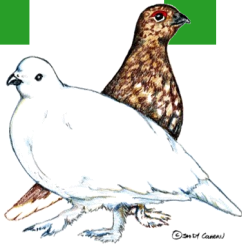


# PTARMIGAN



Northern Colorado Bird Alliance

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

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

May 2026

Volume 58, Issue 5

**Northern Colorado Bird Alliance Hosts Dr. Rebecca Safran Presenting:  
“Barn Swallows and Humans: The Rise and Fall of Coexistence in a Changing World”  
Thursday, May 14**

**Social time with Refreshments: 7 p.m.; Announcements: 7:20; Presentation: 7:30  
Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Dr.**

**This program will be online via Zoom. Enter the following at 7 p.m. to join the meeting:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86310595299>.**

When humans began constructing permanent settlements during the Holocene some 10,000 years ago, they established new ecological niches for the animals and plants whose distributions expanded alongside their own. The Barn Swallow is one of those species whose expansion tracks with human settlement patterns and now is one of the most widespread species of bird on our planet encompassing breeding populations on both hemispheres and all but two continents. Artefacts from ancient human civilizations portray an enduring story between humans and Barn Swallows. This longstanding shared history of humans and Barn Swallows living side-by-side in our built environment is changing again dramatically. Throughout many parts of their widespread range, Barn Swallows



**Barn Swallow by Joesph Webber.**

are declining. Dr. Safran will highlight her research lab’s long-term comparative studies of Barn Swallows throughout their entire range spanning the northern hemisphere and Middle East, and examine their precipitous decline.

Dr. Safran is a professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Colorado where her research group focuses on questions related to the evolution of new species using ecological, genomics, and behav-

ioral studies. She is the founding co-director of Inside the Greenhouse, whose mission is to adapt creative ways to communicate the science of climate change, with the goal of inspiring hope and solution-based narratives.

Join us on May 14 for this informative program that is free and open to the public.

**Northern Colorado Bird Alliance 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 Northern Colorado Bird Alliance. 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.nocobirdalliance.org](http://www.nocobirdalliance.org).

## President's Corner — by John Shenot

Most of our members will recall that the chapter does not host programs or publish a newsletter during the summer months. After this month's program on May 14 (see article on page 1), we won't meet again until September 10. You should get our next newsletter in the final days of August.

Throughout the summer, we will continue to host field trips, offer educational events, and spread the word about bird conservation at local community festivals. We will announce field trips and possibly other events by sending an email to our members and posting notifications on our Instagram and Facebook accounts. Throughout the entire year, following us on social media is a great way to get timely information about what the chapter is doing.

You can also expect one really big change to happen this summer. I'm now confident that the chapter will be launching our completely revamped website sometime in the next three months. I know I've promised this before, but it's turned out to be harder than our little team of busy volunteers expected. In addition to redesigning the style and format and updating content, we've had to learn how to use software for building a website. We're almost there!

If you have ideas or questions or want to get more involved in the Bird Alliance, please send us an email. You'll find some of the most requested email addresses in the contact box on page 2 of this newsletter. Have a great summer!

## Happy Summer!



### Northern Colorado Bird Alliance Welcomes New and Renewing Members.

Robert Blinderman  
Jacqueline Brown  
Richard Brown  
Tyler Facto  
Julie Hellman  
Laurie Kleepies  
Tad Leeper  
Ellis Lusi  
Debbie Mayer  
Barbara Patterson  
Rich Roberts  
Ryan Wakeley

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



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Visit us on Facebook:

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

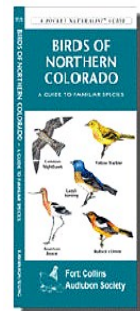
#### Pocket Guide to Local Birds

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



## Sentries of the Bellvue Dome

The imposing silhouette of a Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) has been a common sight in the area currently known as Bellvue, Colorado for decades. It is very likely that generations of humans living in this area have looked up at the imposing Bellvue Dome in awe, watching the annual nesting activity of the eagles along the cliff face. And it is certain that generations of cottontail rabbits have lived in terror every time a shadow passes overhead.

Golden Eagles are one of the largest members of the Accipiter family, with females weighing up to 11 lbs. (5.1 kg.) and sporting a wingspan up to 7 feet (2.34 meters). They also have one of the widest distributions of any eagle, being found across the American west and north, the vast majority of northern and central Asia, northern Europe, and the Mediterranean/North Africa. The key feature that allows them to inhabit all of these areas is the Golden Eagles' overwhelming desire to nest on cliff faces. The benefits of such a nesting site are easy to see when you stare up to massive pile of sticks protruding from a sheer rock face hundreds of feet in the sky; nothing is getting to those eggs without a struggle.

The Bellvue Dome is an ideal nesting site for a pair of Golden Eagles, formed during the Laramide Orogeny (the same geological event that created the Black Hills of the Dakotas) 70 – 55 million years ago. The Dome (also called Goat Hill) gradually inclines on the eastern side, rising up to a sheer drop off above the Poudre River below. The area is teeming and

abundant with life: deer, otters, beavers, rabbits, and 237 recorded bird species. The apex predator of this area is the Golden Eagle, standing sentry on the cliff face, with plenty of food below.

The Bellvue-Watson trout rearing facility began operation in the area in 1968, drawing visitors and another large raptor, the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). This makes the site very special as you can easily see both species of North American eagle in the same outing.

Nesting on a cliff has its drawbacks though. In 1994, a young eagle was found at the base of the cliff with a broken humerus. Fortunately, he was found and taken to the Rocky Mountain Raptor Center where he was able to be treated. Sadly, he was unable to regain the range of motion needed for successful sustained flight, but his calm nature and charisma allowed him to remain as an ambassador for the public; a role he served for over 30 years. He was named Watson, after the site where he was found.

The global estimate for Golden Eagle population is 130,000. In the United States they are protected by the 1962 Bald and Golden Eagle Act. But their greatest threats come from human related activity, with collisions taking the greatest toll along with lead poisoning from scavenged hunter kills.

At the time of this writing there is a pair currently brooding at the Bellvue Dome site.



Golden Eagle by Joseph Webber.



Golden Eagle sprucing up the nest by Joseph Webber.



Golden Eagle chasing a turkey by Joseph Webber.

## Bobcat Ridge Natural Area – A Look Back and to the Future



From Yelp.com.

As of this fall, Bobcat Ridge Natural Area will have been opened to the public for 20 years. The City of Fort Collins purchased the

property from a trust established by long-time Loveland residents D. R. and Ginny Pulliam in 2003, and opened the property for hiking, mountain-biking, and horse-back riding three years later.

Bird surveys of the property, though somewhat irregular at first, were conducted under the auspices of Fort Collins Audubon Society (now Northern Colorado Bird Alliance) and the City of Fort Collins



August 2011 Survey by Lynn Matson.

parking area.

High winds have also left their mark on the property. Many of the burned trees still standing have fallen in the last several months. Even live Ponderosa trees snapped off a few months ago in very high winds. We are now in the middle of a serious drought. This natural area has experienced much from Mother Nature in the last three decades.

Bobcat Ridge is now more foothills meadow than forest; perhaps we will see more grassland birds than nut-hatches and chickadees. Bird surveys in the past several months have included many Wild Turkeys; Mountain and Western Bluebirds; seven species of sparrows, not counting juncos (Chipping, Clay-colored, Lark, Vesper, Song, Brewer's, Grasshopper, American Tree, and

White-crowned); Northern Shrikes; Peregrine and Prairie Falcons; American Kestrels; Blue Grosbeaks; three wren species (House, Rock, and Canyon); Gray Catbirds; Dickcissels; a Lewis's Wood-



Bobcat Power Line Fire December 2016 by Mark Bretting.

pecker; and an Ash-throated Flycatcher. We also have seen interesting mammal, insect, reptile, and plant species on our surveys over the years, including elk, mule and white-tailed deer, coyotes, rock squirrel, plains lubber grasshoppers, tent caterpillars, milk snakes, rattlesnakes, whorled milkweed, and Rocky Mountain bee plant.

Time will show how changing habitat impacts bird numbers and species. Bobcat Ridge Natural Area is clearly not a static place — it will continue to change, and we will be there to view these changes first-hand through our ongoing bird surveys. Come join us.

starting soon after the land was purchased. At least 160 volunteers have participated in the dozens of bird surveys held over the years. That's an impressive track record many of us are part of and of which we can all be proud.

The 2000 Bobcat Fire was likely one of the motivating reasons behind the City's acquisition of this property. Several wildfires have occurred on the property since then, particularly the most devastating 2020 Cameron Peak Fire; it spread through about 85 percent of the property. Flooding followed a year or two later, necessitating clean-up and water mitigating changes in the



Burned cottonwoods and live ponderosa April 2026 by Denise Bretting.



## May and Summer Field Trips

All field trips are free and open to the public. Anyone at any experience level is welcome. Bring snacks or lunch, water, binoculars, and/or spotting scopes. Changes to dates, meeting times, locations, and trip leaders are occasionally unavoidable. To register for most trips, please see posts at [www.facebook.com/NoCoBirdAlliance](https://www.facebook.com/NoCoBirdAlliance), our Instagram page, or member emails sent out 1-2 weeks in advance of each trip. When announced, links will also be posted at [lnk.bio/nocobirdalliance](https://lnk.bio/nocobirdalliance). Attendance may be limited. With comments or questions, contact Amy at [fieldtrips@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:fieldtrips@nocobirdalliance.org). Additional trips and events may be added throughout the summer. Keep an eye on email and/or social media posts for updates or additional field trips.

**May 10, Sunday, Bobcat Ridge Survey.** Leader: Denise Bretting, [dbretting@swloveland.com](mailto: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 4-mile hike covers moderate to flat terrain with some steep sections. No registration required and there is no participation limit, but please email or text Denise that you plan to attend. Meet at 6:30 a.m. in the Bobcat Ridge parking lot. The trip may be cancelled, rescheduled, or relocated if trails are closed.

**May 23, Saturday, Accessible Walk in Loveland.** Location TBD, current top options would be Centennial Park or Boyd Lake State Park. Leaders: Amy Roush, [fieldtrips@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:fieldtrips@nocobirdalliance.org), Frank Morgan, and Kellie Baer. At either location, the path is a paved hike-and-bike trail, and we'd take a two-hour wander beginning at 9 a.m. at a slow walk. More details will be sent out with a signup link by early May.

**May 24, Sunday, Young Gulch.** Leader: Sirena Brownlee, [sirena.brownlee@hdrinc.com](mailto:sirena.brownlee@hdrinc.com), 970-980-6184. A unique opportunity to explore post-fire habitat along the scenic Young Gulch Trail in Poudre Canyon. Target species include Lewis's Woodpecker and Olive-sided Flycatcher, along with other species commonly found in these environments such as Mountain Bluebird, Western Wood-Pewee, Virginia's Warbler, Hairy Woodpecker, and Red-naped Sapsucker. Riparian areas along Young Gulch Creek attract a variety of warblers and vireos. This moderately challenging hike follows a narrow, rocky trail with several creek crossings and uneven terrain. Meet at the Young Gulch Trailhead at 8 a.m. Be prepared for variable weather conditions. Sirena can take four additional people in her vehicle, and carpooling is encouraged. Signup for Young Gulch will be sent out on May 10.

**May 26, Tuesday, Reservoir Ridge Natural Area.** Leader: John Shenot, [president@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:president@nocobirdalliance.org), 802-595-1669. This Fort Collins Natural Area is the most reliable location in Larimer County to find beautiful, bubbly Bobolinks. Reservoir Ridge also offers good habitat for grassland species such as Western Meadowlarks, Vesper and Grasshopper Sparrows, and Blue Grosbeaks. We'll start at 6 p.m. for an evening bird walk and cover about 2.2 miles on a flat, soft surface trail. Meet at the parking lot on Overland Trail. Signup for Reservoir Ridge will be released May 19.

**June 7, Sunday, Well Gulch Nature Trail Lory State Park.** Leader: Sirena Brownlee, [sirena.brownlee@hdrinc.com](mailto:sirena.brownlee@hdrinc.com), 970-980-6184. Abundant wild plum thickets and other native shrubs provide habitat for a variety of migrant and resident foothills birds. This walk will focus on nesting birds. In previous years we have seen nesting Cedar Waxwings, Cordilleran Flycatcher, and Blue Grosbeak. Meet at the Eltuck Group Picnic Area at 7:30 a.m. for a one-mile moderate hike. State park passes are required. Bring water, snacks, and sunscreen. The trail is rough, uneven, and slippery in some sections. Signup will be sent out around the end of May.



Blue Grosbeak by Fi Rust.

**July, date and location TBD, possible alpine birding trip, Lory State Park Summer Programs.** We will lead walks in collaboration with

Lory State Park throughout the summer. The walks are free to attend, but a valid state park pass is required. Registration is done through the Lory State Park visitor center: 970.493.1623 or [dnr\\_lory\\_park@state.co.us](mailto:dnr_lory_park@state.co.us).

Registration for the first Lory State Park summer program begins May 1 and will be Birding 101 on **May 16** at 7:30 a.m. with Lori Pivonka, 970.222.9029. If you are fairly new to birding, this is a good program for you. At home, please download the free app, "Merlin Bird ID," from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Lori will cover birding gear, guides, visual and auditory identification tips, and online resources. The program ends at approximately 9 a.m., but could go longer.

More Lory State Park programs later in the summer may include Birding by Ear, What Birds Eat, Mindful Birding, and others. Keep an eye out for additional announcements from the Birding Alliance or Lory State Park channels.

Northern Colorado Bird Alliance  
PO Box 271968  
Fort Collins, CO 80527-1968



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## Membership Application

Join Northern Colorado Bird Alliance (the chapter), National Audubon Society (NAS), or both.

- New or renewing chapter member \$ 20 Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Receive the *Ptarmigan* by email
- New or renewing chapter member \$ 30 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Receive the *Ptarmigan* by mail
- Lifetime chapter member \$750 City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Receive *Ptarmigan* by mail or email
- Additional support for chapter programs \$ \_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
- Additional support for Alex Cringan Fund \$ \_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
(natural history education grants)
- New NAS member \$ 20 May we send you chapter 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:** \$ \_\_\_

Make tax-exempt checks payable to Northern Colorado Bird Alliance and mail this form to Northern Colorado Bird Alliance, 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.nocobirdalliance.org](http://www.nocobirdalliance.org).