

the Warbler



since 1969

Lois Webster Fund 2012 Grants ~ Presentation Review by Margot Wynkoop

The three 2012 recipients of the Lois Webster Fund annual research grants tackled a trio of topics that were both fascinating and timely in addressing problems facing individual species and larger themes of land use and development in Colorado. They presented their findings at an open meeting for Audubon members on April 3 at the Breckenridge Colorado Craft (Brewery) in LoDo.

Martin Moses led a Bio-blitz in southern Colorado along the Dolores River. He had the help of many volunteers and schoolchildren in surveying everything from bats captured in mist nets to a wide variety of insects. The privately owned property is being restored to a more natural condition by the landowner, who is using the blitz information as a baseline. Moses, a private lands wildlife biologist, used effective graphs and photos to convey the biodiversity of the area.

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8 2012 LWF GRANT RECIPIENT-
MAMMALIAN HABITAT STUDY

There are significantly more male mountain plovers than female. Maggie Riordan, a University of Montana graduate student, investigated the life stages of mountain plovers to determine when male bias manifests itself in the population. Ms. Riordan is a graduate student of Dr. Vicky Drietz, a former LWF committee member, and her study continues to add to the knowledge of one of Lois Webster's favorite birds.



Mountain Plover courtesy Wikipedia

Erica Goad will be publishing the final report on her project soon. She has been working in an area west of Fort Collins plotting wildlife use of natural corridors using 27 wildlife cameras on public and private land. She said the study area has different patterns of development which may lead to drawing some conclusions about how development patterns, clustered versus dispersed, for example affect wildlife.

The enthusiasm and humor of each of the presenters added to the quality and enjoyment of the presentations. All who attended came away with a better understanding of the wildlife issues studied and the intricacies of the scientific techniques being used in

the field of wildlife research today. It was both a fun and educational evening for all of the attendees. Be sure to watch future Warblers for articles about the results of the Moses and Riordan projects. A summary of Erica Goad's project can be found elsewhere in this Warbler.

Conservation Report by Polly Reetz

Legislative Wrap-up for July/August 2013

The Colorado legislature adjourned on May 8, 2013, having accomplished an amazing amount on civil unions, guns and marijuana, but not nearly as much on environmental issues. All in all, though, it was generally a successful session for Audubon, as almost all the bills we objected to were either killed or amended:

- Bad Bills Stopped. Audubon successfully worked to amend or kill bills that would have handicapped State agencies in writing regulations to protect public health, safety and the environment.

A typical one, SB 30, required State agencies that are formulating regulations resulting from legislation to notify certain legislators of the draft rules and also required a cost/benefit analysis for all proposed rules, which would have slowed down rule-making in a major way.

- Instream Flow Program improved. Language included in SB 181, the bill that authorized the Colorado Water Conservation Board's construction funds (loans and grants to water providers for building water projects), included a positive change for the State's instream flow program. All the monies available to the CWCB can now be used to acquire water rights for this program; and rights can be acquired by the CWCB for maintenance AND enhancement of streams, which will allow degraded streams to be restored. It also gives the public a wedge into the debate of projects that might dry up or divert a river. A big improvement!

- Graywater Bill Passed. An important step forward in water conservation, HB 1044 authorizes the use of water from bathroom and laundry room sinks, bathtubs, showers and laundry machines (but NOT toilets, urinals, kitchen sinks or dishwashers) to be collected and used for "beneficial purposes" as defined by the Water Quality Control Commission, rather than just being dumped back in the river.



Mallard by Dick Vogel

- Two short-sighted resolutions died: one would have recommended to the US Fish and Wildlife Service that the Gunnison's sage grouse not be listed as a Threatened or Endangered species. The other gave absolute priority to agricultural water rights, anytime, anywhere, no matter the environmental implications.

- The Habitat Stamp was reauthorized – this stamp, required with purchase of a hunting or fishing license, can also be purchased by birdwatchers, outdoor photographers, or anyone who wants to protect wildlife habitat.

The money so raised must be spent to purchase or get conservation easements on lands for wildlife.

On the losing side of the Ledger:

- Thanks to SB 41, the mere storage of water is now a beneficial use (you don't have to show you have any other use for it at all). The one redeeming factor here was the strong showing made by Audubon members against this bill, and we did get a statement of legislative intent attached that will make it easier to contest application of this law.

- Almost all of the oil and gas bills died except one that strengthens the requirements to report oil spills.

- A bill backed by developers of the Sterling Ranch project passed, though it was amended and, in fact, may have little impact. Sterling Ranch folks were contesting a law that requires a developer has to show that he has adequate water for his project. Even with this law in force he still has to do so!

- While SB 181 did great things for the instream flow program, it also

(Cont. next page)

authorized the CWCB to use \$28 million next year to acquire storage rights in the Chatfield Reallocation project from the US Army Corps of Engineers. The rights will be held by the State until other entities step up and buy the storage space. This not only props up this ill-conceived project but also commits the State (and taxpayers) for funds that may never get repaid, should current proponents of Chatfield change their mind about storing water there. Current estimates of the mitigation costs are \$185 million; since some items have not yet been included, it's possible that mitigation might reach \$200 million. So the public pays twice – to the water providers through their water bills and with the trashing of a much-loved State Park. For information on this project go to www.SaveChatfield.org.

As you have probably noticed, water supply is a constant subject of legislation. Audubon is holding two future meetings that will discuss how we manage water in Colorado: an Activists' Strategy session on September 18, 2013, and our annual Legislative Forum, February 22, 2014.

Come and become informed! Information on both will be on the ASGD website and in the Warbler.

To Report Fox Sightings:

Here is the website for folks to report fox sightings as part of a research project: www.ifoundafox.org. Your contribution of vital red fox information is central to the success of native Rocky Mountain red fox research. By providing the location of a red fox that you have seen, our research can better focus on collecting genetic samples.

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Backyard Birds by Hugh Kingery

The cold, wet and late spring elicited many intriguing observations – and many tardy spring arrivals. Typifying this manifestation of climate change (??),

Rex Nelson took pictures of a Mourning Dove huddled under a blanket of snow. Brrr. Turkey Vultures invaded the city. **Tom Parchman** emailed on Mar. 28, “Last evening Elizabeth saw a large bird swoop past our kitchen window. When she investigated she found a Turkey Vulture



Mourning Dove by Rex Nelson

cruising around the neighborhood. It seems to have been looking for a place to roost for the night, and it did. It roosted in a large blue spruce near 20th and Kipling in our residential neighborhood. It is still there this morning as I write. We have occasionally seen them pass high overhead, but we have never seen them this low in the area.”

Kevin Corwin saw one, Mar. 22, “flying low and working the stiff north wind over Arapahoe Road between Colo. Blvd. & Holly,” and **Mike Serruto** saw 16 “circling low in Crestmoor on Apr. 21.”

On Apr. 17, **Cynthia Madsen** reported, “I’m on cloud nine! I noticed a different bird in my neighbor’s cottonwood tree today. Oh, my gosh...it was a Peregrine Falcon! Unbelievable! There were two American Crows in the tree with it, but they gave only half-hearted warning caws and did not harass it in the slightest. I took my scope and cameras outside in the snow to get better pictures when my little female Downy Woodpecker flew into my

maple tree right beside me. I was worried about her with this falcon nearby, but I noticed that the falcon’s crop was so swollen that it must have been as full as a tick and didn’t have the slightest interest in another meal. It sat in the cottonwood from 12:30 to 2:58 p.m. It kept nodding off like it was listening to a boring speech. It would close one eye, then the other, then both. It was so interesting to watch the eyelids close from the bottom up instead of the top down. When it finally flew off into the storm, the wing beats were a sight to behold...so powerful and stiff. What a magnificent raptor!”

Pat Termin & Rosemary

Peterson said, “The sun came up April 18 after almost three days of overcast skies, wind, and snow. We casually watched the usual suspects arrive at our backyard feeders: finches, chickadees, collared doves, and sparrows. We were surprised to see the Mourning Doves had returned and they sat huddled on the fence. A flapping caught my eye and a bird landed on the largest wooden feeder. I yelled for Rosemary, “We’ve got a Kestrel on our feeder!””



Kestrel by Pat Termin

“We watched for a half hour as it went from perching on the fence in several places. We enjoyed the colorful male as he kept fluttering back and forth. I thought perhaps he could hear mice under the snow, attracted by seed on the ground. The kestrel made a short dive and came up with a body. He flew to a tree closer to our deck. We realized he had captured a bird – perhaps a hapless finch had no time to fly and hid in a small space between the fence and the landscaping. We watched him eat his meal bite by bite, occasionally stopping to remove excess feathers from his mouth. He even ate the feet!”

Brenda Beatty (Castle Rock) enlisted a rock-climbing friend to install an artificial owl nest where one had blown down two years ago. Last year, no customers, but this year a pair occupied it and produced young.

(Cont. next page)

Backyard Birds *(cont.)*

Tom says that “Ravens are nesting at Lowe’s (Colfax at Miller) again this year in the same nest used last year. By Apr. 28, there appear to be five nestlings almost ready to leave the nest. They are doing a lot of stretching their wings and flapping.”

Bob Santangelo (Wheat Ridge), “graduated from redpolls to Rose-breasted Grosbeak. She’s been around at least from Apr. 13-18.” **Gina Gerken**, May 7-8 in Castle Pines, “had a life bird on my feeder – an immature male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. The red triangle on his breast was really more pink than red. He had a few black feathers on his head, but definitely not a full dark head. He seemed to be hanging out with a very mature Black-headed Grosbeak. One would eat at the feeder and the other would watch – almost as if they were taking turns doing watch duty.” And, on May 11, **Urling & I** started our Birdathon with a Rose-breasted Grosbeak clinging to one of our seed cylinder feeders.



Spotted Towhee by Dick Vogel

Shelly Haynes on May 7, emailed: “I have had a male Lazuli Bunting at the feeder in my backyard all week. I live in Centennial – this is a first and I’m wondering if this is a rare occurrence for a backyard feeder or not?” Indeed it is. Other colorful visitors included Bullock’s Orioles seen by **Lynne Duman** May 7 (“a great way to start the day”) and **Jill Holden** May 6 (“visiting my hummingbird feeder”).

On May 8, “the big rain brought a Western Tanager” to **Gina’s** yard. **Joy Schieving**, May 17, had Black-headed Grosbeak, Hermit Thrush, and Spotted Towhee. **Karen Metz**, in Franktown, saw a Hermit Thrush Apr. 17-19.

Several people saw Spotted Towhees: two took up residence in **Lynda Love’s** yard (southeast Denver) both this year and last, and **Cynthia** had one, then two. “Could the pitter patter of little towhee feet be

far behind?” **Barb Shissler** (Littleton) emailed on May 6, “Gotta love this time of year! After an extraordinary morning of birding at Belmar Park, I came home to find a Green-tailed Towhee in our yard and a Lincoln’s Sparrow on our platform feeder.”

Polly Reetz (Congress Park) enjoyed a banner spring. On Apr. 1 and again Apr. 19 “a flock of about 20 Cedar Waxwings visited our yard. On Apr. 1 they drank out of our birdbath, not eating anything that I could see. On the 19th they ate something in the buds of the big ash tree in our yard, I’m not sure whether it was animal or vegetable. (**Dave Leatherman** would tell us that they found some sort of leaf miner or leaf roller in the leaves.) On Apr. 22 two juncos in our yard – a rare occurrence – looked like females of the Oregon subspecies. As far as I know, these are the first juncos in our yard since last fall.”



Northern Mockingbird courtesy Wikipedia

From May 4-7, she reported “we have been regaled by the presence of 3-4 brightly-colored

American Goldfinches. We haven’t seen goldfinches here for many years and wonder why they turned up now. We enjoy the color and motion. They are eating nyger seed and sunflower chips. House Finches eat the nyger too but nobody else does – finally something squirrels won’t eat!”

Lynda had an unusual metro bird: “A Northern Mockingbird has taken up residence along the canal path between the Forest St. and Holly St. bridges. This one appeared with a band of robins in mid-March and I’ve seen it regularly since then, in the same area, and not always around the robins. I’ve heard it singing too.”

Backyard Birds *(cont.)*

Karen Metz, on May 1 in Franktown, saw a few Yellow-rumped Warblers, Lincoln's and Vesper sparrows, and hundreds of bluebirds, mostly male westerns, along the fence lines on Russellville Road. During one of the snowstorms, someone reported at least a thousand bluebirds in Chatfield State Park.

Becky Campbell, near Cherry Creek State Park on May 4, had "my own backyard, three-dove day! A White-winged Dove has been hanging around since early a.m. I got a cell phone shot of all three (WWDO, Eurasian Collared-Dove, and Mourning Dove) under the feeders."



Mountain Bluebird by Hugh Kingery

Kay Chambers reports "an almost-albino Eurasian Collared-Dove down here in Larkspur. He/she is bright white with a few tiny specks of brown on his/her back which really spectacularly contrasts with our Ponderosa pines - the bird is almost neon! Picture available. His/her partner is a normal-colored Eurasian." [We wonder how these doves, new in the state, will affect the Mourning Dove population. Collared-Doves favor small towns and suburban yards; they don't show up in wild places very often (so far).]

Cyn Benegar spotted "a Wild Turkey in our backyard Apr 10-15. Just in case we couldn't trust our eyes, he/she went, 'gobble-gobble.' We've lived in the Pinery for 26 years, and this is the first time I've seen Wild Turkey here."

In nearby Franktown, our neighbor **Pat Phagan** called us to help her deal with a nest that a Say's Phoebe built in a hard-hat inside her garage. We moved the hard-hat halfway to the door in hopes that it might adjust to a new location outside. Because we didn't hear or see the culprit on moving day, we suspected that it might not come back, and it didn't. But - we still hear a phoebe near their house.

Hummingbirds - half the yard reports this spring involved hum-

mingbirds. **Karen Metz** sent the first report, a female (usually males arrived first) Broad-tailed Apr. 17 after the snow ceased, followed by **Jill Holden** (Roxborough) Apr. 20 (the expected male), **Randy Nelson** (Parker) Apr. 26, ("unmistakable wing trill"), **Kay Chambers** (Larkspur) and **Lin Johnston** Apr. 27.

Randy spotted a male Black-chinned on Apr. 30. It "promptly began chasing and being chased by the male Broad-tail (presumably the same one that arrived on 4/26). Our first female Broad-tail joined in the fun shortly thereafter. Several feeders around the yard should keep them fed until this snowy spell departs." On May 2, he said, "The male broad-tail arrived around 8 a.m. and now we know all three of them are apparently



Black-Chinned Hummingbirds by Dick Vogel

okay. It will be interesting to see how the hummers (and other insectivores) cope with the delay or scarcity of insects and flower nectar during the next few weeks and months."

What effects did the cold weather have?

Apr. 18 and 19: morning temperatures of 12 and 13 degrees. Karen put out her feeders "at 6:30 a.m. - and I saw a female hummer drinking nectar at 6:55 both mornings. I kept up an alternate-feeders regime - keep a feeder out for less than an hour and replace it with a feeder that contains room-temperature nectar; otherwise the nectar freezes quickly.) She showed up again soon after dawn and visited the nectar feeder as often as every 12-15 minutes during light snowfall, until early afternoon when the wind and snow really picked up. She apparently then went into torpor."

Backyard Birds (cont.)

May 2: "I heard the chipping vocalizations of hummingbirds from multiple directions when I was outside 15 minutes before sunrise. At 6 a.m., a female came to drink sugar water – the only fuel for them to use to find insect matter, and the latter must be in short supply. Still, there are resources that I do not understand. Some birds survive with their life on the edge and breed to rebound the population. It's been a few years since we witnessed the effects of a hard freeze so late and perhaps we'll witness survival-of-the-fittest during what will likely be a population crash, given the extended drought. The birds that make it through may foster a strong gene pool."



Broad-Tailed Hummingbird by Dick Vogel

May 2, **Jill**: "I brought the mostly frozen, snow-covered feeders in last night to thaw for a morning refill. I wondered how 'my' male broad-tail' had fared since it never seemed to stop snowing. I just said a prayer that the hummingbird would be able to get into torpor and hold out until morning."

"I got the hummingbird feeders out early, and started clearing a spot on the deck to put down seed for ground-feeding birds when I heard the trill of hummingbird wings. He landed at the feeder and got a nice long drink. Rather like the equivalent of our hot chocolate on a cold day. I thanked God for this wonderful sight! He returned several times, and then I saw a second hummingbird chased from the feeder by the first one. Did not hear a wing trill from this one when I saw her leave a feeder by herself. There were several chases as they fought over the feeders. It was good to see that not just one but two hummingbirds made it through the storm."

"I was told that hummingbirds use tree sap when flower nectar is lacking and

that cottonwoods often seep sap at joints on their own without a sapsucker to make holes. Not sure how well the sap is flowing right now with all the cold, but that should change soon, and insects start hatching out at any hint of warmth. As **Karen** said, this weird weather probably eliminated some less hardy birds, but hopefully things are looking up for those that made it."

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

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2012 LWF Grant Recipient - Erica Goad

Mammalian Habitat Use Along a Residential Development Gradient in Northern Colorado

Since the 1990s the American West has been one of the fastest growing regions in the United States, with “exurban” (a region lying beyond the suburbs of a city) development occupying nearly five times more land than urban and suburban development combined. Understanding the effects of exurban development



on biodiversity has important implications for public policy, conservation practice, connectivity, and land use planning. To assess exurban housing density impact on mammalian habitat use, we placed wildlife cameras along a uniquely-designed housing density gradient in a rapidly growing rural region northwest of Fort Collins, Colorado. Multiple-season species occupancy was measured in summer

and winter seasons and these data were analyzed in conjunction with a novel, acoustic-based approach to assessing human presence.

Impacts of exurban housing density varied by mammal species. Some species such as bobcats and coyotes showed decreased activity at higher housing densities; whereas other species such as red foxes, mule deer, and Abert's squirrels used habitat more frequently in these areas. Some of the relationships were non-linear and exhibited thresholds. Human-sourced disturbances from housing density and non-natural sound levels emerged as highest in relative covariate importance.



Relative activity rates corroborated occupancy results, indicating that some species not only used habitat in high density areas, they used it more frequently. In addition, some species preferentially used embedded greenbelts in high-density exurban subdivisions, suggesting their utility for the maintenance of structural



and functional connectivity. This study demonstrates that the impacts of housing density are species-dependent and that incorporating well-designed open spaces into development projects may be critical to supporting wildlife in a region that will likely see continued exurban expansion.

About Erica

Erica Goad, a native of Golden, Colorado, is finishing a Master's degree in the Graduate Degree Program in Ecology and the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology at Colorado State University in Fort Collins. She is currently a Conservation Coordinator for The Nature Conservancy in Boulder, Colorado, and monitors conservation easements across the state. Erica's passion for conservation has led her to Namibia to research conservation efforts of the black rhinoceros and across the American West to investigate environmental issues in the public and private sectors. She also has studied mountain lions in Grand Canyon National Park and wolverines in Idaho. As a graduate from Whitman College with a degree in Biology-Environmental Studies, Erica served as a leader of the Campus Climate Challenge club and received the Harry S. Truman Scholarship for a commitment to a career in public service. She got her feet wet in national public policy working for the Center for American Progress and the Union of Concerned Scientists, but decided she liked being a scientist better. She enjoys backcountry skiing, mountain biking, running, playing frisbee, backpacking, brewing beer, and baking bread.

All Photos this page by Erica Goad

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