus the Commission on public health and safety and remove its job of fostering development. Another of his bills, HB 1267, would increase maximum fines for violations, such as oil spills. Sen. Matt Jones put forward SB 202 to increase the number of inspectors so that every oil and gas facility could be inspected once a year. A bill by Rep. Moreno, HB 1268 requires the seller of a property to disclose the nature of oil and gas rights on that property. All these bills improve public health and the environment in oil/gas development.

Instream Flow Program

SB 181, The bill that funds the Colorado Water Conservation Board's construction account (loans and grants to water providers for building water projects), included a positive change in the State's instream flow program. Water rights could be acquired by the CWCB for maintenance AND enhancement of streams, which will allow degraded streams to be restored if appropriate water rights can be acquired by the CWCB. A big improvement!

This bill also contains money for the CWCB to acquire Chatfield Storage Rights, so the agency can hold these rights until private water providers have the cash to pay for them. If such providers don't come forward, this would leave the state responsible for most costs of the project, forever. Chatfield has been touted as a "private" water project that taxpayers do not have to pay for, but now it appears that the State could be the major funder, while destroying the heart of a premier State Park! Letters to the Governor are still needed! (see www.SaveChatfield.org for addresses and information).



White-Crowned Sparrow by Dick Vogel

Denver's Hentzell Park.

By the time you read this, Denver City Council will have voted on whether to approve a land swap that takes 11.5 acres of Park land and designated natural area out of the city's park system in return for an office building that will provide administrative support for victims of domestic violence. The land in question will supposedly be used by Denver Public Schools for a new elementary school. A citizen petition on this issue is pending. Information is available at www.denvernature.net.



Mother's Day

Breakfast and Bird Banding
May 12, 9am - 11am

- Treat your mother to a one-of-a-kind experience!
- After a light continental breakfast, enjoy a leisurely spring hike and a visit to our popular bird banding station!
- Give the gift of seeing songbirds up-close as they migrate through the South Platte River corridor!

MEMBER SURVEY WINNERS

Dotty Biggs – Front Range gift certificate

Amy Ziegler – Starbucks gift card

Darcy Dallin -- Starbucks gift card

**THANK YOU TO ALL WHO
COMPLETED OUR ONLINE MEMBER
SURVEY! WE GREATLY APPRECIATED
YOUR FEEDBACK.**



Backyard Birds by Hugh Kingery

Out here in Douglas County, bluebirds proclaim the arrival of spring. **Heidi Retherford** reported five Mountain Bluebirds in Parker Feb. 28; **Karen Metz** saw several Mar. 3 in Castlewood Canyon State Park, and **Kit Bazley** counted three on March 6. Then **Lisa Crispin** “saw a lovely (Mountain) bluebird in our pasture yesterday morning. Our new place which we bought last fall is aptly named Bluebird Pastures. It was just beautiful! We put out meal worms after getting advice from the wild bird store.” On the same day, after getting our



season’s parks pass, **Urling and I** saw four Mountain Bluebirds in Castlewood—three males, including one chasing a female—and then two along the road through the Winkler Ranch, south of park.

Then on March 15, Karen reported, “Five **Western Bluebirds** (3 females and 2 males) are nibbling my peanut butter lard cakes this afternoon. Last summer was the first time any bluebirds regularly ate at the ‘suet/lard’ feeders, so I feel confident that these blues here right now were some that nested/were raised here last year. The peanut butter lard cake recipe I use is from **Mary**

Mountain Bluebird by Hugh Kingery **Jo Ballator** of Southeast Arizona. I saw bluebirds at her feeders and decided to give her recipe a try. These WEBLS are the first I’ve seen in my neighborhood this year and arrived about a week earlier than in past years. Welcome back!” (Email me for Karen’s contact info to get the recipe.) The explosion of Common Redpolls reported in the last column continued, but not so abundantly. **Pat Brodbent** hosted 75-150 from January through mid-March. Pat has six thistle/nyjer feeders on his deck plus a cascading water feature—the redpolls throng both. **Kristen Squazzo** took pictures of redpolls in her yard in Monument Feb. 8; they came in with Pine Siskins.

The other spring note from Douglas County: singing Spotted Towhees. **Dave Rapley** noticed them March 10, and **Josette Mastra** heard them about the same time.

From Littleton, **Marianne Rose** sent pictures with this note, “We receive very few visits from Cedar Waxwings in our yard. What a wonderful surprise to stop at home after a root canal and find the birdbath with a steady stream of visitors. For 15 minutes, witnessed a constant flow of finches, sparrows, robins, blue jays, and the waxwings. At one point a robin, house sparrow and goldfinch were in the bath splashing around together. Best Christmas gift from my husband.”

Bill Eden has “Bushtits in the yard daily now. These energetic tiny birds come in to feed on suet. The red-orange dwarf dogwood helps to brighten this ‘little gray bird’ photo.”

From Kiowa, **Fran Shepperdson** reported on Jan. 30, “My son came out with his new ‘toy,’ a remote controlled car about 18 inches long, and drove it around my pasture at dusk. A Great Horned Owl came out of the silo and chased the car around until he realized it wasn’t edible and then left!”

At sunrise all winter long, a legion of Steller’s Jays has descended on our feeders. They started Oct. 9 with 11; the highest count—26—came on Jan. 11. Monthly averages: 13 in October, November, and December, 14 for January, and 10 in February. They vastly outnumber the resident Western Scrub-Jays and



Male Mallard by Rex Nelson

winter’s visiting Blue Jays. (We keep a daily log of our yard birds and submit it to eBird every month.) Northwest of Denver on March 16, **Char Gottlieb** “observed a Mallard, male, who was diving under the water for several seconds at a time, just like a diving duck.

Backyard Birds (cont.)

I haven't ever observed or heard of this before. Is it unusual? The lighting was good and I was very close to the small pond. And I know a Mallard duck - don't we all. Also, yesterday, 3/15, we had 6 Hooded Mergansers on our pond, 4 male, 2 female. So beautiful."

Raptors in the "city" surprise us. **Cindy Yeast** emailed that on Jan. 22, "During my walk at City Park, I saw two Bald Eagles. What made me notice them—I heard that very distinct Bald Eagle cry. I saw one in the shadows, sitting on a branch in a tree on the island on the southeast side of Ferrell Lake. It looked rather small until it flew off toward the zoo, and I saw its enormous wingspan. That's when I saw the second one, who moved to an upper branch and was in full sunlight. It looked larger than the first, so maybe it was a male, and maybe the other was a female or a juvenile. (Female raptors are bigger than males -- HK.) A number of people saw the second one since he was prominently perched, so lots of excitement about the sightings.

"I don't know if eagles hunt in pairs, but they were definitely hanging out and communicating with each other. The larger one was still there when I left. There were a lot of gulls eating dead fish that were exposed since the top layer of the ice on the lake was melting. So, there was definitely food to be had - dead or alive."



Eagle Pair by Marty McCune

then a big mottled bird on the fence post nearby -- an immature. We turned right around and went back, saw a second adult Bald Eagle on the same fence, and then noticed this was a prairie dog town. After some minutes, the grounded adult began flying and the immature followed. The adult flew high, clutching the prey, when the second adult flew up and beneath its mate to catch the prairie dog as it was released. This

Cyn and John Benegar, "driving north on Chambers Rd about 1 pm between Compark Blvd. and Broncos Parkway, on Feb. 13. I passed an open field. John saw a Bald Eagle sitting on the ground and

second adult then flew above and dropped it in turn to its partner! The immature was following behind (was it learning to hunt? was it enjoying the fun?), and I lost track of where the prey landed, because the two adults suddenly flew toward each other, hooked talons, and began spinning! They spiraled downward for 3-4 spins, then broke hold. It was like a sky dance! It was like a Nat'l Geographic special! And it all ended when a fourth eagle flew over from the west and had to be chased away. WOW! So: do bald eagles play? What did we see?" I think that, rather than play, they saw some dramatic courtship.

Urling and I learned something about feeder placement when we saw Pat's redpolls, while in our yard we counted only a couple of **Pine Siskins**, and those briefly. We figured out that the jays (and probably House Finches, flickers, downies, even chickadees) intimidate the smaller siskins.

At Pat's, the thistle feeders didn't have other jay-attracting feeders nearby. Ours we had crowded into sort of an urban cluster. So—we moved the nyjer



Northern Flicker by Rex Nelson

feeder about 20 yards away, into a separate section of our yard.

Result: the next day, 20 Pine Siskins and a couple of goldfinches perched above the nyjer feeders (now we have two), and clusters of siskins clung to the feeders. They also stay longer.

Lesson learned: Suburban sprawl (or zoning) works for birds.

Divide your feeders by food type into



House Finch by Dick Vogel

different suburban locations so that different constituents of your largess have uncrowded restaurant parking.

Backyard Birds (cont.)

On Cobirds, **Bill Schmoker** mentioned that "... flocks coming to feeders are probably under-counted. For example, if someone counts and reports 75 redpolls at a feeding station, there well may be a pool of 200 or 300 birds coming and going." I remember reading that if you see four Black-capped Chickadees at a feeder at one time, 16-20 actually patronize your largess. At our feeders we commonly see 5-10 House Finches at a time. However, when we walk in the field below the house, in a big thicket of three-leaf sumac 200-300 yards away, we typically count 60-120 House Finches.

Do many species, during non-breeding seasons, move around in small cohorts compared to their local numbers? Do all those House Finches in the field sample our feeders sometime during the day? Or do some scorn our offerings for natural food or a neighbor's feeders?

Your contributions write this column. Send a note or post card to P.O. Box 584, Franktown 80116, or Email me: ouzels8@aol.com.

NATURALIST CLASS OF 2013- CONGRATULATIONS!

Black-Capped Chickadee by Dick Vogel



*Karen Bellina, Amber Cain,
Cindy Cain, Kristi Cerbin,
Linda Covnot, Larry Culp,
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(Each Session has a different theme)**

**July 15-19 9am-3:30pm; July 22-26,
9am-3:30pm; July 29-Aug 2 9am-3:30pm**

Visit our website at:

**<http://www.denveraudubon.org/programs/summer-camps/>
for more info.**

PROTECT BIRDS & HABITAT, EDUCATE GENERATIONS

The Audubon Society of Greater Denver (ASGD) offers an opportunity to make a gift or bequest to leave a lasting legacy. ASGD invites friends who share a commitment to protecting birds, other wildlife, and their habitats to consider making a personal investment in the future of our conservation and education programs through one of the following giving techniques:

- Make a current gift of cash, appreciated stocks, mutual funds, or real estate.
- Include a bequest to Audubon Society of Greater Denver in your will.
- Name Audubon Society of Greater Denver as a beneficiary of the assets remaining in your retirement plan at your passing.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL 303-973-9530
OR E-MAIL
INFO@DENVERAUDUBON.ORG**

Legal Designation: If you wish to name Audubon Society of Greater Denver in your will or estate plan, we should be named as: Audubon Society of Greater Denver, a nonprofit organization, organized and existing under the laws of Colorado, with its principal business address at 9308 S. Wadsworth Blvd, Littleton, CO 80128.

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Western Scrub Jay by Rex Nelson



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their time.**

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