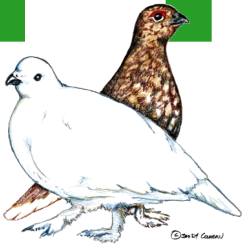


PTARMIGAN



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.

January 2023

Volume 55, Issue 1

FCAS Hosts

Virginia Rose, Founder of Birdability

Speaking Virtually on "The Joy and Empowerment of Birding"

Thursday, January 12

Social Time with Light Refreshments: 7 p.m.; Announcements: 7:20 p.m.

Virtual Presentation: 7:30 p.m.

Door Prize Drawing*

Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Dr.

This program will be online using Zoom and viewable in-person at the Senior Center

Enter the following link at 7 p.m. to join the meeting virtually:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86853389778>

Virginia Rose is the founder of Birdability. In 1973, at age 14, she was paralyzed in a horseback-riding accident and has used a manual wheelchair ever since. Twenty years ago she discovered birding and her life changed. Seeing no other disabled people birding, she decided to find them and introduce them to birding. In her talk she will discuss the difficulties, the joys, the Birdability Map, and the



Virginia Rose, photo by Mike Fernandez.

steps she took — and steps you can take — to make birding accessible for everybody and *every* body!

Join us in-person at the Fort Collins Senior Center on Jan. 12. We will have light refreshments available as you virtually watch Virginia's riveting story, or you can watch the program via Zoom that same evening. The program will not be recorded. And remember, you must be present at the Senior Center to be eligible for the door prize drawing!

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 if you'd like 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.



President's Corner

by John Shenot

I'm very happy to report that I retired in December 2022. I could mark the occasion by writing a column explaining everything I hope to do with all my newly free time, but instead I want to write a column about my hopes for the future of FCAS.

My vision for FCAS is that everyone feels welcome, that appreciation of the natural world increases, and that our organization plays a larger role in the communities of Northern Colorado. We've made a concerted effort in recent years to be more relevant to more people. I doubt if our members know all the innovative things our committee chairs have done, so let me mention a few that didn't get enough attention. We've started mapping birding hotspots for "birdability" so people with mobility challenges can decide where best to enjoy local wildlife (see page 1 for a related January guest presentation). We co-sponsored a bird walk for the blind, an introduction to birding for school children, and scholarships for students doing avian research. We reached out to younger adults with fundraisers that were fun (Birdcall Karaoke is a hit) and partnered with a local brewery to promote the Poudre River Important Bird Area (thanks Horse & Dragon). We've achieved gender equity on our Board of Directors and brought more young people into leadership roles.

But without question, there is more work to do. We

haven't done enough to make FCAS more racially diverse. We expanded our boundaries a year ago to encompass Estes Park and parts of Weld County, but haven't

yet offered programs or services to people in those communities. And the important work of conserving and enhancing natural habitats and protecting wildlife is a job that never ends. I welcome input from members about how we can achieve these goals and how we can better serve you. I'll also note that we'd love to have more volunteers on our Education Committee and our Conservation Committee. Please reach out if you want to help.



It's Time to Renew Your Membership

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: www.fortcollinsaudubon.org. Remember, your membership and contributions are tax deductible, and help make our programs possible.

If you renewed September – December 2021, your membership will expire the end of January 2023. Thank you to all those who have already renewed. We appreciate your support!



Renew

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Visit us on Facebook:

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

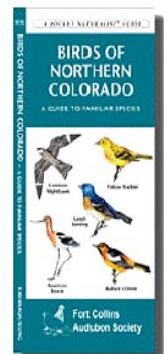
FCAS Pocket Guide to Local Birds

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 Loveland West
Outdoor Gear
2665W. Eisenhower
(970) 667-7375

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



Lesser Prairie-Chicken Listed as Endangered

The news in November that the Lesser Prairie-Chicken finally has received listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is actually a positive step. It will allow critical support for this iconic grassland species that once numbered in the millions within its' historic range across the five states of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Kansas.

Population monitoring has shown this species in decline for decades, with various voluntary efforts failing to halt the losses. Land conversion, loss of native habitat, the increase in industrial agriculture, and climate change have accelerated the threats to this beautiful bird that has fared much worse than its' larger, darker cousin, the Greater Prairie-Chicken. The northern and southern populations of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken are managed separately by the USFWS. The southern distinct population has been listed as endangered, but the northern population is listed as threatened because it is doing slightly better. Federal listing under the ESA provides clear protection by prohibiting anyone from directly or indirectly harming a species, requiring development of a recovery plan, and identification of critical habitat needed for the species survival. Endangered status means that much more than voluntary conservation measures are required and that activities that harm the birds can be excluded from portions of the landscape where they are most at risk. It also means that large investments will be made to improve grasslands, and this is a "win" for all.

The Lesser Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) is a member of the grouse family found in arid, grassland ecosystems of the southern Great Plains short-grass, mixed grass prairie, which is interspersed with shrubs of shinny oak (Harvard and Mohr's oak) and sand sagebrush. Prairie chickens gather on boom-

ing grounds or leks in the early spring for courtship, with the males dancing, stomping, cackling, and vocalizing or "booming" through air sacs on the neck to attract the females. This species is particularly sensitive to any vertical structures in the landscape near the leks and breeding grounds, such as trees, power lines, drilling rigs, wind turbines, and barbed wire fences. Recovery plans must include large unbroken stretches of prairie habitat with healthy stands of native bunchgrass, bluestem, flowering plants, and low shrubs.

Many tools are available to the USFWS to restore the grasslands to habitat suitable for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken that will also benefit landowners, the energy industry, cattle ranchers, and even assist with

goals to combat climate change. Conservation and sustainable ranching programs provide support for livestock producers to rebuild habitat by improving fences, reducing overgrazing through rotational grazing, protecting water sources and aquifers, and reducing stocking rates during droughts. The energy industry (both

fossil fuel and renewable) will only be allowed to develop resources outside of ideal habitat and can use an "Incidental Taking Permit" that allows them to mitigate predicted impacts of energy development by restoring prairie chicken habitat in areas most suitable for their success. Healthier grasslands will improve the soil and water quality and lead to greater potential for carbon sequestration, which is a boon for the

climate crisis. Cooperation among private landowners, and industry and federal land managers will be key as well as a long-term commitment to restoring this species. Though there is a long way to go, we hope that serious action to preserve this species will yield the desired result, allowing people in the future to step into the short grass prairie before dawn, in very early spring, to experience the magical booming and courtship of the dancing Lesser Prairie-Chickens on the lek.



Lesser Prairie-Chicken males by Liza Rossi of Colorado Parks and Wildlife



Female Lesser Prairie-Chicken (foreground) from biographic Forbes Magazine



Meet The New Bird

The first bird to greet me in my new home in Fort Collins about 10 years ago was the beautiful Western Meadowlark. This bird was not a stranger to me. Growing up, I admired the exquisite melody of this beautiful bird having become acquainted with it on trips way out to the country (which I realized later was not as far from the city as my childhood imagining).

I lived in the mountains before moving to Fort Collins, so for about 25 years the melody of the Western Meadowlark was a rare treat. Now they were sitting atop my house serenading me. I wanted to do something to give back to this bird, a resident of this space before me, so the backyard was planted in buffalo and blue grama grasses, in hope they would eat the native grass seed. I was so surprised the first time a small flock of them visited my black oil sunflower seed feeder.

Members of the blackbird family, there are now three species of Meadowlark: Western, Eastern, and the newly described Chihuahuan. The American Ornithological Society, in its 63rd supplement to the *Checklist of North American Birds*, has split out this new species from the Eastern Meadowlark. Johanna Beam, now a PhD student at Penn State, made the proposal based on vocal analysis and whole-genome sequencing while an undergrad at CU Boulder.

While doing research for this article, I listened to the three songs of the Meadowlark species on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology site. Each species song differs, but according to Nathan Pieplow, the species will learn each other's songs. In a *CoBirds* article, he recommends re-

cording the song and getting photos of the head and spread tail to identify the species. The markings vary, with the Chihuahuan Meadowlark having four white

outer rectrices (tail feathers), whereas the Western and Eastern Meadowlark's three outer rectrices are white. The sides of the Chihuahuan Meadowlark sport markings that are more dots than streaks. It also has a paler face and mantle than the other two species, and is described on the Cornell Lab site as a sun-bleached look.

The Chihuahuan Meadowlark breeds in grasslands in Arizona, New Mexico, and into Mexico. The common name comes from part of the breeding range falling in the Chihuahuan Desert. There is also a breeding population in southwestern Colorado. More studies are needed on this population. I hope to be lucky enough to become



Chihuahuan Meadowlark by Alan Schmierer, Flickr

acquainted with

Eastern and Chihuahuan Meadowlarks in the near future.

Fort Collins Audubon is always appreciative of our newsletter authors! If you would like to write an education article for the *Ptarmigan*, please contact Sheila Webber at 13sheilaw@gmail.com.



Eastern Meadowlark by Alastair Rae, Wikimedia Commons



Western Meadowlark by Sheila Webber

FCAS Welcomes New and Renewing Members

Mr. & Mrs. Randy Fischer	Carla Johns	Harry Rose
Alan Godwin	Carol Jones	John Shenot
Robert P. Godwin	James Kuhn	David Sitzman
Larry Griffin	Robin Long	Joseph Sovcik
Craig Harrison	Carolyn Mahakian	K. Roxanne Squires
Clifford Hendrick	Karen Mancini	Linda Squires
Steven R. Hokansson	James DeMartini	Danette Vassilopoulos
Justin Hollis	Michelle McKim	Greg Vassilopoulos
Joel Hurmence	James J. Nachel	Roger Wieck
Gina C. Janett		

Your support makes our programs and conservation efforts possible and helps us achieve our mission of connecting people to the natural world.



Upcoming Field Trips

All field trips are free (unless otherwise noted) and are currently open to the public. All experience levels are welcome. Bring snacks or lunch, water, binoculars, and spotting scopes. Please understand that 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 for a link to registration that will be posted one week before the scheduled trip. Due to Covid, attendance is limited to a maximum of 12 individuals. Waitlisted individuals for a trip will be sent a link for the next available trip before registration is open to the public. Bobcat Ridge surveys do not require registration.

Jan. 8, Sunday, Bobcat Ridge Survey. Leader: Denise Bretting, dbretting@swloveland.com or 970-402-1292. The survey looks at bird populations and helps local scientists better understand bird dynamics. The little more than four-mile hike covers moderate to flat terrain. No registration required and there is no participation limit, but please email or text Denise that you plan to attend. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in Bobcat Ridge parking lot.

Jan. 13, Friday, Red Fox Meadows Natural Area. Leader: John Shenot, johnshenot@gmail.com, 802-595-1669. This local natural area gets little attention from birders, but in recent winters some uncommon to rare species have been seen here, including Cassin's Finch, Harris's Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, and American Woodcock. Trails are unpaved and mostly flat, but may be icy. The field trip will start at 9 a.m., weather and trail conditions permitting. A link to register for the



Northern Cardinal
by Elle Pollard.

trip will be sent a week prior. Those who sign up will be notified of where to meet.

Jan. 22, Sunday, Pawnee Grassland and Raptors. Leader: Nolan Bunting, nbuntingt@rams.colostate.edu, 907-299-4625. This is a trip to one of the most amazing ecosystems on planet earth. The Pawnee Grasslands during the winter is home to a large variety of birds, including Lapland Longspurs, Rough-legged Hawks, and Northern Shrikes. This trip will cover some of the highlights of the grassland, including Crow Valley Campground, parts of the Pawnee Birding Trail, and Raptor Alley, weather conditions permitting. The trip begins at 8:30 a.m. and will likely go until 2 or 3 p.m. Please pack a lunch and be prepared for some driving and birding. A link to register for the trip will be sent a week prior. Those who sign up will be notified of where to meet.

Interested in leading a Birding Trip? Have an idea for a trip? Email nbuntingt@rams.colostate.edu if you would like to volunteer or suggest a trip.

Hotspot Highlight

This year's newsletters will include a Hotspot Highlight, which will include a description of a birding hotspot, the kinds of birds you can see, and will be related to the time of year. Want to submit a suggestion or photo? Email nbuntingt@rams.colostate.edu.

This month highlight is Fossil Creek Reservoir. This reservoir is a fantastic location for birders to explore in the winter and is a designated Important Bird Area. Much of the reservoir remains unfrozen year-round, attracting



Northern Pintails by Jay Breidt.

Bald Eagles and wintering waterfowl such as Buffleheads, Northern Pintails, and Goldeneyes. The land is mostly tall grasses that attract birds like Horned Larks and the occasional hawk. The area has paved and unpaved trails that allow access to the large body of water. Spotting scopes are recommended, but not required for this amazing location. Just remember to look at the far shore and east banks for the most birds.

Thanks to everyone that participated in the Christmas Bird Count. This citizen science project is one of the oldest in the nation and helps with the conservation and preservation of many bird species.



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.

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Receive the FCAS <i>Ptarmigan</i> by email | \$ 20 | Name: _____ |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> | Lifetime FCAS Chapter Member
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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