

THE PRIMARY SOURCE



Bird
Conservancy
of the Rockies

NEWSLETTER FOR BIRD CONSERVANCY OF THE ROCKIES | FALL/WINTER 2021 | NUMBER 58

This year's Bald Eagle nesting season has ended and it's time to take a look at the 2020/2021 preliminary results compiled by the **Bald Eagle Watch** (BEW) community scientist program. It's been a very successful season in terms of nests monitored and reports submitted! Many new volunteers joined our ranks and a first-ever online training course helped expand our network into new areas across the state of Colorado!



Nesting eagles at Green Mtn. Reservoir. Photo: Bruce Snyder

Big Year for Bald Eagle Watchers!

BEW volunteers and collaborators visited 135 active nests statewide in 2021. 104 (77 percent) successfully produced fledged eagles! 20 percent were unsuccessful and three percent undetermined. Over 40 unoccupied nests were also inspected to determine their condition and confirm they were still present. Most unused nests were alternate sites of breeding pairs that we monitored occupied their primary nests.

Following the trend of increased Bald Eagle numbers, 19 new breeding pairs were added to the BEW inventory in 2021. Thirty-six new nests were added due to locating more nests than in previous years.



An immature Bald Eagle near Lyons, CO shows off its adolescent brown coloration. Their adult plumage, including the white head, comes at around five years of age. Photo: Anne Whitehurst

Learning from failure

Nest failures are a sad part of the story, but even misfortune yields useful data. Leading causes of nest failure or loss include inclement weather taking down trees and branches, or adults abandoning nests due to nearby human activity.

What happens after a nest fails? Nesting pairs usually construct a replacement nest after the first one is lost. Typically, the new nest is located within a mile of the original and constructed within a few months. Replacement nests in 2020 at Barr, Stearns and Standley Lakes followed this pattern.

Big data for big decisions

BEW's growing dataset is the largest and most comprehensive in the state, representing over 80 percent of Colorado's known breeding population.

In 2020, Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) launched a four-year study to help understand current population trends, habitat use and impacts of human disturbance on Bald Eagles along Colorado's densely populated Front Range.

Information gathered by volunteer community science networks fills gaps caused by resource and capacity limitations at state and federal agencies. This data is important for making wise conservation and mitigation decisions. We are thrilled to see BEW data collected by our volunteers being put to work.

Keeping the future bright

Eagle numbers have steadily increased in Colorado for years, but so has the human footprint. This research aims to shed light on how eagles are adapting to a rapidly-changing landscape. Looking into the future, we can identify conservation actions based on science to ensure a healthy population of this iconic species in our state in perpetuity!

To learn more about Bald Eagle Watch and other community science initiatives, please visit:

www.birdconservancy.org/communityscience

Report submitted by **Bruce Snyder**
Bald Eagle Watch Volunteer



Photo by Chuck Hundertmark

Become a Bald Eagle Watcher!

Volunteer to help monitor and conserve Bald Eagles in Colorado

You can play a crucial role in the scientific monitoring and conservation of this iconic species!

Bald Eagle Watch started in 1988 to monitor and help protect the Bald Eagle nest at Barr Lake State Park northeast of Denver. Today, community scientists monitor eagle nests across Colorado to gather and report valuable data about the nesting success of the state's Bald Eagle population.

Program at-a-Glance:



What: Volunteers monitor and collect data on Bald Eagle nesting behavior and productivity in Colorado. Visit designated nest(s) weekly for a minimum of one hour, fill out a data sheet and submit to an online reporting system. Spotting scope or binoculars are required, and volunteers supply their own transportation.

When: During eagle nesting season, Feb.-July

Training: Held in January of each year at **Barr Lake State Park Nature Center**
13401 Picadilly Rd, Brighton, CO 80603

To sign up for the next training, contact:
Kelsey Mazur (Outreach & Volunteer Coordinator)
kelsey.mazur@birdconservancy.org

Reminders of Resilience

THE PRIMARY SOURCE

The Primary Source is the member newsletter of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

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The Primary Source refers to a bird's primary feathers which power its flight. You, our members, Friends, volunteers and partners are the primary source of Bird Conservancy's power to accomplish its mission to conserve birds and their habitats.

Editing and design:

William Bevil, Communications Director

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Carrying on with our mission amid winds of constant change

A consistent theme that comes through in this issue of the *Primary Source*—from our Bald Eagle Watch volunteers, to forest restoration work, to kids at camp—is resilience.

Our first-ever virtual Bald Eagle Watch training created opportunities for new volunteers across Colorado to get involved. Through their commitment, 135 active nests were monitored for a record year. The majority of nests were successful. Monitoring data are shared with key partners, including Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to help inform conservation and management strategies across the state. Thank you volunteers for helping advance a state-wide perspective! It is great to see our national symbol thriving.

Camps took flight again this year! It was wonderful to get our youth outdoors engaging in the natural world, exploring, learning and just having fun. The education crew did an excellent job maintaining a healthy and safe environment and the kids made memories that will last a lifetime. Our overnight camps gave teens a space to discuss mental health and a place for Tyler, Camp Coordinator, to help them overcome traumas of the pandemic. One parent mentioned how their teenage daughter, Willow, couldn't wait to get back to camp. It had been a hard year with COVID and she was struggling with isolation. Having camp around the corner brought hope. Her Mom dropped her off, knowing she was in good hands and that she wouldn't hear from her daughter again until camp was done. She would be too busy making friends and enjoying the experience. When she was picked-up, Willow said "I didn't want it to end, I can't wait until next year when camp is even longer." We look forward to having Willow join On the Wing as she soars ahead into our final camp tier before graduation.

Habitat restoration work continues and land resiliency is a huge focus. We all have been impacted by the smoke from fires near and far away. Our forest health is stretched and we need active management including thinning and prescribed burning to improve conditions. Dave McNitt from our Stewardship team shares more about our collaborative efforts to approach forest management from multiple angles, not only improving land health but also habitat for birds and other wildlife.

Thank you all for flocking with us and ensuring Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is resilient in these ever-changing times. Know your support is changing the land, lives and birds we all love. Join us for our Fall Fundraiser (see pg. 4) to learn more, talk with our staff and support conserving birds and their habitats now and for the future.



Tammy VerCauteren, Executive Director



Inspiration Points to Nature: Bird Camps Snapshots

We had a successful COVID-free camp season, with campers of all ages coming together in safe spaces that resembled normality! Here are just a few highlights from a remarkable season, shared through photos and testimonials from our camp participants...



"This was my favorite and best year of camp!" - Ana



"It was so cool to sit in the dark trying to find owls. It was much needed peace and quite even though we didn't see or hear any owls" - Logan



"Camp this year was such a good time. I was able to learn more about birds and have a safe place to be myself away from home" - Ella



VISIT A BIRD BANDING STATION

See real science in action and experience an up-close and personal encounter with migrating and resident songbirds. Bird

Conservancy of the Rockies conducts banding at seven stations each fall in Colorado and Nebraska.

Registration is required for all visitors. For more info. about station locations & hours of operation, or to register online, visit: birdconservancy.org/birdbanding

JOIN US AT UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Our Family and Homeschool Program line-up continues into the fall and beyond, including **Nature Art**, the **Crepuscular Crawl**, **Archery & Feathers**, and the **Christmas Bird Count for Kids**.



For more information and a complete list of our upcoming programs, visit birdconservancy.org/events

Please note that online **registration is required** for all programs. We cannot accept walk ins. Registration opens one month before each program and closes one week prior to program date.

On the cover:



Photo by Pete Seel

Bald Eagle

(*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

This majestic, charismatic raptor has been a spiritual symbol to native people of the Americas for centuries, and is a modern national emblem of the United States. It almost disappeared when populations dropped to critical levels by the mid-1970s. Since that time, following bans on harmful pesticides like DDT, they have strongly rebounded. They were removed from the Endangered Species list in 1995. Today, Bald Eagles are hailed as a conservation success story.

Bald Eagles are large birds that capture the imagination. Their wingspan can exceed 7 feet, and they build enormous nests measuring 5-6 feet across.

They are skilled hunters, scavengers and thieves! Fish is their favorite entrée, but they also hunt mammals, waterfowl and other birds—and will even eat carrion and garbage, or steal a meal from other birds like Osprey and herons.

Look for them near rivers, lakes, reservoirs and coastal areas with nearby woodlands. Give them plenty of space during the nesting season, as human disturbance could cause the parents to abandon their nest.

OUR MISSION

Conserving birds and their habitats through science, education and land stewardship

OUR VISION

A world where birds are forever abundant, contributing to healthy landscapes and inspiring human curiosity and love of nature.

OUR APPROACH

Our mission is advanced through sound science, achieved through empowering people, realized through stewardship and sustained through partnerships.

Our work radiates from the Rockies to the Great Plains, Mexico and beyond.

Together, we are improving native bird populations, the land and the lives of people.

Connect with Us

For the latest on our upcoming events, visit www.birdconservancy.org, sign up for our e-newsletter on our website or become a fan of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies on Facebook.

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[@birdconservancyrockies](https://www.instagram.com/birdconservancyrockies)

Get the Full Story

Bird Conservancy's blog is the place to go for news and information about Bird Conservancy's migratory milestones and the positive impacts we are having on bird conservation efforts across the West.

birdconservancy.org/stories

Birds OF A Feather

TOGETHER AGAIN!



Bird Conservancy
of the Rockies

2021 FALL FUNDRAISER

FRIDAY, OCT. 15 • 6 P.M.

AT
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OF NATURE & SCIENCE**

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Join us for a fun evening celebrating Bird Conservancy's efforts to conserve birds and their habitats and raise critical funds for people, birds and land!

TICKETS: \$40 PER PERSON

REGISTER ONLINE:

birdconservancy.org/2021fundraiser

Special thanks to our Event Sponsors:



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Seeing the Impact of Your Support

by Joe Pettit, Development Director

As the new Development Director at Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, I have spent the past 3 months listening and learning.

I hiked around Barr Lake with longtime supporters and learned about the 30+ year evolution of the organization. I visited project sites and learned first-hand from ranchers the benefits of our collaborative stewardship projects. I spent time at a banding station watching staff and volunteers gather data and prepare for autumn education programs. I heard the happy sounds of day campers outside my office window throughout the month of July. I have been busy and I have been loving every second of it!

Reflecting on these experiences, I go into autumn inspired, energized and grateful. I have seen the commitment of our staff, volunteers and donors and witnessed our programs' impacts on the community. Like you, I know how special Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is and I am proud to be part of the Flock!

As we draw near the end of another successful year, we would like to thank you for all your support and let you know of a few additional ways to maximize your support in 2021.

For more information on these giving vehicles, or to learn more about other opportunities to make an impact, please contact me at (303)659-4348 ext. 12 or joseph.pettit@birdconservancy.org.



Ways to Chip-In

Attend Our Fall Fundraiser

Join us at Birds of a Feather, Together Again! on October 15th at Denver Museum of Nature and Science and take part in the silent or live auction. Buy your tickets online at birdconservancy.org/2021fundraiser

Online Donation

We encourage you to make an end of year contribution or schedule a monthly contribution. You can even make a gift in someone's honor as a holiday gift. Make your donation online at birdconservancy.org/donate

IRA Charitable Distribution

You can make an IRA Charitable Rollover Gift to help Bird Conservancy this year! Are you 70½ or older? If so, you can give up to \$100,000 per calendar year through your IRA and possibly receive substantial tax benefits. (Be sure to consult your tax advisor).

Gift of Stock or Mutual Funds

Your gift of appreciated assets can provide an income tax deduction at fair market value and can avoid capital gains tax. Check with your tax advisor to see how this can benefit you. Learn more about gifts of securities at birdconservancy.org/appreciated_securities

Leave a Legacy

Including the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies in your estate plans is an incredibly impactful and practical way to support the conservation of nature for future generations. Not only will you support the vital programs that will conserve birds and their habitat, your gift may also reduce the tax burden for your heirs.

Share the View

2021 International Photography Competition

This annual event aims to increase appreciation of the natural world by highlighting images from outstanding nature and wildlife photographers. 20 cash prizes amounting to \$5000 will be awarded! Photographers worldwide are eligible for entry. Landscapes, wildlife and nature images from anywhere in the world qualify. Proceeds from the contest are used to support nature and wildlife initiatives.

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is honored to be selected as one of the beneficiaries of this year's event proceeds! **Thank you** to the Share the View organizers, and to participating photographers. We look forward to seeing the amazing images you share!



2020 Grand Prize Winning Photo by David Bates
www.davidbates.com

Enter online beginning Oct 15, 2021 through Dec 1, 2021
sharetheview.contestvenue.com



FLOURISHING FORESTS

by *David McNitt (Private Lands Wildlife Biologist)*

Fire is a fact of life in the American West, of that you can be sure. Our forests have long been shaped by fire, and efforts to prevent it have significantly changed forests and often backfired—making wildfires worse. Today, we are correcting course by using a process called forest restoration which uses land management tools to transition forests back to near historic conditions to make forests more resilient to natural disturbances, such as fire, while also providing benefits to people and wildlife.

Tools for Forest Management

Forest restoration targets uniformly dense forests with the objective of diversifying forest structure by removing excess trees. This removes potential fuel that can lead to an out-of-control, “mega” wildfire. In more remote areas, intentional fires - either letting wildfires burn or using prescribed fire - can be an effective way to achieve objectives. In areas closer to human development, such as where our Private Lands Wildlife Biologists work in the southern end of Colorado's Front Range, it is safer to mechanically remove trees. The resulting forest structure enhances wildlife habitat and increases biodiversity by restoring the mosaic quality of the forest, with vegetation of various age, size, species, and distribution. In fact, species dependent on periodic disturbance events will benefit from this management. By aiming to restore historical forest structure and reduce vegetative fuel loads, managers are also helping to reduce the severity of wildfires that have become more prevalent across the west.

Win-Wins for People and Wildlife

The benefits of forest restoration extend far beyond increased biodiversity and enhanced habitat. Property, infrastructure and even human lives all gain protection when wildfire severity is mitigated. Restoring grazed forests can improve lands for livestock, while the trees removed from overly dense forests provide a sustainable and plentiful source of lumber. Forest restoration can even increase water availability and reduce erosion. It's an ecological and economical win-win, especially on working lands.

Science Guides Action

As revealed in the 2018 “3 Billion Birds Lost” report in the journal *Science*, western forest species have lost approximately 140 million birds since 1970—an estimated 33% decline. Our forest restoration projects are guided by scientific data on historic forest conditions, wildlife habitat, climate change, fire science, and more. A major plus of these projects is that they're not species-specific but benefit entire wildlife communities, as supported by a recently published paper from our science team. We will continue to study these relationships to help guide our land stewardship efforts, including prioritizing project locations and monitoring the effects over time following restoration.

Continued on next page



Forest restoration often involves removing trees mechanically with heavy machinery. Material removed from restoration projects becomes lumber, firewood, mulch and more. Photo: T. Woodward.



At Pueblo Wood Products, trees from forest restoration projects are used to manufacture pallets, an example of a restoration materials being used as a sustainable resource in global commerce. Photo: D. McNitt.



We work with landowners to achieve their goals while folding in wildlife benefits. The rancher enjoying this horseback view also saw improved grazing in his forests soon after restoration work was completed. Photo: D. Lorenz.



This recently restored ponderosa pine woodland from a meadow. Once the machines leave, nature takes control again quickly—this time on a better path. Photo: T. Woodward.



Welcome to our new Staff!

Anna Greenberg Private Lands Wildlife Biologist (Alamosa, CO)

Anna grew up in Chicago, and spent her childhood searching for worms, frogs, and ducks. That curiosity and passion for nature continues today. She holds a B.A. in Environmental Studies from Univ. of Pittsburgh and Master's in Ecosystem Science & Management, and Environmental Policy & Planning from Univ. of Michigan. Anna enjoys climbing and snowboarding.



Bryan Nuse Research Scientist (Atlanta, GA)

A native of Atlanta, Bryan's career path as a quantitative ecologist was sparked by an interest in songbirds. He received his PhD in 2014 from the Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources at the Univ. of Georgia, then worked as a postdoc in the Georgia Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit. Bryan is interested in bridging the gap between statistical modeling and practical conservation management applications.



Chris Latimer Research Director (Fort Collins, CO)

Chris grew up in Virginia where he received his B.S. & M.S. Fisheries & Wildlife Science at Virginia Tech. Chris completed his doctorate in Wildlife Ecology, Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison and then spent 4 years as a Landscape Ecologist at TNC, Colorado. Chris has a strong interest in quantitative ecology and leveraging data to inform conservation delivery. In his spare time, Chris enjoys getting outdoors with his family hiking, camping, fly-fishing and skiing, and brewing beer.



Joe Pettit Development Director (Brighton, CO)

Joe is a development professional with experience spanning performing arts, conservation, climate change, foreign policy, political campaigns and urban horticulture. He grew up in eastern Nebraska and earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English from the University of Nebraska-Omaha. When not working, he can be found gardening, cycling, cooking, and, of course, birding.



Sofia Prado-Irwin Communications Assistant (Brighton, CO)

Originally from Denver, Sofia has had an interest in natural history and biology from a young age. She received her BA from Barnard College studying immune mechanisms in honeybees, completed her MS at San Francisco State Univ. studying the ecology of skin microbiomes in salamanders, and will soon finish her PhD at Harvard where she is studying the evolution/ecology of Central American Anolis lizards. Sofia's Bird Conservancy role gives her a chance to further explore science communications. In her spare time, Sofia enjoys writing, nature photography, cooking, crochet and birding.



Farewells:

Kelli Hirsch, Kristina Kline,
Stacey Monahan

Visit birdconservancy.org/staff to view extended team member bios and contact information.

Flourishing Forests *Continued from pg. 6*

Restoring Western Forests: A Big Task

Considering the millions of acres of forest in the Western US alone, the task ahead is a big one. Restoring forests at a meaningful scale is intensive and expensive. It typically means big machines, removing many trees, using prescribed fire, and lots of time and money. It can appear to be a messy affair when the process is underway, and can be counter intuitive for many of us nature lovers.

Perhaps the most valuable thing we can do is approach forest restoration with an open mind and challenge our concept of what a forest "should" look like. If we pay close attention to the science, the history, and the wildlife, the path ahead becomes clear. Once the machines leave, return to the same forest a year or two later and let the birds speak for themselves.

In partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, local Conservation Districts, and other partners, our Stewardship team helps landowners plan, fund and conduct collaborative restoration projects on their land and across property boundaries.



Talking forest restoration in the field, L-R: Kaitlyn Nafziger (BCR), David McNitt (BCR), Matthew Marshall (Big Thompson Conservation District) and Dylan Alsbach (Fort Collins Conservation District).

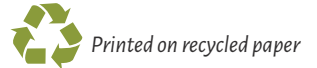


To learn more about our forest restoration projects being led by our Private Lands Wildlife Biologists, visit our website: birdconservancy.org/stories



Bird Conservancy of the Rockies
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www.birdconservancy.org

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