

Challenged to Grow

ASGD Receives Endowment Match from LMC Community Foundation

by Donny Roush, ASGD Executive Director

From now through March 31, 2008, your Audubon Society of Greater Denver (ASGD) needs to grow its endowment from the current \$77,000 to \$200,000.

This challenge from the LMC Community Foundation comes with a huge incentive: they match .50 for every \$1 contributed to the Audubon Society's endowment!

We hope you'll agree that securing the long-term financial health of your Audubon chapter is an absolute condition of meeting our mission of protecting the long-term ecological health of the South Platte watershed.

Over the next few months, as you make decisions about your charitable giving, please consider the tremendous

leverage LMC Community Foundation has extended to us.

Since 2004, LMC Community Foundation has committed more than \$5.8

million in endowment challenge grants to strengthen the long-term financial stability of nonprofit organizations in metropolitan Denver. During the challenge period, the Foundation matches

50 cents for every dollar contributed to a permanent endowment established at the Foundation. The Foundation also guarantees 5 percent interest and does not charge administrative fees during the challenge period.

ASGD's Endowment Challenge Grant is contractually tied to a goal of \$200,000 in principal. Until that amount is reached, ASGD will not be making any withdrawals to support organizational operations. Our endowment will be permanently administered and maintained by LMC Community Foundation for the sole benefit of ASGD.

At the risk of lapsing into an imitation of a hawk on late-night TV, it is awfully hard to imagine a better time to give to ASGD than now.

NONPROFIT PRESERVATION

Our Everyday Hero

Kevin Corwin, volunteer director of the Colorado Bluebird Project, receives the "7 Everyday Hero" certificate from KMGH Channel 7. The award, a salute to Coloradans making a difference in their community, was presented on May 1. Kevin was interviewed by 7 News reporter Mitch Jelniker, with his story running June 17-24. With Kevin at the helm for the past three years, the Colorado Bluebird Project has been reinvigorated. In 2003, Colorado had only 93 known nest attempts by bluebirds. In 2004, that jumped to 269; then in 2005, we had 606 recorded nest attempts. Last year, an astounding 1,015 reports were made. Audubon Society of Greater Denver is home to the Colorado Bluebird Project.



Photo by Donny Roush

Challenged to Grow+

LMC Community Foundation offers second funds match opportunity

In conjunction with "Nonprofit Preservation Endowment Challenge Grants," LMC Community Foundation also has created www.GivingFirst.org, an investor-centered tool designed to enrich donors' knowledge of the nonprofit sector and to encourage charitable giving in metropolitan Denver. At GivingFirst.org, there's more information about

See GivingFirst continued on page 10

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE—

The "U" in Audubon

An article in my local newspaper quoted an environmentalist as saying, "No one can do everything, but everyone can do something." While she was discussing saving the planet, those same wise words can certainly apply when discussing Audubon.

We have wonderful volunteers who lead hikes, teach classes, assist in the office, and do many other things to keep things running smoothly. If you are not currently volunteering, think about getting involved and how you can "do something." Volunteers are always welcome.

At our office, there are shirts, sweatshirts, books (new and used), and bluebird houses for sale. At least twice a year, bird seed sales are held. Proceeds from all these sales help pay the rent. Outside the office, there is a large recycle bin. Members are invited to recycle newspapers, glass, cans, cardboard and what ever else you have. No need to separate items for this single-stream recycling program. Audubon receives a small check every time the bin fills up and the company collects the recycled materials.

Members meetings are planned for the first Wednesday of August through November. Look for meeting times and places elsewhere in this newsletter. You show your support when you and your family and friends show up!

The most important way to show your support to Audubon is with your financial contributions. You may choose to give to the annual appeal, buy a brick to honor a loved one, or even give "just because." Your board of directors is working to maximize your gifts by building an endowment fund to insure operating costs will be covered for many years to come. You can maximize your gift by asking your employer to match the funds you contribute. Many companies have a plan in place for matching funds to non-profit organizations.

The field trips, special events, and travel tours listed in this newsletter are fun, exciting opportunities to meet other members and learn more about Audubon. Did you ever notice the "u" in the middle of Audubon? No one can do everything, but "u" can do something.



Thanks To Our Volunteers!

Front Range Birding Company Open House: Karen von Saltza & Mary Ellen Sargent

Adopt-A-Platte: Fran Campbell, Ellie Jones, Peter Mulholland, Joyce Quigley, Tom Reilly, Peggy Roberts, Betsy Weitkamp, Emilie Wiersma, Ralph Wiersma

Warbler Mailing: Marc Goodbody, Vi Nicholson, Lori Sharp, Barbara Shissler, Bill Turner

Spring Appeal Mailing: Mary Ann Brown, Willa Brunckhorst, Helen Hale, Allison Hilf, Vi Nicholson, Krista Redlinger, Carolyn Roark, Lori Sharp

Auction Event: Craig Abramson, Emily Abramson, Nancy Abramson, Barbara Brown, Tom Bush, Carmine DeStefanis, Carol DeStefanis, Bill Eden, Kelly Forrester, Lynne Forrester, Diane Hutton, Courtney James, Courtney James, Rosalie Metzger, Nancy Osborn, Krista Redlinger, Carolyn Roark, Susan Robbins, Susie Roush, Candace Ruiz, Ruth Schoening, Rhonda Shank, Lori Sharp, Barbara Shissler, Frank Shissler

Office Support: Courtney James, Phil Reynolds, Carolyn Roark, Grace Weber

Field Trip Leaders: Allison Hilf, Joey Kellner, Hugh & Urling Kingery, Harold & Betty Oliver, Dave Rhoades, Bill Turner, Mary Turner, Karen von Saltza, Lynn Willcockson



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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).

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2007 Environmental Stewardship Award winners

Two individuals, George Larsen and Polly Reetz, were honored for their tireless commitment to conservation during the Audubon Society of Greater Denver's Spring Benefit and Awards Ceremony on April 14. The Environmental Stewardship Awards are presented annually by the ASGD Board of Directors.

George R. Larsen

As a boy growing up in Englewood, Ohio, George Larsen often visited the Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm. As a teenager, he worked on his uncle's farm, near Americus, Georgia. Later, he pursued a college education in environmental management.



Then, George visited Colorado on a spring-break ski vacation in 1974, while attending college in Ohio. Soon, he made plans to transfer to Colorado State University. He and new wife Sheryl trekked cross-country that autumn, with all of their possessions packed in a 1963 Ford Van—the Conestoga wagon of the 70s. Ft. Collins was to be their honeymoon destination.

George connected again with Audubon when he attended a program at the Pawnee National Grasslands in 1980, while working

as environmental manager for ARCO's Thunder Basin Coal Company in Campbell County, Wyoming. As the Environmental Director for Lockheed Martin Space Systems-Denver Operations in the 1990s, George pursued policies of pollution prevention and public engagement. His leadership resulted in the Waterton Campus significantly reducing its environmental "footprint."

During his 23-year career, he created several partnerships, with Chatfield State Park, Denver Botanic Gardens – Chatfield Nature Preserve, Jefferson County, Denver Water, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC), Urban Drainage and Flood Control, Chatfield Watershed Authority, Roxborough Park Metropolitan District, and the Denver Audubon Society.

In 1992, as a part of his Master's Capstone Project, George envisioned the transformation of abandoned Lockheed Martin buildings in the southern end of Chatfield State Park. Vision became reality by convincing Lockheed Martin to invest \$300,000, which was leveraged into \$700,000 in matching funds and volunteer labor. The dramatic transformation of that derelict site on Earth Day 1996 in less than a day by almost 2,000 VOC volunteers is still one of his most memorable and heartfelt moments. Today, this site is the Audubon Center at Chatfield and the Lockheed Martin Discovery Pavilion.

Currently, George is part of Lockheed Martin's Business Development organization. One of his activities is to support the GOES-R Program—the next-generation environmental and weather-monitoring satellite.

George earned a Bachelor of Science in Range Ecology from Colorado State University in 1976 and a Masters of Science in Environmental Policy and Management from the University of Denver in 1992.

Polly Reetz

Polly has been a Denver Audubon member for 30 years and volunteer leader for 25. Polly combines a creative imagination with a vision of what can be achieved when environmental, social and political groups work together for common conservation goals.



One of her early successes was collaborating with conservationists, labor, and business to pass the Alaska Lands Act. This act, created in the late 1970s, set aside national parks, wildlife refuges, and national preserves.

Throughout her Audubon years, she has served on the Conservation Committee, chairing it for the last decade. This committee and the local Sierra Club chapter co-sponsor the Colorado Legislative Workshop each February, bringing together state legis-

lators, our environmental lobbyist, and participants to discuss state environmental priorities and proposed legislation.

She represented ASGD on the coalition that created the Sand Creek Greenway. This task force created a 13-mile wildlife corridor and trail along Sand Creek to complete a 70-mile loop of greenway encircling the metro area.

The Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge is the largest refuge within a U.S. metropolitan area. Grassroots efforts to designate the 27-square-mile Arsenal were spearheaded by Polly and the conservation committee.

Management of the Pawnee National Grassland, a short-grass prairie in northeastern Colorado, is a good example of government (U.S. Forest Service), private owners (two grazing associations), and conservation organizations (ASGD) working together for the good of the land. Under Polly's guidance, the Grassland Committee—charged with overseeing management of the national grassland and also Mountain Plover protection over the bird's entire range—created the Mountain Plover Workshop. This workshop brought together government agencies, researchers, conservation organizations, and interested citizens from a 10-state region. The Grassland Committee published its proceedings and helped organize a follow-up conference. Following the conferences, they conducted research in 13 western states and Mexico, providing range data used in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's consideration for listing of Mountain Plover as a threatened species.

She received the National Audubon Society's Charles H. Callison Award for environmental legislative policy achievement in 2002.



Eagle Eye

Watching Public Policy for the Environment
by Polly Reetz

A few weeks ago, Speaker Andrew Romanoff remarked that the 2007 legislative session has seen unprecedented cooperation between Democrats and Republicans, resulting in passage of important pieces of legislation. Audubon lobbyist Jen Boulton calls this "the best session we've ever had." She goes on to say, "Everything bad got amended or killed, and most of the good bills passed." Unfortunately, media outlets have insisted on blowing the relatively few disagreements between the parties all out of proportion. Controversy makes better press. Here is a brief review of this year's Audubon top priorities.

Energy. A slew of bills addressing alternative energy and energy conservation passed and were signed by the Governor, including ones encouraging development of renewable energy on certain State school lands, doubling the percentage of energy utilities have to get from renewable sources (wind, solar, biofuels, etc.) by 2020, and allowing cities and counties to offer sales tax rebates to consumers purchasing renewable energy fixtures such as solar panels.

An important step forward in the protection of wildlife resources was passage of a bill to expand membership of the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) from seven to nine. The commission must now include a member with expertise in health care, an expert in wildlife or the environment, one representing local governments, one landowner who owns royalties, three experts in oil and gas production (down from five), and the directors of the state departments of Natural Resources and Health and Environment. This was a substantial victory for the Colorado conservation community.

Another new law requires COGCC to consult with the Division of Wildlife to establish rules protecting wildlife from ramifications of oil and gas development. We are hoping the Division's rules will retain the stringency of their original guidelines which were cut out of the bill. Again, this is a big step forward, not possible under the Owens administration.

Water. Possibly the most important water bill passed this year allows the State to address water quality impacts when water is transferred from one river basin to another (read: from the Western Slope to the Front Range). For example, when water is diverted from a river, the lower water levels in that river may be insufficient to dilute drainage from abandoned mines, agricultural runoff, municipal runoff, and other sources of pollution. Aquatic life may die off, with a resulting loss of fish and wildlife populations. Under this law, at least we'll know what the impacts of water diversion are. The other biggie is a bill, now a law, encouraging owners of water rights to loan their water to maintain in-stream flow levels adequate for wildlife. This loan of water would not be counted as an "abandonment" of their water right that year. (If they abandon their water right several years out of every 10, they can lose it under Colorado water law).

Audubon remains concerned that standards for siting renewable energy facilities like wind farms and hydropower haven't been set. Although such facilities don't put carbon in the air, they have impacts on the ground that can be just as

severe as those of oil and gas development as far as wildlife are concerned. With proper planning and adequate wildlife surveys, the impacts can be avoided or minimized; this is what we want to work for next year. We'd also like to pass a bill to protect isolated wetlands, like prairie playas, lakes and ponds, which provide essential breeding habitat for many species of birds. Jen Boulton will be working on these issues between now and December, to be ready for the 2008 legislative session.

Since some birds begin their migrations in August, here are some recommendations from National Audubon for making their journeys safer:

- Turn off lights at night to avoid disorienting traveling birds, especially between midnight and dawn
- Reduce your windows' reflectivity with shades, blinds, drapes or decals to avoid collisions
- Keep cats indoors
- Eliminate pesticides or use the least-toxic alternatives to avoid having birds ingest them
- Keep feeders stocked and clean
- Provide a source of fresh water
- Plant native plant species in your yard and garden.

These basic recommendations can help some of the 5 billion migrating birds reach their destination. Meanwhile, support local and national efforts to protect breeding habitats. Protect parks and open space; promote healthy rivers, streams, and wetlands; work to maintain prairie dog colonies and associated wildlife on public lands. Above all, as Edward Abbey said, get out and enjoy the natural world.

Banding Station highlight

Between late April and early June, we operated a migratory bird banding station along the South Platte River, near the Audubon Center at Chatfield. An annual endeavor, the station is cooperatively operated by Audubon Society of Greater Denver, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, and Denver Water. The station is located along the South Platte River, near the Audubon Center at Chatfield. Station chief Meredith McBurney, on May 15, captured, processed and released this Western Tanager and six others. She reports: "Guess it's feast or famine...We did not catch a single one of these last year, and today we have 7 (yes, 7) of them in the SAME net at the SAME time. Quite the sight!"



Photo by Meredith McBurney.



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

DATES: Sunday, July 8 8 a.m.
Sunday, August 5 8 a.m.

LEADERS: Hugh & Urling Kingery (303-814-2723), Doris Cruze, and other Master Birders

Pre-registration NOT required.

FEE: None

MEETING PLACE: Audubon Center at Chatfield. The Audubon Center is located on Waterton Road, 4.4 miles south of C-470 and Wadsworth.

DESCRIPTION: We will hike along the South Platte River, looking for such gems as nesting redstarts and lots of fledgling birds just out of the nest. Everyone welcome—please wear long pants because poison ivy is lush. Sunscreen, sun hats and mosquito repellent are a good idea, too. Bring binoculars, field guide, water and a snack.

Filius Park to Echo and Summit Lakes on Mt. Evans

DATE: Friday, July 13 8 a.m.

LEADER: Lynn Willcockson

Pre-registration is required;

call the ASGD office at 303-973-9530.

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

MEETING PLACE: At Filius Park, a Denver Mountain Park. Go west on I-70 to Evergreen exit then 2 miles to first Bergen Park exit (at a stop light) and turn right. Filius Park is ahead 100 yards.

DESCRIPTION: The habitat is diverse going from foothills to alpine. In the foothills, we hope to see Green-tailed Towhee, Pine Siskin and Western Bluebird. At Echo Lake, we might spot Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbird, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch. Full day of birding. Bring lunch and water. Mt. Evans has a \$6 per car fee. Golden Eagle Pass may be used. Group limit is 10 participants.

Aurora Bird Walk – Ponderosa Preserve

DATE: Saturday, July 14 7:30 a.m.

LEADER: Mary Ann Bonnell, Lead Naturalist, City of Aurora Parks and Open Space Department

Pre-registration IS required, through Aurora Parks at 303-739-2428 or nature@auroragov.org

FEE: None

MEETING PLACE: Call 303-739-2428 for instructions. Ponderosa Preserve, which is accessible only by special arrangement, is located in far southeast Aurora, off S. Coolidge Way, outside E-470.

Cherry Creek Reservoir

DATE: Saturday, July 21 8 a.m.

LEADER: Karen von Saltza

Pre-registration is required;

call the ASGD office at 303-973-9530.

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

MEETING PLACE: At Cherry Creek Reservoir Marina.

DESCRIPTION: We will scope the reservoir and then car-pool to other points of interest. July can be quiet at Cherry Creek, but it might be possible to find rails and interesting hummingbirds. Bring lunch and plenty of water. Half-day trip.

Prospect Park – Wheat Ridge Greenbelt

DATE: Saturday, August 4 7:30 a.m.

LEADER: Jackie King

Pre-registration is required;

call the ASGD office at 303-973-9530.

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

MEETING PLACE: At Prospect Park Lake, near the permanent restrooms, south of West 44th Ave., just east of Robb St.

DESCRIPTION: This is an excellent area to see warblers, as well as shore and water birds. This will be a half-day trip, so bringing lunch is optional. Leader uses a scooter for mobility, so this trip is accessible and will involve easy walking only.

WE'RE HOT

The latest issue of *Birder's World* named the Audubon Center at Chatfield on its list of 20 "Hotspots Near You," featuring great locations near large U.S. metropolitan areas. Thanks to Hugh Kingery for submitting a first-person testimonial for the listing.



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– FIELD TRIPS –

Aurora Bird Walk – Star K Ranch (Morrison Nature Center)

DATE: Saturday, August 11 7:30 a.m.

LEADER: Mary Ann Bonnell, Lead Naturalist, City of Aurora Parks and Open Space Department

Pre-registration IS required, through Aurora Parks at 303-739-2428 or nature@auroragov.org

FEE: None

MEETING PLACE: From Chambers Road take Smith Road east to Laredo St. Look for Morrison Nature Center sign. Turn south to the building with the green tile roof.

Beginning Bird Watching Class

DATES: Thursday, Sept. 20 7-9p.m.

(Classroom Session) Saturdays, Sept. 22, 29, Oct. 6, 13, 20, and 27 8 a.m.-1 p.m. each day (Field Trips)

LEADERS: Hugh & Urling Kingery (303-814-2723)

Pre-registration is required;

call the ASGD office at 303-973-9530.

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

MEETING PLACE: Classroom session at the Audubon Center at Chatfield. The Audubon Center is located on Waterton Road, 4.4 miles south of C-470 and Wadsworth. Field trips go to bird watching sites around Denver: Chatfield, Barr Lake and Castlewood Canyon state parks, Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, and Genesee Mountain.

DESCRIPTION: Voted "Best of Denver!" 20 years ago and still going strong. Colorado's premier (and most entertaining) birding couple teaches the art and science of birding like on one else. Learn bird identification, choosing binoculars and field guides, and much more. Visit a variety of habitats and some of the best birding spots in the Denver metro area. Become more observant and develop a practiced eye and ear. Make new friends and sharpen the focus of your time outdoors. You can make up any field trips that you miss during future fall or spring class sessions.

Come on down for members meetings

Get out your highlight pen and circle Wednesday, August 1 on your calendar, so you and your family can come on down to the Audubon Center at Chatfield for our next members meeting. Mary Ann Bonnell, lead naturalist for the City of Aurora, will present an entertaining and educational program on rattlesnakes. Mary Ann is an award-winning naturalist who assisted in a study of rattlesnakes at the Plains Conservation Center and she will share interesting facts and fascinating stories from that study. The program starts at 7 p.m. In 2006, Mary Ann received a grant from the Lois Webster Fund for a census of the birds of Aurora.

The Audubon Center at Chatfield will go "batty" on Wednesday, September 5, when Rick Adams from the University of Northern Colorado presents a program on bats. Rick also received a grant from the Lois Webster Fund in 2006. He will share his findings and include some live bats in his presentation.

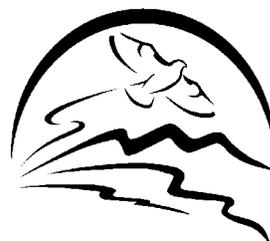
Come autumn, our members meetings will move to the large meeting space at the REI Flagship Store, 1416 Platte Street, in Denver (just off I-25 near Invesco Field at Mile High). Old-timers will remember this building as the Forney Museum. REI is generously donating space for the meetings and including announcements of the meetings in their calendar of events.

Ever wonder why Brown-headed Cowbirds do the things they do? How come they have such a bad reputation with birders? Come learn answers to these and other questions from Alex Cruz of the University of Colorado at Boulder as he discusses these interesting birds and their

lives on Wednesday, October 3.

Then on November 7, Joyce Gellhorn, well-known author and biological consultant, will present a program titled "Colorado's White-tailed Ptarmigan: Ghosts of the Alpine Tundra."

No meetings are planned for December and January due to the holidays and Christmas Bird Counts. All programs are free and open to members and their guests. All programs start at 7 p.m. The Program Committee welcomes your suggestions for future meetings.



AUDUBON
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of GREATER DENVER

Burrowing Owls, prairie dogs, and disease on the Pawnee National Grasslands

by Reesa Yale Conrey and Michael F. Antolin, Colorado State University

Burrowing Owls look like “potatoes on stilts,” noted one of our field workers. This may be an apt physical description, but it doesn’t convey the attitude of a robin-sized bird that preys frequently on kangaroo rats, occasionally on large snakes, and can chase off a badger. In addition to their scientific interest and innate appeal, Burrowing Owls are a species of conservation concern. We’ve been studying Burrowing Owls (*Athene cunicularia*) on the Pawnee National Grassland (PNG) in northern Colorado since 2005. So, we’ve had ample opportunity to observe, study, and appreciate this charismatic denizen of the shortgrass steppe.

The PNG is a dry, presumably stark landscape that nevertheless surprises visitors with its rolling hills and surprising biodiversity. Administered by the U.S. Forest Service, the PNG is a patchwork of public and private lands used for ranching cattle and for recreation by those who appreciate open spaces. Thousands of visitors each year travel the self-guided birding trail sponsored by the PNG, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and others.

To find Burrowing Owls, seek out black-tailed prairie dogs (*Cynomys ludovicianus*), which have increased in numbers and area occupied on the PNG. Burrowing Owls nest at far higher densities on prairie dog towns than in uncolonized prairie, most likely because of available burrows, the clipped vegetation, and variety of prey. The spatial structure of prairie dog populations has been drastically altered by plague, the infamous disease caused by a bacterial pathogen (*Yersinia pestis*) and introduced into the United States around 1900. Plague reached northern Colorado by 1948. The disease decimates prairie dog towns during outbreaks, resulting in a dynamic patchwork of active, extinct, and recently recolonized towns.

Although Burrowing Owls do not contract plague, they are strongly affected by it. Owls cannot dig their own burrows in the hard clay soils of the PNG. Without prairie dogs to maintain them, burrows collapse and owls must abandon nesting sites. Extinct towns are sometimes quickly recolonized by prairie dogs, however, and the temporary increase in burrow availability and landscape heterogeneity appears to attract Burrowing Owls returning from winter migration. We were interested in learning more about this species of concern whose breeding behavior and success may be influenced by an introduced disease that doesn’t make it sick.

We locate owl nests early in the breeding season by looking for males, who don’t incubate eggs, but are typically perched conspicuously near the nest during the day. We monitor nests once per week until the youngest owlet in the brood has fledged, around 42 days of age. Banding a subset of owlets in randomly chosen broods and towns enables us to recognize individuals and determine what proportion of the brood is visible above ground for our observations. By developing new estimators for fledging success, we will determine how well owls reproduce on prairie dog towns with different plague histories. We’ve learned occupancy does not necessarily mean owls are breeding with high success.

Most successful nests fledge 3-5 owlets, and a few fledge up to 10. Owls rival prairie dogs in abundance on recently plagued and reoccupied towns, making it a challenge to keep

track of the busy creatures until all have fledged. This is not your typical nocturnal owl; owlets run, hop, chase after adults and one another, and hunt insects throughout the day except during hot afternoons or rainshowers.

We are part of the Shortgrass Steppe Long-term Ecological Research project (SGS-LTER), funded by the National Science Foundation. SGS-LTER provides data on climate, grassland productivity, prairie dog town sizes, plague histories, and some wildlife populations. In addition, our detailed estimates will be compared to owl counts collected by PNG biologists since 1998, because it isn’t possible to study population dynamics for a long-lived species in just three years. We are also supported by the Lois Webster Fund, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and a Colorado Wildlife Conservation Grant.

The PNG is an excellent place to view Burrowing Owls and other raptors such as Swainson’s Hawks, Northern Harriers, Prairie Falcons, Golden Eagles, and many other birds, including Mountain Plovers.

We hope this study will do more than expand scientific understanding about how introduced disease alters ecosystems, but will also clarify the status of Burrowing Owls on the PNG. Burrowing Owls are a conspicuous part of the shortgrass steppe, and may serve as a flagship species for conservation and education.



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Colorado Birding Trail, on-line and on the road

Colorado bird watchers have dozens of new places to go birding and a great new cyber-resource to locate them. It's called "The Colorado Birding Trail."

"With a simple click of a mouse, people can get directions to new places they haven't been before," said John Koshak of the Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW).

To "hit the trail," go to <http://www.coloradobirdingtrail.com/>.

For the last two years, the DOW and a consortium of groups interested in promoting wildlife watching have been working with public and private landowners in southeastern Colorado to open up birding opportunities. "You can watch birds in your own back yard, but when you get an inkling to venture out to new areas, the birding trail website can help you find some great places," said Koshak.

And it's not just about birds. The Colorado Birding Trail is designed to help people discover all kinds of wildlife. There are opportunities to see everything from sleek pronghorn antelope on the eastern plains to White-tailed Ptarmigan in the alpine tundra. "With more than 900 species of wildlife to view in Colorado," Koshak said, "we have the best opportunities for wildlife viewing of any state without a sea coast."

The site is organized into zones: Eastern Plains, Rocky Mountains, and Western Colorado. Each zone is sub-categorized into "trails" within those zones. Individual trails each have between 10 and 25 local "sites." Details about each site include such information as whether the site is public or private, hours of operation, what you can expect to see there, contact information, and whether an entrance fee is required.

Interactive maps provide a wealth of information from how to get there to what the elevation is.

There are 265 sites on 16 trails. More than 50 sites have been developed in cooperation with private landowners. Planning is currently underway to develop and add trails to the site, especially from the southwest part of the state.

"The philosophy of the birding trail is to create an op-

portunity for landowners to tap into the millions of dollars spent each year on nature tourism," Koshak explained. "It's a great example of a win-win situation. Wildlife watchers have more outstanding places to view wildlife, and landowners have a new source of revenue to continue stewardship on their ranches and farms."

Pikas, Bats, Owls, and Plovers

On the evening of May 2nd a near-capacity audience gathered at the Audubon Center at Chatfield for the annual Lois Webster Fund (LWF) reception and program. They were treated to informative and entertaining presentations on pika, bats in Mesa Verde National Park, Burrowing Owls, Aurora's Big Year, and Mountain Plover. Four fabulous and capable young scientists described their research techniques and progress to date on their respective topics. The Webster Fund provided a total of \$4,900 to support their field work in 2006. In addition, out of respect for Lois Webster and her favorite bird, Dr. Vicky Dreitz (LWF Board member), gave the group an update on her Mountain Plover research, which received support from the LWF several years ago. Unfortunately her news was not very encouraging—the Colorado Division of Wildlife has discontinued its plover research—but she still provided insights into plover biology and behavior.

The Lois Webster Fund was founded to support education and research on Colorado's nongame (i.e. nonhunted) wildlife. In 2007, LWF is providing \$5,400 in project funding for a feasibility study of a wildlife bridge over Vail Pass and additional follow-up research on last year's Burrowing Owl project. Watch for a notice in *The Warbler* next spring of the next annual meeting and report on LWF projects.

ASGD's Announcement Listserv

News, events, conservation action alerts and volunteer opportunities from the Audubon Society of Greater Denver.

The denveraudubon listserv was created to quickly and efficiently disseminate news from the Audubon Society of Greater Denver (ASGD). Posts will include information on the organization's events, conservation action alerts and volunteer opportunities. ASGD members and volunteers are encouraged to subscribe.

This listserv is an "announcement-only" listserv and not intended to serve as a discussion forum. Messages to the list will be held for approval before being posted to insure that they contain information directly pertaining to ASGD, its members and volunteers.

To join the denveraudubon.org listserv, point your web browser to:

http://denveraudubon.org/mailman/listinfo/denver-audubon_denveraudubon.org



Photo: Dr. Vicky Dreitz shares Mountain Plover data.
(Photo by John Wright.)

backyard birds....

by Hugh Kingery



MORE BACKYARDERS saw Cedar Waxwings this spring than any other migrant. Ed and Judy Butterfield reported the first ones, in mid-March. A flock visited Pat McClearn in Hilltop on April 2, flocking with robins and drinking at their birdbath. Joy and Bud Schieving, south Denver, saw some flocks the same week. In Arvada, Jan Eckhardt saw a flock April 15, “an annual occurrence but always exciting.” The same day, Herb Samenfeld saw a flock of 30 “in the trees just outside our apartment in Heather Gardens. We are on the sixth floor, so we got to look down on them.” Kevin Corwin in Centennial saw a loner on April 29 and then 20-30 on May 30. In Franktown, we saw 4 on April 11 and about 15 on May 4; they didn’t stay long.

SO MANY REPORTS came for this two-month period that I’m reporting the rest of them in a semblance of Checklist Order (the order that the American Ornithologists Union specifies to show relationships among bird species). On May 11, “a Great Blue Heron flew into [Joy and Bud’s] yard, checking out the pond. It landed on the roof, 20 feet away. We were so startled that we went out to make sure we were not imagining things, and spooked it. It was probably looking for fish, as was the Black-crowned Night-Heron that raided the fish last summer. As we have given up on fish, the raccoons and herons can fend for themselves.”

ROOSTS OF TURKEY VULTURES permeated the city this spring. Jim Knoy saw 30 flying north across Belleview near Broadway on April 5. Flo deCesare writes, “In April, we had cars stopping on Cottonwood Lane because of a very large flock of Turkey Vultures passing over our side lawn. They turned around and then flew back over our house and landed on a very large cottonwood tree; they actually landed in two trees, 50-75 birds.” Near Flo’s on May 7, a Golden Eagle stopped and perched along the Highline Canal. “He was extremely large and I could clearly see his eyes move.”

POLLY REETZ SAW on April 27, two Sharp-shinned Hawks sailing above the tree canopy near the Denver Country Club. They nested there two years ago and fledged three young. The next day, in the same neighborhood she saw, soaring over the country club, a Red-tailed Hawk carrying “what appeared to be a stick—for a nest, I assume.” Georgia Hart forwarded a Cooper’s Hawk photograph taken by Carolyn Derrington-Tate on April 4 in Englewood. In the past few years several people have reported Cooper’s Hawks nesting in Denver neighborhoods.

TWO REPORTS THIS SPRING make me wonder if Swainson’s Hawks will join Cooper’s in nesting in metro Denver. Kevin saw a crow harassing one on April 3. David Gulbenkian reported their return to Crown Hill open space in April. (David saw a juvenile there last fall; it perched on a pole of his tennis court, the first time he’d ever seen a hawk use that vantage point.) This spring, one returned and “perched on that

pole and uttered several piercing calls, exactly as last year’s did! How strong would you characterize that circumstantial evidence that it’s the very same bird, all the way back from the Pampas to precisely the same location?” On March 30, Patty Echelmeyer saw, perched on top of a nursing home at 32nd and Federal, a Peregrine Falcon, not your usual residential visitor. A Wild Turkey plodded through the yard outside my office window on May 16 and spent a half-hour preening, apparently comfortable despite all the action inside as Urling and I stared at it.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVES continue their incursions. April 2, Jane Barron saw two at her home south of Titan Road near Chatfield. For two weeks in early April, Keith Ketner watched a pair that fed with Mourning Doves and pigeons on his driveway in Arvada; the birds didn’t stay however. A White-winged Dove stayed April 26-28 on Green Mountain, in the backyard of Mark Chavez. It fed from a platform feeder and preened in an apple tree. Three dove species have increased in Colorado in the last decade; white-winged and Inca doves both started nesting in Rocky Ford and have subsequently spread out to other parts of the state. We heard our first Common Poorwill on April 28, but then none until May 9; our first Common Nighthawk growled from the night sky on May 27.

A MALE BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD visited Mark’s feeders during afternoon rain showers on May 4, followed by a female (“the sixth summer in a row we have had a pair of black-chinneds”) and then by a male broad-tailed hummer. In Roxborough Village, Jill Holden reports that the first Say’s Phoebe arrived March 17. A Barn Swallow checked out Jill’s Holden’s front door: “looked like he was looking for a place to nest. I don’t think he would like having us come and go so close to the nest, so I hope he found a more suitable place.”

MARCH 9, JILL SAW A BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE her first in over a year. A crabapple tree in Polly’s front yard attracted a Red-breasted Nuthatch, a first for her yard that she discovered by hearing its call. Backyarders reported only a few warblers. At home in Lakewood, Patty saw a Chestnut-sided in late May, and Mark saw a Black-throated Gray on April 30.

KEVIN HAD SOME COLOR on May 17: first a Lesser Goldfinch at the thistle feeder, then a male Western Tanager “bouncing around in the hawthorns.” Joy and Bud saw a Green-tailed Towhee April 28. From his breakfast table in south Cherry Creek, Jim Wilson watched a Lazuli Bunting April 28 and May 3—pretty neat company for coffee and eggs. Urling spotted a hybrid bunting, a cross between a Lazuli and an Indigo (see page 470 in the big Sibley guide) on May 27-28.

NEAR WASHINGTON PARK, Barb Masoner, on May 14, spotted her yard’s first Black-headed Grosbeak, and Kirk Huffstater saw one May 4 in his yard near Castle Rock. Also near Wash Park, on April 20, Angie Koehler thrilled to see a Red-winged Blackbird stop at her feeders. And lastly, both Carolyn Zwahlen and we saw a bird that for several years has seemed scarce in the metro area. At Perry Park, she saw two Evening Grosbeaks on March 30, and Urling spotted a pair at our feeders May 20.

Backyard Birds continued on page 10

Backyard Birds continued from page 9

THE POSTAL SERVICE'S 41-cent wildlife stamps I mentioned in the last column—the pollination combination of bat, bee, butterfly, and bird (humming)—comes out June 29. The Rocky Mountain Park plate will show up in September.

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.

Giving First continued from page 1

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For credit card donations made through GivingFirst, LMC Community Foundation will pay the credit card processing fees, typically about 3 percent per gift. This means that 100 percent of gifts made through [GivingFirst.org](http://www.GivingFirst.org) goes directly to the participating nonprofit. Additionally, in 2007, the Foundation has committed \$100,000 in matching funds to participating nonprofits through [GivingFirst.org](http://www.GivingFirst.org) at 50 cents for every dollar, up to \$5,000 per participating nonprofit. What a wonderful way to maximize contributions.

Learn more about GivingFirst at www.GivingFirst.org or by visiting LMC Community Foundation at www.lmccf.org.

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