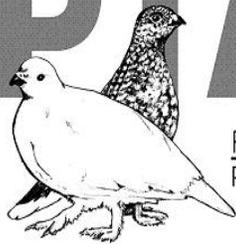


PTARMIGAN



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

May 2013

Volume 44, Issue 5

**Gunnison Sage Grouse:
The Crawford Population Habitat Use and Movement Study
Presented by: Physical Scientist Doug Ouren, USGS
Thursday, May 9, 2013
Fort Collins Senior Center; 1200 Raintree Drive, Fort Collins
Social Gathering: 7 p.m. – Program: 7:30 p.m.**

Loss and alteration of sage-steppe habitat is a primary reason for declines in Gunnison Sage Grouse populations. The Gunnison Sage-grouse is a species of special concern for all federal and state natural resource management agencies throughout its range. One of the remaining seven populations, the Crawford population, exists in Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area and the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. While the Crawford population is small, it is still considered a self-sustaining population; the persistence and growth of this population directly conserves genetic diversity of this declining species. There is little factual information available about the movements and habitat use of the Crawford population; therefore, the objective for this project is to use GPS-marking techniques to examine the habitat use and seasonal movements of the Crawford population. To date the



Gunnison Sage Grouse. File photo.

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has identified over 1,300 locations to develop initial resource-selection models and as new potential lekking areas. This information will be used to model and test models for development of decision-making tools for wildlife managers who are trying to increase or preserve Gunnison Sage Grouse population and habitat. Collaborators include National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, USGS, and Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife.

Doug Ouren is a physical scientist with the Biological Resources Division of the USGS at the Fort Collins Science Center. Doug began working for the USGS in 1996 and is currently leading a multi-agency research effort in western Colorado assessing the impacts of motorized vehicle use on Gunnison Sage Grouse.

Join us on May 9 at the Fort Collins Senior Center for an evening of information and photos. This program is free and open to the public.

Strength in Diversity

After Ron Harden spoke at our last program meeting, I realized what a wealth of talent we have on the FCAS Board. Each member possesses a talent and dedication to a specific job, the whole of which makes a very effective organization. Ron Harden, not only an excellent birder and photographer, has been involved in the public policy side of Audubon for many years. John Waddell rattles the numbers around with great proficiency and keeps us honest with all government filings. Jessie Meschievitz contacts our speakers and arranges the programs with grace and finesse. Louise Parker diligently walks the sidewalks posting our posters to invite newcomers. Scott Cobble not only keeps our minutes, but has designed the membership card. John Shenot has rejuvenated our field trip program with enthusiasm. Susan Cottingham, our newest member, has already made herself indispensable by updating

the laptop computer that was given to FCAS. Liz Pruessner keeps us healthy with new memberships and renewals. Hildy Morgan eagerly creates and executes education programs. And, last but not least, Bill Miller, without whom FCAS could simply not function, is dedicated to the principles of conservation. From state level with Ron to very local level with Hildy, FCAS brings care and concern for the environment and knowledge of the birds to everyone!



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/Audubon.

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FCAS Pocket Guide to Local Birds
Is available at the following retailers who support our organization with the sales:
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Jax Mercantile
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(970) 481-2221
BIRDS OF NORTHERN COLORADO
A GUIDE TO FAMILIAR SPECIES
Fort Collins Audubon Society



If in a given community unchecked popular rule means unlimited waste and destruction of the natural resources—soil, fertility, waterpower, forests, game, wild-life generally—which by right belong as much to subsequent generations as to the present generation, then it is sure proof that the present generation is not yet really fit for self-control, that it is not yet really fit to exercise the high and responsible privilege of a rule that shall be both by the people and for the people. The term “for the people” must always include the people unborn as well as the people now alive, or the democratic ideal is not realized.

-- Theodore Roosevelt - *In A Book-Lover's Holidays in the Open* (1916)

Giving Away the Farm: The Story Behind the Keystone XL Pipeline

Canada is a land of considerable natural resources. Valuable metal resources are found in both the eastern and western portions of Canada, while the “Interior Platform,” which encompasses Alberta and Saskatchewan, provides petroleum, coal, potash, and salt. Alberta is approximately 400 miles wide and stretches 760 miles north from the U.S. border. The Athabasca River originates in Jasper National Park and meanders to the north and east, some 765 miles, before draining into Lake Athabasca on its way to the Arctic Ocean. The Athabasca River was used by no fewer than six First Nations tribes prior to the colonization by Europeans who used the river to access beaver habitat. Several of those tribes still use the river for subsistence hunting and fishing.



Tar sands mining in Alberta, Canada.

On its way north, the Athabasca River passes through Fort McMurray. Prior to the arrival of European fur trappers in the late 18th century, the Cree were the dominant [First Nations](#) people in the Fort McMurray area. The [Athabasca tar sands](#) were known to the locals and the surface deposits were used to waterproof their canoes.

The Athabasca tar sands are deposits of bitumen, an extremely heavy crude oil. The bitumen is mixed with silica sand, clay minerals, and water that must be subjected to high levels of heat to separate the bitumen from the sand, clay, and water. This process creates heavy air pollution that settles into the local watershed and is also deposited during snow storms. Collectively the three oil sand deposits lie under 54,000 sq. mi. of

boreal forest and peat bogs (almost the size of Florida) and contain about 1.7 trillion barrels of bitumen, about equal to the world’s proven oil reserves of conventional petroleum.

There currently are two major areas of oil sands excavation located about 20 miles and 42 miles, respectively, north of Fort McMurray. Both straddle the Athabasca River. Tar sands mining has resulted in the creation of 65 square miles of toxic waste lakes that leach about three

million gallons per day into the Athabasca River.

Residents of First Nation communities downstream from the oil sands excavations have seen an abnormal number of fish with strange tumors as well as high incidences of rare human cancers.

The United States needs to say NO to the Keystone XL pipeline for the following reasons:

1. The tar sands oil is the dirtiest oil on the planet. Two tons of tar sands must be heated to produce a single barrel of low-grade, corrosive, high sulfur crude oil that must be extensively refined to produce fuel. Producing bitumen is three times more polluting than producing North American crude oil.

2. The U.S. State Department estimates that construction of the pipeline may create 6,500 jobs, but only during construction. Several hundred permanent jobs would exist after construction. A Cornell University study posits that the pipeline would kill more jobs than it would create because of a reduction in investment in clean energy technologies.

Continued on Page 6



A Murder of Crows

Why murder? I have wondered that ever since my brother brought me a movie to watch. "A Murder of Crows," was filmed in New Orleans, my home town, and features many scenes of the beautiful architecture of the older homes in the inner city neighborhoods. The movie was satisfying because of the location, but the plot was not particularly memorable. However, the title, "A Murder of Crows," stuck with me.

The term was used as early as the 15th century and is attributed to the behavior of crows that are often seen as violent and/or malevolent. In the past several years, a murder of crows arrives in my neighborhood every spring. Their sheer numbers, size, and raucous calls announce their arrival. Last year one crow stayed on the ground beneath my huge Blue Spruce tree for a couple of weeks. I thought there was a nest nearby, but I could never find it. The bird often walked up and down on the lawn like a proud father awaiting the birth of his child. When it left, I did not think much about it, until, this year when I watched a segment of the show Nature on PBS.

Oh my goodness, what a bird! A bird that has been regarded in the past as a nuisance, a bad omen, and a scavenger, has been found to be among the world's smartest animals with a brain

-to-body size ratio approaching that of some apes. New research shows that they use tools as only elephants and chimpanzees do. The program illustrated that crows also possess the ability to recognize individual human faces and can pick them out of a crowd up to two years later.

Armed with my new found information, I have been more observant of the crows that often feed on the lawn after the first aeration, dethatching, and mowing. Two birds walked around eating and talking with one another, and each had a different pitch to its voice. As they wandered about, one bird flew across the street and landed on a fence post, but before leaving, it called to the remaining bird in a very different tone of voice, as if telling its mate that it was going across the street. Researchers have identified 250 distinct calls used by crows.

The crow has worked its way into the mythology of multiple cultures usually as a trickster, an omen of bad news, or an evil being. But, crows mate for life, roost in large groups, collectively raise the young, have a language, use tools, and are very intelligent. I highly recommend the Nature show, "A Murder of Crows," which can be viewed on the Internet. I believe it will "cawse" you to think twice about this remarkable bird!



American Crow by Bill Miller.

FCAS Welcomes New and Renewing Members

Roger F. Alexander
Barbara Case
Mary M. Davis
Rob Gregory
David Hartley

Tina C. Jones
Sue Kenney
Donald & Katherine Lybecker
Nancy E. Metzler
C. Paul Sayers
Lori Zabel



Thank you! Your support makes our programs and conservation efforts possible.



Upcoming Field Trips

All field trips are free of charge (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 and updates. RSVP is recommended.

May 4 & 5, Saturday and Sunday, Colorado Birding Series Fundraising Trips: Chico Basin Ranch. Each day is a separate field trip. Leader: John Drummond. For information/reservations, contact Nick Komar, quetzal65@comcast.net, 970-449-3645. FCAS has partnered with Quetzal Tours to offer an educational Colorado Birding Series that allows you to learn from the experts while traveling through Colorado's various life zones. Each trip is limited to five participants. Migrating passerine birds of the east and west mix together at Chico Basin Ranch, perhaps Colorado's premier migration hot spot. This tour features a visit to Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's spring migration banding station where you will see birds in the hand. Target Birds: Flycatchers, vireos, warblers, tanagers. \$80 for FCAS members, \$100 for non-members, due one week in advance. Proceeds benefit FCAS.



Pelican by Nick Komar.

May 11, Saturday, Falcon Ridge (private property). Leader: John Shenot, johnshenot@gmail.com, 970-682-2551. Start at 6:30 a.m. Call for directions, parking information, and carpool options. An RSVP is essential as this trip is on private land. Falcon Ridge is a 37-acre farm about eight miles from Fort Collins that has been developed primarily as wildlife habitat, especially for birds. It is a well-known magnet for eastern species that have strayed off course during migration. Landowner Steve Martin has documented almost 250 species here over the past 35 years, and sees about 125 species in a typical year, including two Colorado rarities last May: Scarlet Tanager and Mourning Warbler.

May 12, 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 a.m. in the parking lot. FCAS performs a monthly bird census for the City of Fort

Collins. All levels are welcome.

May 17, Friday, "All A-Bird" to Pineridge Natural Area (Dixon Reservoir). Leader: John Shenot, johnshenot@gmail.com, 970-682-2551. Meet at 6 p.m. at the Pineridge parking lot for a "happy hour" bird walk.

June 9, Sunday, Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey. Meet at 6:30 a.m. See description and contact details above for this recurring, monthly survey.

June 15 & 16, Saturday and Sunday, Colorado Birding Series Fundraising Trips:

Rocky Mountain Chorus. Each day is a separate field trip. Leader: Nathan Pieplow. For more information or reservations, contact Nick Komar, quetzal65@comcast.net, 970-449-3645. This is another in the series of educational field trips offered by Quetzal Tours. In our local mountains, over 100 species of birds sing up a

storm during nesting season, and Nathan Pieplow, a nationally-renowned bird sound recorder will interpret them in the canyons and hillside above Boulder. Target Birds: Virginia's, MacGillivray's and Hooded Warblers, Ovenbird, Yellow-breasted Chat, Lazuli Bunting, Western Tanager, Olive-sided, Dusky, Cordilleran, and Hammond's Flycatchers, Veery, Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes. Cost and registration: Five participants only. \$80 for FCAS members, \$100 for non-members, due one week in advance. Proceeds benefit FCAS.

June 22, Saturday, Rocky Mountain National Park Birds and Butterflies. This is a joint field trip for the Fort Collins and Boulder County chapters of Audubon. Leaders: Ron Harden (FCAS), hardenrr@msn.com, 970-667-3819 and Steve Jones (BCAS), curlwsj@comcast.net, 303-494-2468. Enjoy birding and butterfly watching, beginning at 8 a.m. at the

Field Trips Continued on Page 7



Tar Sands continued from Page 3

3. The Canadian companies have already admitted that the delivery of tar sands oil to Texas refineries will not help America's energy dilemma because it is intended that the tar sand oil would be exported around the world. Our own military experts have advised that the Keystone XL pipeline would just perpetuate our dependence on foreign oil imports and not make us more energy secure.

4. Canadians have put the brakes on the construction of pipelines to the east and west coasts because of the environmental concerns about water quality and safety. Yet the companies behind the Keystone XL pipeline have no qualms about asking (telling?) Americans to expose themselves to the risks inherent to the construction of a tar sands pipeline. Witness the March 29 rupture of an ExxonMobile tar sands pipeline in Mayflower, Arkansas.

5. The Keystone XL pipeline will cut through the Great Plains, a land of more than 250,000 ranches and farms, putting croplands and food



An ExxonMobil tar sands oil pipeline ruptured on March 29 in Mayflower, Arkansas.

producers at risk of oil spills. The pipeline would cross more than 1,500 waterways between Montana and Texas, threatening them with the same kinds of accidents that put 42,000 gallons of oil in the Yellowstone River and 20 times that

amount in Michigan's Kalamazoo River in 2010—a spill that has yet to be cleaned up.

6. Continued extraction of the Alberta tar sands will lay waste to Canada's boreal forest, upon which many migratory bird species are dependent for summer breeding habitat.

If the United States gives approval to the completion of the Keystone XL pipeline we will truly be "giving

away the farm." A Google search provides the following definition of this expression: "It means you are giving away everything without receiving anything (or enough) in return."

Rather than deepening our addiction to fossil fuels, it is time to reduce our dangerous dependence on oil. It is time to invest more in wind and solar, other renewable fuels, and energy-efficient cars, workplaces, and homes of tomorrow.

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, hum-



Giant Antpitta
by Nick Komar.

mingbirds, 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.



Highlights of Recent FCAS Field Trips ————— by John Shenot

The Early Spring Migrants trips led by Quetzal Tours provided yet another successful fundraiser for FCAS. More than 60 species were observed on each day, including many Northern Colorado rarities like Varied Thrush, Red-necked Grebe, Bohemian Waxwing, Long-eared Owl, Long-tailed Duck,



April 12 Field Trip Highlight: a Great Horned Owl!
Photo by John Shenot.

and Trumpeter Swan. At the Fossil Creek Reservoir trip on March 30, 13 species of ducks were

identified along with more than a dozen other species. Participants in this year's first Friday evening field trip, to Riverbend Ponds and Cottonwood Hollow Natural Areas in Fort Collins, were treated to beautiful flight displays by Northern Harriers, a singing Marsh Wren, an adult Bald Eagle, and a very cooperative Great Horned Owl. We also enjoyed a fun game of Bird-O (bird species bingo).

Field Trips continued from Page 5

Upper Beaver Meadows trailhead. RSVP is recommended, as trip details are still tentative.

June 23, Sunday, Pawnee National Grasslands. Leader: Bill Miller, 5mcorp@comcast.net, 970-493-7693. This trip will leave from Fort Collins at 6 a.m. Contact Bill for details. The grasslands 35 miles east of Fort Collins are a world-class birding area. Join Bill for a special day in search of Burrowing Owls, Mountain Plovers, McCown's Longspurs, and Ferruginous Hawks.

July 14, Sunday, Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey. Meet at 6:30 a.m. See description and contact details above for this recurring, monthly survey.

July 20 & 21, Saturday and Sunday, Colorado Birding Series Fundraising Trips: High Plains of North Park. Each day is a separate field trip. Leader: Chuck Hundertmark, President, Denver Field Ornithologists. For more information or reservations, contact Nick Komar, quetzal65@comcast.net, 970-449-3645. This is another in the series of educational field trips offered by Quetzal Tours. Each trip is limited to five participants. Nowhere is water bird nesting in the High Plains more interesting than in North Park (Jackson County). Mammal encounters can include moose, elk, mule deer, prong-

horn, muskrat, yellow-bellied marmot, white-tailed prairie dogs, porcupine, ground squirrels, chipmunks and others. Target Birds: Eared Grebe, American White Pelican, Willet, Wilson's Phalarope, California Gull, Marsh Wren, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Greater Sage-Grouse, Sage Thrasher, and Brewer's Sparrow. Cost and registration: \$80 for FCAS members, \$100 for non-members, due one week in advance. Proceeds benefit FCAS.

Aug. 11, Sunday, Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey. Meet at 6:30 a.m. See description and contact details above for this recurring, monthly survey.

Aug. 24, Saturday, Sylvan Dale Guest Ranch. Leader: Denise Bretting, dbretting@swloveland.com, work: 970-669-1185, home: 970-669-8095. This trip starts at 8 a.m. and will take approximately three hours. Naturalist Dave Armstrong will do an introduction. Expect pretty easy walking over a short distance. This trip is limited to no more than 15 or 20 people. Advance RSVP is required. Directions, details about where to park, etc. will be provided to those who RSVP.

Sept. 8, Sunday, Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey. Meet at 6:30 a.m. See description and contact details above for this recurring, monthly survey.





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