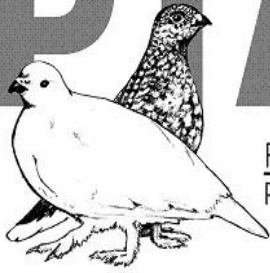


PTARMIGAN



FORT COLLINS AUDUBON SOCIETY
P.O. Box 271968 • Fort Collins, CO 80527-1968 • www.fortnet.org/Audubon

Promoting the appreciation, conservation, and restoration of ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife, through education, participation, stewardship, and advocacy.

May 2006

Volume 37, Issue 9

Conservation Success in Northeastern Colorado

The Laramie Foothills is one of the last places along Colorado's northern Front Range where it is still possible to conserve forever a landscape stretching literally from the mountains to the plains. This is an area that is over 70% private land and that has been well stewarded by ranchers for generations at no cost to us. Consequently, there are large intact tracts that contain wonderful examples of our natural heritage: grasslands, scrublands, woodlands, and riparian systems.

This landscape not only provides habitat for wildlife, but also gives us unmitigated viewsheds, a sense of open space, healthy soils and water, recreational opportunities, and a working landscape that is compatible with all of these values. In addition, a rich cultural heritage has been preserved for us to enjoy and learn from, including tipi rings, burial sites, historic trails, and the Lindenmeyer site.

To date, over 100,000 acres of private lands have been conserved forever in the Laramie Foothills. Added to the existing public lands, we have now connected together about 200,000 acres across the



North Fork of the Cache la Poudre watershed. This has only been possible because of a unique partnership between private individuals, public agencies, and land trusts. Four of the partners—Legacy Land Trust, Larimer County Parks and Open Space Program, City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, and The Nature Conservancy—appreciate this opportunity to share this

story with you and invite you to come and dream about the next steps needed to complete this exciting project.

In addition, these partners have been working in other parts of northeastern Colorado to conserve habitat, open space, and working ranches, and to provide recreational and educational opportunities in our community. Come hear about those projects and, in particular, work that is

occurring on the shortgrass prairie. Grasslands provide significant habitat for migratory bird species, but they are the least protected habitat on Earth and are also under threat.

Join us to hear about a creative partnership that has resulted in significant conservation in northeastern Colorado.

THURSDAY EVENING PROGRAM—May 11, 2006
Ludlow Room, Fort Collins Lincoln Center, 417 W. Magnolia St.
Social Gathering: 7:00 PM, Program: 7:30 PM

FORT COLLINS AUDUBON SOCIETY PROGRAMS AND FIELD TRIPS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Visit our website at www.fortnet.org/Audubon or call 970-490-BIRD.

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recycled paper





M A Y – J U N E F I E L D T R I P S

All field trips are free of charge and open to the public. All experience levels are welcome. Attendees should dress appropriately for the weather. Bring snacks, water, binoculars, and spotting scopes (if you have them). Carpooling is encouraged. A \$2.00 (unless otherwise specified) contribution per passenger to the driver is suggested. Visit www.fortnet.org/Audubon for more information. For all field trips and surveys, please contact the trip leader for signup and trip details, or contact the Field Trip Coordinator, Joe Martin, at joe3eagles@msn.com or 970-412-2481.

Colorado state law requires all visitors to state-owned lands to be in possession of a Habitat Stamp while on the property. Purchase a stamp wherever hunting and fishing licenses are sold, at a Colorado Division of Wildlife service center, or online for \$5.00 with a previously purchased license, or \$10.00 if purchased separately. Visit <http://wildlife.state.co.us/ShopDOW/AppsAndLicenses/HabitatStamp/> for more information, including exceptions.

5/6/2006 Saturday. Migrating Birds along Poudre River and Dixon Reservoir. Leader: Phil Friedman at 970-493-2959 or phifri@frie.com to register. See and hear many species at these two premier Fort Collins spring migration areas. This is a great spring morning for all outdoor lovers, but will be focused toward beginning birders. Meeting time is approximately 7:00 AM. Group size is limited.

5/7/2006 Sunday. Fort Collins Area Raptors. 9 AM to 1 PM. Leader: Eric DeFonso at 970-472-1761 or eric_defonso@yahoo.com. We will look for resident and spring migrant hawks, eagles, falcons, and owls. We'll also discuss some basic raptor biology and identification tips. Stops will include local prairie dog colonies, known nesting sites, and riparian areas. Limited to 8 people.

5/13/2006 Saturday. Search for Wildlife Families. Bring the family to celebrate Mother's Day by joining Master Naturalists Kathy Herbener and Joann Thomas to learn about and search for wildlife families. We will take a morning walk from 9:00 to 11:00 AM in search of wildlife in the city. It's spring time and young animal families abound. We'll supply the binoculars and you supply the curiosity. Call 482-7125 to reserve your spot.

5/14/2006 Sunday. Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey. Leader: Sol Miller at eagleeye1029@yahoo.com. Meet at 7:00 AM. FCAS performs a monthly bird census for the city. All levels welcomed. Contact leader for signup and details.

5/21/2006 Sunday. Fossil Creek Reservoir Bird Survey. Leader: Nick Komar at quetzal65@comcast.net or 970-416-7527. FCAS performs a monthly bird census for the county. All levels welcomed. Participation limited to five plus leader. Contact leader for signup and details.

6/11/2006 Sunday. Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey. Leader: Sol Miller at eagleeye1029@yahoo.com. Meet at 7:00 AM. FCAS performs a monthly bird census for the city. All levels welcomed. Contact leader for signup and details.

6/18/2006 Sunday. Fossil Creek Reservoir Bird Survey. Leader: Nick Komar at quetzal65@comcast.net or 970-416-7527. FCAS performs a monthly bird census for the county. All levels welcomed. Participation limited to five plus leader. Contact leader for signup and details.

Occasionally, new field trips may be announced or details may be finalized between issues of the *Ptarmigan*. Please visit our website and click on "Field Trips," or call the FCAS message center at 490-BIRD to check for updated field trip information.

Interested in becoming a field trip leader? Want more information about it? Call or e-mail Joe Martin at 970-412-2481 or joe3eagles@msn.com. Lead a trip about prairie ecosystems, wildflowers, wildfire dynamics, whatever. Maybe even birding!

2006 Fort Collins Audubon Birdathon

Friday and Saturday, May 12–13, 2006

Spring migration has begun and the Birdathon is right around the corner! The Birdathon is Fort Collins Audubon's annual spring fundraiser. It is also a great birding and social get-together that is an enjoyable—if exhausting—24-hour search for birds. It is a great way to help raise money for Fort Collins Audubon, too!

Pledges are needed to support our newsletter, programs, scholarships, and conservation efforts.

Birdathon teams will be formed in late April or early May. Prior to the Birdathon, team members obtain pledges based on the total number of species the team lists. On Birdathon day, team members will search for as many species as can be seen or heard in 24 hours.

Participate in any of four different ways:

(1) **Team Leader** - lead a Birdathon team near and far in Larimer and Weld counties; (2) **Team Member** - participate on a team and help spot birds and, of course, obtain pledges; (3) **Pledge** - provide a pledge to a team member; and (4) **Business Pledge Partner** - provide a pledge to a team member or a team.

For more information, contact Birdathon Coordinator, Phil Friedman, at 970-493-2959 or phifri@frii.com

Birdathon Matching Funds

Your pledge will mean even more: A Fort Collins couple—members of Fort Collins Audubon—has promised to match all donations received for the 2006 Birdathon!

Please note: Colorado state law requires all visitors to state-owned lands to be in possession of a Habitat Stamp while on the property. Purchase a stamp wherever hunting and fishing licenses are sold, at a Colorado Division of Wildlife service center, or online for \$5.00 with a previously purchased license, or \$10.00 if purchased separately. Visit <http://wildlife.state.co.us/ShopDOW/AppsAndLicenses/HabitatStamp/> for more information, including exceptions.

Birdathon Donation Form

I want to support Fort Collins Audubon by making a pledge for the Birdathon. I am pledging as a

Business Individual

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____

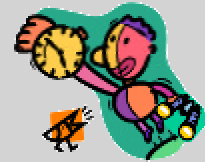
E-mail address: _____

I want to pledge as follows: (choose one)

I want to pledge a fixed amount for the Birdathon: (specify) \$ _____

I want to provide incentive by pledging an amount for each species identified by the winning team! I understand that the number of species is usually between 120 and 170. (specify an amount below)

Amount per species:
(specify) \$ _____



For more information, contact Birdathon Coordinator, Phil Friedman, at 493-2959 or phifri@frii.com

Please send this form to Fort Collins Audubon Society, PO Box 271968, Fort Collins, CO 80527-1968. You will be contacted by the Birdathon Coordinator. You may also donate to FCAS online at our website, www.fortnet.org/Audubon

Thanks for Supporting Fort Collins Audubon!



A Case For Responsible Cat Ownership

From a letter to the editor (Loveland Reporter-Herald)

Written by Carol Fiore

As a former researcher studying urban domestic cat predation of birds, I feel it is my responsibility to address comments being raised by Kevin Cook's recent article.

As a graduate student, I studied cats in Wichita, Kansas. I collected and identified birds killed by my 41 randomly distributed study cats, analyzed fecal material, and tracked cats using radio collars to estimate mean numbers of birds killed per cat per year. I also estimated average numbers of pet cats in the city and numbers of birds of a single species. The impact of house cats on bird populations was significant. Without going into specifics of the study (which is available through the Wichita State University library), here are just a few of my findings.

- 83% of my study cats produced physical evidence of a kill
- Declawing has no effect on hunting (6 out of the 7 declawed study cats produced kills)
- Bells on cat collars do not protect birds
- My data suggests night time hunters catch more birds (though day hunters did kill)
- Predation and hunger appear to be unrelated. All study cats were well-fed but continued to hunt.
- The owners of my study cats were largely unaware of their cat's activities (scat analysis often revealed feathers)
- Most birds killed were adults (69%)
- The bird killed most frequently was a federally protected species.

The house cat is an introduced exotic species. It is not native to North America and our birds did not evolve in the face of such a capable predator. With a few exceptions, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act makes it illegal to harm or injure birds, yet we allow house cats to roam free, killing protected birds.

My study upset people, just as Kevin Cook's article did. I learned an important lesson as I studied cats. Never tell the truth unless you don't mind making people mad. I know most people won't listen to me, but I'll keep saying it. **Keep cats indoors.** It's the responsible thing to do. And your cat will live a safer and longer life.

Note: The research results discussed in this letter represent a very abbreviated synopsis of the full study.

Hillsdale Park Grand Opening!

Hillsdale Park in Berthoud has been under construction for the last two years. Thanks to grants from the Colorado Tree Coalition and Great Outdoors Colorado, the park is nearly complete. The grand opening is scheduled for June 10th. Located on the south end of town, directly south of the intersection of Kansas Avenue and Longview Avenue, Dry Creek meanders through the park providing an invaluable water source for attracting wildlife. This passive park provides a great opportunity to learn, look, and enjoy our outdoors and wildlife.



Want less mail? Get your newsletter online!



Would you like to reduce the amount of mail you receive? Use less paper? You can choose to receive e-mail notification when the Ptarmigan is available on the Fort Collins Audubon Society's website! The current issue of the newsletter is available online to members only, AND is available a week or two earlier than the paper copy! If you'd like to receive an e-mail notification, please e-mail your **name and address as it appears on your newsletter's mailing label** and the e-mail address you wish to use to bjones@frii.com. Please indicate if you just want e-mail or if you would prefer both e-mail and the paper newsletter. We'd be happy to accommodate!

CHIDINGS OF THE TIMES

Bill Miller, Acting Conservation Chair

Something dawned on me this week. And that is, the federal and state agencies that were created to protect wildlife and our natural resources appear to have come under the influence of those interests who view the protection of wildlife and other natural resources (clean water, clean air, and other resources that we imply that we all should be entitled to) as hindering their ability to maximize their profits. Three recent rulings by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) brought this home to me—the Gunnison Sage-Grouse will not be listed as threatened or endangered, the Arizona population of the Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy-owl will be removed from the endangered species list, and the area once set aside for the California red-legged frog was reduced by 40%.

Of course, one must realize that we live in an age of amazing “coincidences.” In the case of the California red-legged frog, the largest species native to the western United States, and probably the inspiration for Mark Twain’s tale, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, the USFWS reduced the designated protected habitat from 738,912 to 450,288 acres. An Associated Press article states “...updated information about the frogs’ habitat needs and better maps allowed it to better pinpoint which areas needed designation.”¹ The very next sentence cites an economic analysis showing the original proposal would have cost \$497 million in lost development opportunities over 20 years. Now, isn’t that a coincidence?

On April 14th, Tucson’s *Arizona Daily Star* reported that the USFWS would no longer protect the Cactus Ferruginous Pygmy-owl under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).² While found mostly in Mexico, the population of these owls extends northward into Arizona, with a small population found in the mountainous outskirts of northwest Tucson. If you have been there lately you know that development is relentlessly inching up the mountainsides.

What is uncertain at this time is the genetic uniqueness of the Arizona population. What is known, coincidentally, is that the decision to delist the owl will expedite the construction of more than a half-dozen development projects, making way for more than 12,000 new homes permitted in 2005. Death by a thousand cuts, anyone?

Closer to home, on an issue in which local chapters and state Audubon organizations have been involved, the USFWS recently decided to reverse its own 2000 decision to designate the Gunnison Sage-Grouse as a candidate for the endangered species

list. Their rationale—the bird’s numbers have stabilized or increased over several years.

At issue is the accuracy of the population models. Coincidentally, 54% of the bird’s habitat is on federal land. About 1,700 acres of potential habitat area will be offered in the May 11 oil and gas lease auction by the Colorado office of the Bureau of Land Management. It is important to note that not only federal lands are being looked at by the oil and gas industry for drilling, but so are private lands. Thus, much of the Gunnison Sage-Grouse’s habitat is at risk.

To top off the string of coincidences given above, the effectiveness of the ESA is being questioned. On April 3rd, the San Diego *Union-Tribune* reported that USFWS officials asked for \$141 million for the ESA on one hand and, on the other hand, indicated that they can’t prove how well their efforts have worked.³

***‘Only after the last tree has been cut down;
Only after the last fish has been caught;
Only after the last river has been poisoned;
Only then will you realize that money cannot be eaten.’
-- Cree Indian Prophecy***

Currently, there are two bills in Congress that could affect the ESA. Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID) introduced Senate Bill S2110, and Rep. Richard Pombo (R-CA) pushed a bill to rewrite the act through the

House in September. Pombo’s logic is that the ESA is a failure because so few species have recovered enough to be removed from the list.

The same article goes on to indicate that the ESA is underfunded. The USFWS couldn’t report on the status of about one-third of the listed species. Because of insufficient resources to determine the status of listed species, the agency comes under attack from both environmentalists and developers and is fighting off numerous lawsuits brought against it, thus diverting scarce financial resources from its mandated efforts. In a vicious circle, the agency doesn’t have the resources required to learn what it needs to learn so that it can report back to Congress. This then lends fuel to the fire that the ESA is broken and needs to be fixed. And the fix is not what the environmental community wants.

So, how coincidental is it that the USFWS funding is inadequate for it to do its job, and its lack of desired performance is reason to weaken the ESA? Think about it.

References:

¹ www.enn.com/today.html?id=10261

² www.azstarnet.com/dailystar/dailystar/124606

³ www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20060403news_1n3status.html

For further information on the Gunnison Sage-Grouse, read the following four articles:

www.comcast.net/news/science/index.jsp?cat=SCIENCE&fn=/2006/04/12/366786.html

www.gjsentinel.com/news/content/news/stories/2006/04/12/4_13_1A_sage_grouse_listing.html

www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/local/article/0,1299,DRMN_15_4618039,00.html

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/12/AR2006041202010.html

TAKE ACTION

It takes almost four weeks to publish and distribute the Ptarmigan. Thus, late-breaking issues cannot be brought to your attention in a timely fashion. I strongly encourage you to subscribe to our chapter's Yahoo! Group listserv to receive timely updates and reminders about the chapter's activities, as well as issues and legislation.

You may subscribe to FCAS Yahoo! Group by sending an e-mail to the list moderator at fcaudubon@yahoo.com. Further details of chapter activities can be found on our website at www.fortnet.org/Audubon, or by calling 970-490-BIRD .



Kudos and Raspberries



Major raspberries go to Initiative 86, a proposed change to the Colorado Constitution that will likely be on the ballot this fall. It is a citizen's initiative, which means the proponents will be gathering signatures through the summer. Initiative 86 requires compensation for enacting *or enforcing* any land use regulation that reduces property values by 20%. Property is defined as any interest in real property, and the reduction in value may be for all or a portion of the property. In addition, the initiative is ***retroactive to 1970***, or the date the owner's family first came into possession of the property. If the governmental entity cannot compensate the property owner, it may exempt him from the regulation, or enter a binding contract specifying permissible uses of the property.

This is perhaps the most egregious takings proposal we have seen in Colorado. We need to gear up for a tough campaign—this is for all the marbles!

Welcome to our new members! We look forward to seeing you at our meetings!

Frank Amigo	Amy Eash	Marthy Lynne Kesel	Cynthia Powell
John and Sheryl Atkinson	Joan Fishburn	Kim Kessler	Rich Roberts
Penelope Bauer	Robert Forste	Edmund Levering	Bill Sawtelle
Ina R. Bicknell	Scott W. Gillihan	Charles Lynch	Mark Sears
Elyse Bliss	Shari Gingery	Maxine Mark	Emil Siefken
Thomas G. Boston	Kim Grayson	Helen Menze	Carol Steinbock
Norma Boyd	James Patrick Harrison	Gary Miller	Courtney Stone
Spencer D. Chapin	Barbara Helmers	Karen Morris	Marjorie Tello
Diane Winn Clouse	Delores Hicks	Jo Moyer	Rose-Davie Van Riper
James Clymer	Sean Hoggarth	Michael J. Mucci	Lisa White
Bill and Rebecca Combs	Jane T. Householder	Patrick Odenbeck	Michael Williamson
Annie Cowan	Melvin Hyatt	Donald Oehlerts	Raymond Zehr
Pat Doge	Ann Karpinski	Cheryl Oshell	
Kathleen Dwire	Harold Kehr	Mary Lou Peace	

Better Birding, Better Living

Lynne Hull, Education Chair

Ever felt annoyed about “farm subsidies,” which “pay farmers not to farm?” Since we have seen a number of negative articles regarding agriculture and habitat destruction, I want to write this month about the good news: how farm and ranch owners are working with the USDA to restore and preserve bird and wildlife habitat, and generally improve our environment.

This has happened under three programs: The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQUIP). Established in 1985, the earlier programs under the Farm Bill intended to reduce erosion and find a better use for lands that were never appropriate for crop farming. The newer EQUIP program offers direct habitat enhancement incentives.

Here in Larimer County, landowners have participated in the CRP, although many contracts have now expired. The wetland program has 100 acres under easement. In Weld County, there are 219,000 acres with 1,290 landowners in the CRP. Steve Martin’s wetland program is an outstanding local example, and George Wallace has a WRP project currently in wetland restoration.

The Conservation Reserve Program sets aside agricultural lands highly prone to erosion, and, more recently, includes buffer zones between farmed land and waterways. A cover crop, which might include tall grass, trees, and shrubs, is planted and left unused. The result is reduction of erosion of topsoil, which resulted in much silting and dredging in major waterways, and filtering of herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizer before they reach waterways and create pollution. The reserves also provide a lot of habitat for wildlife, particularly birds, which once inhabited the area.

The Wetland Reserve Program helps the landowner restore the hydrology and vegetation of former wetlands, often marginal farm lands. As birders, we are generally aware of the value of wetlands to wildlife, and that wetlands host a biodiversity of more than 5,000 plant species, provide natural pollution control by filtering chemicals and heavy nutrients from water, and serve as the breeding grounds for 12 million ducks annually. Local experts for questions and advice regarding the program include Todd Boldt and John Fusaro at the Natural Resources Conservation Service. They are district conservationists for the Fort Collins Field Office, with the mission to help producing agricultural landowners improve property by applying conservation on the land. Boldt can be reached at 970-295-5650 or Todd.Boldt@CO.usda.gov.

Many landowners are going a step further and placing segments of their land into conservation easements and agricultural trusts. While most of the federal programs require one to ten years of participation, conservation easements and agricultural trusts can put land aside for specific purposes in perpetuity, protecting land into the future for uses the landowner feels are appropriate, whether habitat, natural areas, or farming. Nonprofit organizations such as the Colorado Cattleman’s Agricultural Land Trust, The Colorado Land Trust, Legacy Land Trust, and Larimer County Open Lands, Fort Collins Natural Areas, City of Loveland Natural Areas, Nature Conservancy, and others assist landowners to create conservation easements. In some cases, they help to find “purchasers” for the conservation easements to provide the landowner with most of the value of their land but keeping it in the landowner’s control, or to create tax benefits nearly equal to the value of the land. Currently in Larimer County, acreage in easements exceeds 14,867 acres. To learn more about the county program, call 970-679-4570.

While National Audubon Magazine and other wildlife conservation publications tell us of the (verifiable) damage caused by overgrazing, we can also applaud the actions of farmers and ranchers who are making major efforts on behalf of habitat conservation.

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Membership Application

Join the Fort Collins Audubon Society (FCAS) directly, or automatically become a member by joining the National Audubon Society (NAS). *Choose one below:*

- New or Renewing Member of FCAS** (annual dues) **\$15**
 (Receive the *Ptarmigan* newsletter)
 FCAS may share my name with NAS
- New Member of NAS & Chapter** **\$20**
 (Receive *Audubon* magazine and *Ptarmigan*)
- Renewing Member of NAS & Chapter** **\$35**
 (Receive *Audubon* magazine and *Ptarmigan*)

Did you know? Less than \$1 of your NAS dues is left for FCAS funds. FCAS serves NAS members through its own fundraising efforts. We appreciate your financial support!

Additional donation to FCAS \$ _____
Total enclosed \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

- I prefer to receive the *Ptarmigan* via the FCAS website. Please e-mail me when posted.**

Please make your check payable to **FCAS** and send along with this form to: **Fort Collins Audubon Society, PO Box 271968, Fort Collins, CO 80527-1968**

