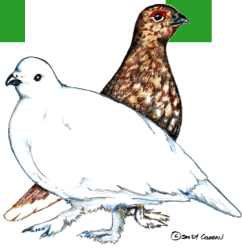


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FORT COLLINS AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 271968 • Fort Collins, CO 80527-1968 • www.fortcollinsaudubon.org

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

February 2021

Volume 52, Issue 2

FCAS Hosts

Jonathan Reitz, Wildlife Biologist, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Presenting: "Translocation as a Conservation Tool for Lesser Prairie-Chickens"

Thursday, February 11

Announcements: 7 p.m.; Program 7:20 p.m.

*****This will be an online meeting using Zoom*****

Enter the following link on your web browser at or before 7 p.m.

and follow the instructions to join the meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81322534840>

The Lesser Prairie-Chicken is an icon of Colorado's southeastern prairies. Due to a long list of environmental and anthropogenic factors, they nearly became extirpated in extreme southeastern Colorado and southwestern Kansas, one of its core areas. In an effort to recover the species on and around the Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Kansas Wildlife Parks and Tourism, and Kansas State University partnered and embarked on an unprecedented project for Lesser Prairie-Chickens. Over the course of four years, a small army of biologists, wildlife technicians, and graduate students caught and translocated over 400 Lesser Prairie-Chickens to the U.S. Forest Service grasslands. First and foremost, project partners wanted to take a signifi-



Lesser Prairie-Chicken by Jonathan Reitz.

cant step toward recovering this dwindling population on the sand-sage prairie. But, another major goal was to determine if trapping and transplanting could even work, and if it could be a viable tool that should be included in the Lesser Prairie-Chicken conservation tool box. In many ways, this challenging project was the first of its kind. Biologists had no idea whether or not the birds' own instincts and behaviors would get dictate success.

Jonathan Reitz is a wildlife biologist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and has worked on Lesser Prairie-Chicken conservation since 2006. He helps manage, research, and conserve big and small game, and threatened/endangered species in southeast Colorado.

We welcome FCAS members and guests to this Zoom meeting on February 11.

FCAS welcomes new National Audubon Society members. Please subscribe on the last page of the newsletter or on our website at www.fortcollinsaudubon.org.

Please note: All Field Trips are cancelled until further notice.

I want to thank the membership for entrusting me with another term as president of FCAS. I'm starting my 7th year in this role! Fortunately, we were extremely successful in recruiting board members for 2021. Although I'm sad to see a few friends drop off of the board, I'm excited to have more help than ever before, lots of fresh faces and fresh ideas, and better representation of our membership in terms of age and gender (we still have work to do to ethnically diversify FCAS).

As you might guess, it's extremely hard to predict what 2021 has in store for FCAS. Nevertheless, I want to share with you some of my top goals for the year. Just please keep in mind that, as we learned last year (the hard way), we may have to adjust our goals as the year progresses. With that caveat, here are some of my top priorities for 2021.

I want to expand membership in FCAS. I hope to achieve this through two strategies. First, I'll be discussing an expansion of our chapter boundaries with National Audubon that would automatically assign more Audubon members to our chapter. But equally important will be a more concerted effort by FCAS to use our social media accounts to connect with the community, spread the word about what we have to offer, and sign up new members.

Another priority for this year will be to bring our six

new board members up to speed so they can thrive in their positions and make my job easier! In my time with FCAS we've never before brought this many new people onto the board at once. If we invest in their success, the entire organization will benefit.

The third priority that I'll mention here is to refocus and expand our conservation advocacy efforts. Of course, everyone knows that there is a new federal administration in Washington, but locally we have two new Larimer County Board of Commissioners and we'll soon have a new mayor and city council members in Fort Collins. I'm hopeful that FCAS will have new allies and new opportunities to promote habitat conservation, wildlife protection, and outdoor recreation.



Mark Your Calendar for the Great Backyard Bird Count

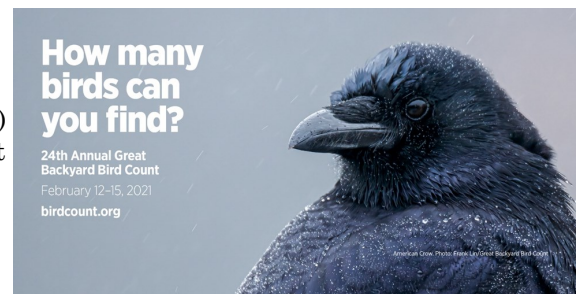
The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is an annual birding and citizen science event for people of all skills from around the world. This year, it runs from Friday, February 12 through Monday, February 15. Participants are asked to watch for birds at any location (it can be

your backyard, but doesn't have to be) for at least 15 consecutive minutes, then submit a

checklist of their observations on a website. What better way to enjoy nature and further scientific knowledge while keeping safe during a pandemic?

More information about the GBBC can be found at <http://birdcount.org/>. Last year, GBBC participants globally submitted nearly a quarter of a million checklists and reported almost 7,000 bird species. In Larimer County, 101 species were observed by more than 100 participants during the four-day period. The top hotspot in Larimer County for the second year in a row was Fossil Creek Reservoir.

Please consider participating in this year's GBBC. Even your observations of House Finches at a backyard bird feeder can contribute to better scientific understanding of bird distribution and abundance.



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Visit us on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/FortCollinsAudubonSociety>



Planning Process Underway for New Kestrel Fields Natural Area

Considering the year we have all been through, it feels helpful to focus on positive efforts happening in the world of conservation. There is some good news about a large property in northwest Fort Collins that did not get developed and turned into houses. Instead, citizen advocacy and fundraising supported a City of Fort Collins decision to establish a new natural area.

Two large, privately owned parcels of farmland were for sale. Located in an undeveloped area north of Vine Drive, between Overland Trail and Taft Hill Road, these lands are part of a largely open corridor linking the foothills and the Poudre River zone. As the community grows, this is becoming a rarity. It was on the radar of the City of Fort Collins Natural Area staff, but prices were high and Natural Areas staff considers many potential opportunities.



Looking southwest over Kestrel Fields by Doug Swartz.

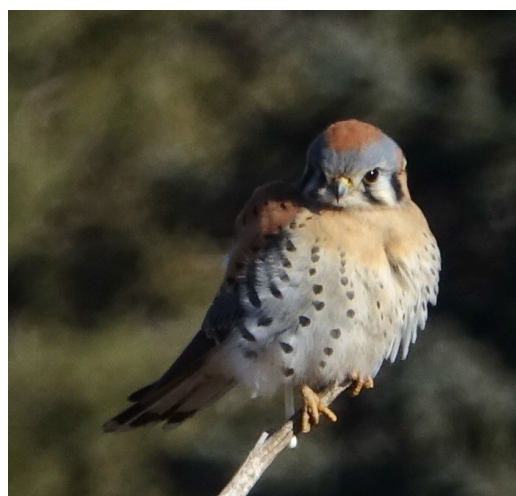
ment proposals were inevitable. So they proactively reached out to Natural Areas staff, to see how they might help the City acquire these properties for long-term protection. A fundraising campaign was launched to assist with restoration of the properties once they were purchased. The goal: \$70,000. Enthusiasm was

high and, in six weeks, well over a hundred donor households pitched in \$76,125!

The citizen involvement and financial commitment for this project helped the City make the decision to purchase the first property in late 2019 and the second six months later. In total, 73 acres have been preserved and are becoming Kestrel Fields Natural Area. The name fits well because the open lands have provided critical habitat for numerous broods of American Kestrels over the years. This new protection bodes well for their future.

A vision for the natural area is being developed that includes habitat improvements, a “conservation agriculture” pilot project, and neighborhood connections. The agriculture pilot has goals of shifting the vegetation from monoculture (grass hayfield) to diversified crops, reducing water use, improving soil health, and integrating native plants to benefit wildlife (pollinators, birds, small mammals). Restoration and site planning are in the early stages, so it will likely be several years before the natural area opens to the public.

The creation of this new natural area is an inspiration that shows how much we can do as motivated citizens, working together with local government to improve life in our community. Kudos to all who had a hand in this exciting success story for conservation!



American Kestrel perched in Kestrel Fields by Doug Swartz.

on wildlife, as the development would effectively plug the corridor. They organized, identified other areas of concern, and actively participated in the development review process. Citizens made the case that the proposed design flaunted many aspects of the Northwest Subarea Plan that was intended to guide the future of the northwest portion of Fort Collins.

The housing proposal was eventually dropped, but the group of motivated neighbors recognized that the lands were still on the market and that other develop-

Meanwhile, in 2018, a dense housing plan was submitted to Larimer County for one of the parcels. Residents in the neighborhoods surrounding the properties were concerned about the impacts of the proposal



Loggerhead Shrike at Kestrel Fields by Doug Swartz.



The (Un)Common Snipe

During a recent walk along the Poudre River Trail, I encountered a man who was pointing out something in the shallow river water to his companions. I asked what they were looking at, and the reply was “snipe.” I stared at the smooth rocks by the stream bank and noticed an American Robin, but no other bird. Only after looking long and very intently could I discern the beautifully patterned buff and brown back of a smallish long-billed bird probing for food in the water among the smooth river rocks. The rounded back of the bird made it extremely difficult to discern it among the river rocks. It is even difficult to re-find the bird in my photographs!

The bird was first named the Common Snipe (CS). The word snipe is derived from “snite,” a variant of snout, and refers to the long bill of the bird. However, in 2003 our CS was separated from Old World populations and given its own species status rather than being a subspecies of the CS. Now it is known as Wilson’s Snipe (WS), being named for Alexander Wilson, (1766-1813), who emigrated from Great Britain and became a poet/ornithologist/self-taught illustrator. In 1808, Wilson began publishing a self-illustrated book on the natural history of U.S. birds that inspired John Audubon to produce his own famous volumes of avian illustrations.



Wilson's Snipe showing upturned upper mandible, aka rhynchokinesis by Richard Herrington.

The WS differs from the CS in having a narrower white trailing edge to the wings, and eight pairs of tail feathers instead of the usual seven of the CS. The WS is 10 ½—11 ½ inches in length. It is capable of rhynchokinesis in which the terminal part of the upper jaw may be raised or lowered independent of the rest of it by the bending of the nasal or pre-maxillary bones.

Although the WS is a shy and elusive bird, the male has a spectacular courtship performance to impress his potential mate. He produces an eerie sound called winnowing or bleating, which is produced by the vibration of outer tail feathers when he is flying in a downward swooping motion.

Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dam0sDp6Xig> to hear it.

The WS has extra-large pectoral muscles that gives it the ability to “explode” into the air

and reach 60 miles per hour. The word sniper came about because snipe were so difficult to shoot; thus a sniper was an excellent shooter.

The WS likes cattail and bulrush marshes, willow wetlands, and bogs in montane and subalpine habitat. The nest is built on the ground in a well hidden location. The male and female WS are similar in size and coloration. Although widely hunted in the past by “snipers,” the WS rebounded and is now a year round, uncommon, confirmed breeder in Larimer County.

FCAS Welcomes New and Renewing Members

Eileen Baker
Susan Barbour
Donald Beaver
Hetty Bixby
Robert Blinderman
Lisa A. Browne
Sally Castner
Larry Caswell
K. Dunnington
Robert Ellis
Martin Forstenzer

William Gerk
Vince Griesemer
Larry Griffin
Ellie Harrison
David Hartley
Melannie Hartman
Jane Hawk
Vicki Helton
Gina Janett
Carol Jones
Nancy Jones

Laurie Kleespies
Tom Kleespies
Diane C. Kristoff
Bob Lucas
Rosemary Lucas
Thomas J. Lynch
Margo Matthews
Larry Moskowitz
James J. Nahel
Sandra Pitcaithley

Joseph Polazzi
Hetmut Retzer
Brian Richmond
Bill Smith
Patricia A. Sowby
Linda Squires
David Steingraeber
Edith B. Thompson
Kay Ward
Robin Welsh

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.



Local Christmas Bird Counts Were Safe and Successful

by John Shenot based on reports from CBC Coordinators

FCAS helped promote eight local Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) this year, more than ever before. The organizers of these counts did a great job of emphasizing the need for COVID precautions, and participants acted responsibly and safely by all accounts.

The Fort Collins CBC was conducted on December 19. This was the 74th consecutive count in Fort Collins, the longest consecutively run count in Colorado. Exactly 100 species were observed on count day, which was close to a record. Unusual species (for December) included Trumpeter Swan, Red-breasted Merganser, Turkey Vulture, Sora, Eastern Bluebird, Vesper Sparrow, and Lincoln's Sparrow.

seen the week of the count. The biggest surprises on this CBC were Double-crested Cormorant, Northern Bobwhite, and Canyon Towhee, all of which had never before been seen on a Loveland CBC. Other unusual species included White-winged Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Glaucous-winged Gull, and American Three-toed Woodpecker.

Results of other local CBCs were not available at press time.

FCAS thanks all CBC coordinators: Tom Hall (Fort Collins), Gary Lefko (Nunn and Pawnee National Grasslands), Doug Kibbe (Rawhide), Denise Bretting and Nick Komar (Loveland), and Scott Rashid (Estes Park/Rocky Mountain National Park).



Canyon Towhee, Loveland CBC, photo by Nick Komar.



Western Meadowlark, Pawnee Buttes CBC, by Gary Lekfo



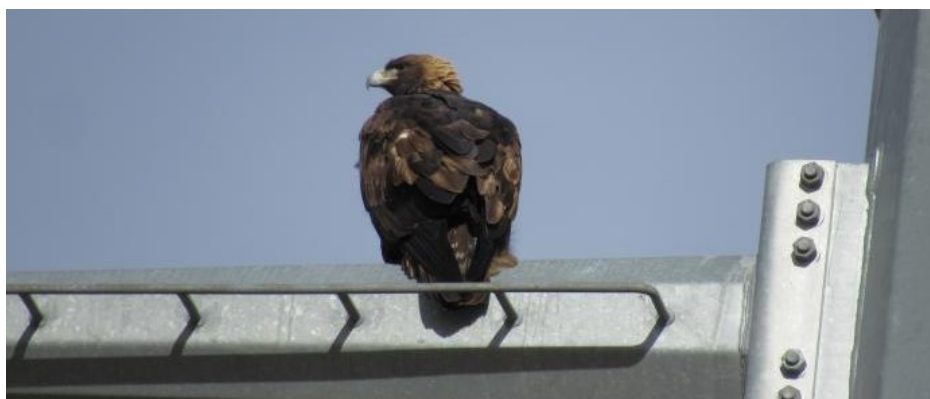
Above: Ferruginous Hawk by Chris Petrizzo.

Below: Golden Eagle by Gary Lefko.

Both photos from Pawnee Buttes CBC.

The Nunn CBC was held on December 26. Although the species count was low (because this area doesn't have very diverse habitat) there were two exciting and unexpected surprises: a Sharp-tailed Grouse and a flock of 60 Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches.

The Loveland CBC on January 1 once again yielded the largest number of species of all the local CBCs: 102 on count day, plus eight more



Fort Collins Audubon Society
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Join Fort Collins Audubon Society (FCAS), National Audubon Society (NAS), or both.

- ☐ New or renewing FCAS Chapter Member \$ 20 Name: _____
Receive the FCAS *Ptarmigan* by email
- ☐ New or renewing FCAS Chapter Member \$ 30 Address: _____
Receive the FCAS *Ptarmigan* by mail
- ☐ Lifetime FCAS Chapter Member \$750 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Receive FCAS *Ptarmigan* by mail or email
- ☐ Additional support for FCAS programs \$ _____ Phone: _____
- ☐ Additional support for Alex Cringan Fund \$ _____ Email: _____
(natural history education grants)
- ☐ New NAS member \$ 20 May we send you FCAS email alerts if updates occur for field
Receive the NAS *Audubon* by mail trips, programs, etc.? Yes or No
- ☐ Renewing NAS member \$ 35 May we contact you for volunteer activities such as helping at
Receive the NAS *Audubon* by mail events or contacting legislators on important issues? Yes or No

Total Enclosed: \$ _____

Please make your tax-exempt check payable to FCAS and mail with this form to FCAS,
P.O. Box 271968, Fort Collins, CO, 80527-1968. Your cancelled check is your receipt. All renewals are due in January. New
memberships begun after August 31 extend throughout the following year. Applications can be completed at

www.fortcollinsaudubon.org.