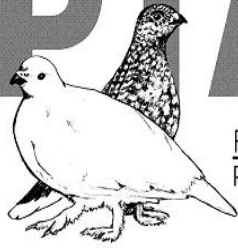


# PTARMIGAN



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.

November 2010

Volume 41, Issue 8

## Patterns in Birdsong



Bird sound recordist and expert, Nathan Pieplow, will speak to FCAS on birdsong patterns on Thursday, November 11, in the multi-use room at the Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Drive. The program begins at 7:30 p.m.



Western Meadowlark.

Nathan posts regularly to [www.Earbirding.com](http://www.Earbirding.com), a Web site that focuses on recording, identifying, and interpreting bird sounds. A sampling of his postings include: "Humming Their Own Tune," "What's that Screeching?" and "Rattles, Claps, and Burp-clicks," in which Nathan responds to birder inquiries of bird sounds. He also documents sound recordings and observations collected in his U.S. and International travels. He is editor of the Colorado Field Ornithologists' *Colorado Birds Quarterly*.

It is an extreme pleasure to have Nathan as our presenter for the FCAS November program. You won't want to miss this informative presentation!

  
**Christmas Potluck**  
 It is hard to believe, but it is just a little more than a month away until the December Potluck and Member Slide Show. Mark your calendar for Dec. 9, and bring your dish—enough to serve six to eight people—and any necessary serving utensils to the Fort Collins Senior Center by 6:30 p.m. Also, please bring your own plates, cups or glasses, and silverware. FCAS will provide beverages and napkins. For those of you wishing to "strut your stuff," you may bring up to 15 digital images to show, preferably on a jump drive. Please limit your presentation to no more than 10 minutes to give those after you their fair share of time. We should be finished by 9 p.m. per our contract with the Senior Center.  


**Patterns in Birdsong  
Presented by Nathan Pieplow  
Bird Sound Recordist  
and Expert**

**Thursday Evening Program  
November 11, 2010**

**Fort Collins Senior Center-Multi-Use Room  
1200 Raintree Drive  
Social Gathering: 7 p.m.; Program: 7:30 p.m.**

At 7 a.m. on the perfect autumn day of September 25, 20 people joined me on a bird walk at Fossil Creek Open Space. We were one group of seven of the 150 people who showed up to take the early bird walks at the Northern Colorado Birding Fair (NCBF). It was exciting to note many of the participants were first time birders. Binoculars were available for loan so everyone had an opportunity to watch the birds.

We walked to the east without spotting much in the grasses, but at trail's end, we watched four young Snowy Egrets foraging at water's edge. At first glance, we could not tell if they were large gulls or small pelicans, but as they came closer, it was obvious they were young egrets. The beginner birders were quite excited working out the identification of the young by noting the golden color rising higher on the legs than it would on an adult.



NCBF participants watch a bird release. Photo by Joann Thomas.

What looked like youthful behavior—romping and playing in the water—was in reality feeding activity. Snowy Egrets exhibit frantic foraging behaviors to capture small fish and crustaceans. Their active feeding often causes mixed-species aggregations of birds that join in the feast. We watched until the four egrets flew off to the east on their migratory way. Snowy Egrets nest in the Arapahoe National Wildlife Refuge east of Walden, and these youngsters were taking off on their first migration. The departure of the egrets inspired one person to note that it was like a rite of passage—teenagers taking off on a road trip. We all nodded in agreement.

The NCBF attracted a total of 758 people. The day included entertaining programs and serious clinics for birders along with information booths about birds and their habitats. The FCAS booth hosted a display on “the art of camouflage,” explaining birds’ use of protective coloration in concealing nests, eggs, and themselves. Audubon members Bill Miller, Ron Harden, and Scott Cobble greeted people along with me. It was an absolutely splendid day for the birds!

**NOTE:** Last month’s Education corner contained one error and one omission. Jim Tolstrup’s title is Executive Director of the High Plains Environmental Center. To help in the generous fund matching for the wetlands garden project, go to: <http://www.friendsofbeanstalk.org/node/199/view/overview>.

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"The supreme reality of our time is... the vulnerability of our planet."

—John F Kennedy (1917-1963), 35th President of the United States, Address Before the Irish Parliament, June 28, 1963

"If it were only a few degrees, that would be serious, but we could adapt to it. But the danger is the warming process might be unstable and run away. We could end up like Venus, covered in clouds and with the surface temperature of 400 degrees. It could be too late if we wait until the bad effects of warming become obvious. We need action now to reduce emission of carbon dioxide."

—Stephen Hawking, Physicist, 1999

**The Beginnings of a Youth Chapter?**

At the Northern Colorado Birding Fair (NCBF), held on September 25 at Fossil Creek Reservoir, the FCAS booth was visited by many of the over 700 visitors that attended the event. Our display included an activity involving the identification of the common bird species shown in 10 photos. Most young people (and their parents!) struggled with these identifications. Around mid-day a young man (6<sup>th</sup> grade) stopped, took the quiz, and breezed through it with 100% accuracy. A thought occurred to me: perhaps FCAS could do a better job of providing activities for younger people who will, someday, be our replacements. Following the encounter with that young man, we



Bill Miller explaining camouflage to a mother and daughter at the NCBF. Photo by Joann Thomas.

collected the names of four more youngsters for a future youth program.

Initially this youth program would provide field trips for youngsters and at least one of their parents. With the right mix of volunteer leaders, the youths, and parents we hope to develop other age-appropriate activities. The key to the success of any such program will be the participation of sufficient volunteers and the parents of the involved youths. We hope that this program will appeal to some of you more experienced birders. So, stay tuned as the youth program sprouts wings.

**Welcome New and Renewing Members**

- |                        |                    |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| Judith Balice          | Ann D. Molison     |
| Susan Bonsall          | William Mygdal     |
| Kate Carr              | Kristen Philbrook  |
| Larry & Margie Caswell | Parker Preble      |
| Erica Christensen      | Holmes Rolston III |
| Susan Degutz           | Leslye Sherman     |
| Melannie D. Hartman    | Charles Sturgill   |
| Gregory Holman         | Sandra J. Tinsman  |
| Carole Hossan          | Matthew Webb       |
| William Hurmence       | Robin Walsh        |

Thank you for your membership! Your support makes our programs and conservation efforts possible and helps us achieve our mission of connecting people to the natural world.

**FCAS Pocket Guide to Local Birds**

Is available at the following retailers who support our organization with the sales:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Wild Birds Unlimited<br>3636 S. College Ave<br>Ste. C<br>(970) 225-2557 | Bath Garden<br>Center & Nursery<br>2000 E. Prospect<br>(970) 484-5022              |
| Jax Outdoor Gear<br>1200 N. College<br>(970) 221-0544                   | Jax Farm & Ranch<br>1000 N. Hwy. 287<br>(970) 484-2221                             |
| Ranch-Way Feeds<br>546 Willow St.<br>(970) 482-1662                     | The Matter Book-<br>Store/Bean Cycle<br>Coffee<br>144 N. College<br>(970) 472-4284 |



## Bird Notes

by Eric DeFonso

During the delightfully warm stretch in September and October, migrants in Colorado were extraordinary, with reports of hard-to-find varieties like *Sprague's Pipit* and a whole slew of *Ammodramus* sparrows including *Baird's*, *Nelson's*, *Henslow's* and the more commonly found *Grasshopper*. That genus called *Ammodramus* are on many birders' "nemesis" lists, as they are particularly secretive, well-camouflaged ground-dwellers who rarely afford their viewers good looks, and generally have abrupt, unmusical calls and songs. Most of the sightings of these aforementioned species occurred well east of here, in places like Bonny Reservoir in Yuma County, and down in southeastern Colorado near John Martin Reservoir in Bent County.

Another extraordinary sighting that unfortunately was enjoyed by few if any familiar birders in Colorado, was a report of a *Crested Caracara* in the Buena Vista area of Chaffee County. *Crested Caracara* is a scavenging falcon ranging



Grasshopper Sparrow by Eric DeFonso.

well south of here in southern Arizona, southern Texas, and parts of central Florida. Only one other record of the species has been documented in the state and that was over 10 years ago. It

was an individual that had been hit by a bus in Trinidad.

The recent bird in question apparently was seen over a span of four days in early October. It seems that the locals who spotted it were not aware of how rare it was, and they were not in touch with the larger birdwatching community in the state. Without that sense of urgency, word was slow to percolate to the Front Range. By the time it did, the bird was not seen anymore, and subsequent searches proved fruitless. Nonetheless, quality photographs were taken and it seems like good documentation of its occurrence will be forthcoming. This means that this bird will indeed be the official second state record for Colorado. Let's hope a few of us may be so lucky to see a third state record at some point!

## New Colorado Audubon Office Coming to Fort Collins

by Ken Strom

On January 1, 2011, the official office of Audubon Colorado will move to Fort Collins, where it will share space with Audubon Wyoming in the new Rocky Mountain Regional office of Audubon. The Fort Collins office will be the home base for all three staff currently working in the main Denver office: Ken Strom, Stephanie DeMattee, and Tricia Hamilton. At the same time, Audubon Colorado will secure inexpensive workspace in Denver in a shared office with Colorado Trout Unlimited. This space is needed because of Audubon Colorado's frequent activities and projects in the

greater Denver area, including work with the state legislature and state agencies, the To-

getherGreen education program, Important Bird Areas (IBA) restoration efforts, and others. On any given day, any of the Colorado staff may be working in Ft. Collins or Denver, depending on the focus of their work that day. On many days, one or more of the staff also may be on the road to another part of the state because of commitments in those areas as



Patricia Hamilton, Ken Strom, and Stephanie DeMattee. Photo by Bill Miller.

well. The address and phone number for the new Rocky Mountain Regional office of Audubon will be posted soon.



## The Decline of Audubon Chapters

by Bill Miller

There are two major problems that underlie why an Audubon chapter loses its vitality. The first is financial stability. Since 2000, we've witnessed the decline of independent, local Audubon chapters from approximately 700 to the 459 that are currently listed on National Audubon Society's (NAS) Web site. Much of this decrease in chapter numbers is attributed to NAS reducing dues sharing with its chapters, which began in 2000. With the recent meltdown of the U.S. economy, charitable organizations across the country, including FCAS, have experienced a drastic decline in contributions.

The other problem that affects chapters is the dearth of volunteers, especially those needed to fill the vacancies in leadership. Nationally, Audubon movement membership, which includes the more than 500 Audubon clubs, societies, and organizations in North America, is recognized as consisting mostly of white, aging adults. It has been long recognized that this demographic needs to change to be more inclusive of greater ethnic diversity and younger people who are needed for the movement's future leadership. The lack of younger leaders has, within the past five or six years, resulted in the loss of two Colorado Audubon chapters. The San Juan Audubon Society, centered in Durango, dissolved several years ago due to a lack of up-and-coming replacement leaders. Just this year, the Platte and Prairie Audubon Society, centered in Greeley, but serving most of northeast Colorado, finally let its status as an organization expire. Reason: the same as the San Juan Audubon—no replacement leadership.

This year FCAS is faced with both financial and leadership problems. However, the second problem is perhaps more troubling as I write. Currently the FCAS nominating committee needs

candidates for the following positions: Vice-President, six Directors-at-Large, Field Trip Coordinator, Publicity Chair, and Volunteer Coordinator.

One of the truly great privileges of organization membership is the personal enjoyment that it can bring. For example, FCAS:

- Provides informative, enjoyable monthly programs;
- Provides frequent field trip opportunities with experienced birders;
- With other Colorado chapters, collectively

advocates for sound legislation by funding the only full-time environmental advocate. This is achieved by contributing \$2 per member each year, and

- Publishes nine issues of a chapter newsletter each year.

But being part of a volunteer membership organization implies that members also bear responsibility for the success of their organization. To that end, FCAS members should:

- Pay their membership dues on time. FCAS must

stretch its revenues and resources to cover its operational costs. If you are only a member of NAS, very little of your dues reach FCAS. Please consider taking out a chapter membership.

- Vote for officers and board members at the January meeting.
- Participate in FCAS activities and committees. Currently, many FCAS responsibilities are undertaken by one person. Two committees in particular, membership and education, are in great need of more volunteers.
- Consider filling leadership positions on FCAS's board. Members who serve in these positions for extended periods experience burnout. If no replacements are found, programs may be

*(Decline continued on Page 6)*



Participation, such as provided by Marcia Maeda and Karen Dornself, are needed to keep FCAS going. Photo by Bill Miller.



## Upcoming Field Trips

All field trips are free of charge (unless otherwise noted) and open to the public. All experience levels are welcome. Participants should dress appropriately for the weather. Bring snacks or lunch, water, binoculars, and spotting scopes. Carpooling is encouraged. A \$3.00 (unless otherwise specified) contribution per passenger to the driver is suggested. Visit [www.fortnet.org/Audubon](http://www.fortnet.org/Audubon) for more information. For all field trips and surveys, please contact the trip leader for signup and trip details



**Nov. 13, Saturday. Larimer Lakes.** Leader: Nick Komar, [quetzal65@comcast.net](mailto:quetzal65@comcast.net) or 970-416-7527. November is a great time to find unusual migrants and winter visitors on the numerous lakes at the foot of the Rockies in northern Colorado. Many species of waterfowl are expected, along with a good chance to find uncommon species such as swans, scoter, and loons. We also should find many gulls, including several uncommon species. Participants (no limit) can join part or the entire trip. Wear layered clothing for cold weather, and bring food, water, binoculars, and a telescope if you have one. Carpooling is encouraged (please contribute gas money to the drivers). Meeting times are as follows: Lake Loveland Swim Beach, 7:30 a.m.; Fossil Creek Reservoir Visitor Center, 11:30 a.m.; Timnath Reservoir west side parking area, 3 p.m. We will end the day back at the Lake Loveland Swim Beach at dusk. Contact Nick Komar for information



Swans at Cattail Pond by Eric DeFonso.

and to RSVP.

**Nov. 14, Sunday. Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey.** Leader: Denise Bretting, [dbretting@swloveland.com](mailto:dbretting@swloveland.com); work, 970-669-1185; or home, 970-669-8095. Meet at 7:30 a.m. FCAS

performs a monthly bird census for the city of Fort Collins. All levels welcomed and encouraged!

**Nov. 14, Sunday. "Unthemed" casual birding in Fort Collins.** Leader: Eric DeFonso, [yo-ericd@yahoo.com](mailto:ericd@yahoo.com) or 970-443-4239. Meet

at 7:30 a.m. at a location TBA. Contact Eric for details. Unlike other trips that have focused on specific habitats or targeted species or families, this trip will emphasize the sheer joy of bird-watching, and integrate the various aspects of bird appreciation into a more holistic approach. We will listen closely and watch birds not just to identify them, but also to see how they fit into the places we find them. All levels are welcome and encouraged.

*(Decline continued from Page 5)*

dropped—something that affects the entire membership. How would the loss of a Program Chair or Field Trip Coordinator affect you?

- Support FCAS through contributions of both time and money.

Membership has its privileges, but to maintain those privileges, members have responsibilities as well. Consider the analogy of a skein of geese during migration. The skein changes leaders so that the entire flock can reach its destination. If we are to continue with current programs and start a youth program, we will need new volunteers to make them fly.



Joel Hurmence doing his part at a natural area cleanup. Photo by Bill Miller.



## Christmas Bird Counts Around the Corner

by Bill Miller

Prior to 1900, people participated in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "side hunt," in which armed teams competed to bring in the largest pile of feathered (and furred) creatures. Conservation was in its beginning stages around the



Paul Opler, Cynthia Melcher, Rick Schroeder, and Larry Lechner go over the numbers after a Christmas Bird Count. Photo by Bill Miller.

turn of the 20th century, and many observers, scientists, and even hunters, became concerned about declining bird populations due to both market hunting and the plume trade for millinery fashion. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then budding Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition: a Christmas bird census during which birds would be counted instead of hunted. Thus began the Christmas Bird Count (CBC).

This year the 111<sup>th</sup> CBC will be conducted between Tuesday, December 14 and Wednesday, January 5, 2011. Thousands of volunteers, motivated by both the opportunity to make a difference and the opportunity to experience nature during a time not normally devoted to birding, will join the adventure, roaming fields and neighborhoods as defined by 15-

mile diameter circles drawn on maps called count circles. CBC teams will tally both the number of species as well as the number of individuals in each species. While the data thus collected may not be precise, they do show trends in bird populations. For example, the Fort Collins count has shown that grassland species have declined within the count circles while birds more adapted to urban areas have increased. This phenomenon is attributed to increasing urbanization that has replaced former rural agricultural areas within the count circle.

FCAS is sponsoring two CBCs, one in the Fort Collins area (Dec. 18) and the other in the Loveland area (Jan.1). The compilers for the two counts are Tom Hall, [redbear44@msn.com](mailto:redbear44@msn.com), and Nick Komar, [quetzal65@comcast.net](mailto:quetzal65@comcast.net), respectively. Contact either Tom or Nick if

you wish to participate in either or both counts. Participants are requested to chip in \$5 that is sent to National Audubon to help defray the expenses of publishing the data.



"Richardson's" Cackling Goose—often seen during Christmas Bird Counts. Photo by Nick Komar.



**Support your local Audubon chapter.  
Take out a FCAS membership today!!**





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Join Fort Collins Audubon Society (FCAS), National Audubon Society (NAS), or both. Check all applicable::

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>New or renewing FCAS Chapter Member</b>	\$20	Name: _____
(Receive the <i>Ptarmigan</i> by email)		Address: _____
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Please make checks payable to FCAS and mail with this form to:  
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