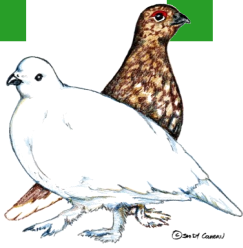


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FORT COLLINS AUDUBON SOCIETY

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.

April 2023

Volume 55, Issue 4

**FCAS Hosts Kimberly Fraser (and BFF "Dude")
Outreach Specialist, National Black-footed Ferret Conservation Center
"The Life of the Prairie Bandit"**

Thursday, April 13

Social time with Refreshments: 7 p.m.; Announcements: 7:20; Presentation: 7:30

Door Prize Drawing (must be present to win)

Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Dr.

*****This program also will be accessible online using Zoom*****

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

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89425740063>

The Black-footed Ferret (BFF) is the only ferret native to the short-grass prairie of North America. Black-footed Ferrets are members of the Mustelidae family, which is often referred to as the weasel family. Other members of this family include mink, badger, marten, fisher, polecat, wolverine, and domestic ferret. The BFF spends its entire life in prairie dog colonies and 90 percent of the BFF's diet is prairie dog; they eat over 100 prairie dogs a year. Black-footed ferrets spend about 90 percent of their time underground in prairie dog burrows, where they shelter from predators and weather, eat, sleep, and raise their young. They are nocturnal, solitary, and require large areas on the landscape. Their home range is in 12 western states, Canada, and Mexico. They are one of the most endan-



BFF Dude by Kimberly Fraser.

gered mammals in North America and are federally protected; over 50 state, federal, tribal, non-governmental organizations, and private landowners participate in BFF recovery efforts. In 2020, the BFF was the first North American endangered species to be cloned. It is an effort that is changing the face of saving species from extinction.

Kimberly Fraser is the Outreach Specialist for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the National BFF Conservation Center, Colorado. She is also the BFF Program Coordinator at the

Museum of Discovery in Fort Collins. Join us on April 13 to discover why the BFF is so important and meet BFF Dude. This program is free and open to the public.

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

In April 2021, voters in Fort Collins approved a ballot measure directing the City to acquire the property where CSU's old Hughes Stadium used to be and "to use said property for parks, recreation, and open lands, natural areas, and wildlife rescue and restoration." The measure passed easily by a 69 to 31 percent vote.

The City recently began planning for the future of this undeveloped foothills property that sits roughly between two existing heavily used natural areas: Pineridge and Maxwell. Council members are hearing from a well-organized, vocal, and engaged group of mountain bike enthusiasts who want to see the property developed as a large-scale bike park, similar to the Valmont Bike Park in Boulder County.

Although we normally regard mountain bikers as allies, and we are happy to share many of our open space trails with them, FCAS wants to see as much of the old Hughes Stadium property as possible designated a natural area and managed to protect and enhance wildlife. Opportunities to expand quality habitat for birds and other wildlife are rare and precious. Having lost 3 billion birds in North America since I was born, we can't afford to miss these opportunities. But more than that, I am concerned that a large-scale bike park, especially if it is illuminated at night, wouldn't provide any new wildlife habitat and could degrade the existing habitat at Maxwell and Pineridge Natural Areas. That would be a sad step in the wrong direction.



Hughes Stadium land from *The Coloradoan*.

I should mention that FCAS can support continuing use of the eastern portion of this property for disc golf and winter sledding. Those established, low-impact recreational activities, combined with a newly designated natural area, would be a great representation of what most of the voters envisioned when they voted for the ballot measure in 2021. If you agree, I hope you will monitor this issue as it works its way through City Council, show up, and speak up. We'll try to keep you informed on our social media channels as things develop.

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Visit us on Facebook:

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



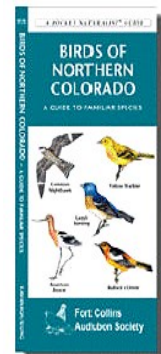
FCAS Pocket Guide to Local Birds

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



Little Ghost on the Prairie

As the days lengthen, snow recedes and breeding birds return to the eastern plains of Colorado. While Halloween is two seasons away, a ghost softly alights onto the barren landscape.

Perhaps one of the most poorly named birds in Colorado, the Mountain Plover, breeds in the shortgrass prairies of the eastern Colorado. To say that Mountain Plovers build their nest also would be misleading as they scrape a shallow indent into the soil to ensure that their eggs won't roll. Once the indent has been made and the eggs have been laid, the female plover leaves the male to tend to the eggs and young.

Finding a bare spot in the middle of the eastern plains may not sound like a challenge, but these habitats are quickly vanishing in exchange for farmland. Shortgrass prairies don't exactly conjure words like "critical" or "habitat." Looking around, the wind-swept vista offers about as much texture and aesthetic reprieve as a burnt suburban lawn. However, while un-



Mountain Plover by Brian Gengge.



Mountain Plover by Julio Mulero.

home with Mountain Plovers in the vast eastern Colorado landscape. These ecosystems, critical habitat for numerous species, are largely in decline.

According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, the Mountain Plover population has decreased by 80 percent over the last few decades, leaving fewer than 20,000 individuals today. The decline of grassland birds (e.g., Burrowing Owls, Ferruginous Hawks) is

well documented (<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/working-lands/grasslands-report>).

Progress on any conservation challenge requires a multifaceted approach and many conservation practices (e.g., controlled burning, invasive plant management) have proven successful.

I want to suggest an additional angle to shortgrass

prairie conservation. Pulling from research that connects time spent in nature to pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors, my call to action is to get out to the shortgrass prairies and appreciate what they have to offer. April is the perfect time.

Appreciation begets conservation-minded attitudes. I recognize the challenge of appreciating shortgrass prairies: the barren nature of this ecosystem does not evoke the same aesthetic arousal

of a river system, montane meadow, or snow-covered peaks. However, an early spring day on the prairie will give an appreciation for this ecosystem that will last a lifetime.

If you visit this often overlooked ecosystem to find the ghost of the prairie, (as I hope you do) and you still want more, the annual Mountain Plover Festival (<https://mountainploverfestival.com/karval-community-alliance-organization/>) is scheduled for the end of April in Karval, Colorado.

However you choose to experience the shortgrass prairies, I hope that this experience allows you to see that every ecosystem is beautiful in its own way.



Mountain Plover from Audubon Field Guide.



Ethical Birding

Seeing an elusive or unusual bird is thrilling. A Black-and-white Warbler passing through on migration is just too awesome to miss. A pair of Eastern Screech Owls perching and nesting in a popular area may make them a bit too irresistible.



Black-and-white Warbler
by Robert Cook.

We love our birds! Protecting them is at the very core of our being. Some ways to accomplish this goal include placing decals on windows to avoid collisions, keeping cats indoors, buying bird-friendly coffee, and employing best ethical practices while out birding. I know I am preaching to the choir here, but am hoping to spread the word widely to keep our beautiful

feathered friends safe from being loved too much.

Getting too close and altering a bird's behavior can adversely affect its ability to survive and breed. Disturbance costs a bird valuable energy if it must fly to a new perch or find another suitable nest site. Disturbing a bird may scare it off a valuable food source or expose it to predators. If birds are continually flushed or harassed at a nest site they may abandon it, resulting in no offspring that season, or trying again at another location.

Some guidelines to follow: Give the bird plenty of space. If it changes behavior or takes off, you're too close. Speak quietly. Limit the use of audio to attract a species and don't use during nesting season. Stay on

the trail to minimize disturbance to habitat. If a bird looks at you frequently and / or stops normal behavior such as preening, slowly step back to give the bird more space. Binoculars, spotting scopes, and telephoto lenses are wonderful tools that bring birds closer to us, so we don't approach too closely. Use of flash or other artificial light for nocturnal species causes disturbance.

Some bird species, such as owls, are more likely to remain perched when disturbed and will give clues that you are too close. Opening its eyes, raising the feather tufts on its head, making its body tall and thin, and head bobbing are some of these clues.

Three very good sites to review ethics in photography and birding are:

<https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/audubons-guide-ethical-bird-photography>, https://www.internationalowlcenter.org/respectful_observation.html#howtobehave, and <https://www.aba.org/aba-code-of-birding-ethics/>.

These sites do have some information overlap, but are all good references. The second site is especially good, with photos of owl postures and behaviors. The first and third sites are also in Spanish.



Eastern Screech-Owl
by Joanne Bartkus.

FCAS Welcomes New and Renewing Members

Derek Atkinsonm
Laurny Benedict
Kristy Clark
Ann Colpitts
Joan Craig
William Cushman
Matthew Dane
Paul Gordy
Mike Knowles and
Michelle Haele
Jennifer Hahn

Nancy Hitchins
Donna Johnson
William Leeper
Bob Lucas
Rosemary Lucas
Jessie Meschievitz
Christina Mild
William Miller
Hildegard Morgan
Rich Roberts
James Stoneberg

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



Great Horned Owls
by Doug Swartz.



Upcoming Field Trips

To register for any trip, go to Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/FortCollinsAudubonSociety/>), or <http://www.fortcollinsaudubon.org/>. Registration will be posted one week before the scheduled trip. Attendance is limited to 12 individuals.

April 9, Sunday, Bobcat Ridge Survey. Leader: Denise Bretting, dbretting@swloveland.com or 970-402-1292. The survey looks at bird populations and helps



Least Sandpiper by Carrie Olson.

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 a.m. in the Bobcat Ridge parking lot.

April 14, Friday, Running Deer and Cottonwood Hollow Natural Areas. Leader: John She-

not, johnshenot@gmail.com, 802-595-1669. Space limited and registration required. Spend the morning at one of the top 10 birding hotspots in Larimer County. This is a great place to find waterfowl, wading birds, and marsh-loving species like blackbirds and rails. Registrants will meet in the parking lot on East Prospect Road at 7:30 a.m.

April 22, Saturday, Lon Hagler Reservoir SWA. Leader: Denise Bretting and Andrew McFadden, dbretting@swloveland.com or 970-402-1292. Explore Lon Hagler Reservoir SWA for an easy walk/hike lasting 1.5–2 hours over 2–2.5 miles of walking. Lon Hagler offers a variety of habitats and birds where practically any bird is a possibility. If conditions are muddy, we'll try some other natural area in Loveland with non-muddy paths. Participants need an SWA pass. Meet at 7 a.m. in the north parking lot (on the archery range side of the reservoir).

Hotspot Highlight: Watson Lake State Wildlife Area

This year's newsletter will include a Hotspot Highlight. The highlight 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 nbunting@rams.colostate.edu.

This month's highlight is Watson Lake State Wildlife Area. April, as people know, is a great time for observing spring migration. One of the best places to spot birds along the migration route is Watson Lake. This area houses riparian areas with wooded trails and access to the Poudre River, which is great for Warblers of many varieties, including common Yellow-rumped Warblers and rarer species such as Blackpoll Warblers. The

canyon walls to the north and east have hunting and nesting Golden Eagles. The lake itself is relatively deep, allowing for birds like Green-winged Teals, Bufflehead, and other migratory waterfowl.



Looking for eagles at Watson Lake State Wildlife Area. Photo by Christine Shenot.

Past Field Trips

On Feb. 26, a group led by Nolan Bunting had the opportunity to hear Northern Saw-whet Owls and Great Horned Owls in the morning at Horsetooth Mountain Open Space. The day continued with the appearance of many mountain species such as Townsend's Solitaire, Pygmy Nuthatch, and Steller's Jay. Though the trail was muddy, it was a trip to remember.

On March 10, John Shenot and his group saw more than 20 species at Fossil Creek Reservoir, including Northern Pintail, Redhead, Mountain Bluebird, and American Kestrel.



American Kestrel by Roger Wieck.



Steller's Jay from SierraSun.com



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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| <input type="checkbox"/> New or renewing FCAS Chapter Member
Receive the FCAS <i>Ptarmigan</i> by email | \$ 20 | Name: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New or renewing FCAS Chapter Member
Receive the FCAS <i>Ptarmigan</i> by mail | \$ 30 | Address: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime FCAS Chapter Member
Receive FCAS <i>Ptarmigan</i> by mail or email | \$750 | City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Additional support for Alex Cringan Fund
(natural history education grants) | \$ _____ | Email: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New NAS member
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
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.