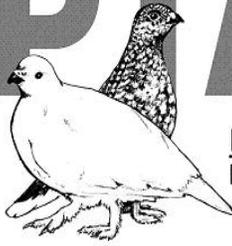


PTARMIGAN



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

March 2013

Volume 44, Issue 3

“Ecology and Conservation of North America’s Grassland Birds in the Chihuahuan Desert.”

By: Arvind Panjabi, Director, International Program

Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory

Thursday, March 14, 2013

Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Drive, Fort Collins

Social Gathering: 7 p.m. – Program: 7:30 p.m.

Grassland birds have declined more than any other group of North American birds, possibly because of decreased survival on their wintering grounds in the Chihuahuan Desert. Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO) has conducted monitoring and research in nine U.S. and Mexican states in the Chihuahuan Desert since 2007 and has identified patterns of winter abundance, habitat

use, survival, and habitat loss for grassland bird species. This bi-national effort has built a framework for strategic habitat conservation while increasing local capacity and awareness for grassland bird conservation in the region. Arvind Panjabi, Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, will share advances in the understanding of wintering grassland birds, habitat, and implications for the future of migratory grassland birds in Colorado and across the American West.



Vesper Sparrow, Chihuahuan Desert grassland bird by Jose Hugo Martinez.

Before coming to RMBO in 2000, Arvind worked on bird conservation projects from Alaska to Panama. He managed RMBO’s Black Hills bird monitoring project through 2005 and published several reports on the avifauna of that unique region. He works closely with Partners in Flight (PIF), manages the PIF Species Assessment Database, and was instrumental in applying the PIF assess-

ment process to the Mexican avifauna in conjunction with federal and nongovernmental organization partners in Mexico. In 2005, he launched RMBO’s International Program to build a permanent bridge for bird conservation throughout the Americas. He is involved in several cooperative projects in Mexico’s Chihuahuan grasslands, western Mexico, and the Sierra Madre Oriental. This program is free and the public is welcomed.

President's Corner

by Joann Thomas

And the work begins...in addition to holding down the position of president, I remain Education Chair of FCAS. I love it. Meeting people and explaining who we are is one of the joys of being involved in the education function.

On Saturday, February 2, board members Susan Cottingham and Louise Parker, along with FCAS member Star Jorgensen, helped greet people at the Bath Avian Day held at Bath Nursery. They also supervised student volunteers who were busy helping children and some adults make pine cone bird feeders by smearing the cones with peanut butter and rolling them in bird seed. Simple, but lots of fun. The main goal was to get more peanut butter on the cone than on your hands!

We are always asked the question: "What is this bird?", as visitors carefully describe a bird that frequents their garden, or their back yard, or that they saw one day in a field. It's fun; a sort of stump the expert. While I'm not an expert, I can usually help them figure out what the bird is.

And, you learn lots about what people think about their relationship to birds. One woman decided it was time to commit and became a FCAS member, and another shared her secret



Volunteer helping with pinecone feeders by Star Jorgensen.

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recipe for suet. I will share that with you after I've field tested it!

That's about all there is to it. You share who you are and what you do, and they share the same. A win/win for everyone! Join us at an event sometime and you will understand what the student volunteers know: that it's fun and you learn something new every time!

Welcome New National Members

FCAS welcomes new National Audubon Society members by sending complimentary copies of our newsletter for one month. We invite you to join us at our monthly programs on the second Thursday of the month to find out more about FCAS. National dues do not cover the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter, so if you'd like to keep receiving the *Ptarmigan* after the complimentary issue, please support your local chapter and subscribe to the newsletter. See the details on the last page of the newsletter or on our website at www.fortnet.org/



"We have too long treated the natural world as an adversary rather than as a life-sustaining gift from the Almighty. If man has the genius to build, which he has, he must also have the ability and the responsibility to preserve." -- *Gerald R. Ford (1913 - 2006) - Remarks at dedication of National Environmental Research Center, July 3, 1975*

"The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations, and towards humanity as a whole."
-- *Pope Benedict XVI (1927 -) - Encyclical Caritas in Veritate, June 29, 2009*

Endangered Species Act has a Birthday this Year

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will honor the 40th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act with a year-long commemoration of the law that has been so successful in stabilizing species at risk, preventing extinction of many, and conserving the habitats upon which they depend.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) was formulated in Congress and signed into law by Presi-



Captive-bred black-footed ferrets.

dent Nixon in 1973. It superseded earlier acts that protected wildlife, dating back to the Lacey Act of 1900, when, in response to growing public concern about the pending extinction of the passenger pigeon, Congress passed the first wildlife law. At the time when Europeans first discovered America it was estimated that there were 3 billion to 5 billion passenger pigeons, which constituted 25 to 40 percent of the total bird population of the United States. The notable decline of passenger pigeons started when professional market hunters began netting and shooting the birds to sell to city markets. Although the birds always were used as food to some extent, even by the Indians, the real slaughter began in the 1800s. The last known individual, named Martha, died in 1914 in the Cincinnati Zoo

The next 70 years saw an increase of public awareness of environmental problems and support for wildlife conservation, which led to political activism. The history of species and habitat

preservation since 1900 is summarized at <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/ESA40/preESA.html>.

As of January 2013, the Fish and Wildlife Service has listed 1,436 U.S. species that are threatened or endangered. Five factors are considered when evaluating a species for listing: 1) damage to, or destruction of, a species habitat; 2) overutilization of the species for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; 3) disease or predation; 4) inadequacy of existing protection; and 5) other natural or manmade factors that affect the continued existence of the species.

The bald eagle, brown pelican, Lake Erie water snake, American alligator and Maguire daisy were all close to extinction, but have successfully rebounded. The wood stork, Kirtland's warbler,



Bald Eagle: removed from ESA protection in 2007.

Okaloosa darter, black-footed ferret, and Louisiana black bear also are listed, but showing significant progress.

Many species, however, may be in jeopardy due to global climate disruption. The pika is susceptible to overheating and, generally, is not able to move higher to cooler temperatures. Wolverines, hunted to near extinction during the western settlement era, rely on deep snow cover for denning and breeding. Polar bears, arctic seal populations, and others are at risk.

Reference: http://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/ESA_basics.pdf



Armchair Birding

A dear friend has flown away to Denmark—a place she loves to visit with old friends. What do you want me to bring you she asked me? A photograph of the Northern Lights, I responded. But, what do I know about Denmark? Seems that in winter, Denmark almost always has grey skies, so what do you want, she asked again? Birds, I said, any photographs of birds you can get. And, so I met the Hooded Crow: *Corvus corone*.

Excitedly, I pulled the *Birds of Great Britain and Europe* from the bookshelf and using the photo she sent, I found the bird. Reading about this foreigner, I learned that it's usually not found in flocks, and it has a black head, black wings, and black tail with an otherwise grey body. It hybridizes with some of the other corvidae species that live there. What is its habitat? Well, almost anywhere!

Its solitary nest is a cup of twigs, lined with wool, found atop a large tree, cliff, or building. This crow lays between four and six eggs that are pale bluish-green, spotted with dark browns and greys. With its wide-ranging food preferences of grain, insects, small birds, and carrion, this bird is very successful and widespread.

And its size? It's 47 centimeters, which my con-

version charts says is 18.5 inches. Our American Crow is 17 to 21 inches. This delightful book, a "Collins New Generation Guide," has lots more data about the birds of Europe. For example, it lists the flight speed of several birds in miles per

hour; this crow flies about 31 miles an hour.

An interesting section discusses migration explaining that the Hooded Crow has changed its habits. It does not migrate as far southward in Western Europe as in the past; in

fact, the bird is rarely seen south of the North Sea anymore. The book suggests that the spread of "rubbish-tips" has caused the Hooded Crow's migratory habit to change because of improved feeding conditions. A quick search reveals that

"rubbish-tips" are landfills. What a charming name for garbage!

Now I am fascinated, mainly because under feeding habits, the book lists the Hooded Crow as a bird that raids gull colonies. And what did my dear friend photograph in Kattegat, Denmark, on the Baltic Sea? A solitary

Hooded Crow raiding a gull colony.

I may never get to Denmark—although I hope I do—and when I do, there is a friend I want to meet: the Hooded Crow. And I know where to find him!



Hooded Crow (left) raiding a gull colony by Pam Rochlin.



Hooded Crow taking a break by Ram Rochlin.



Upcoming Field Trips

All field trips are free (unless otherwise noted) and open to the public. All experience levels are welcome. Bring snacks or lunch, water, binoculars, and spotting scopes. Visit www.fortnet.org/Audubon for more information.

March 10, Sunday, Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey. Leader: Denise Bretting, dbretting@swloveland.com, work: 970-669-1185, home: 970-669-8095. Call for any change. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot. FCAS performs a monthly bird census for the City of Fort Collins. All levels are welcome.

March 16 & 17, Saturday and Sunday, Colorado

Birding Series Fundraising Trips: Early Spring Migration. Each day is a separate field trip. Leaders: John Vanderpoel (March 16), Nick Komar (March 17). For more information or reservations, contact Nick Komar, quetzal65@comcast.net, 970-449-3645. FCAS partners with Quetzal Tours to presents educational



Eastern Screech Owl by Nick Komar.

field trips as part of a Colorado Birding Series that lets you learn from the experts while traveling through Colorado's various life zones. Each trip is limited to five participants along with a leader and a driver. In mid-March, many species of migratory waterfowl are on the move and passing through Colorado en route to boreal breeding areas. Visit lakes of Northern Colorado that serve as stopover sites for ducks,



Something's been spotted during an FCAS fieldtrip. Photo by John Shenot.

grebes, loons, and gulls. Target birds: Bonaparte's Gull, Thayer's Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Red-breasted Merganser, Horned Grebe, Long-tailed Duck. Cost and registration: \$80 for FCAS members, \$100 for non-members, due one week in advance. Proceeds benefit FCAS. For more information about the remaining Colorado Birding Series, see the FCAS website: <http://www.fortnet.org/Audubon/pages/fieldtrips.html>.

www.fortnet.org/Audubon/pages/fieldtrips.html.

March 23, Saturday, Namaqua Park in Loveland. Leader: Connie Kogler, zblueheron@gmail.com. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the park. The group will be birding the park and along the river and meeting at the Coffee Tree afterward.

March 30, Saturday, "All A-Bird" to Fossil Creek Reservoir Regional Open Space. Leader: John Shenot, johnshenot@gmail.com, 970-682-2551. Meet at 8 a.m. at the parking lot. This should be a good introduction to birding for beginners. After-trip coffee is optional.

Still Looking for Field Trip Volunteers

At least once a month, including the summer, FCAS wants to offer an "All A-Bird" field trip that will be in or near Fort Collins, last roughly two hours, and be focused more on fun and camaraderie than finding rare birds or tallying a long species count. These trips will be inviting to new members, non-members, and beginning birders. To make this happen, we still need volunteers who are willing to lead one field trip at a time and location of your choosing. FCAS will help with the rest. Expert birding skills are not required of trip leaders! We just need people who want to spend time in the field with fellow birders and have fun. Please contact John Shenot at johnshenot@gmail.com or 970-682-2551.



Christmas Bird Counts Resulted in Some Area Firsts

by Tom Hall and Nick Komar

This past Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was the 66th consecutive annual count in Fort Collins



Mountain Chickadee by Cole Wild.

and the 13th in Loveland. With this quantity of data, we can assess trends in some species that are important indicators of environmental

quality, such as raptors, and we can document local population expansions and reductions. In Fort Collins, 71 observers counted 40,124 birds of 95 species on Dec 15, while in Loveland, 50 observers counted 22,842 birds of 92 species on Jan 1. Conditions were mild and dry with quite a bit of open water in Fort Collins, but a cold spell and a white Christmas resulted in mostly frozen lakes and a blanket of snow in Loveland. While the CBC is an annual event that inspires competitive birding and efforts to find as many rare bird species as possible, its principal value as a citizen science project is the standardized monitoring of winter bird populations throughout North America. Fort Collins CBC broke the 100 mark with six additional species seen during count week, bringing the week's total to 101.

The most abundant bird of the Loveland CBC, representing about a quarter of all birds counted, was the Cackling Goose. Combining these with their close cousins, the larger Canada Goose, more than 9,000 "white-cheeked geese" were



Saw-whet Owl by Chuck Hundertmark.

counted, almost half of all birds counted in the 15-mile diameter circle. In addition to the geese, the four other species most counted, with over 1,000 each, were: American Robin, House Sparrow, Eurasian Collared-Dove, House Finch. This was the first year that Eurasian Collared-Doves breached 1,000 and that Cackling Goose outnumbered Canada Goose. The most exciting

finds, and new for the count's cumulative bird list, were a Northern Saw-whet Owl and a Pine Warbler. A couple of White



Pine Warbler by Helmut Retzer.

-throated Sparrows were also new, bringing the count's list to 152 species after 13 years.

Fort Collins similarly counted 16,000 "white-cheeked geese" about 40 percent of all birds counted in the circle. During the first year of the Fort Collins CBC in 1947, these geese were not seen at all; it was not until 1958 that Canada Geese were recorded for the first time. Because of the CBC, we are able to quantify these types of changes in the bird populations, which in turn, helps us monitor our changing environment.

Photos from the Loveland CBC are posted at <http://www.pbases.com/quetzal/lovelandcbc>. The general CBC data are available at

www.audubon.org.

Special thanks go to Sylvan Dale Guest Ranch, Larimer County Natural Resources Department, City of Loveland, Quetzal Tours, and Fort Collins Audubon Society for sponsorship and support in various capacities.



FCAS Welcomes New and Renewing Members

Judith Ann Balice
 Bill Hunt
 Margo & Anne Butner
 Carole Cotham-Machala
 Susan Degutz
 Larry DeMers
 Kim Dunlap
 Elizabeth Edwards
 Scott Farquhar
 Ray & Joan Glabach
 Ruth Grant
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 Elizabeth Ross
 Anne Saunders
 Edie Thompson
 Sandra J. Tinsman
 James Tolstrup
 William West
 Sandra Winkler

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.

Ecuador Birding Excursion

This summer, join fellow Auduboners in experiencing the mystique of Ecuador's Andean peaks and cloud forests. Quetzal Tours is offering an eight-day relaxed-pace birding adventure to Ecuador, led by the bilingual Ecuadorian birding guide, Xavier Muñoz. Not only will this be a unique experience at a low price (\$2000 per person), but the event also serves as a fundraiser as a portion of the proceeds will be donated to FCAS. Locations to be visited include Mindo, Nanegalito, Papallacta Pass, and Guacamayos Pass. Birding highlights will include dozens of species of brightly colored tanagers, hummingbirds, and, of course, quetzals, many of which can be seen at close range for breathtaking photography. Ecuador has the highest biodiversity in the world, hosting more bird species than any other country. The tour is limited to six customers in order to guarantee a quality, personalized experience. Add-on guided birding excursions to the Amazonian rainforests or the unique Galapagos Islands also can be arranged. For more information or to reserve your spot, contact Quetzal Tours, at info@quetzal-tours.com, or call Nick Komar at 970-449-3645.



Crested Quetzal
by Nick Komar.



Wood Duck by Nick Komar.

FCAS Pocket Guide to Local Birds

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

Wild Birds Unlimited
 3636 S. College Ave
 Ste. C
 (970) 225-2557

Jax Mercantile
 950 E. Eisenhower
 Loveland
 (970) 776-4540

Jax Outdoor Gear
 1200 N. College
 (970) 221-0544

Jax Farm & Ranch
 1000 N. Hwy. 287
 (970) 481-2221





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- New or renewing FCAS Chapter Member** \$20
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 Membership applications may be completed online at: www.fortnet.org/Audubon