

the Warbler

A BIRD IN THE HAND

By Steve Tarlton

Six or seven small brightly-colored bags hung from the pegboard. Occasionally, one would jerk or rock, then be still. Meredith takes one down carefully, opens it, and gently retrieves the small feathered creature within. She cradles it in both hands, then it emerges when she has a firm grip of its tiny legs between two fingers. The bird flaps once or twice and is sheltered by cupped hands until it calms.

Six or eight “tourists” watch the activity, standing around the picnic table in the woods near the river, and vie for better views or photo ops. Meredith holds the bird out for us to see and asks who can identify it. Several of us guess, but it is one of Meredith’s assistants who properly identifies it as a kinglet. Meredith nods her approval and using a wetted finger, examines the bird’s crown. Scruffing a few feathers, she exposes a red patch, and finalizes the identification – a ruby-crowned kinglet.



Photo by ASGD staff

Meredith is a bird expert with the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (formerly Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory) working today with the Greater Denver Audubon Society at their Chatfield Nature Center. *(Cont. page 2)*

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A Bird in the Hand *(cont.)*

Each spring, bird banding is performed at this site and in the fall at the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies site near Barr Lake, to intercept migrating songbirds on their way from Latin and South America to their summer homes in North America. The confluence of the mountains and plains, and the Platte River Valley, funnels the migration route through metro Denver. The travelers stop to rest and feed, and maybe stay.

For banding, fine-lined mist nets are strung among the shrubs and trees along the Platte River bottomlands where the migrants and local birds hang out. The nets have enough give that when a bird flies into one, it is folded gently and trapped. Experienced staff patrol the netting sites frequently, gently untangling the captured birds and placing them into the hand-made bags. The soft cloth prevents the birds from panicking and thrashing about and possibly injuring themselves.

Capturing the birds allows these organizations to collect bird types, weights, age and sex and fat content, which are recorded by volunteers and reported in a national data base. Fat content and age figure prominently in determining whether the bird is a migrant or a local. Banding each bird allows for a historical record of its travels. Birders finding banded birds anywhere can access and update the data base for that bird.

At the banding station, Meredith holds the kinglet out for a quick photo by a young girl, possibly creating a school report. Meredith uses both of her hands to explain her measurements and details about these birds. Several of us try vainly to follow the bird-in-the-hand movements with our cell phone cameras as Meredith energetically describes what she is learning and her measurements. She patiently describes the sexing (by plumage), age and fat content (by inspection of the breast and throat) and weighs the bird in a small tube to keep it still. A tiny metal band with identifying information is placed on the bird's leg.

When all measurements and observations are completed, Meredith motions to the young girl to cup her hands. She carefully lays the kinglet on its back in the amazed girl's hands and lets go. It lies still. Then at Meredith's instruction, the girl tilts her hands and the kinglet hops up and flitters away. The observing crowd offers a soft, "Oooh!"

In the next few minutes Meredith examines and bands a yellow warbler and a house wren and throughout the following days these efforts will continue to build the record, and allow the local and national experts to assess the health of bird populations across the two continents.



Photo by Carolyn Jones

Conservation Report by Polly Reetz

Legislative Wrap-Up (in brief)

Overall this was a successful session for Audubon chapters in Colorado. Our lobbyist, Jen Boulton, reports that “In the end, while we were unable to take many meaningful steps forward, we were successful in continuing a few programs and, just as important, we stopped every major attack on that which we hold dear.” Jen was aided by Audubon volunteers who testified at several hearings.



Eastern Kingbird by Dick Vogel

Translation: Bills we strongly opposed died. Examples:

A full-fledged “takings” bill, SB 93, which required local governments to compensate mineral owners for any oil and gas regulations imposed that reduced their hypothetical future profit margin by 60%, was killed in the House.

SB64, the “annual attack on Forest Service land use policy,” would have interfered with the Forest Service’s water management. This is an annual ritual, made more interesting by the fact that the bill also seemed to violate the US Constitution – we wouldn’t have had actual proof until it was challenged in court – but thankfully it died in the House.

A repeal of last year’s bill to require high-efficiency water fixtures in future construction died.

Bills to support the transfer of federal lands (like National Forests) to the State also died.

A bill to extend the season on black bears, due to increasing human/bear conflicts in northwestern Colorado, was pulled back, in anticipation of efforts to settle this issue outside of legislation.

2nd Translation: A number of bills we supported passed.

Examples:

SB 8 starts us on the path of including water conservation in land use planning; it provides a framework on which we can build (see the previous Warbler for more on this law).

HB 1016 made the current law on rainwater harvesting more user-friendly; however the bill to allow ordinary citizens to collect rainwater in barrels died.

Money was appropriated from the Species Conservation Trust Fund to lease water for instream flows on the main stem of the Colorado River for endangered fish recovery, the largest instream flow in State history (HB 1277).

At this juncture, it’s difficult to make progress on important environmental issues (like water) but we did hold the line on many points. If you would like to receive Jen’s reports on the legislature’s progress, call the ASGD office and sign up – they come out approximately twice a month (303-973-9530).

Protecting Burrowing Owls. Burrowing owls are a threatened species under Colorado law, which should provide them some protection, but they have the misfortune of nesting in prairie dog burrows. When prairie dogs are poisoned, shot or gassed (which happens more than we know) the owls are at risk. This was forcibly brought home when an amateur photographer made a trip out to a colony on the north side of DIA to photograph the owls known to be nesting there in mid-May. To his dismay he observed USDA agents exterminating prairie dogs in the very area where he had hoped to make his photographs. Not only had the area been fumigated but the agents were shooting the prairie dogs as well, causing the owls to fly up in alarm.

Conservation Report (cont.)

According to staff of Colorado Parks and Wildlife, this extermination was perfectly legal – the USDA has the appropriate permits to apply pesticides and to “take” migratory birds in areas near the airport, to prevent bird strikes on airplanes. However, CPW said, USDA will usually try to avoid disturbing burrowing owls when they see signs of nesting. In this case, they didn’t. And while safety is certainly a valid concern - most of us fly out of/into DIA on occasion - we need a dialogue on the ethics of harassing a State threatened species (the owl) in the process.

The USDA’s Wildlife Services department was formerly called Animal Control, and its agents trapped, shot, poisoned and gassed thousands of coyotes and other predators, causing the deaths of many non-target species as well. In the 1970’s agents in west Texas looked the other way while ranchers illegally shot over 100 golden eagles (this was described in Incident at Eagle Ranch by Donald Schueler). In present-day Colorado we could expect that they would refrain from disturbing a State threatened species even if they have the legal right to remove prairie dogs, and birds, around airports.

Audubon members can register their protests with their Members of Congress: Sens. Cory Gardner and Michael Bennet, and your Representative, who can be contacted via their websites or calls to their Colorado offices.

Chatfield Reallocation. A report on the further progress of ASGD’s lawsuit to protect Chatfield State Park will appear in the next Warbler. Stay tuned!

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Colorado Big Year

It's Not Too Late to Participate!

Zeiss joins **Opticron** with prize binoculars for the Audubon Society of Greater Denver and Front Range Birding Company's 2015 Colorado Big Year contest! Join us by keeping track of your species this year. The person who sees the highest number of bird species in Colorado in 2015 will have a chance to win prizes:

1st place

Opticron 8x42 Verano BGA HD Binocular
Retail value: \$669



2nd place

Zeiss Terra ED 8x42 Binocular
Retail value: \$449



Additional Winners

A drawing from all Colorado Big Year Participants will produce additional winners who can win: \$200 of birdseed plus bird feeders donated by Front Range Birding Company! 2 free memberships to ASGD!
All you have to do is participate to have a chance to win!

Colorado Big Year Backyard Division

The event even has a backyard category! Simply log the birds you see at the feeders and birdbaths around your home address and have the chance to win \$100, \$75, or \$50 worth of anything birds eat from the Front Range Birding Company! Just follow the American Birding Association's code of ethics and log your species on [ebird](http://ebird.org).

The FRBC/ASGD Colorado Big Year rules are as follows:

1. All birds must have been seen within Colorado.
2. All your lists must be documented through ebird.
3. You must follow the [American Birding Association](http://americanbirding.org)'s rules for a Big Year.

Call to let us know you are participating!
info@denveraudubon.org



Backyard Birds by Hugh Kingery

Janet Metzen, on May 5 emailed, “I spotted this baby in my backyard. It has been there an hour that I know of. Can you please tell me what it is? Should I be worried for it? I do not have a dog and there are no cats in the neighborhood. We do have a billion rabbits and the occasional coyote. I live in University Hills across from ‘Dinosaur Park.’” Her picture showed a somnolent Common Poorwill. Janet replied, “I have never seen a Poorwill before, but I am bird illiterate! The Poorwill is beautiful! I decided to work in a different part of the yard, in between raindrops. I am so relieved that it is probably okay! Excellent camouflage! I walked by twice before I noticed him/her! It was gone this A.M. But what a treat to see it! And thank you for identifying it for me! I shared it with all the neighbors!”

Bright orange and black Bullock’s Orioles stole the May show.

Kay Chambers, in Larkspur, saw her first May 9 and instantly hung up a “feeder full of grape jelly and oranges. I have a gazebo-shaped feeder that I hang from the top of the deck to keep the bears away. The orioles ate an entire 32-ounce jar of good old Kroeger jelly last year, and were working on the second one when the season ended. They will eat generic.” That refers to a comment from Karen Metz: “My sister tells me that ‘her’ orioles will eat only Smucker’s grape jelly and they ignore every other brand - I think Smucker’s should build a commercial around that!”

May 9, **Debbie Trujillo** saw her “first-of-the-year Bullock’s Oriole that came to the tree-nut feeder Saturday, only one male bird. After the Sunday snowfall, the lone male oriole came to eat the tree-nuts and some apricot jam. Pretty soon there were 3 males and 2 females.”

Linda Broeren reports from Aurora, “Last year, the Mother’s Day



Poorwill by Janet Metzen

snowstorm brought three new yard birds: male Bullock’s Oriole, Chipping Sparrow and Lark Sparrow. This year’s storm brought in male, female, and first-year Bullock’s Orioles. (I’d like to think same male but who knows.) They have been here for 4 days so far this year.”

Fran Sheppardson, near Kiowa, said, May 16, “I’ve been hearing a skit, skit sound at my hummingbird feeder in the early morning, but no humming sound. Yesterday I saw a Bullock’s male fly in and try to drink from the feeder.”



Bullock’s Oriole by Linda Broeren

From Centennial May 9, **Shelly Haynes** emailed, “Two years ago, I had a male Lazuli Bunting at my feeder. Today he came with, I believe, his mate. I am happily watching them from my window today.” Linda saw one May 11; it arrived with the 10-inch snowstorm, along with a Green-tailed Towhee.



Lazuli Bunting by Linda Broeren

“I had an Indigo Bunting on my deck this morning!” (**Jill Holden**, Roxborough, May 8). I get a Lazuli every now and then, but had never seen an Indigo here before.”

Sharon Hines, south of Franktown, reported the return of her Say’s Phoebe, Mar. 31, and **Lucy Michel** had one in Littleton April 1. They returned to Highlands Ranch yards Apr. 2, both **Julia Grundmeier’s and Linda Williams’s**. On May 3, **Rhonda Kelly** said, “Say’s Phoebes here for awhile now. There’s one sitting on my security camera every night.

Would be awesome to know if it is the same one as last year.”

Backyard Birds (cont.)

Hummingbirds always excite. **Chris Arthun** reported the first one (Broad-tailed), from Franktown, Apr. 8, followed by **Randy Nelson's** in Parker Apr. 11, **Linda Williams** (Highlands Ranch) Apr. 15. Randy saw his first Black-chinned Apr. 29 – they have become regular, if scarce, in the metro area.

Other migrants:

Ruby-crowned Kinglet Apr.

28, **Dave Cameron:** “Flitting around the thicket in my backyard yesterday afternoon, bringing the yard list to about 58.” **Rhonda Kelly,** Parker:

“Western Kingbirds arrived May 3.” Hermit Thrush, May 8 and 10 in Franktown and Elbert County (Karen, Debbie).



Green-Tailed Towhee by Linda Broeren

Peggy Wait and Lowell Baumunk, near Chatfield State Park, on Apr. 19, “saw a female Lesser Goldfinch. Later in the afternoon the female returned to the feeder and brought her boyfriend with her. A White-throated Sparrow spent part of last week’s snow and rain at our feeders.” **Amy Law-Ziegler** also saw them at her feeder on Green Mountain.

Our neighbor, **Bill Greer,** reported the only flock of Sandhill Cranes, “a couple of hundred going north.” Urling and I missed them.

In Arvada, **Char and Tom Gottlieb's** Great Horned Owls “fledged out of the nest about Apr.14, but are still present in our willows each day. The young ones are about 3/4ths the size of adult, but very fuzzy. Very cute. Both Mom and Dad present.” They also saw a pair of Western Scrub-Jays although “the coloring is much more muted than shown in some field guides and my books don’t seem to agree. Definitely long-tailed, but no white eye-line.” Colorado scrub-jays seems more muted than the California birds that some field guides show.

By Mar. 31, **Karen vonSaltza,** east Denver, saw and heard daily “courting American Kestrels in the cottonwoods by my house or hunting over the golf course across the Highline Canal. This will be the 13th year that I have

had kestrels nest in my flicker box or sometimes, at my neighbor’s box. The young learn to hunt in the flood plain nearby. Late June at my house can be very noisy. It is a ritual I look forward to every spring.”

Mallards generated two calls to ‘Dial Zero’ – the ASGD wildlife-questions-answered button. One hen opted to nest next to a house in violation of the HOA covenants, and Nancy Sherman feared that the lawn mowers would run over it. The intransigent HOA prohibits putting up even a fence around the nesting area. Despite that, she put up tape and signs around the nest area.

The other hen hatched 14 ducklings before a car killed her in the parking lot of a nursing home. In hopes that they live through the night residents of the home put up a shelter—a roof and blankets to them from the rain and snow, (Mallards feed themselves right after they hatch, so maybe the ducklings survived.)

Near her house, **Lucy** saw “Two gorgeous male Cinnamon Teal and their ‘friend,’ a male Blue-winged Teal hanging out on the small ponds near our house. First Cinnamon I have seen since Bosque del Apache in 1996.”

Deb Carstenson reported, Apr. 21, “two pairs of Common Mergansers on the ponds here in Littleton for 3 weeks now and I’m hoping they find a place to nest here. There was a pair of Wood Ducks here on 4/16 which was a welcome sight after I found a partially eaten female Wood Duck under a tree a few days earlier. Sad to see!”

She also sees there a belted Kingfisher, Double-crested Cormorants, and a lone female Hooded Merganser. On Apr. 26, **Maggie Brahm** saw “80+ Black-crowned Night-Herons perched in the trees on the west side of the isle in the southmost lake.” These herons, along with cormorants, Snowy and Cattle egrets, nest on the island close to 17th Avenue in City Park.

Also in City Park, **Sue Anderson** “Saw a white robin with only a few gray feathers & a few orange feathers. Wondered how often this sort of bird appears and how it survived the winter with that plumage; or if it molted into the plumage this spring.” These leucistic birds show up occasionally and we all wonder exactly the things Linda mentions.

Backyard Birds *(cont.)*

The Chukar that visited **John Martin's** backyard in Aurora Apr. 27 probably escaped from a game farm. (John's dog "started barking and then continued to bark and bark until I finally got curious to see what all the ruckus was about. I found this rather rotund little bird walking around my backyard, a bird that I certainly had never seen in Aurora before.")



Chukar by John Martin

Bill Wuerthele harked back to winter: "An observation on wintering Juncos in my part of Park Hill. In all the winters we've lived in Denver (30+), we get only the Pink-sided, Slate-colored, and Oregon races of juncos coming to our feeders (once, a White-winged). We do not get the Gray-headed race in winter - the race that actually nests in Colorado.



Gray-Headed Junco by Bill Wuerthele

Looking at Sibley's range map, it looks like Gray-headed Juncos do winter in eastern Colorado, and I've seen them in places like Red Rocks in winter - but not in the City. The only time, we ever get them in the yard is in the spring, when I assume they are on their way back to the mountains. On schedule, one showed up in the yard 3/29 - first sighting this year. I participate in

FeederWatch, and so I do keep close watch on juncos."

We eagerly note the first arrivals in the spring, but do a poor job of tracking the last observations of the winter or summer. At our house, our records show the last American Tree Sparrow on Mar. 14 and the last Townsend's Solitaire Mar. 27.

Red-breasted Nuthatches continue to show up in the city.

Reports came from **Linda Williams, Char & Tom, and Amy, plus Kathy Dressell** in Franktown.

Finally, a paean, after the snowstorm, from **Linda Broeren**: "The color we had on our feeders was glorious. The new birds joined our American Goldfinches, Downy Woodpeckers, Blue Jays, Chipping and White-crowned Sparrows, House Finches, Black-capped Chickadees, etc. Also, a FOS Broad-tailed Hummingbird joined in."

Your contributions write this column. Thanks to you in urban and suburban Denver who sent in all these intriguing reports. Send a note or post card to P.O. Box 584, Franktown 80116, or Email me: ouzels8@aol.com



Bullock's Oriole by Amy Law-Ziegler

Lois Webster Fund

Birds and Bats Featured at Lois Webster Fund Gathering

This year's Lois Webster Fund Research Reports Program featured fascinating presentations by the 2014 grantees, who entertained a packed room at Angelo's Taverna in Denver on April 22nd.

Travis Gallo, CSU doctoral candidate, described how habitat manipulation for mule deer impacts avian communities in the oil patch of the Piceance Basin. He was joined by Molly Warren, whose internship was partially sponsored by the Lois Webster Fund. Molly gave us an eye opening presentation from the point of view of a novice field worker who spent six weeks completing over 600 point count surveys and 125 vegetation surveys. This information will be helpful in influencing the choice of projects used to mitigate the impacts of energy development.

The Lois Webster Fund enabled grantee Colin Woolley of CU Denver to purchase GPS tags which were attached to individual nesting Mountain Plover so that they could be tracked during incubation in 2014. The birds were also tracked during brood-rearing so that their habitat use during both stages could be compared. This study will continue this summer and the Lois Webster Fund was pleased to be able to provide some funding for the second season of the study. Everyone appreciated the Mountain Plover photos as well as the excellent maps and charts Colin presented.

Laura Heiker, a student at University of Northern Colorado, gave an excellent presentation on the preliminary results of her study of the effects of stream heavy metal contamination on bat communities along an elevation gradient in the eastern Rockies. She discussed having students from Colorado Mountain College assist her in collecting data on the bats and water near Montezuma, CO. This study will also be continued in the 2015 field season.



These presentations documented preliminary results, methodology and the experience of field work, often under less than ideal conditions. The slides, graphs and photography were all superb. As always, the audience enjoyed the talks and participated enthusiastically in the question/answer sessions. We look forward to more excellent presentations from the 2015 grantees at the annual meeting next year.

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The Audubon Society of Greater Denver offers an opportunity for you to make a gift or bequest to leave a legacy and a lasting impact. The goal of planned giving is to help you plan your estate and charitable giving in a way that benefits you, your family and ASGD. We invite friends who share a commitment to educating all ages about birds, other wildlife, and habitats to consider making a personal investment in the future of our programs. There are several ways you can make these planned gifts to charity and enjoy tax and income benefits:

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Please consult with your financial planner and attorney to assure you receive the best financial advantages and that your intentions are carried out fully.

We would be glad to discuss any planned giving option with you – in confidence and without obligation. For more information, please call 303-973-9530 or e-mail Karl Brummert, Executive Director, at kbrummert@denveraudubon.org

Please Let Us Know

We often receive bequests from people whom we have never had the opportunity to thank. If you include Audubon Society of Greater Denver in your estate plans, please let us know. We value the opportunity to express our gratitude in person to let you know that your gift is greatly appreciated now and for future generations of people and birds to come. Those people who have notified us of their intention to make a bequest to the Audubon Society of Greater Denver are invited to our Legacy Circle. Legacy Circle special events and activities highlighting the work we accomplish together will keep you connected to the “legacy” that you have planned for us.

Legal Designation: If you wish to name Audubon Society of Greater Denver in your will or estate plan, we should be legally designated as: *“Audubon Society of Greater Denver, a nonprofit organization (Tax ID #23-7063701), with its principal business headquarters address of 9308 S. Wadsworth Blvd, Littleton, CO 80128.”*
Date of Incorporation: September 30, 1969



Photo by Dick Vogel

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