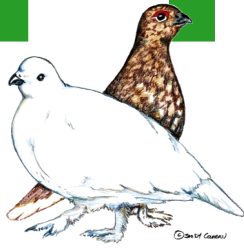


# PTARMIGAN



## FORT COLLINS AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 271968 • Fort Collins, CO 80527-1968 • [www.fortcollinsaudubon.org](http://www.fortcollinsaudubon.org)

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

January 2022

Volume 54, Issue 1

### FCAS Hosts

**Nolan Bunting, FCAS Field Trip Coordinator and CSU DVM Student**

**Presenting: "Habitat Corridors to the Future"**

**Thursday, January 13**

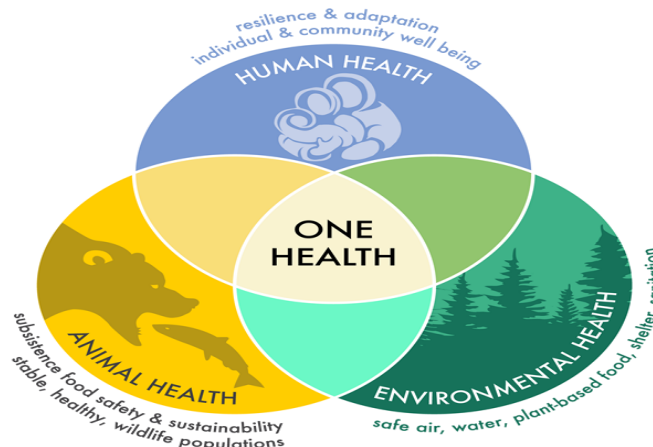
**7 p.m. Announcements; 7:20 Program**

**Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Dr., Masks Required**

**\*\*\*This program also will be accessible on Zoom\*\*\***

**Enter the following link on your web browser at or before 7 p.m.  
to join the meeting virtually: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84649627779>**

Did you know that biodiversity does more than just help the ecosystem? Recent conservation trends are aiming toward improving the biodiversity of an ecosystem and not just protecting flora and fauna. This focus on biodiversity has led to new studies that show humans benefit greatly from biodiverse landscapes. In this talk we will cover topics from water conservation to mental health, and even to reducing the chances of future pandemics. We also will discuss the role of habitat corridors in this process, as well as functions of One Health. So come and join us on Jan. 13 as we explore a "Corridor to the Future."



Nolan Bunting is a DVM student at CSU whose focus is wildlife pathology and One Health. He has been a naturalist for 10 years, leading tours for birding groups, classes, and educational programs.

NOTE: Due to the unpredictable nature of the pandemic, it may become necessary to cancel the in-person portion of our meeting and conduct the meeting entirely via Zoom. If you plan to attend the meeting in person, please check our website, Instagram, or Facebook page the day of the meeting to see if the in-person gathering has been canceled. We hope that won't be necessary.

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**FCAS welcomes new National Audubon Society members** by sending one complimentary copy of our newsletter. 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 to keep receiving it, please support your local chapter and subscribe. See details on the last page of the newsletter or on our website at [www.fortcollinsaudubon.org](http://www.fortcollinsaudubon.org).

January is a time when we make New Year's Resolutions, but instead of sharing mine with you I thought I'd instead report back on a resolution I made *last* year. I decided to devote myself to a Larimer County "Green Big Year" in 2021, meaning I tried to see as many bird species as possible without getting in a car. Leaving my Old Town Fort Collins house on foot or by bike, I spent the year concentrating on hotspots within 15 miles of home. I want to share a few takeaways from the year in the hopes of inspiring one or two of you to take up "green" birding in 2022.

The first thing I want to share is that this resolution probably did more for my health than all those times I started a new year vowing to get in better shape. Finding birds and keeping a species count was incredibly motivating for me. Unfortunately, I didn't log how many miles I rode on my bike, but I suspect it topped 1,000. Rides that I found tiring at the start of the year are now routine. I even found myself running more errands on the bike. And my iPhone tells me I also walked an average of 16 miles per week (not all of it birding, of course, but probably more than half).

The second great thing about the Green Big Year is that I felt really good about pursuing my passion with a reduced environmental impact. Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not laying a guilt trip on anyone who drives to their favorite hotspots to go birding. I've done that for many

years, I did it some in 2021, and I will continue to do it in the future, especially when rare birds make appearances. But for everyday outings, I think I am much more inclined now than I was a year ago to just walk or bike to someplace close and see whatever I see. Surrender myself, as I like to say, to the Bird Gods. And I think I'm also more appreciative now of the luxury of owning a car and being able to dash off to some place 20 miles away without a moment's hesitation or concern.

I don't expect many people to try a Green Big Year, but maybe the next time you want to go birding you'll think about whether there is a nice place within walking or biking distance and go there. Even if "more exciting" birds can be found farther afield, you'll feel good about getting some exercise and reducing your carbon footprint.

For those who like to keep score, my fellow FCAS Board Member, Jay Breidt, also did a Green Big Year in 2021 and both of us succeeded in seeing 200 species.



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Visit us on Facebook:

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

## Renew Your Membership Today

It is time to renew your annual membership. FCAS chapter memberships run for the calendar year from January through December. Dues are \$20 to receive the *Ptarmigan* electronically or \$30 for a printed copy through the mail. Please use the form on the back page of the newsletter to renew by mail or renew at a program meeting. You also can renew online at our website.



Renew

## FCAS Pocket Guide to Local Birds

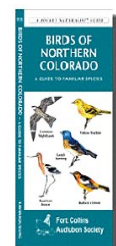
Is available at the following retailers who support our organization with the sales:

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



### Albatrosses Working as “Ocean Sentinels” Detect Fowl Play

In remote areas of the Southern Indian Ocean, researchers have discovered a new method for monitoring fishing vessels from a literal bird’s eye view. Over the course of six months, scientists studied a group of albatrosses as they traveled over large areas of ocean equipped with GPS trackers, enabling them to detect illegal fishing vessels.

Albatrosses are large seabirds capable of traveling extremely far distances over long periods of time. Some species may spend years at sea without ever touching dry land. They can detect fish from high elevations, allowing them to hunt effectively. Just 50 individuals together can cover eight million square miles of the ocean’s surface — an area twice the size of Europe.

Historically, GPS animal tracking has been used to better understand animal habitats and behaviors, such as migration patterns. More recently, this tracking method also is used for more practical purposes. Conserva-

tionists track marine animals, like albatrosses, to determine important sites for protection. Scientists at the French National Center for Scientific Research were curious if this same technology could be applied in other real-world operations.

Illegal fishing is a widespread and harmful practice. While operating unregulated, these vessels may overharvest and practice damaging and wasteful methods that excessively harm marine ecosystems. However, detecting these operations and enforcing fishing laws over waters that cover the majority of the Earth’s surface is a near-impossible task. Understanding that complex problems require creative solutions, the scientists wondered if nature’s sentinels, albatrosses, could be enlisted to the task.

Albatrosses would be cheaper and less detectable monitoring tools than planes or drones. They are attracted to fishing vessels as sources of food, which they can detect from nearly 20 miles away. Additionally,

they hunt in areas of the ocean that are difficult or impossible to patrol by ship, aircraft, or satellite.

Legal fishing operations identify themselves and their location using an automatic identification system (AIS). If a ship were to turn off AIS in a remote area, authorities would have no way of locating them. However, even ships that do not emit AIS still send out short-range radar signals to navigate. These signals could be detected within a few miles. That’s where the albatross sentinels come in. By comparing the locations identified by albatrosses with AIS data, researchers were able to

identify which ships were not emitting AIS and, therefore, were likely engaging in illegal fishing activity.

In a project titled, “Ocean Sentinel,” scientists equipped 169 albatrosses with GPS trackers, followed their movements, and collected radar detection data between December 2018 and June 2019. Altogether, the albatrosses covered 18 million square miles dur-



Albatross equipped with a GPS tracker. Photo by Alexandre Corbeau.

ing the study. They received over 5,100 radar detections corresponding to 353 different boats. Of these 353 boats, a staggering 28 percent were operating without AIS, and therefore were fishing illegally. Although there are some AIS-free operations near coastlines, the majority work in international waters where they are harder to detect. This study revealed that there is much that authorities do not know about illegal fishing, and much work to be done to better enforce fishing laws.

Although this study tackles one specific area of human threats to ecosystems, it may serve as a model for enacting similar methods elsewhere. Ocean Sentinel shows that engaging animals in their own conservation can be a unique and effective way to solve some of our most difficult environmental challenges. “All hands on deck” just might include wings and paws!





## The Gratitude of the Crow, et al.

When I first moved into my home, I noticed several American Crows (ACs) hanging out in the outer reaches of the back yard. After observing their behavior, it looked like they were two adults trying to encourage a younger AC on the ground to fly. I left them alone and



**American Crow**  
by Richard Herrington.

eventually they all left. Several days later I discovered a cleanly scraped young squirrel pelt placed on the ground next to the bottom bird bath. I choose to believe the pelt was placed there by an AC as a thank you for not harassing the trio as well as for providing a water

source for them. After doing some research, I found that gifting is a rather common crow behavior.

I had another visitation by three ACs recently and I wonder if they are the same three. It's possible; a wild crow was recorded living for over 15 years. However, their usual lifespan in the wild is six to 10 years. The ACs were trying to get the peanuts in the shell that I put out on the bird feeder for Blue Jays, but the ACs were too large to fit on the feeder and had to abandon their quest.

A memorable sighting last December was a Brant at Sheldon Lake in City Park in Fort Collins. As Brants do not normally winter here, it was a special occasion for local birders. Another highlight was noticing and

photographing an occupied Osprey nest on a cell phone tower near Costco. And last but not least, was the thrill of my first viewing of a male Northern Harrier that was hunting for prey over hills near Horsetooth Mountain. I have seen several brown females, so seeing the gray male was a special occasion.

I love the twice a day visits of Blue Jays to my back-yard bird feeder. They send out a scout who checks to see if there are peanuts available and, if so, the scout screeches to alert the rest of the tribe to come and get it! They seem to enjoy stealthily snatching the coveted peanuts. The Blue Jays' beautiful blue, white, and black coloration is especially cheering during the dull gray days of winter. In my opinion, they rank second only to the gorgeous male Mountain Bluebird in regards to beautiful blue hues.



**Brant and Cackling Goose**  
By Richard Herrington.

This New Year I am hoping for more species of birds to view while they visit the bird feeder, more rarities to come our way, and good weather, including more precipitation to nourish our wildlife, prairies, forests, and mountains.

If you would like to write an education article for the FCAS newsletter please contact Barbara Patterson at [bpatters1957@gmail.com](mailto:bpatters1957@gmail.com). We welcome new and aspiring authors!

## FCAS Welcomes New and Renewing Members

Dorothy Adel  
Susan Barbour  
Elaina Baughman  
Craig Benkman  
Lucie Bourdon  
Barbara Case  
Guy Cheatham  
Ann Colpitts  
Hillary Condit  
John Dietrich  
Bob Ellis

Margaret Ferguson  
Kathleen Hardy  
David Hartley  
Cecilia Huber  
Dorothy Hudson  
Kit Gray Illustration  
Linda Kotsides  
Ted Manahan  
Karen Mancini  
Judd Paterson  
Linda Pejchar

Timothy Priehs  
Ann Reichhardt  
John Reichhardt  
Brian Richmond  
Laurie Sada  
Barbara Seibert  
Joseph Sovcik  
Linda Squires  
Daniel Teska  
Cheri R. Ware  
Roger Wieck  
Lori Zabel



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.



## Species Highlight: Bushtit

To celebrate the New Year and 25<sup>th</sup> Great Backyard Bird Count, we will highlight a bird species in every newsletter this year, as well as on Facebook and Instagram. Want to submit a suggestion or photo? Email [nbunting@rams.colostate.edu](mailto:nbunting@rams.colostate.edu).

This month highlight is the Bushtit. The Bushtit is the only member of the *Aegithalidae* family found in the Americas. This gregarious bird is found in the mountains and foothills of Colorado in large flocks of 10 to



Male Bushtit by Darren Clark, Macaulay Library.

40 individuals. These flocks are stable, meaning they do not change often. Bushtits also are communal nesters with bachelor males acting as nest helpers for breeding pairs. Fun facts for this species: in cold weather Bushtits are known to huddle together for warmth, and males and females can be identified by eye color with males having black eyes and females having yellow eyes with black pupils.

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### Field Trips

All field trips are free (unless otherwise noted) and currently open to the public. All experience levels are welcome. Bring snacks or lunch, water, binoculars, and spotting scopes. Changes to dates, meeting times, locations, and trip leaders are occasionally unavoidable. To register for any trip, please visit the Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/123106328705>), Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/fcaudubon/>), or [fortcollinsaudubon.org](http://fortcollinsaudubon.org). Registrants are posted one week before the trip. Attendance is limited to a maximum of 14 individuals. Waitlisted individuals for a trip will be sent a link for the next available trip before registration is open.

**Jan. 22, Saturday, Colorado State University Environmental Learning Center.** Leader: Nolan Bunting, [nbunting@rams.colostate.edu](mailto:nbunting@rams.colostate.edu), (907)2994625. Meet at 9:30 a.m. in the parking lot of the Environmental Learning Center. We will be looking for forest birds and potential cavities for nesting owls.

**Feb. 18–21, Friday–Monday, The 25<sup>th</sup> Great Backyard Bird Count.** For the last 25 years, the Great Backyard Bird Count has monitored bird populations around the world through citizen science. From Uganda to Alaska, people submit eBird lists and photos to help scientists better understand bird populations.

We encourage you to participate in this great event either as an individual or in a group. Instructions to participate can be found at this website <https://www.birdcount.org/participate/>.

### CBC Thank You

Thank you to everyone who participated in the 122<sup>nd</sup> Christmas Bird Count. Your contributions help form conservation policies, monitor changes in bird populations, and promote conservation of the birds we all love. Highlights will be in the February *Ptarmigan*.



Photos from the December FCAS meeting. Lazuli Bunting by Judy Holt (left). Harris Sparrow by Roger Wieck (right).



Fort Collins Audubon Society  
PO Box 271968  
Fort Collins, CO 80527-1968



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### Membership Application

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

- |  |         |  |
|--|---------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> New or renewing FCAS Chapter Member<br>Receive the FCAS <i>Ptarmigan</i> by email | \$ 20   | Name: _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New or renewing FCAS Chapter Member<br>Receive the FCAS <i>Ptarmigan</i> by mail  | \$ 30   | Address: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime FCAS Chapter Member<br>Receive FCAS <i>Ptarmigan</i> by mail or email    | \$750   | City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Additional support for FCAS programs  | \$ ____ | Phone: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Additional support for Alex Cringan Fund<br>(natural history education grants)    | \$ ____ | Email: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New NAS member<br>Receive the NAS <i>Audubon</i> by mail                          | \$ 20   | May we send you FCAS email alerts if updates occur for field trips, programs, etc.? Yes or No                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Renewing NAS member<br>Receive the NAS <i>Audubon</i> by mail                     | \$ 35   | May we contact you for volunteer activities such as helping at 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](http://www.fortcollinsaudubon.org).