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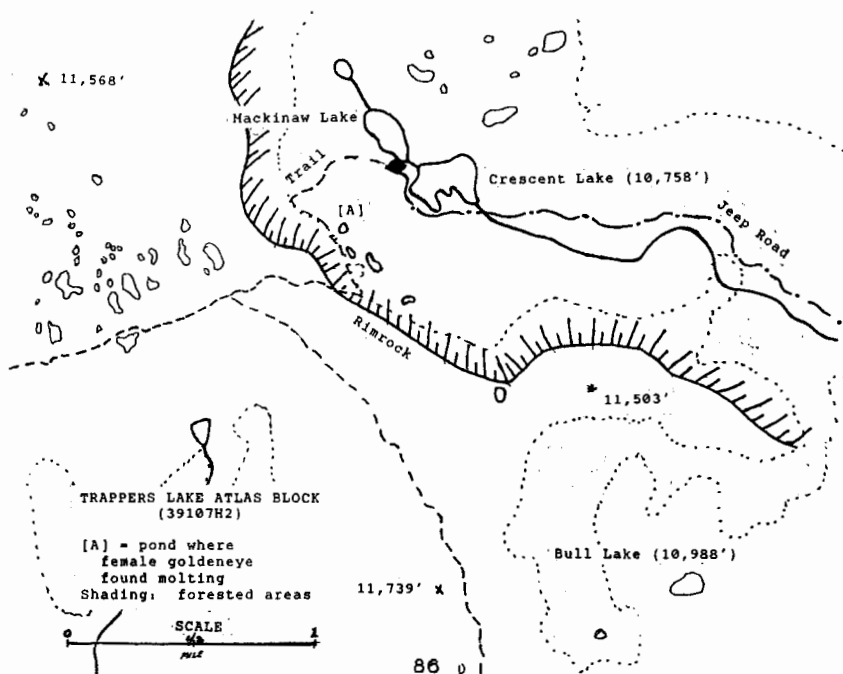
COVER ILLUSTRATION: Western Meadowlarks by Karen M. Mancini.

## BARROW'S GOLDENEYES SUMMER IN FLAT TOPS WILDERNESS

Hugh and Urling Kingery  
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No one has reported Barrow's Goldeneyes nesting in Colorado since the 19th Century, although hens with "juveniles" were observed near Walden in 1982 and 1983 (C.F.O. Official Records Committee file, Denver Museum of Natural History). Our observations on a Breeding Bird Atlas trip into the Flat Tops Wilderness in northwest Colorado raise interesting possibilities of present-day breeding.

We surveyed the Trappers Lake Atlas priority block, 39107H2 (not near Trappers Lake but across the "divide" on the east side of the Flat Tops Wilderness, 25 miles northwest of Gypsum).



The Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas, which began in 1987, is surveying blocks three miles on a side, one in each topographic map in the state. The survey techniques generally follow those of other similar projects in the United States.

#### Habitat

In the late 1940's, a beetle outbreak killed literally all the trees over hundreds of square miles of the Flat Tops. Today, skeletons of many of these trees remain standing, a standing forest of dead trees. Most retain their conical shape although some have the tops broken off. Underneath this forest of dead trees, a renewing forest of Engelmann Spruce and Subalpine Firs has become established, resulting in a bi-level forest: dead trees 75-100 feet tall and 25-40 foot conifers growing underneath them.

The area contains hundreds of lakes. The Trappers Lake Atlas block includes two reservoirs (Crescent Lake, about one-half mile long and a quarter to a half-mile long, at 10,758 feet, and adjacent Mackinaw Lake), and about 75 natural lakes and ponds: two or three small beaver ponds on the stream a mile below Crescent Lake; about 15 natural lakes in the forest on three sides of Crescent and Mackinaw plus three in a basin about two miles to the south; and about 50 on the crest of the Flat Tops plain, above timberline.

#### Observations

At noon on June 27, 1988, we observed two female Barrow's Goldeneyes, distinctive with their all yellow bills, swimming in Crescent Lake. In the lake near the dam and shore are several cut tree stumps which protrude a foot or two above the water level. One female goldeneye climbed into a stump, as if she was settling into a nest. The second one then hopped up and displaced the first, and exhibited similar behavior. They may have been feeding in the stump or may have been simulating nesting behavior. Eventually they flew off together, into the forest southwest of Crescent Lake.

The next morning, June 28, we did not observe any goldeneyes at Crescent Lake. However, we flushed a female from a beaver pond a mile below the lake. When we returned to Crescent Lake at about one p.m., a female goldeneye was on the lake. She displayed the same interest in the stump as observed on June 27, then flew to a

small cove. After resting for 10 minutes, she flew up, circled over the forest, and made a pass at a potential nest hole in a 50 foot snag before landing back on the lake. She acted as if she wanted to land on the snag or in the hole, but always approached the snag from the side opposite the hole. She flew six times past the same snag and twice past a similar broken-off tree nearby. We found, upon close inspection, that the second snag lacked holes suitable for nesting.

After the final flight by the goldeneye past the first snag, a Hairy Woodpecker flew to the hole, whereupon a Tree Swallow flew out. Another or the same Tree Swallow went in the hole and looked out. We don't know if the swallow was in the hole during the goldeneye's activities directed at the snag. The hole did seem small even for a small duck.

On August 2-4, I (Hugh) searched Crescent Lake and Mackinaw Lake, a pond on a shelf to the east, about 20 ponds above timberline, and six ponds in timber within a quarter mile and southwest of Crescent Lake. I found only one Barrow's Goldeneye, a female on a small pond about a quarter of a mile southwest of and 250 feet above Crescent Lake. The pond was perhaps half an acre in size and apparently shallow. She stayed in the middle of the pond during two separate half hour observations, and acted as if she could not fly. When I first approached quietly, she began to feed actively, diving for 5-14 seconds per dive. As I circled the pond, she permitted me to come within 25 feet of her. I concluded that she probably was molting flight feathers.

#### Discussion

Nest sites: Edwin Carter, probably the first to find nest and young of the Barrow's Goldeneye in the United States (near Breckenridge, Colorado), said they nest in hollow trees, sometimes in surprisingly small cavities (Bent, 1925; Bailey & Niedrach). Others have observed that, in treeless areas of Iceland, they use hollows in rocks or peat shelters built for sheep (Bent, 1925). In the Flat Tops, they conceivably could select either tree cavities below timberline or hollows in piles of rocks above timberline. We did not see any goldeneyes above timberline, however.

We originally interpreted the June behavior as a female searching for a nest hole but according to Palmer (1975), unmated

females act in a manner he calls "prospecting." He says, "While females are incubating, groups of 2-20 adult and yearling females, occasionally joined by males, often fly rapidly in circles low over or through the forest, and back over the lake. One or more of the participants calls continuously while in flight . . . The entire group sometimes splashes down noisily on the water, only to take off again and repeat the performance. Sometimes such a group will flutter persistently for up to an hour around an unoccupied nest hole, or even a dead stub or telephone pole in which there is no hole. . . Such activities by females presumably is incipient nesting behavior of prebreeders and unmated older birds; it may serve to establish some degree of attachment to a particular place to which they will return the following year." In view of Palmer's description, we concluded that the birds we observed were unmated females, not nesting birds.

The Flat Tops contain extensive suitable habitat for nesting goldeneyes, although summer observations in other, more accessible sections of the Flat Tops (Deep Lake, Sweetwater Lake) have revealed other ducks--Lesser Scaup and Ring-necked Duck--but no goldeneyes. Nonetheless, we think it quite possible that Barrow's Goldeneyes do nest somewhere in the Flat Tops. Censusing for them among the hundreds of lakes would take an enormous effort. We think the search should concentrate on the east, more remote, side of the wilderness.

#### Conclusion

Very likely, Barrow's Goldeneyes do nest in the Flat Tops. Confirmation would require a thorough search, probably timed after the young had hatched, of the east side of the wilderness.

#### Acknowledgements

Our thanks to Larry Green and Craig Wescott, both of the Colorado Division of Wildlife, for providing transportation over a world-class four-wheel drive path to Crescent Lake. Also many thanks to Mike Szymczak of the Colorado Division of Wildlife for reviewing the first draft of this manuscript and recommending many improvements.

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NEWS FROM THE FIELD:  
SUMMER 1989 (June, July and August)

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This issue's article will consist of only the summer report, and will not include updated sightings from the spring which were reported to American Birds. The main reason for this is that I did not receive this data by my deadline. I will summarize the major trends from this period in my next report. To report any sightings, please drop me a note, or just leave a message after calling the Colorado Bird Report at (303) 423-5582.

Summer 1989 (June, July and August)

This summer's weather could be described by one word: HOT. Denver and much of eastern Colorado suffered through a record-breaking heat wave as temperatures soared over 100 degrees for 5 consecutive days in July. Wildfires ravaged many areas of the state with the worst occurring west of Boulder on Sugarloaf Mountain and burning over 30 houses in a few hours. The western slope had similar problems, with Rich Levad reporting that the very hot and dry weather kept the waterfowl numbers very low in the Grand Junction area. August was cooler, probably closer to a normal August, with good monsoon rains in the first half of the month.

A pair of Common Loons in basic plumage was seen at Blue Mesa Reservoir by Levad on July 27. Dexter reported that the 28 American White Pelicans found in Grand Junction August 12 was very unusual for the west slope. Mark Janos found an impressive 1600 American White Pelicans on August 27 at Lake Meredith as they rested on their southward migration. A displaying American Bittern put on a show on June 4 at Lower Latham Reservoir for Bill Kaempfer. Up to 5 Great Egrets were reported all summer within 20 miles of their nesting site along Boulder Creek in eastern Boulder County. Elsewhere, a Great Egret was seen on June 1-2 by Bill Howe at Red Lion State Wildlife area below Jumbo Reservoir, and one was found by Levad west of Grand Junction on August 8. Green-

backed Herons were seen on June 23 at Chatfield Reservoir by Dorothy Horton, on August 20 at Boulder's Valmont Reservoir by Kaempfer, and on August 27 by Janos at Rocky Ford State Wildlife area. Much more uncommon was a Green-backed Heron found by Coen Dexter in Grand Junction August 12. As is their usual habit, Cattle Egrets were congregating at the end of August at Lower Latham Reservoir where Bob Andrews reported 66 seen on August 25.

A single well-described Glossy Ibis was reported on June 28 by Lee and Marilyn Rowe at Lower Latham Reservoir foraging in a wet field with White-faced Ibis. Eighteen White-faced Ibis were seen by Levad on July 16 in a gravel pit west of Grand Junction, while 5 White-faced Ibis at Lake Meredith on July 26 were the earliest fall migrants on record for Janos. The Trumpeter Swan reported last April by Mark Nikas east of Longmont at Foster Reservoir was still there at the end of August. This is the first summering record for Colorado, and could involve a bird which was injured and couldn't fly. Redheads spent all summer on Cheraw Lake where Janos counted 410 on July 10.

Late migrant Ospreys were found in Lakewood on June 3 by Dick Schottler and in Wheat Ridge on June 10 by Wade Leitner. A pair of Ospreys observed on an established nest by Paul Burell at Meadow Creek Reservoir, north of Tabernash, produced no young this year. A pair of Ospreys was seen by Levad on Grand Mesa on August 2-3. With its many lakes, Grand Mesa would be a great place for Osprey to nest but no nests have ever been found there. At press time, no information has arrived as to the Osprey nesting success in the Granby area. A fall migrant Osprey was seen at Cheraw Lake by Janos on August 31. A Mississippi Kite was seen on the fourth of July as it sailed over Harold Oliver's Lakewood home. Janos reported many Mississippi Kites in La Junta in mid-August where they are now nearly as common as in Lamar. These Kites are easily found in spring and fall but can almost disappear during the nesting season. An adult Bald Eagle surprised David Schilberg on August 21 as it flew over Belleview and Simms in Lakewood. A report of a Harris' Hawk on June 26 at Mesa Verde National Park by park employee Rodney Torres would be a first state record if submitted and accepted. Bill Brockner states that Harris' Hawks are used by the local native Americans to train young men who will graduate to handling eagles for their religious ceremonies. Harris' Hawk is also popular with falconers. Several years ago, Schottler watched in amazement as a Harris' Hawk flew by him and vanished over a small hill during the Denver Christmas Bird Count.

As he raced to the top of the hill to get another look, he saw the hawk landing on the outstretched arm of a falconer. These factors will all have to be considered by the Colorado Official Records Committee before Harris' Hawk appears on the Colorado state list. A Peregrine Falcon, found by Joe TenBrink, was seen August 9-26 in the Prospect Reservoir area of Weld County, keeping the migrant shorebirds in shape. The Red-backed Buzzard summered in Gunnison again this year but was unsuccessful at seducing any young impressionable Swainson's Hawks.

Bill Fink easily found White-tailed Ptarmigan on June 19-20 at Rocky Mountain National Park when the calling males become more conspicuous. At least 4 adult Chukars, including a female with 7 chicks, were found by David Leatherman June 7-9 on the hill behind the Gay Johnson's Truck Stop at the Island Acres State Recreation area exit at Interstate 70 near Grand Junction. This introduced species likes Cheatgrass (also an introduced species), and is often found where there are good stands of this plant.

An early Black-bellied Plover in breeding plumage was seen on August 12 at Jackson Reservoir by Himmel. The shorebird story of the summer was the Piping Plover nest with four young found by Mike Carter's Colorado Bird Observatory at Nee Noshe Reservoir north of Lamar in June. This is the first successful Piping Plover nest in Colorado. A second nesting occurred here later, as week-old chicks were seen with an adult Piping Plover pair by Peter Gent on August 7. Other observers found up to 6 adult Piping Plovers here as late as August 19. It is not clear if two pairs nested or if one pair nested twice. Also at Nee Noshe Reservoir were up to 10 Snowy Plovers seen by David Silverman in late July and seen by others through August. Snowy Plovers were also reported by Janos this summer at Blue (Adobe Creek) Reservoir and at Cheraw Lake.

The first major thrust of the shorebird migration was noted on July 17 by Janos at Cheraw Lake where 100 shorebirds of 8 different species were seen including a Short-billed Dowitcher. Janos also reported 4 Black-necked Stilts chicks at Lake Cheraw on July 10 where the adults were abundant all summer. American Avocets chicks were seen on June 3 by TenBrink in Thornton at a pond located at 88th Avenue and Dahlia Street. Avocet chicks were also found by Janos at the La Junta Golf Course sewage ponds on July 16.

A late spring pair of Long-billed Curlew were seen on June 9 by Levad near Fruita, and an early fall migrant Long-billed Curlew was seen on July 9 at Barr Lake by the Rowes. August saw two Ruddy Turnstones in Colorado. The first was seen on August 19 at Nee Noshe Reservoir by Joe and Adam Mammoser and Dave Leatherman. Not to be outdone, Joe Himmel found another on August 26 at Jackson Reservoir where he also reported a large concentration of shorebirds. A breeding-plumaged Red Knot was found on August 27 at Lake Meredith by Janos and was seen at the same spot by Denver Field Ornithologists field trip participants 6 days later. Another Red Knot, this one an immature, was found by Himmel at Jackson Reservoir on August 29. On July 16, Dexter found a migrant Baird's Sandpiper along the shore of 12,600 foot high American Lake in the San Juan Mountains. By July 21, Pectoral Sandpipers had arrived, with 3 seen at Timnath Lake by Mammoser (along with 12 other species of shorebirds) and one found at 88th Avenue and Dahlia Street in Thornton by TenBrink. Fifteen Stilt Sandpipers in breeding plumage were seen by Janos at Cheraw Lake on July 17 and were seen there for the remainder of July. Short-billed Dowitchers were found on July 17 by Janos on Cheraw Lake, August 27 at Jackson Reservoir by Nick Watmough, and another found again by Janos at Cheraw Lake August 31. Mark Nikas found a Red-necked Phalarope on August 20 at Mesa Verde National Park at the Cedar Tower Road Sewer Ponds. This species is new to the Park bird-list. Other reports for this species were normal for fall with a few seen in eastern Colorado and a high of 41 seen at Cheraw by Janos on August 28.

A first-year Little Gull was found by David Silverman at Cheraw Lake on July 23. This gull was seen through the end of August by all visitors except one birder from Glenwood Springs. By late August, the gull had molted into second-winter plumage. Another Little Gull, this time a juvenile, was found by Bob Righter on August 30-31 at Cherry Creek Reservoir in Denver. A Little Gull was a remarkable find only a few years ago in Colorado, but several have been found in the last two years in the fall. Are there more Little Gulls, or are there more and better observers? *While looking for the Little Gull at Cheraw Lake on July 31* Tom Kent, who is C.F.O.'s representative in Iowa, discovered an early Sabine's Gull still in breeding plumage. The trend of multiple Caspian Tern sightings this spring continued through summer. This species was first seen in Colorado only 15 years ago, yet this summer alone no less than 17 individuals were reported! It can't be long before we find this species nesting in

the state. A rundown of this summer's Caspian Tern list looks like this: 1 on June 19 at Chatfield State Park found by Horton; 6 from June 22-25 at Sloan's Lake found by Dale Peterson (in with lots of Forster's Terns); 2 on July 1 at the Walter Walker Wildlife area in Grand Junction found by Dexter; 1 on July 15 at Windsor Lake seen by Mammoser; 2 on July 16 at Longmont's Union Reservoir found by Ray Davis; 2 on July 21 at Cherry Creek Reservoir found by Floyd Pendell; 2 seen from August 24-27 by TenBrink at 120th and Washington in Northglen; and 1 on August 28 at the Walter Walker Wildlife area, found by Dexter. Additionally, Duane Nelson found two single Caspian Terns on two different ponds on July 8 just north of the Colorado state line on the road to Laramie, in a latilong where they nest. Least Terns were found in their usual spots with a nest found at Nee Noshe Reservoir, and four Least Terns seen there from late July through August. Four Least Terns were also seen by Janos on August 21 on the island at Blue (Adobe Creek) Reservoir.

Three different Northern Pygmy-Owls were found on July 1 by Lee and Marilyn Rowe in Rocky Mountain Park and were subsequently observed by many birders through July 15. These owls deserve the "Most Cooperative Owls" award for 1989, with many visiting birders from the east enthusiastically counting them as "lifers." A hazard of being a Burrowing Owl was pointed out by Janos who found 5 live and 3 dead owls in a prairie dog town south of Lake Meredith on July 10. This prairie dog colony is bisected by a road and all the dead owls were road kills. A single Long-eared Owl seen July 7 at Crow Valley campground by Leatherman was probably one of the two which spent the winter there. A Short-eared Owl seen on July 31 at Cheraw Lake by Toni Brevillier and Cindy Lippincott might have been a local nester. A pair of Boreal Owls successfully fledged their chicks on July 10 from their nest hole on Cameron Pass, and two immature Boreal Owls were found by Jim Fuller on July 30 sitting alongside a trail in the Eagle Nest Wilderness above Silverthorne, an area where they have never been reported. Levad found a Boreal Owl on the Anthracite Range Breeding Bird Atlas Priority Block on July 28. Corman found 5 different Boreal Owls on Cameron Pass on August 31.

Black Swifts are one of those mysterious birds that everybody gets excited about when they see. Davis found a single Black Swift on June 8 above Longmont as a thunderstorm moved into town. In California, the Black Swift is known to travel hundreds of miles in advance of thunderstorms and is believed to forage on

insects which have been swept up by the storm. We might follow Ray's example along the front range and use our binoculars to scope the skies ahead of summer thunderstorms from the mountains. Three more Black Swifts were seen on June 12 by Robin Byers at Longmont's Union Reservoir, and a single Black Swift was sighted on June 25 in the gorge between Georgetown and Silver Plume, an area where they must nest. Dexter visited Colorado's most accessible Black Swift nesting colony in Ouray's Box Canyon on the fourth of July amid a large holiday crowd. Despite the crowd of tourists, Dexter found 7 Black Swift nests. Several were only a foot or two above eye level along the boardwalk with birds calmly sitting on eggs. The 3 Black Swifts seen on July 7 at Endovalley in Rocky Mountain National Park by Bill Gillespie were near their traditional nest site, and 3 more found at Loch Vale in the Park on July 17 by Mike Greenwall may have been the same individuals. On July 19, Glen and Jean Hageman found many Black Swifts at the Black Canyon of Gunnison. The best spot was the first overlook, as you drive into the Park. Up to 20 Black Swifts were seen by Levad on Blue Mesa on July 27. A pair of Chimney Swifts were seen by Rob Wilson on July 27 at 7th and Vine in Denver, an older neighborhood where they nest.

Steve Bouricius reports that the 14 feeders at his house at 8500 feet attracted the first Rufous Hummingbird on June 27 and the first male Calliope Hummingbird on July 13. By mid-July, there were many Rufous Hummingbirds with up to 12 hummingbirds per feeder. They consumed almost two gallons of syrup a day. Two unconfirmed reports of Blue-throated Hummingbirds arrived after the fact: one was a male at a Pagosa Springs feeder seen for about a week in mid-May; a second was of a pair coming to a feeder set up by tourists in their trailer park outside of Leadville this summer. A single female Magnificent Hummingbird was seen for several days in mid-July at Paula Hansly's feeder at 9000 feet elevation in Coal Creek Canyon west of Denver. Calliope Hummingbirds put on a very good show during July, with one seen on the 19th in Parker by Cheryl Scott, 3 seen on the 20th by Lippincott in Colorado Springs and 3 more seen on the 21st by TenBrink at the Hansley's feeder in Coal Creek Canyon. Most unusual was an immature male Calliope Hummingbird found by Bob Andrews on August 25 feeding on roadside sunflowers on the Pawnee Grasslands, almost out of sight of the mountains! On the west slope, a Rufous Hummingbird was seen by Bob Evans at his Grand Lake feeder on July 2 and Dexter reported them as common in the mountains by July 11.

A Red-headed Woodpecker surprised Nelson when it was seen on June 10 in northeast Moffat County along Slater Creek, 5 miles south of the Wyoming state line. Similarly, Brian Moscatello of New Jersey was surprised when he found a Red-headed Woodpecker on June 15 sitting on the Cameron Pass summit sign at 10,000 feet in western Larimer County. Three-toed Woodpeckers gave a good accounting of themselves this summer with one seen on June 18 in Rocky Mountain National Park by Patty Echelmeyer. Others were reported in the Park from July 12 through August 8 by Glenn and Jeane Hageman and at Fern Falls on June 19 by Fink. Another Three-toed Woodpecker was seen by TenBrink on July 21 in Golden Gate State Park, and a female with young was seen by Levad on July 28 in the Anthracite Range.

The Eastern Wood-Pewee seen from June 1 through August 19 at Chatfield State Park by Joey Kellner was probably the same bird found calling in this spot last fall. A Gray Flycatcher nest was found by Evans on August 7 in Colorado National Monument at Grand Junction. Great-crested Flycatchers continue to be found in the Platte River valley in northeastern Colorado. A pair was studied by Howe from June 4-10 and another seen by TenBrink on June 10 at Julesburg. Norm Erthal found a single at Prewitt Reservoir on August 19. Eastern Kingbirds were seen by Levad three different times during the summer in Clifton. This is an uncommon bird on Colorado's western slope.

There are Purple Martin's in Colorado but if you were from the east, you would never know it. They are only rarely seen on the eastern plains, and then briefly as migrants. Our Purple Martins nest as pairs or in small, loose colonies in aspen groves in the mountains of the west slope. They pick groves with good nest site availability and prey abundance. In the first week of July, Dexter found 4 pairs of Purple Martins around Norwood, and Victor Zerbi reported 6 at McClure Pass and 6 more on Haystack Mountain at New Castle.

A single Blue Jay which visited Evans' Grand Lake feeder on July 30 was obviously lost. Eastern Bluebirds had produced young from a nest found by Howe at Tamarack Ranch by June 4. A Swainson's Thrush was found on July 21 on the Uncompahgre Plateau by Levad. It is considered rare in that area. A pair of Bendire's Thrashers found by Bill Gillespie 4 miles northwest of Del Norte on July 9 were at a nest. Six singing Bell's Vireos found by Howe on June 4 at Tamarack Ranch were on traditional

nesting grounds. A single Golden-winged Warbler was seen on June 8 in Chatfield State Park by Joey Kellner. A pair, or two male Chestnut-sided Warblers, found by Dale Peterson spent all of June in Wheat Ridge Greenbelt but no evidence of nesting was found. Dexter found nesting Grace's Warblers July 1 at Norwood; also south of Redvale where the nest contained a cowbird egg. Three Grace's Warblers were found on July 19 at the Lower Piedra Campground west of Pagosa Springs by Glenn and Jeane Hageman. Very unusual was a female Black-throated Blue Warbler seen August 21 at Echo Lake by Gus Yacki. Echo Lake is about 10,000 feet in elevation. An early Townsend's Warbler was seen on August 14 by Himmel at Crow Valley Campground. Townsend's Warblers arrived on August 20 with 6 seen at Barr Lake by Schottler. Nikas saw 3 at Mancos and 3 west of Del Norte that same day. American Redstarts and Ovenbirds are two of Colorado's more uncommon breeding warblers. Redstarts breed along the South Platte River from the start of Waterton Canyon to Chatfield Reservoir. Fink observed a singing male from June 1-3 at the Waterton Bridge. Three singing Ovenbirds at Indian Creek Campground west of Sedalia, reported by Nelson on July 1, were at a traditional foothills nesting area. A single singing Ovenbird found by Bob Spencer west of Golden along the Beaver Brook Trail on July 4 was also on territory. An Ovenbird seen on August 20 and a Northern Waterthrush seen on August 14 on the University of Colorado campus by Kaempfer were migrants.

A Hepatic Tanager was found by Janos on June 14 northwest of Kim about 30 miles north of the closest known Colorado nesting site for this species. A pair of Summer Tanagers was found by Van Truan summering in Pueblo but no nesting evidence was found. A male Northern Cardinal was found on June 4 by Janos as it sang in the Rocky Ford State Wildlife area. Another male Northern Cardinal probably set a North American altitude record for the species on July 17 when it was trapped at the Denver University High Altitude Laboratory at Echo Lake by Lorane Reiner. As many as 4 Dickcissels were found by Janos singing all through July west of Las Animas, and another at Nee Noshe Reservoir on July 25. Four Cassin's Sparrows were found by Howe singing on June 4 at Tamarack Ranch, and Cassin's Sparrows were called abundant by Janos who found many on July 14 at the south end of the Villegreen Breeding Bird Survey. On June 4, Howe found two singing Field Sparrows at Tamarack Ranch. Singing Field Sparrows were also found this summer on the Arikaree River by Kingery but with no hard nesting evidence. Two male Lark Buntings were found by Levad



in the Grand Junction area on August 1, an uncommon bird there. A single Fox Sparrow found at Echo Lake by the Denver Field Ornithologists was in an expected habitat. Ray Davis found a pair of Grasshopper Sparrows on June 1 in a grassy field at Chatfield State Park, and Janos reported them as easily seen in the entire southeastern part of the state this summer.

Bobolinks were reported from all their usual spots. Howe found them on June 4 at Tamarack Ranch, Bob Spencer reported them still at their Boulder breeding grounds at Baseline and South Boulder Creek on June 28, and Paula Jordan reported 3 pairs from late July to early August at Bear Creek Greenbelt in Lakewood. Bobolinks were also found in an unusual spot, a prairie dog town west of Norwood, where Eller McClintock found them on August 8. Great-tailed Grackles continue to spread. Two were reported by Howe at Jumbo Reservoir on June 2, the Weld County population in the Lower Latham drainage was at least 10 in early June and a flock of 10 spent the summer in Clifton. Four Scott's Orioles were seen by Leatherman on June 7 at Brewster's Ridge near Grand Junction. Up to 7 White-winged Crossbills were seen by Nelson from June 9 through July 14 on Bears Ears Peak north of Craig. Evening Grosbeaks began to wander by August with 6 seen by Kathy King at her Littleton feeder on August 2, and 10 seen in Parker by Scott on August 28.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1989 27th ANNUAL CONVENTION  
OF THE COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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The 27th Annual Convention of the Colorado Field Ornithologists was held at Holiday Inn University Park in Fort Collins, Colorado May 19-21, 1989. Over 50 people attended the convention, many assembling informally Friday evening to register and talk about birds and birding. There were two field trips the following morning. The weekend was marked by nice weather and a lack of unusual migrants. Nonetheless, the total of 145 species reported was respectable.

On Saturday, one group led by Joe Mammoser and Paul Opler toured four areas along the west flank of Fort Collins: Spring Canyon, College Lake, Lion's Park/Cache La Poudre Junior High School woodland, and Watson Lake. Highlights of this trip included glimpses by some of a Wood Duck (known to nest in nearby cottonwoods), Sharp-shinned Hawk, a Bank Swallow colony, Canyon Wren, Veery, four Gray Catbirds, a female Black-and-White Warbler, a first spring male American Redstart and Lesser Goldfinch (black-backed form).

The second Saturday trip was led by Ron Ryder and David Leatherman to the Flatiron Site/Riverbend Ponds and the Grandview Cemetery. While the birding was decidedly common, we did see a Redheaded Woodpecker, a cooperative singing Willow Flycatcher (and heard a second individual), Red-breasted Nuthatch (possibly breeding?), Black-headed Grosbeak and Savannah Sparrow.

The paper session was held on Saturday afternoon. The papers and speakers were:

UPDATE ON THE COLORADO BIRD OBSERVATORY

Michael F. Carter

Abstract: The Colorado Bird Observatory is now about 1½ years old. It has a board, state and federal non-profit status, members and quite a few funded projects. The update included information on these projects. There was also information on the Observatory's purpose, plans, and how all this fits in with other ornithological organizations in the state. The update was illustrated with slides of C.B.O. fieldwork, including banding stations.

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE DISTRIBUTION  
OF PRAIRIE GROUSE IN NORTHEASTERN COLORADO

Michael A. Schroeder

Department of Fishery and Wildlife Biology  
Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523

Abstract: The plains Sharp-tailed Grouse (Pedioecetes phasianellus jamesi) and the Greater Prairie-Chicken (Tympanuchus cupido cupido) are endangered species of Grouse in northeastern Colorado. Although Sharp-tailed Grouse were native to the area, Greater Prairie-Chickens apparently were not found in Colorado until the late 1800's. During the early 1900's both species overlapped widely in distribution throughout northeastern Colorado. Sharp-tailed Grouse are presently limited to a small area of Douglas County while Greater Prairie-Chickens are common throughout Yuma County. Most of the changes in distribution are attributable to changes in land-use. Greater Prairie-Chickens apparently require an intermixture of grassland and shrubs. The stability of Greater Prairie-Chicken populations, the frequency of Sharp-tailed Grouse sightings, and the improvement of habitat all indicate that prairie grouse populations in northeastern Colorado may at least be stable.

CROSSBILL ATTRACTION TO SALT: A COLORADO EPISODE

David Leatherman, 2048 Whiterock Court  
Fort Collins, CO 80526

Abstract: Salt and related compounds are widely reported in the literature as influencing local movements of certain finches. Both the Red Crossbill (Loxia curvirostra) and the White-winged Crossbill (L. leucoptera) are among species that occur in Colorado that are reported to be strongly attracted to these materials. While initial crossbill attraction to a general area is usually tied to tree seed crops, it does not appear that crossbill attraction to salty sites is due to soil texture, site characteristics, associated food availability or the breeding cycle. Published observations indicate that attraction to salty locations is chemical in nature and that some dietary deficiency is being met. Crossbills of both species were noted from March-May of 1989 to be attracted to salt and grit along the road over Cameron Pass in Larimer and Jackson Counties at about 10,000 feet elevation. Numbers of crossbills were struck and killed by vehicles using the roadway.

THE LITTLE BLUE HERON, A NEW BREEDING BIRD FOR COLORADO

Ronald A. Ryder, Colorado State University  
Richard W. Schnaderbeck, Alamosa-Monte Vista  
National Wildlife Refuge  
Clinton W. Jeske, Colorado State University

Abstract: At least one (possibly two) pair of Little Blue Herons (Egretta caerulea) nested on Parker Road, Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge, in Rio Grande County, Colorado in June 1988. On June 20, Ryder found one adult on a nest containing 2 eggs and 3 young. All 3 authors visited the nest on July 5 and found 4 dead young and 1 cold egg. An adult was seen at a possible nest 200 yards to the west. The young are now preserved in the Denver Museum of Natural History. Although immature Little Blue Herons were first reported near Boulder in June 1955, this is the first verified nesting attempt in Colorado. Over 20 observations of the species are known for Colorado, including birds in the

San Luis Valley since 1974. It is reported from 16 of the 28 Latilong blocks in the state.

THE COLORADO BREEDING BIRD ATLAS: A PROGRESS REPORT  
Hugh Kingery, 869 Milwaukee St., Denver, CO 80206

Abstract: This paper summarized progress of fieldwork on the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas project to date. It presented statistics on blocks covered, distribution of the coverage for the state and numbers of species reported.

COMPUTERIZATION OF COLORADO BREEDING BIRD ATLAS DATA  
Donald L. Schrupp, Colorado Division of Wildlife

Abstract: Integration of field data from the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas Project (CBAP) into the Colorado Division of Wildlife Database has begun. Explanation of the D.O.W. Wildlife Database(s), their structure and use, the description of relationships between Atlas data and this database, maps of coverage and species distribution to date were presented. There exist future opportunities to integrate CBAP data with other habitat-based information in the Division's Wildlife Resource Information system.

The annual business/board meeting was held following the paper session, late on Saturday afternoon. The following members were present: Peter Gent, Beth Dillon, Steve Bouricius, David Martin, David Silverman, Mark Janos, Paul Opler, Mike Carter, and Linda Vidal. Invited guest: Vic Zerbi. The following items were discussed:

1. DUES INCREASE: If the C.F.O. continues to support the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas Project, the Colorado Bird Observatory, and other organizations, then a dues increase is necessary. The group was supportive of these contributions, so after discussion it was decided to increase annual membership dues from \$10 to \$12 in 1990.

2. NEW OFFICERS: The new officers of the C.F.O. are President-Bill Prather, Vice President-David Martin, Board Members-Linda Vidal, Mike Carter, and Susan Allen.
3. 1990 CONVENTION: David Silverman has extended an offer to host the 1990 C.F.O. convention in Pueblo, in conjunction with the Arkansas Valley Audubon Society. A tentative date was set for the third weekend in May, 1990.
4. DONATIONS: The C.F.O. donated \$250 to the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas Project. A donation of \$100 was made to the Colorado Bird Observatory, thus the C.F.O. becomes a founding member of the C.B.O.
5. INCOME: A current treasurer's report was made by Steve Bouricius. The board agreed to advertise the availability of the Colorado Bird Distribution Latilong Study on the back of the C.F.O. Journal as has been done in the past.
6. MEMBERS: There were 74 new members for 1989. Thanks to David Martin for his work in generating this interest.
7. POST OFFICE: Beth Dillon reported that the C.F.O. passed its first audit by the Postal Service.

A banquet followed the papers session and business meeting on Saturday evening. Wendy Shattil and Bob Rozinski made an outstanding slide presentation with many stunning slides of Colorado birdlife. Wendy and Bob are just as interested and willing to discuss their methods for taking photographs of wildlife as they are in talking about the birds themselves.

The Sunday field trip was to Pawnee National Grasslands. We started at Timnath Reservoir with great close-up views at nearly 100 Aechmophorus grebes, including at least 8 Clark's. Courtship activity was in full swing, with some limited interaction between the two species. Brief stops in Weld County on the way to Briggsdale produced Red-necked Phalaropes and a nice Black-necked Stilt. Once on the grasslands, most participants got excellent views of prairie specialties like Mountain Plover (one adult toured a prairie dog town with 3 chicks), Burrowing Owls, McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Red-headed Woodpeckers, and nesting Ferruginous Hawks. Those who crossed Murphy's Pasture were treated to a Peregrine Falcon circling overhead.

Crow Valley Campground was peppered with large numbers of Boy Scouts (well-behaved race) and Swainson's Thrushes. Early morning birders reported a Lazuli X Indigo Bunting. Also unusual here was a Chimney Swift (not on the Pawnee Grassland check-list) and Cedar Waxwing. Orchard Orioles and Blue Grosbeaks rewarded those seeking these beautiful species.

Sidetrips by individual parties during the weekend yielded other good birds. Bill Prather reported a calling ("tu-tu-tu") Short-billed Dowitcher and a Black-necked Stilt at Duck Lake early Saturday. Vic Zerbi's persistence (two trips to Cameron Pass in the same weekend!) paid off when he found four White-winged Crossbills near the Zimmerman Lake Trailhead outhouse. Joe and Adam Mammoser and Dave Leatherman found another first-spring male American Redstart north of Nunn. The silage pit north of SR34 and CR9 produced two Band-tailed Pigeons one evening. Thanks to Joe Himmel and Bill Prather for the tip on this site.

We wish to express our thanks to the many C.F.O. members who helped in the organization and carrying out of this convention. Field trips were expertly planned, organized and pre-scouted by David Leatherman. His pre-convention fieldtrip outline is a model of what should be done for each such event. Thanks to Dr. Ronald Ryder for organizing the papers session and to those who presented papers. And thank you to Peter Gent and Beth Dillon for much of the organization necessary to have the convention.

Our annual convention is clearly one of the birding and social highlights of the year for many of our members. We enjoyed the birding and appreciated the chance to experience firsthand our member's skills, insights and general field knowledge of natural history.

## A HOUSE WREN SINGING AT 11,800 FEET

Bob Righter, Hugh Kingery, and Rob Wilson  
Denver, Colorado

In the mountains of Colorado, the House Wren (Troglodytes aedon) breeds in a variety of coniferous and aspen-associated habitats, to 10,000 feet (Bailey and Niedrach, 1965). In the La Garita Mountains on Boot Mountain (Bowers Peak quad, 37106H5) at 11 a.m. on June 19, 1989, we observed a House Wren singing from a dead snag approximately fifteen feet above the ground on a south-facing slope. The habitat can best be described as an upper subalpine area that had at some time experienced a burn which had killed all the coniferous trees, resulting in a hillside containing many scattered snags. There was no visible evidence of any regeneration of trees. The snag from which the wren was singing was only about four hundred feet distant from the natural tree line.

Although no nesting activities were noted during the five minutes of observation, the singing behavior can therefore only be construed as suggestive of anticipated breeding. It should be noted that Mountain Bluebirds (Sialia currucoides) were actively nesting in this same region.

This observation seemed significant to us, as again Bailey/Niedrach's Birds of Colorado implies that the House Wren breeds to 10,000 feet. No other literature that we surveyed (A.O.U., 1983; Grinnel and Miller, 1986) cites any higher breeding. So if breeding did occur, it would be almost 2,000 feet higher than previously recorded for Colorado and most probably be the highest elevation in North America for breeding House Wrens.

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## WESTERN SCREECH-OWLS IN THE GRAND VALLEY

Rich Levad  
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The Western Screech-Owl is nocturnal and quite secretive, so accurate information about its abundance is difficult to obtain. This difficulty has led to a rather slow recognition of the bird's actual abundance in the Grand Valley of Western Colorado.

Davis in Birds of Western Colorado (1969) commented on the Screech Owl: "Uncommon resident; there are few records." His line graph records the bird as rare from March through July and shows no records for the remainder of the year. The Colorado Bird Distribution Latilong Study (1982) lists the Western Screech-Owl as a fairly common breeder and as unusual to fairly common in winter. The Audubon Society of Western Colorado Checklist of the Birds of Mesa County (1985) lists the bird as common in all seasons.

I conducted fieldwork this past winter that indicated the bird is not only common, but is the Grand Valley's most abundant raptor, with densities perhaps as high as 8-10 birds per square mile in prime habitat.

A review of past Grand Junction Audubon Christmas bird counts revealed that the Western Screech-Owl was counted on only 10 of 36 past counts. All 10 of these years were after 1970. The total number of birds counted was only 19, the high being 4 in 1982. No owling parties had been active on these counts, and the owls counted had all been seen during the day, most of the observations at two or three holes where owls have regularly been observed over the years.

To ensure that this bird was not missed on the 1988 count, I decided to locate a few beforehand. By calling for an hour or so before daylight on 3 mornings in December, I located six owls, four of which answered again for the Christmas count. Several more were located during the week following the Christmas count. The unexpected ease with which these were located led to a more systematic attempt at estimating the Western Screech-Owl

population of the Grand Valley.

Between January 1 and March 4, 1989, I used a tape to call at 199 locations. Virtually all of the calling was done in the hour or so before daylight. By recording the addresses of likely spots beforehand, 10 to 12 locations could be covered in that time. Tom Moran and a thermos of his amazingly good coffee accompanied me on most of the trips. Usually we would simply pull up to one of our pre-planned spots, open the windows of the car, place the recorder on the roof, play a five-minute tape (6 thirty-second copies of the National Geographic tape interspersed with 30 second periods of silence), and then watch and listen quietly. Generally, a response would follow the second or third burst of the tape if one was forthcoming.

At the 199 locations, 77 owls responded at 70 spots for a response rate of 35%. Our most successful outing was the morning of January 28 when we found at least one owl at each of nine successive stops.

The responses varied greatly. Some returned the call vigorously; some called so softly as to be barely audible at 10-15 feet; and others flew in but were silent. When two owls called in response, they were invariably a male and a female, the female call being noticeably higher. Ninety percent of the responses were by a single bird. This pattern corresponds closely to Donald and Lillian Stokes' report of the Eastern Screech-Owl: "In general, only one member of a pair responds to the playback. It may be that this is usually the male and that the males do the majority of territorial defense..." They further note that the owls generally remain on their territory throughout the year. If the habits of the Western Screech-Owl are like those reported by the Stokes for the Eastern, most responses by a single bird probably represent a pair of owls.

The presence of two observers pushed the response rate up to 45%, which seems to indicate that a single observer misses a number of the quiet or silent responses. Two observers probably still miss a few responses. If single bird responses generally represent a pair, and if two observers miss 5 or 10 percent of the responses, the 199 locations surveyed may well host nearly 200 screech owls. A cursory survey of the remaining habitat suggests that in addition to those we surveyed, there are perhaps 200 to 300 more locations in the valley that potentially host owls. If

the population is evenly distributed, the total population may approach 400-500 owls.

We found that farm buildings with several mature cottonwood trees which had not been recently pruned, and with some low-level shrubbery such as lilac, almost certainly supported owls. We did not get a response at two or three places that met these criteria, but that were very close to a heavily traveled road. We suspect that owls attempting to inhabit these places may be killed by traffic. Two other very likely-looking places which did not produce screech-owl responses later proved to be within the territories of Great Horned Owls.

If a site's cottonwoods were neatly trimmed, or if there were only one or two mature trees, or if a site lacked low shrubs, the chances of owls being present declined. We did find owls in some very skimpy looking spots, however, and found that if a tree with a chance of containing a suitable hole was present, the site was worth a try.

I played the Western Screech-Owl tape at four locations northeast of Longmont on the morning of February 17. I didn't get any Western Screech-Owl responses, but one Eastern Screech-Owl responded enthusiastically at one stop. I was in Latilong 4, only about two miles from Latilong 5. The Latilong study lists this owl as an unusual probable breeder in 4 and missing in 5. There are hundreds of farm places in northeastern Colorado which have stands of mature cottonwoods. Was the response on February 17 just fortuitous, or is this owl more common than supposed?

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## COLORADO BREEDING BIRD ATLAS UPDATE

Hugh Kingery  
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Denver, Colorado 80206

At this writing, neither the Atlas office nor the Regional Coordinators can report more than anecdotes on 1989 field work. We think that we accomplished more this year than in either of the past two years of field work, but we still have to collect the field cards and to process them. We should have preliminary reports by the next issue of the C.F.O. Journal.

We are running out of field cards, so probably will order more. The new cards will incorporate the requests for additional statistical data about field work which this year's cards had on a rubber stamp. They will also incorporate the new A.O.U. taxonomic changes as they relate to species and common names--Western Flycatcher has become Cordilleran, our pipit is now the American Pipit and Brown Towhee has become Canyon Towhee.

C.F.O. Journal readers will soon read of 1989 confirmation of Buffleheads nesting in Colorado, thus confirming Jenny Rechel's 1987 Atlas observations. Colorado Division of Wildlife researchers, James K. Ringelman and Kenneth J. Kehmeier, confirmed the nesting this year.

Some of the anecdotes: Randy Lentz found a Saw-whet Owl at 10,500 feet near Guanella Pass, quite a high elevation for this species. The Field Sparrows mentioned in the last issue of the C.F.O. Journal eluded confirmation of breeding this summer. The singing males ranged over a large area and sang from two or three different draws. The closest to confirmation of breeding was the observation of pairs on two occasions. White-winged Crossbills and Summer Tanagers also eluded confirmation. Maybe another year!

I can report on my own field work. On a block on the Arickarée River north of Idalia, we found 5 breeding pairs of Eastern Bluebirds. The prairie north of the river had several pairs of Upland Sandpipers along with abundant Cassin's and Grasshopper Sparrows.

The Field Sparrow block (Vernon 39102H3) had an impressive complement of Bell's Vireos--I would estimate that 50-75 pairs nest in the skunkbush thickets there. This block also had a territorial Northern Cardinal (though not a very enthusiastic singer; I doubt that he had a mate). In this block, I also discovered a hairy Woodpecker nest--the only one that I have seen on the plains. In the southwest part of the state, we found Fox Sparrows in four blocks in widely-separated portions of the Rio Grande National Forest. We also located Three-toed Woodpeckers in three of those blocks. Two of these blocks had four Empidonax sp. flycatchers. In one, Urling and I sought unsuccessfully for a Dipper nest. We had to settle for a consolation prize, sitting on eggs, beside a 75 foot waterfall: a Cordilleran Flycatcher.

## FIELD TRIP REPORT: NO WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN

Bill Brockner  
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Evergreen, Colorado 80439

Eight C.F.O. members and guests hit the trail on June 18, 1989 at Bergen Park for Mt. Evans. It was a beautiful day with a tendency for bird-disturbing winds. The Mt. Evans road was closed at Summit Lake, so we parked there and hiked up the road about two miles in a determined search of the elusive White-tailed Ptarmigan. Although the ptarmigan was not found that day, the Brown-capped Rosy Finch was spotted in between Water Pipits and White-crowned Sparrows. Rocky Mountain Goats were most cooperative.

We dropped down to timberline at the lower end of Mt. Goliath and did succeed in getting very good views of the Hammond's Flycatcher. This was a lifer for some of the members. We all thank Bob Dickson for creating some territorial competition that lead to the great views.

We finished up a great trip with 28 species.

CONTINUING:  
THE C.F.O. TOUR OF COLORADO

Sunday, November 12, 1989

**Pueblo Reservoir**

Dave Silverman is always turning up interesting birds at Pueblo Reservoir--we've been hearing about them on the Colorado Bird Alert and seeing them written up in the seasonal reports. Target birds include loons, gulls, Bald Eagles, Rusty Blackbirds and surprises. We will carpool and take light, easy, short walks. Bring clothes appropriate for variable November conditions, bring food and drink, and of course a telescope, if you have one. Camping will be cold but can be done at Pueblo Reservoir, and many motels are available at I-25 and U.S. 50 West. Meet at Park headquarters at Pueblo Reservoir (near the South Marina) at 7:30 a.m. For more information, call Dave Silverman at (719) 489-3565 or (719) 543-1842 (12:30-2:00 p.m. only).

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