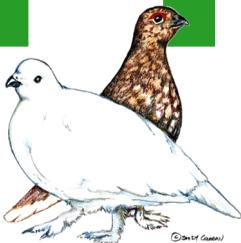


# PTARMIGAN



Northern Colorado Bird Alliance

(formerly Fort Collins Audubon Society)

P.O. Box 271968·Fort Collins, CO·80527-1968·[www.nocobirdalliance.org](http://www.nocobirdalliance.org)

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

January 2026

Volume 58, Issue 1

**Northern Colorado Bird Alliance Hosts**

**Steve Armstead presenting:**

**"The State of the Butterflies in the United States: A Colorado Viewpoint"**

**Thursday, January 8**

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

**Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Dr.**

**This program will be online via Zoom. Enter the following at 7 p.m. to join the meeting:**

**<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88962672607>**

Declines in insect abundance are increasingly being documented in recent years; however, additional insights about the geographic scopes and implications for specific groups and species is greatly needed. Butterflies have some of the most geographically widespread data available in the United States due to long-term monitoring programs and community science efforts across the country. This talk will summarize a study focusing on the Mountain-Prairie region and provide illustrative examples of butterflies occurring in Colorado. Additionally, we'll hear how these findings can reinforce the importance of existing conservation efforts and what we all can do to take action.

Steve Armstead is a pollinator conservation specialist



Monarch on teasel  
by Steve Armstead.

for the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation in Colorado. His work focuses on management and creates high quality, connected, and climate-resilient pollinator habitat. Steve has collaborated with local communities, land managers, community organizations, and other pollinator conservation organizations to explore ways to expand and leverage support for pollinator conservation throughout the state. He has over three decades of experience working in natural lands management, environmental planning, and community engagement. Steve co-authored the *Colorado Native Pollinating Insects Health Study* for the Department of Natural Resources.

Join us on Jan. 8 for this informative program that is free and open to the public.

**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](http://www.nocobirdalliance.org).

I am excited to announce that we are finally ready to launch some new email addresses that we will henceforth use for chapter business:

[president@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:president@nocobirdalliance.org): to contact the Chapter president.

[treasurer@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:treasurer@nocobirdalliance.org): for inquiries about payments or Chapter finances.

[membership@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:membership@nocobirdalliance.org): for inquiries about new memberships or renewals.

[programs@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:programs@nocobirdalliance.org): for questions, suggestions, or feedback about monthly programs and guest speakers.

[education@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:education@nocobirdalliance.org): for anything related to our educational programs, materials, and events.

[conservation@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:conservation@nocobirdalliance.org): for inquiries about the chapter's local conservation activities or public policy advocacy work.

[fieldtrips@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:fieldtrips@nocobirdalliance.org): for inquiries about chapter hosted field trips.

[publicrelations@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:publicrelations@nocobirdalliance.org): for information about social media accounts, press releases, or public announcements.

[contact@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:contact@nocobirdalliance.org): for all other matters.

These generic email addresses will simplify transitions whenever there is turnover on the Board of Directors because the email addresses that our members and the

public use to contact us will not change no matter who is serving in any specific role. In addition, this change will somewhat insulate board members from spam and phishing attempts because our personal email addresses

will no longer be publicly advertised. Finally, we're excited about the new email addresses because it makes our chapter look more organized and professional. Please consider adding our domain (@nocobirdalliance.org) to your trusted email address list so messages from us will not end up in your junk folder.

## Pocket Guide to Local Birds

Is available at the following retailers who support our organization with the sales:

Wild Birds Unlimited  
3636 S. College Ave  
Ste. C  
(970) 225-2557

Jax Loveland West  
Outdoor Gear  
2665W. Eisenhower  
(970) 667-7375

Jax Outdoor Gear  
1200 N. College  
(970) 221-0544



## 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](http://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**

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Visit us on Facebook:  
<https://www.facebook.com/NoCoBirdAlliance>



## A Quiet Blitz on Environmental Protections

Some of the most consequential threats to conservation today are coming. They will arrive not in the form of highly publicized rollbacks, but through a series of technical proposals and rule changes advanced largely without fanfare that collectively would weaken the foundation of environmental protection in the United States.

At the federal level, multiple cornerstones of conservation law are currently under pressure at the same time. Proposed changes to how wetlands are defined under federal jurisdiction would dramatically narrow which wetlands receive protection (<https://www.epa.gov/wotus>). Under these definitions, many wetlands that are currently considered protected in Colorado could lose that status entirely, despite continuing to provide essential functions like flood mitigation, water filtration, and wildlife habitat.

National forests are also in the crosshairs. Pending legislation such as the Fix Our Forests Act (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/471>) would substantially alter how national forests are managed by reducing environmental review requirements and limiting public input, while prioritizing expedited treatments across broad landscapes. Strategic thinning can be an important and appropriate tool in certain forest types, particularly in overgrown, low-elevation ponderosa pine forests where decades of fire suppression have altered historical conditions. However, the concern with this legislation is that it fails to meaningfully distinguish among forest types. Applying the same approach to fire-adapted dry forests, mixed-severity forests, and wet, high-elevation systems risks undermining ecological integrity and, in some cases, may actually increase vulnerability to severe wildfire rather than reduce it.

A similar effort is underway targeting the Endangered Species Act (ESA), one of the most successful conservation laws ever enacted (<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/11/21/2025-20552/endangered-and-threatened-wildlife-and-plants-regulations-pertaining-to-endangered-and-threatened>). The ESA has prevented the extinction of more than 99 percent of the species listed under it, including iconic birds like the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon. These recoveries did not happen by chance; they occurred be-

cause the law required early, precautionary, science-driven action.

A suite of proposed federal rule changes would weaken how the ESA functions in practice. Among other things, they would reduce automatic protections for threatened species, make it harder to designate and protect critical habitat, limit consideration of cumulative environmental impacts, and allow economic factors to influence decisions that have historically been based on biological need alone. Individually, these changes

may sound technical. Taken together, they would make it easier for species to decline unnoticed until recovery becomes far more difficult, or impossible.

What ties these efforts together is not any single policy area, but a shared strategy: narrowing definitions, shortening timelines, and shifting discretion away from science and toward economic or political considerations. The result is a quiet but coordinated weakening of protections for ecosystems that are already under im-

mense stress from habitat loss, fragmentation, and climate change.

This moment matters. Conservation laws remain effective only when the public understands what is at stake and insist they be upheld. We encourage members to learn more about these proposed changes, share this information with others, and communicate with elected representatives about the importance of maintaining strong, science-based environmental protections.

Quiet policy shifts can have lasting ecological consequences, but informed voices still matter, and they still make a difference.



Bald Eagle by Ron Harden.



Peregrine Falcon by Stan Keiser.

## Birding at The Wild Animal Sanctuary

The Wild Animal Sanctuary (TWAS) is located at 2999 County Road 53 in Keenesburg, Colorado, off of Interstate 76; it is about an hour drive from Fort Collins.

When some friends and I visited TWAS last October, we were immediately treated with a view (and sounds) of Sandhill Cranes flying overhead making their strange and wonderful clacking cries — a great omen! A Red-Tailed Hawk flew by as well.

However, in terms of numbers, the bird of the day was the European Starling. All members of the family Sturnidae, commonly called sturnids, are collectively known as starlings. They are passerines, meaning perching birds. There were quite a few of them around the Sanctuary, especially where water was

close to the animal enclosures. They were splendidly iridescent.

Starlings have an interesting history: they were first released in New York City's Central Park in 1890 and quickly became common and adept at taking over nests of other birds such as Tree Swallows and Red-headed Woodpeckers. Starlings also became talented mimics of bird calls such as

those of Killdeers, Red-Tailed Hawks, Soras, and others. We were fortunate to see a starling murmuration; it brought back a memory from years ago when I glimpsed my first murmuration above a distant field while driving. I researched starlings at home, and found that there are many species of starlings: the European Starling, the Rosy Starling, the Spotless Starling, the Superb Starling, the Red-winged Starling, the Violet-backed Starling, the Tristram's Starling, the Brahminy Starling, the Chestnut-cheeked Starling, the Asian Pied Starling, the Wattled Starling, and the White-cheeked Starling. Wow!

The largest bird of the day was the Ostrich. At first, I thought the Ostrich was one of the bears as its head and

neck were covered by high grasses; however, it turned out to be feeding on something on the ground. More commonly sized birds such as a House Sparrow and Mourning Dove were getting a drink from one of the ponds.

There were also metal birds and metal mammals to observe: a hawk landing on the back of a hippopotamus, as well as Crowned Cranes flanking a hippopotamus, and flamingos. It looked like a metal scene out of *The Lion King*. I particularly like these words that were on a metal sign: "If people were superior to animals, they'd take better care of the world" (Winnie the Pooh), and "The love for all living creatures is the most noble attribute of man" (Charles Darwin).

Walking in the Sanctuary is like hiking in an exotic land; scanning the animal areas to see who you discover whether bird or mammal or even reptiles. You may be surprised.



Eurasian Collared-Dove  
by Carole Hossan.



European Starlings by Carole Hossan.



Metal zoo at the Sanctuary by Carole Hossan.



More European Starlings by Carole Hossan.



## January Field Trips

All field trips are free and open to the public. Anyone at any experience level is welcome. Bring snacks or lunch, water, binoculars, and/or spotting scopes. Changes to dates, meeting times, locations, and trip leaders are occasionally unavoidable. To register for any trip, please see posts at <https://www.facebook.com/NoCoBirdAlliance> or member emails sent out 1 — 2 weeks in advance of each trip. When announced, links will also be posted to the linktree at [linktr.ee/nocobirdalliance](https://linktr.ee/nocobirdalliance). Attendance may be limited. Bobcat Ridge surveys do not require registration. With questions, suggestions, or interest in leading trips (all you need is a desire to share your love of birds and/or nature), please email [ncbafieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:ncbafieldtrips@gmail.com). Keep an eye on email and/or social media posts for additional field trips!

**Jan. 11, Sunday, Bobcat Ridge Survey.** Leader: Denise Bretting, [dbretting@swloveland.com](mailto: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 in the Bobcat Ridge parking lot at 8 a.m. The trip may be cancelled, rescheduled, or relocated if trails are closed.

**Jan. 17, Saturday, Fossil Creek Reservoir.** Leader: Sirena Brownlee, [sirena.brownlee@hdrinc.com](mailto:sirena.brownlee@hdrinc.com). This reservoir can attract a large variety of water birds in winter and is a great place for birders of all ages and abilities to practice identifying duck species. Early migrating passerines are also possible. Bring a spotting



Greater White-fronted Goose by Jay Breidt.

scope if you have one, but we'll have at least one to share. The trail includes a paved section and a section surfaced with loose pea gravel that may shift underfoot. Meet in the parking lot at 9 a.m.

**Tentatively, Jan. 25, Sunday, Indoor Birding at High Plains Environmental Center.** Leader: Amy Roush, [amy@suburbat.org](mailto:amy@suburbat.org). Join Amy to watch birds from inside the building at the High Plains Environmental Center (HPEC). If you feel stuck indoors by the winter weather, come be stuck indoors in a spot where we can watch birds together! This will be a laid-back opportunity to be with other birders during a lull in our field trip offerings and look at anything we can see from inside the classroom of the main building.

Contact Amy at [ncbafieldtrips@gmail.com](mailto:ncbafieldtrips@gmail.com) to share or express interest in a January planning meeting for 2026 field trips.

## Northern Colorado Bird Alliance Welcomes New and Renewing Members

Eileen Baker  
Susan Barbour  
Melanie Barnett  
Mary Beck  
Craig Benkman  
Kerstin Braun  
Jacqueline Brown  
Richard Brown  
Lisa Browne  
Jean Christman  
William H. Cushman  
Dirk Draper  
Brandee Eide  
Glenn Elmore  
Irene Fortune

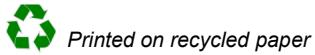
Alan Godwin  
Ron Harden  
Kathleen Hardy  
Clifford Hendrick  
Kathleen Hunt  
Debbie Van Der Hyde  
Nancy B. Jones  
Linda Kotsides  
Deborah Larson  
Michelle McKim  
Joyce Owens  
Lori P. Pivonka  
Timothy Priehs  
Susan Puder

Charlene Reimnitz  
David J. Robertson  
Lesley Roper  
Kathleen Salter  
Anne Saunders  
Carol Seemueller  
K. Roxanne Squires  
William Staudenmaier  
Paula Stearns  
Jeff Stewart  
Mary Jeanne McFerren Stobie  
John Stroup  
Doug Swartz  
Joseph Webber



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

Northern Colorado Bird Alliance  
PO Box 271968  
Fort Collins, CO 80527-1968



## Membership Application

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

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> New or renewing chapter member \$ 20              | Name: _____  |
| Receive the <i>Ptarmigan</i> by email                                      |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New or renewing chapter member \$ 30              | Address: _____   |
| Receive the <i>Ptarmigan</i> by mail                                       |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime chapter member \$750                     | City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____  |
| Receive <i>Ptarmigan</i> by mail or email                                  |  |
| <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 \$ 20                              | May we send you chapter email alerts if updates occur for field trips, programs, etc.? Yes or No                               |
| Receive the <i>NAS Audubon</i> by mail                                     |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Renewing NAS member \$ 35                         | May we contact you for volunteer activities such as helping at events or contacting legislators on important issues? Yes or No |
| Receive the <i>NAS Audubon</i> by mail                                     |  |
| <b>Total Enclosed: \$ _____</b>  |  |

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](http://www.nocobirdalliance.org).