

PTARMIGAN



Northern Colorado Bird Alliance

(formerly Fort Collins Audubon Society)

P.O. Box 271968·Fort Collins, CO·80527-1968·www.nocobirdalliance.org

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

December 2025

Volume 57, Issue 9

Join Us for Our Year-End Extravaganza!

Book and Art Sale *plus* Annual Potluck and Member Slideshow

Thursday, December 11

Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Dr.

Book and Art Sale, and Potluck Setup: 6:30 p.m.; Dinner: ~6:45

Announcements: 7:20; Member Slideshow: 7:30

Please note the early start time for this month's program

Announcements and slideshow will be accessible on Zoom. Enter the following link at 7:20 p.m. to join the meeting virtually:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86373878413>

This month we are combining our annual fundraiser with our annual potluck and member slideshow. Come early (6:30) for a little holiday shopping for gently used books/art/etc. Local bird guide Nick Komar will be available to sell signed copies of his new book, *The Biggest Year in American Birding: A Quest to Find 900 Birds in the USA and Its Territories*. Please bring cash as we cannot accept other forms of payment.

The book sale will run simultaneously with our potluck and slideshow. For the potluck, please bring a dish



Bring a dish to share or this is all we'll have to eat! Photo by Camilla Cerea.

to share with a serving utensil and your own place setting. We will provide beverages and cups. Setup time will begin at 6:30 p.m. and food will be available to enjoy beginning at 6:45.

For the slideshow, members can bring some of their favorite wildlife photos from 2025 on a USB memory device. Please plan to limit your presentation to 10 minutes or less, and just one presenter per household. If you will be sharing slides, please notify John Shenot in advance: johnshenot@gmail.com. This program is free, and non-members are welcome to join in the fun!

Northern Colorado Bird Alliance welcomes new National Audubon Society members by sending one complimentary copy of our newsletter. Join us at our monthly programs on the second Thursday of the month to find out more about Northern Colorado Bird Alliance. National dues do not cover the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter, so if you'd like to keep receiving it, please support your local chapter and subscribe. See details on the last page of the newsletter or on our website at www.nocobirdalliance.org.

In keeping with our bylaws, the Northern Colorado Bird Alliance Board agreed in November on a proposed annual budget for our 2026 operations. Members can vote on whether or not to approve the budget at our annual meeting in January.

The following tables summarize our proposed revenues and expenses for 2026 by category. A complete budget proposal with details on expenses and revenues is available to any member upon request. The proposed budget represents a 0.3 percent decrease in budgeted expenses compared to 2025. Membership dues will not change.

2026 Proposed Budget by Category

Revenues	Amount	Percentage
Memberships	\$6,000	42%
Annual Fundraising Goal (net)	\$3,394	24%
National Audubon Baseline Funding	\$1,800	13%
Donations & Gifts	\$1,600	11%
Investment Interest	\$900	6%
Sales	\$500	4%
Total	\$14,194	100%

Expenses	Amount	Percentage
Publications	\$3,415	24%
Conservation	\$3,409	24%
Programs	\$3,230	23%
Misc./Admin.	\$2,180	15%
Education	\$1,960	14%
Total	\$14,194	100%

Report of the Nominating Committee on 2026 Northern Colorado Bird Alliance Board Candidates

In October, the Northern Colorado Bird Alliance Board of Directors appointed a Nominating Committee, consisting of John Shenot (chair), Barb Patterson, and Lori Pivonka, to identify candidates to serve as officers and directors on the 2026 Board. The president serves a two-year term, while all other board members

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www.nocobirdalliance.org

Visit us on Facebook:

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

serve one-year terms. In keeping with our bylaws, the Nominating Committee hereby announces a slate of recommended candidates to be officially nominated at our January membership meeting: Vice-President, Liz Pruessner; Treasurer, Joe Polazzi; Secretary, Kimberly Jordan; and Directors at Large (six positions to fill), Alan Godwin, Jessie Meschievitz, Lori Pivonka, Ryan Twedt, Karen Wheeler, and Stephanie Wheeler.

Additional nominations for all elected positions will be accepted from the floor at the January meeting. Members present will vote, and those elected will be installed at the conclusion of the meeting.

The Nominating Committee also identified candidates to chair our standing committees in 2026. Committee chairs are not elected; rather, they are appointed by the president with the consent of the board. Those candidates are Conservation, Tom Schultz; Membership, Harry Rose; Education, Sheila Webber; Finance, Cliff Hendrick; Programs, Nolan Bunting; Field Trips, Amy Roush; Publications, Joe Webber; Public Relations, Cassie Cranmore; Hospitality, Rich Brown; and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Delilah Lopez.



Big Win for Natural Areas Conservation

The results of the November election are a big win for the Natural Areas Program in Fort Collins and the wider region. Voters overwhelmingly chose to continue supporting the acquisition, restoration, and maintenance of our natural areas by making the existing 0.25 percent sales and use tax permanent. We'll never have worry about passing it again. With 73 percent voting yes, citizens once again have shown how much we love and value our open space and natural areas in northern Colorado. The community-initiated measure to fund natural areas and open space was first passed in

1992, and it has been successful both times it came up for renewal in 1997 and 2002. The 2002 measure was due to sunset in 2030. Community advocates decided this time to try to make the tax funding permanent, rather than simply renew it for another 25 years, so they gathered signatures to get it on the ballot for the November election. There is much to celebrate with the passage of a permanent funding stream for natural areas and open space, especially in these divisive times.

The outcome has been decades in the making and serves as a powerful example of how much can be accomplished through the dedication, vision, and hard work of passionate advocacy. Kudos to all who were involved.

During the 1970s, far sighted individuals in northern Colorado realized the mounting pressures of growth and development and began advocating for preserving open space; acquiring land for community separators and natural areas for maintenance of wildlife habitat; protection of rivers, streams, and waterways; and building trails and spaces for recreation that sustains healthy ecosystems. People worked to educate and promote these values and were met with much resistance and indifference for 20 years. Those working for promotion included our own former chapter president Bill Miller, current City Council

member Kelly Ohlson, Linda Stanley, and many others. Slowly, portions of land were purchased for open space, but a reliable funding mechanism was needed to maintain the conservation efforts. Frustrated by the lack of action from city and county government, the proponents finally took it to the people through a citizen-initiated ballot measure in 1992. The people under-

stood the importance of the idea and voted by 53 percent to fund natural areas programs and a department within the city to manage them. The momentum grew as surrounding

communities and counties began their own efforts, and soon more dedicated funding measures were passed in Larimer and Boulder counties. The city of Fort Collins worked with Loveland to purchase land for community separators to create permanent open space between our two cities. This conservation movement to expand the total open space acreage preserved and protected has had many positive benefits throughout northern Colorado, including far-reaching management plans for

habitat protection across entire ecozones from the plains to the mountains. Partnerships between cities, counties, and conservation groups using additional Great Outdoors Colorado grant funding have led to the creation of trails connecting natural areas and open space from the foothills in Bellvue along the Poudre River all the way to Greeley, and multiple trails along the Front Range from the Wyoming border to Boulder.

Thanks to visionary, persistent advocates and support from citizens, the community-driven sales tax ballot measures have preserved over 128,517 acres of open space in Fort Collins and Larimer County, with more to come every year. Get out there to celebrate this big win and enjoy the amazing bounty right out your back door!



River Bluffs Open Space by Charlie Johnson, Larimer County/Natural Resources.



Bobcat Ridge Natural Area from
<https://ourcity.fcgov.com/>.

Magpie the Hero

I love the tradition, practiced by serious and not-so-serious birders, of looking for your first bird of the New Year on January 1. My first bird of 2025 just happened to be my favorite, a chatty, intelligent, and resourceful bird: a Black-billed Magpie.

Despite having lived in many regions of the United States, I never saw a Black-billed Magpie until I moved to Colorado. As a child, however, I had heard many stories.

You think you know magpies, but did you know that it was the magpie who saved humanity from extinction back when the world was young? Although details vary slightly among the nations of the Great Plains, the Lakota tell it this way:

When the Great Spirit created the earth and all living things, humans and animals lived in peace and neither ate flesh. Over time, the buffalo grew to believe themselves the most powerful beings in the world, which gave them the right to kill and eat all other creatures. During a council meeting between the humans and the animals, the humans, with the support of the other animals, challenged Buffalo's belief, claiming humans should be the most powerful species. To settle the argument, Buffalo challenged the humans to a race, the winner to be declared the most powerful.

To avoid the buffalo having an unfair advantage — two legs can't compete with four — it was decided the birds would race for the humans while the other animals would attend to cheer on the racers. On race day, all living things went to a place at the edge of the Black



Black-billed Magpie from <https://urbanbird.org/>.

Hills called Buffalo Gap and lined up.

In those early days, the birds and animals had no color. But, for the race, each creature painted themselves carefully, according to its own medicine, its own vision. Skunk painted a white stripe on its back, Deer painted its tail black and Antelope gathered red-brown earth, mixed it with water, and painted its whole hide. To this day, all creatures have looked the same since painting themselves for this great race.

The buffalo chose a young cow named Running Slim Buffalo Woman as their contestant, while the humans chose four birds: a hummingbird, a meadowlark, a hawk, and a magpie. At the signal, Running Slim took off. Hummingbird kept up for a while, but soon fell back exhausted, and Meadowlark took over. At the halfway point, Meadowlark dropped out, but Hawk flew forward, the fastest of the birds, Hawk shot ahead of Running Slim, but Hawk's endurance did not match his swiftness, and the speed burst exhausted him. Running Slim returned to the lead.

Far behind, a black and white speck moved forward, flying hard. Magpie! Slow, but strong-hearted. Nearing the finish line, Running Slim was leading when suddenly, Magpie shot ahead. The humans roared and both racers collapsed, exhausted.

Magpie's resilience and determination defeated the buffalo. So, the next magpie you see, please express your thanks!

Northern Colorado Bird Alliance Welcomes New and Renewing Members

Elaine Burritt	Carrie E. Graves
Lisa Carp	Ada Kan
Barb Colvin	Ed Miron
Mark D. Colvin	Philip Ogle
Ann Donoghue	Susan Puder
Karen Downing	Harry Rose
Lisa Downing	Ingrid Rosoff
Kathy Fieseler	Juliette Wilson
Jack Godwin	

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

It's Time to Renew Your Membership

Northern Colorado Bird Alliance chapter memberships run for the calendar year from January through December. Dues are \$20 to receive the *Ptarmigan* electronically or \$30 for a printed copy via mail. Use the form on the back page of the newsletter to renew by mail, renew at a program meeting, or renew online at www.nocobirdalliance.org. Your membership and contributions are tax deductible, and help make our programs possible. If you renewed Sept.–Dec. 2025, your membership is good through January 2027. Thank you to all who have already renewed. We appreciate your support.



Renew

Field Trips: 126th Christmas Bird Count

The 126th Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will take place in count circles across the Americas and some Pacific Islands from December 14 to January 5. The CBC is the longest running citizen science survey in the world: tens of thousands of participants come together to brave the wintry weather and contribute to critical data on bird population trends spanning over a century. Volunteer teams cover designated areas, counting every bird they see or hear all day (some counts may be shorter). All levels are welcome; beginners can be paired with more experienced birders. Volunteers who live within a count circle who just wish to record what comes to their backyard feeders also are welcome to participate; please contact your local CBC compiler for details. To center attention on this important effort, Northern Colorado Bird Alliance will not host any December field trips aside from the Bobcat Ridge Survey. For more information, contact each CBC compiler.

Fort Collins, Dec. 20, Saturday. Compiler Thomas Hall, redbear44@msn.com. To participate in Fort Collins, please send address and phone along with your preference for hiking or car areas to Tom Hall. The Fort Collins CBC typically gets 90-plus species with a goal of 100. Each Area (A-Q) will have

a Team Leader. You can participate as much as you like, but you will be assigned to a Team Leader for a given area and coordinate with them. The count starts at 7 to 7:30 a.m., Saturday, Dec. 20, though some groups may go out owling earlier. The count will conclude about 5 p.m. Team leaders compile information for an area and must have numbers by the end of the day for the compilation. We are going to try to do a hybrid dinner/Zoom call for compilation. The CBC final tally and dinner will be held from 5:30 to 9 p.m. in the conference room of the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, 230 Cherry Street, Suite 150, Fort Collins. It is just west of the Ft. Collins Museum of Discovery.

Greeley, Dec. 27, Saturday. Compiler Paul Lightsey, plightse@info2000.net. We organize groups beforehand (via email) and assign sections of the count area. Local section leads arrange with their team where to meet to conduct the count. Information on the tally rally can be obtained from the compiler when you are assigned to a count group.

Nunn, Dec. 14, Sunday. Compiler: Cliff Hendrick, cliff.hendrick@gmail.com (Robert Beauchamp is traveling this year). The Nunn CBC covers the western portion of the Pawnee National Grasslands, just north of

Nunn, Colorado. Beginning in 1966, this count circle has been active for nearly 60 years. Join us for a day birding the short-grass prairie. For more information or to register, contact Cliff.

Loveland, Jan. 1, Thursday. Compiler Denise Bretting, dbretting@swloveland.com or 970-402-1292. The Loveland CBC circle is a birdy combination of lower foothills, higher Great Plains, managed residential landscapes and gardens, a river corridor, and plenty of lakes and reservoirs. Bird highlights are gulls, raptors, waterfowl, and sometimes a small mountain owl. Contact Denise for an assignment.

Rawhide Energy Station, date TBD. Compiler Joshua Smith, joshua1vs89@icloud.com. We will meet at the visitors overlook/parking lot outside the Rawhide

Power Station at 7 a.m. to get area assignments and to break into groups. If you are interested in owling before this, contact me via email or text and we will work out a plan. Participants are invited to meet for a post-count tally and dinner at 5 p.m. at Sol de Jalisco Mexican restaurant in Wellington. I must provide the power plant with a list of participants' names in advance of the count so they can provide us special

access to the reservoir; therefore, it is critically important to register early. Bring layers of warm clothes, warm hat, gloves, scope, binoculars, camera, water, a packed lunch, and a desire to see some fantastic waterfowl!

Rocky Mountain National Park, date TBD. Compiler Scott Rashid, pygmyowl15@gmail.com or 970-227-9425.

To view these count areas and more, go to the National Audubon Society's map at <https://gis.audubon.org/christmasbirdcount/>

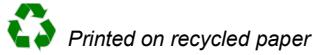
https://gis.audubon.org/christmasbirdcount/?gl=1*1a77crs*gcl_au*MjEzMzQ2NjE0OS4xNzMwOTMyNDU2*ga*MTcxOTk3MjcwMC4xNzIyNzE4ODg5*ga_X2XNL2MWTT*MTczMDkzMjQ1Ni40LjEuMTczMDkzMjgzMy41My4wLjA

Bobcat Ridge Survey, Dec. 14, Sunday. Leader: Denise Bretting, dbretting@swloveland.com or 970-402-1292. The survey looks at bird populations and helps local scientists better understand bird dynamics. The little more than 4-mile hike covers moderate to flat terrain with some steep sections. No registration required and there is no participation limit, but please email or text Denise that you plan to attend. Meet at 8 a.m. in the Bobcat Ridge parking lot.



American Dipper by Evan Lopez.

Northern Colorado Bird Alliance
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Membership Application

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

<input type="checkbox"/> New or renewing chapter member Receive the <i>Ptarmigan</i> by email	\$ 20	Name: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> New or renewing chapter member Receive the <i>Ptarmigan</i> by mail	\$ 30	Address: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime chapter member Receive <i>Ptarmigan</i> by mail or email	\$750	City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional support for chapter programs	\$ ____	Phone: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional support for Alex Cringan Fund (natural history education grants)	\$ ____	Email: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> New NAS member Receive the <i>NAS Audubon</i> by mail	\$ 20	May we send you chapter email alerts if updates occur for field trips, programs, etc.? Yes or No
<input type="checkbox"/> Renewing NAS member Receive the <i>NAS 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: \$ ____		

Make tax-exempt checks payable to Northern Colorado Bird Alliance and mail this form to Northern Colorado Bird Alliance, P.O. Box 271968, Fort Collins, CO, 80527-1968. Your cancelled check is your receipt. All renewals are due in January. New memberships begun after August 31 extend throughout the following year. Applications can be completed at

www.nocobirdalliance.org.