

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.

March 2016

Volume 47, Issue 3

FCAS Presents

David Leatherman—Birder, Entomologist, Writer

"Fox Squirrel—Cutest Devil On The Block"

Thursday, March 10, 2016

Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Dr.

Social Time: 7 p.m.; Program 7:30 p.m.

Dave Leatherman will explore the local life history of the Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*). Whether you love 'em or hate 'em, you have to be amazed at the variety of things they do. Dave will discuss how they affect other animals, shape tree architecture, challenge bird feeders, and, at this moment, are probably trying to hack your computer.

Dave Leatherman served as the forest entomologist for the Colorado State Forest Service from 1974 to 2005 during which his major responsibilities included all aspects of Mountain Pine Beetle, teaching, and surveys. He is an avid birder, active in the Colorado Field Ornithologists, has seen 445 species



Fox Squirrel by David Leatherman.

in the state, and has been part of finding three first state records. Dave says his favorite bird is the Blackburnian Warbler, along with crossbills, shrikes, Canyon Wren, vireos, pelagic species, and the Merlin. Dave said his interest in arboreal squirrels, of which the Fox Squirrel is one, was inevitable when a person spends as much looking at and into trees as he does.

Join us March 10 at the Fort Collins Senior Center for an evening to learn the virtues of

fox squirrels as presented by Dave Leatherman. Dave invites you to bring your favorite squirrel story or recipe to share. This free program is open to the public.

Welcome New National Members

FCAS welcomes new National Audubon Society members by sending one complimentary copy of our newsletter. 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 the newsletter, so to keep receiving the *Ptarmigan*, please subscribe to the newsletter. See the details on the last page of the newsletter or on our website at www.fortcollinsaudubon.org.

President's Corner

by John Shenot

One of our top priorities for 2016 is to expand our membership ranks. By now, most of you have renewed your FCAS membership for 2016. I thank you for that, but now I want to enlist your help in recruiting new members.

Do you have friends who are interested in birds, other wildlife, or conservation, but are not FCAS members? I'll bet you do! In fact, there are several hundred members of the National Audubon Society (NAS) who are assigned to our chapter but are not full members of our chapter. I know that many people are confused by this distinction, so I will explain. In the simplest terms, ignoring some minor details, the difference is that NAS members get the beautiful NAS magazine, but not the FCAS newsletter. FCAS members

get the newsletter, but not the magazine. Dues for NAS membership go almost entirely to the national organization, with an extremely small portion returned to the local chapter (in this case, FCAS), while dues for FCAS stay entirely within our chapter and our community. Many of us see good value in being a member of both NAS and FCAS.

So, for starters, talk to your friends about FCAS. Ask them if they are members, and tell them why you are. Invite them to join you on one of our field trips, or at a chapter meeting. And if they say they are already an Audubon member, ask if they are also an FCAS member and explain the difference.

FCAS Annual Membership Renewal

Memberships run from January to December, so please renew your FCAS membership for 2016. It's easy to renew online via PayPal at our website: www.fortcollinsaudubon.org or use the form on the back page of the newsletter to renew by mail or at a program meeting. Dues are \$20 to receive the *Ptarmigan* electronically or \$30 for a printed copy through the mail. Membership and contributions are tax deductible. Thanks to all who have already renewed.

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www.fortcollinsaudubon.org

Visit us on Facebook:

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

PLIGHT OF THE GRASSLAND BIRDS

Film Screening and Panel Discussion

Thursday, March 31
Doors open 5:30 p.m.
Film at 6 p.m.

Fort Collins Museum
of Discovery

Tickets are free, but registration is required at

www.fcmod.org or 970-221-6738.



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



Spring Fever Returns (Along with the Birds)

As we spring forward in March (Vernal Equinox is March 19) and gain more evening daylight (daylight savings time returns Sunday, March 13), many Coloradans begin to feel the pangs of spring fever.

For birders, spring fever often equates to first-of-year sightings (FOY)—evidence that spring is truly returning. Although this winter has been harsh in terms of cold and snow, many of nature’s cycles are controlled more by day length than by temperature. Spring migrations are underway, and here in Colorado there are several “must-see” migrations in the months of March and April.

Every year, approximately 20,000 Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*) descend upon Colorado’s San Luis Valley to rest and refuel before continuing their northward migration. One of three main staging areas located in Colorado, along with the Yampa River near Hayden and the Elk River west of Steamboat Springs, the San Luis Valley hosts a celebration of the cranes’ return in March. This year’s celebration will be March 11-13 at the Monte Vista Wildlife Refuge (<http://mvcranefest.org/2016-festival>). Sandhill Cranes are occasionally spotted flying overhead and in fields and lakes around Fort Collins during spring migration. In 2005, Nick Komar (*Colorado Birds* 39(1):15-16) reported a Sandhill Crane nesting in Larimer County.

Beginning in mid-March and throughout April, Mountain Plovers (*Charadrius montanus*) return to the eastern grasslands of Colorado for breeding from their winter ranges in California, southern Arizona, Texas, and Mexico. Mountain Plovers can best be seen on the Pawnee and Comanche National Grasslands of eastern Colorado. Even though nearly half of the population of Mountain Plovers nests in Colorado, they are

difficult to see because of their coloration and behavior (hence their nickname “prairie ghost”). The best chances for viewing plovers are in bare agricultural fields, cattle-grazing and gathering



Sandhill Cranes from southern-colorado-guide.com

areas near water tanks, freshly burned fields, and prairie dog colonies. The town of Karval, Colorado, hosts an annual Mountain Plover Festival every April. The festival provides optimum viewing of Mountain Plovers on private ranch tours. This year the festival will be held April 29 through May 1. For information visit <http://www.karval.org>.

Swainson’s Hawks (*Buteo swainsoni*) also return to the grasslands of

eastern Colorado in early-to-mid-April from their wintering grounds in Argentina. They breed throughout the eastern plains of Colorado in grassland and lowland riparian areas, and often are seen perching atop fence posts and utility poles along country roads.

If you don’t want to or aren’t able to travel, you’re in luck. Soapstone Prairie Natural Area is a prime area for viewing all types of wildlife, including Swainson’s Hawks and Mountain Plovers.



Mountain Plover from en.wikipedia.org

For information about Soapstone, visit <http://www.fcgov.com/naturalareas/finder/soapstone>.

Spring is just around the corner and with it, one of nature’s greatest shows on Earth: spring migration. March—time to spring into birding!



Name That Bird

I used to assume that when the common name of a bird species included someone’s surname that it indicated the person who first documented the species or recognized it as distinct from some other species. Whoever that Cassin guy was (Cassin’s Sparrow, Finch, Kingbird, Vireo, and Auklet), I reasoned, he sure had a knack for details!

In fact, the real story is more interesting and in my opinion more honorable. Common names of bird species that include a person’s name are usually a tribute by the discoverer of the species to a loved one, a colleague, an historical figure, or a noteworthy star in the ornithological firmament.



Thomas Mayo Brewer from en.wikipedia.org

Take, for example, the case of noted Boston ornithologist, Thomas Mayo Brewer. On an expedition in 1843, John James Audubon himself identified for the first time a blackbird that he named Brewer’s Blackbird as a tribute to his colleague. In 1856, another of their colleagues, John Cassin, was sorting through skins of Clay-colored Sparrows when he realized one of them was from a previously unknown species. Was it Cassin’s Sparrow? Of course not! It was Brewer’s Sparrow!

So what about Cassin? He is credited with the

initial descriptions of almost 200 new bird species from around the world, not one of which bears his name. Cassin’s Finch was named by Spencer Baird, Cassin’s Kingbird by George Lawrence, and Cassin’s Vireo by John Xantus.

Each of those men were, in turn, honored by others who included their names in the common names of, for example, Baird’s Sparrow, Lawrence’s Goldfinch, and Xantus’s Hummingbird.



Brewer’s Sparrow from www.pinterest.com

I guess some people might consider this a kind of “old boys club.” (It is true that few species are named in honor of female ornithologists, and none that I know of in North America, but I consider that an historical artifact.) I choose instead to think of these common name tributes as the interesting legacy of honorable men who respected their colleagues and their considerable contributions to the emerging field of ornithology. There are so many people honored in this way, each with their own story. I encourage you to dig into the rich history of American ornithologists. Find out for yourself, who was that Wilson guy of Phalarope, Plover, Snipe, Storm-Petrel, and Warbler fame?

Upcoming Field Trips

March 12, Saturday, Watson Lake State Wildlife Area. Leader: Sirena Brownlee, sirena.brownlee@hdrinc.com or 970-980-6184. Meet at the parking area on the northeast end of the lake at 10 a.m. A spotting scope would be helpful for viewing waterfowl on the lake or raptors on adjacent cliffs. The group will walk the trails around the lake and along the Poudre River. Bring a picnic lunch if you would like to eat after the walk.

March 13, Sunday, Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Survey. Leader: Denise Bretting, dbretting@swloveland.com, work: 970-669-1185, home: 970-669-8095. FCAS performs a monthly bird census for the City of Fort Collins. All levels are welcome. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot. Call for any change.

Future Bobcat Ridge Natural Area Bird Surveys: See description and contact details above for this recurring, monthly survey. Future surveys: April 10, Sunday, 7 a.m.; May 7, Saturday, 6:30 a.m.; June 12, Sunday, 6:30 a.m.



A Look Back at Chapter History ————— by Bill Miller

Several years ago I came into possession of a binder of early newsletters that had been archived at the Morgan Library on the CSU campus. Unfortunately the collection is not complete; issues are missing. The earliest issues were typed and probably mimeographed to produce issues that were either handed out at meetings or possibly mailed. The first page of the early issues had a nice logo image of both summer plumaged and winter plumaged Ptarmigan. The newsletter was titled “Ptarmigan—Newsletter of the Fort Collins Bird Club.” I thought that today’s FCAS members might be interested in reading about some of the chapter’s early history. I don’t have the time or space to reproduce each entire issue, so I will summarize them.

Vol. 1, No. 6, David W. Lupton, Editor, June 1970: “The Fort Collins Bird Club welcomes all participants and guests of the joint Cooper and

Wilson Ornithological Societies meeting, June 18-21, to Fort Collins, Colorado. We hope that the programs, field trips, and entertainment will make your visit a most pleasant one.

“On May 23, a joint field trip with the Denver Audubon Society was conducted on the International Biological Program Pawnee National Grasslands site near Nunn, Colorado. Approximately 40 people (five from the Fort Collins Bird Club) assembled at the IBP headquarters at 9 a.m. for the field trip.... Forty-three species were observed as follows: A porcupine also gave the group a bit of excitement.”

The rest of the seven-page issue contained a species list from Spring Canyon, a segment on recent sightings, a listing of periodical and serial titles at CSU libraries, and a two-page species list for the Fort Collins Bird Club’s spring count on Sat., May 16, 1970.



(left) Gadwall on South Platte River by Carole Hossan.



(right) Brewer's Blackbird from txtbba.tamu.edu

FCAS Welcomes New and Renewing Members

Susan Barbour
Rick Barry
David Bayer
Robert Beauchamp
Donald Beaver
Denise Bretting
Irene Briggs
Debora Busse
Kate Carr
Larry Caswell
Irene Fortune
Ray & Joan Glabach
Ruth Grant
Barbara Greenawalt
Jennifer Griffin
Kathleen M. Hardy

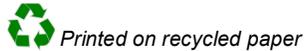
Melannie Hartman
High Plains Environmental Center
Paul W. Husted
Cynthia Jacobson
Barbara Jones
Joyce Jones
Nancy B. Jones
Kristin Joy
Laurie Kleespies
Tom Kleespies
Charles Knopp
Dave Landers
Lark Latch
Jane Low
Rosemary B. Lucas
Ron & Marcia Maeda

Larry Moskowitz
Pam & Bob Parish
Laurie Paulik
Christine & Joe Polazzi
Judith Putnam
Anne Saunders
Linda Smith
Myron Smith
Paula Stearns
Joann Thomas
H. Bruce Vigneault
Sheila Webber
Jerry Welch
Robin Welsh
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.



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



Membership Application

Join Fort Collins Audubon Society (FCAS), National Audubon Society (NSA), 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.