

# 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.

February 2026

Volume 58, Issue 2

## Northern Colorado Bird Alliance Hosts Mark Surls presenting: “Rodenticides and Colorado”

Thursday, February 12

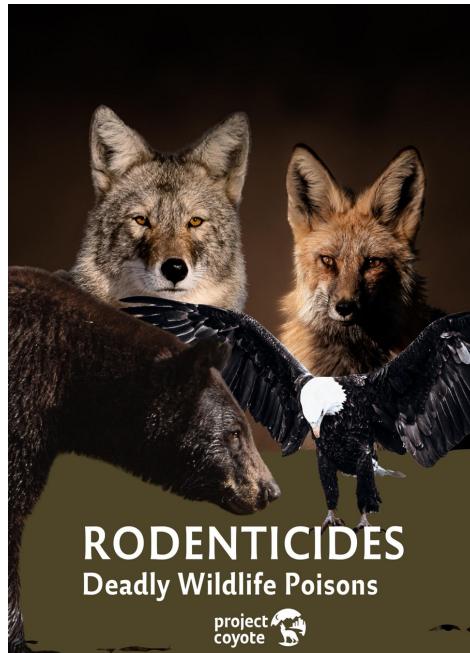
Social time with Refreshments: 7 p.m.; Announcements: 7:20; Presentation: 7:30  
Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Dr.

This program will be online via Zoom. Enter the following at 7 p.m. to join the meeting:  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86926950080>

This talk examines how rodenticide poisoning reaches far beyond its intended targets and why Colorado is now considering legislation to prohibit the most dangerous poisons.

Rodenticides bio-accumulate in carnivores that consume poisoned rodents, affecting more than 25 wildlife species including hawks, owls, foxes, bobcats, coyotes, and mountain lions. These poisons can cause internal bleeding, immune suppression, increased vulnerability to diseases like mange, and widespread mortality in non-target wildlife.

The talk also explores the broader ripple effects on children, pets, and community health, and outlines long-term, sustainable solutions that reduce reliance on toxic chemicals while improving rodent management outcomes. It concludes with an overview



of the Colorado legislation aimed at eliminating the most harmful poisons.

Mark Surls is the Colorado and Northern Rockies Coordinator at Project Coyote, where he helps expand the organization's core programs and campaigns across the region. Over the past four years he has been a vocal champion for rodenticide reform, broader carnivore protections, trophy hunting, and fur trapping while promoting coexistence education. Mark believes in the power of people to create change and is dedicated to helping communities speak up for wildlife and the wild places we all depend on.

Join us on Feb. 12 for this free program that is 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).

# President's Corner

by John Shenot

One year ago, members voted to change the name of our organization. Throughout 2025, the Board of Directors then took countless little actions to implement the name change. That work is nearly done, but two big tasks remain.

First, sometime in the next three months, we plan to launch a completely revamped website that will be fully managed by the volunteers that serve on the Board. We will no longer be dependent on an outside webmaster. This will give us the ability to make changes faster and will reduce our administrative costs.

Second, there is still work to do with introducing and reintroducing our renamed organization to people across Northern Colorado. This is a crucial task for achieving our mission, and it is a task for which we can always use more help from members, especially (but not only) those who live outside of the Fort Collins and Loveland communities. If you know of events or venues where you think we should be present, let us know. If there is a destination where you think we should host a field trip, let us know. If there is a hot issue that you think the chapter should speak up on, let us know. And most of all, if you want to help with any of these things as a volunteer, please let us know! You can always reach me at [president@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:president@nocobirdalliance.org).

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Visit us on Facebook:

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

## Northern Colorado Bird Alliance Welcomes New and Renewing Members

Dorothy Adel  
Amy Adler  
Stephen Armstead  
Hetty Bixby  
Gene J. Blatt  
Denise Bretting  
Craig Busack  
Grant Campbell  
Robert Mann &  
Judith Christy  
Morris Clark  
Wayne Crayton  
Kathleen Cromar  
Karen Cruise  
James DeMartini  
Joyce Dempsey  
Mary Beth Dillon  
Kim Dunlap  
Elizabeth Edwards  
Randy Fischer  
Julie Fowler  
Anna Fuller  
Suzanne Gauch  
William Gerk  
Susan Glenn  
Mike Knowles &  
Michelle Haefele  
Nancy Hill  
Janet Holley  
Carole Hossan  
Gina C. Janett  
Sean Jaster  
Barbara Jones  
Kristin J. Joy  
Kathryn Kay  
Sue Kenny  
Josephine Kerrigan  
Dean & Loretta Klingenberg  
Elizabeth Knees

Nick Komar  
Janet Larson  
Christie Lee  
Jane M. Low  
Sandra Pitcaithley &  
Thomas Lynch



Karen Manci  
Connie Marvel  
Margo Matthews  
Linda McNamara  
Barb Messineo  
Frank Morgan  
Larry Moskowitz  
Jim Nachel  
Jerry Partin  
Eric Powers  
Elizabeth Pruessner  
Kathrine Reed  
Margaret Reek  
Lesley Roper  
Kathy Rushing  
Christine Schmuhl  
John Shenot  
Luke Simmer  
David Sitzman  
Sally Sprouse  
Donna Stump  
Hank Thode  
Ester L. Thorson  
Danette Vassilopoulos  
John Vassilopoulos  
Kimberly Vercimak  
Sharon Visk  
Sheila Webber  
William West  
Karen Wheeler  
Roger Wieck



Marsh Wren  
By Ron Harden.



## 2025 Christmas Bird Count Successes

The weather was mild and unseasonably warm for the Christmas Bird Count, with great volunteer participation in Fort Collins and Loveland, and high species counts. Special appreciation to the CBC compilers Tom Hall (Fort Collins) and Denise Bretting (Loveland) for their leadership.

**Fort Collins Count, Dec. 20:** It was a great year for the 78<sup>th</sup> Fort Collins CBC, recording 103 species, but three less than the 2024 CBC of 106 species. Additionally, nine count-week birds were reported, species not recorded on count day, but seen from December 17-23 in the CBC circle. The high number of species present reflects the warm weather pattern we have experienced this fall with a minimal number of brutally cold days

and snow. Participation was down a little in 2025 from last year that saw 130 participants (113 in the field and 17 feeder watchers) compared to 127 participants this year (107 in the field and 20 feeder watchers.)

Rarities in 2025 included a Short-billed Gull (previously only recorded as a count week bird), a Mexican Duck found for the second year in a row



Trumpeter Swans by Carole Hossan.

were both found for the fifth time in count history. It's noteworthy that a Northern Bobwhite was found for only the second time, but is likely an escape (and treated as such for the report).

There were 10 species with new high counts: nine Trumpeter Swans, up from five last year; 305 Ring-necked Ducks, up from 233; 55 Buffleheads, up from 51; 1,825 Common Mergansers, up from 460; 15 Sandhill Cranes, up from just one last year; one Short-billed Gull, whereas one was seen as a count week bird last year; 60 Bald Eagles, up from 45; 421 Blue Jays, up from 416; 793 White-crowned Sparrows, up from 738; and 36 Spotted Towhees, up from 21. While some of these increases reflect weather patterns, some truly represent increasing populations, like the Trumpeter

Swans and Bald Eagles. White-crowned Sparrows were interesting in that they were found this year in every section of the count circle in small flocks. Low count species included Ring-necked Pheasant, Rough-legged Hawk, and American Crow.

**Loveland Count Jan. 1:** It was an interesting and productive 26<sup>th</sup> Loveland CBC with 107 species recorded; one more (Greater Scaup) was seen during count week. For comparison, last year ended up with 107 species, and an additional four species during count week. Three new species were recorded for this year's count: American White Pelican, Orchard Oriole, and Golden-crowned Sparrow. The number of volunteers was a new high: 113 participants

including 25 feeder watchers.

High counts for the 26 years of the Loveland CBC were recorded for Pied-billed Grebe (10), Great Horned Owl (52), Merlin (5), Say's Phoebe (5), Bushtit (234, previous high 111), White-crowned Sparrow (427), Spotted Towhee (65), Bonaparte's Gull (18, previous high of 1, found 14 years ago), and Red-winged Blackbird (4,488). Five species of grebes were logged: Pied-billed, Eared, Horned, Red-necked, and Western; and four species of owls: Great Horned, Eastern Screech, Northern Pygmy, and Northern Saw-whet. Several species were low in numbers: Golden Eagles (4), Rough-legged Hawk (1), Great Blue Heron (9), and no Ferruginous Hawks.

Thanks to all the volunteers who came out to participate in the 2025 CBC. Your time and effort led to the success of this significant, long-running citizen science project.



Female Mallard with orange and black bill behind Mexican Duck by Doug Swartz.



Winter Wren by Doug Swartz.

## The Unique Parasitism of Brown-headed Cowbirds

The Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) is a member of the blackbird family endemic to North America and most commonly known for its nest parasitism. It is far from the only bird species that engages in nest parasitism; many species of ducks lay eggs in the nest of other species, but for very different reasons to the cowbird. Brown-headed Cowbirds, prior to European expansion across North America, relied on bison stirring up insects in the short-grass prairie for food. As the bison herds travelled and migrated, the cowbirds would follow suit. This nomadic relationship prevented the cowbirds from staying sedentary for several weeks of nesting and parenting, making nest parasitism their only realistic option. As the bison herds and forests became cow herds and farm fields, the Brown-headed Cowbird's range grew to encompass the entire lower 48 states, most of Mexico, and the warmer latitudes of Canada. This expansion, widespread nest parasitism, and its effects on several host species have given the Brown-headed Cowbird a rather infamous reputation, perhaps undeservedly, as these traits are a result of circumstance, not of choice.

The cowbird's parasitic relationship with several dozen other species, from sparrows to warblers to other blackbirds, is an active area of study. Of chief concern is how host species react to the presence of a cowbird egg and hatchling in their nest. The Brown-headed

Cowbird has not evolved to make their eggs appear similar or near-identical to the host eggs as cuckoos have. Some host species recognize the odd-one-out and either adopt strategies to circumvent raising the cowbird (like building a new nest on top of the parasitized nest) or raise the cowbird hatchling regardless. A 2006 study by Pagnucco et. Al., of cowbird hatchlings in Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) nests studied the effects the parasitism had on the cowbird and sparrow hatchlings. They found that the cowbird hatchling was usually first to begin begging when a host parent returned with food. Additionally, the cowbird hatchling would mimic begging calls of the Song Sparrow, but at a higher pitch and amplitude. In response, the sparrow hatchlings in the parasitized nests would alter their begging calls to similar pitch and amplitude of the cowbird hatchling. This is thought to be a means of preventing the cowbird from receiving more parental provisioning, and indeed, the sparrow hatchlings in parasitized nests received the same number of feedings as the cowbird did.

Brown-headed Cowbirds are interesting themselves, because despite never being raised by a member of their own species, they don't imprint on their host species. They learn the song of their own species, despite instinctively mimicking the begging call of their host species. Their unique adaptations to the changing world have softened their reputation in my mind.



Brown-headed Cowbirds, female on top,  
by Joseph Webber.

### 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](#)

### 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



## February 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 link-tree at [linktr.ee/nocobirdalliance](https://linktr.ee/nocobirdalliance). Attendance may be limited. With comments or questions, contact Amy at [fieldtrips@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:fieldtrips@nocobirdalliance.org) (new email address).

**Feb. 8, 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 four-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 7:30 a.m. in the Bobcat Ridge parking lot. The trip may be cancelled, rescheduled, or relocated if trails are closed.

**Feb. 15, Sunday, Raptor Alley.** Leader: Nolan Bunting, [nolanbunting@hotmail.com](mailto:nolanbunting@hotmail.com) or 907-299-4625. A trip out to one of the most amazing ecosystems on planet earth. The Pawnee National Grasslands during the winter is home to a large variety of birds, including Lapland Longspurs, Rough-legged Hawks, and Northern Shrikes. The group will meet in Nunn at 8 a.m. to carpool; the trip will likely run until 2 to 3 p.m. Please



Brown Creeper by Evan Lopez.



Bald Eagle by Evan Lopez.

pack a lunch and be prepared for some driving and birding. Signup for Raptor Alley will be released on Sunday, February 1.

**Feb. 21, Saturday, Riverbend Ponds.** Leader: Sheila Webber, [13sheilaw@gmail.com](mailto:13sheilaw@gmail.com). Meet at 8 a.m. in the southern parking lot along Prospect for a walk of about two hours along the smooth, but unpaved path around the ponds. There are many ponds and a wide variety of wildlife. Possible sightings include ducks, geese, raptors, sparrows, and Townsend's Solitaire.

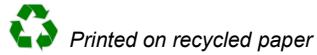
**Feb. 28, Saturday, (possible addition of Sunday, March 1), Sandhill Cranes.** Leader: Lori Pivonka, [lori.pivonka@gmail.com](mailto:lori.pivonka@gmail.com). Attendees will gather at 7:15 at the Jax Farm & Ranch in northern Fort Collins

(<https://maps.app.goo.gl/44L1wZz2Pe3cEJnd9>) to carpool north, where they will try to find migrating Sandhill Cranes. The trip will involve driving along agricultural fields to spot the cranes and will run from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. Bring binoculars, a camera, and/or a scope if you have one. Lori will also have a scope. Expect to learn about cranes and their behavior, and possibly get to watch their mating dance displays! If you attended this trip in 2025, please consider attending in alternating years to give others the chance at this experience. Signup for the Sandhill Crane trip will be sent out on February 14. If the trip on Saturday fills, we may announce an additional signup for a Sunday trip.

**March 14, Saturday, LGBTQIA+ Community and Allies at Arapaho Bend.** Leader: Kit Gray, [kit@kitgrayillustration.com](mailto:kit@kitgrayillustration.com). Join us at 9 a.m. for a relaxed and social bird outing in southeast Fort Collins. We will keep our eyes and ears open for different types of waterfowl (Common Goldeneyes, American Wigeons, Buffleheads, and more), Belted Kingfishers, raptors, Song Sparrows, chickadees, and more. All levels are encouraged. Please bring binoculars if you have them. Meet at 9 a.m. at the parking lot located off of Harmony Road (at Harmony Transfer Center). We will meet in the NW section of the parking lot near the intersection of paved and dirt trails. This outing will be a slow-paced, 2-hour walk on a relatively flat trail. The signup for the LGBTQIA+ Community walk at Arapaho will be sent out in mid-February.

Keep an eye on email and/or social media posts for updates or additional field trips!

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 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
<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).