

THE PRIMARY SOURCE

Our mission is to conserve birds of the Rocky Mountains, Great Plains, and Intermountain West and the habitats on which they depend through research, monitoring, education, and outreach.

Bald Eagle Watch Marks 20th Anniversary

By Nelda Gamble,
Bald Eagle Watch Coordinator

This year Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's Bald Eagle Watch marks its 20th anniversary. In the 20 years since the program's inception, observers have seen the nesting population of Bald Eagles along the South Platte River Drainage grow from one pair at Barr Lake State Park to more than 30 nest sites. Seventeen of these were observed by the watch last year.

In 1988, concerns were growing about potential effects of the developing Denver International Airport on a nesting pair of Bald Eagles at Barr Lake State Park. The newly formed Colorado Bird Observatory, now Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, organized Bald Eagle Watch (BEW) in partnership with Barr Lake State Park and Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) to monitor and document the behaviors of this nesting pair.

The eagle pair had first been reported in 1986 by students who spotted the nest from the Barr Lake Gazebo while on a nature walk. Mike Lockhart, a biologist working on the environmental cleanup of Rocky Mountain Arsenal near Denver, determined that the female Bald Eagle at the Barr Lake nest was the same female they had equipped with a radio transmitter during the previous winter.



Photo courtesy Jerry Craig

Three eaglets keep an eye on an intruder at Barr Lake State Park.

It was the first documented nesting of the then-endangered species in the Northern Front Range. After a few weeks' observation by the Bald Eagle Watch volunteers, the nest and tree were felled in a wind storm. Jerry Craig, raptor biologist with CDOW, then installed an artificial nest basket to provide a more stable nest platform. He climbed a large live tree near the fallen nest-tree, secured the new nest, and within a week the eagles adopted the nest. Incubation was observed on the nest, but no young hatched. The next year the first young were hatched and fledged at the Barr Lake nest.

Since the inception of the program, BEW has documented the growth of the nesting Bald Eagle population at 17 nest sites along the Front Range. Last year

37 Bald Eagle Watch volunteers donated more than 1,091 hours monitoring. The nests produced 27 hatchlings including the 33rd and 34th birds fledged at Barr Lake. Table 1 (page 4) displays the history of the Barr Lake Nest. Since 1987, 137 hatchlings have been documented along the Front Range. In addition to monitoring,

Bald Eagle Watch provides opportunities for groups of students to observe the Barr Lake nest and learn about the natural history of the Bald Eagle.

At the January 26th meeting to kick off the 2008 Bald Eagle Watch season, program coordinator Nelda Gamble, one of the original eagle watchers, introduced four other observers who have been part of the program since its inception. Paula Fischer, Debra Mallory, Pam Roth, and Sarah Smith were among the original watchers at Barr Lake. They continue to monitor the growing population of nesting eagles.

In 2007, the Bald Eagle was delisted as a federal Threatened Species.

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From the Director...

Tammy VerCauteren, Interim Executive Director

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory. During the year, we'll be inviting our members and partners to join us in celebrating bird conservation in our region and identifying a course of action for the next five years of conservation. The lead article in this issue of *Primary Source* narrates the history of Bald Eagle Watch, one of RMBO's early successful partnerships. Bald Eagle Watch, like RMBO, celebrates its 20th anniversary this year.

We have several events planned this year to complement our goals of engaging and informing diverse publics about the amazing birds in our region. The Hawk Watch Celebration took place April 12, providing Denver area communities the opportunity to see and learn about migration and the importance of conserving Dinosaur Ridge. The event included guided hikes and two talks at the Dinosaur Ridge Nature Center, and one talk at the Morrison Natural History Museum. This effort was conducted in cooperation with Dinosaur Ridge Natural Area, Morrison Natural History Museum, Jefferson County Open Space, the Scientific & Cultural Facilities District, and Wild Birds Unlimited. This event highlights the kind of partnerships that have been a hallmark of RMBO's work. It provided a first-hand opportunity to learn about and see the different raptors that migrate along the front range of Colorado.

In addition, we will celebrate International Migratory Bird Day at Barr Lake State Park on May 10th from 8 am to 1 pm. The celebration will commence with banding at the state park followed by guided bird walks and activities for adults and children. Local partners will also be involved including Barr Lake State Park and the Scientific & Cultural Facilities District. Visit www.rmbo.org to learn more.

Our 20th year celebration is also a strategic time for the staff and board to take a hard look at our mission, vision, goals, and financial strategies and chart a course for the next five years. We will have a two-day retreat at Sylvandale Ranch, which is located at the mouth of the Big Thompson River. All staff and board members will come together under one roof to critically evaluate how we are addressing our mission, opportunities for improvement, and new strategic directions. We thank the National Association for Interpretation for facilitation and support of the retreat and New Belgium Brewery for their generous donation.

We have learned a lot from our 20-year history and will use this foundation of knowledge to build a stronger organization that is prepared to meet the challenges of global climate change, energy development, habitat loss, and declining bird population trends. Through our broad approach to conservation we are well suited to be in the forefront of developing and implementing strategies and partnerships that are critical for bird conservation.

We greatly appreciate your support and investment in RMBO and we look forward to a productive future.



A Tribute to the Life of Rich Levad – What an Adventure

Glenn Giroir, Senior Biologist

It is a beautiful fall afternoon as we pull into a small parking area in Silverton, CO. Three of us step out of the car and start walking toward the mouth of a deep canyon. We quickly realize that we will have to cross the Animas River, but oh well, this is the stuff of adventures. We search the river's edge looking for a reasonable ford. Rich looks at a spot in the rushing whitewater and says "this looks good." We nod in agreement, or doubt, as Rich removes his boots, rolls up his pants, and plunges right in. About halfway across the river, knee-deep, Rich stops to wave at the passengers on the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge train as the old steam engine chugs by. It is our turn. About half-way across we realize with admiration, or irritation, what Rich had accomplished and has led us into. Rich smiles and says "come on." We reach the other side with frozen feet but otherwise okay. We hike a few miles to a small creek, scramble up a rock wall, and find ourselves at the base of a hidden waterfall. Rich immediately lies on his back and scans the ledges near the waterfall. Suddenly he jumps to his feet, points at a dark nook, and says "that looks like a nest." We look, see a dark nook, and say "we can't say." We try not to look as Rich climbs the steep wall to get a better look, smiles, and gives us a thumbs-up. We repeat this several times and then begin our trek back. We decide this time to avoid the river by walking near the narrow gauge tracks. With the San Juan Mountains spread out before us, we quickly lose ourselves in the scenery. Suddenly we are jarred back to reality as we feel the ground shake, hear a loud rumble, and see a large, billowing smoke cloud approaching from around a tight bend. We clamber up the rocks on side of the tracks and once again wave at the passengers of the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge train, this time much



Glenn Giroir

Rich Levad makes notes at a Black Swift nesting site.

more intimately. We laugh as the engineer blows his whistle and rounds another bend. What an adventure.

So was the life of Rich – an adventure. As a young man, Rich left his home in Iowa when he joined the U.S. Air Force. He was stationed for three years in Spangdahlem, Germany and enjoyed traveling throughout Europe during his time there. Upon leaving the Air Force, he enrolled at Colorado State College (now University of Northern Colorado) in Greeley, where he met his wife Karen. After graduation, Rich and Karen moved to Grand Junction to start a family and begin a life of service, education, and appreciation of the natural wonders of western Colorado. Rich began teaching English literature and composition at Central High School in 1968. He continued to shape his students' love of the written word over the next 30 years until his retirement in 1998. After retiring from teaching, he turned his love of birding into a vocation when he began working full-time for RMBO. His colleagues, friends, and family recognized his dedication in 2005 when he received a Certificate of Appreciation for years of outstanding service to Audubon Colorado, The Ronald A. Ryder Award from Colorado Field Ornithologists, and the inaugural Richard G. Levad Award from RMBO. In the face of ongoing challenges presented by

his struggle with Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS), Rich retired from RMBO in July 2006. With more time to pursue his own projects, he began writing "The Coolest Bird," a natural history of the Black Swift, a bird that he had spent several years studying and tracking throughout Colorado and New Mexico. Meticulously typing with just one finger, he completed the manuscript, which is now being considered for publication by Oregon State University Press.

Colleagues, friends, and family have recently mourned the loss of Rich. To RMBO, Rich was a talented naturalist with an infectious curiosity and a wonderful sense of adventure. Rich's contributions to the scientific community are far too great to list here. And, after all, those contributions are only a small part of who Rich was. Those of us who were fortunate enough to know Rich understand that every data point that Rich collected comes with a story. And, like any good story, Rich's are filled with character, courage, humor, happiness, sometimes sadness, and, yes, adventure. Like the memory of looking for Black Swifts on the Animas River, these stories are what we will carry with us to tell around campfires, share with friends, and live in on in our hearts. We all miss Rich greatly, but are grateful for the wonderful memories that he has given us.

Recently, Rich and his family created the Richard G. Levad Memorial Fund to fund work based on Rich's wishes/interests. To make a donation, send a check to RMBO, PO Box 1232, Brighton, CO 80601-1232. Please write "Levad Memorial Fund" in the memo line.

Bald Eagle Watch (from Page 1)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has issued management guidelines to sustain a healthy breeding population of the eagles. Colorado also has issued its own

guidelines. At this year's Bald Eagle Volunteer kick off meeting, Craig, now retired from CDOW, emphasized that BEW observations will be critical to

enforcing the disturbance buffers around nest sites under the new guidelines.

Table 1: Barr Lake Bald Eagle Watch Annual Data

<u>Year</u>	<u>Nest Attention</u>	<u>Incubation</u>	<u>Hatch Date</u>	<u>Hatchings</u>	<u>Fledge Date</u>	<u>Fledglings</u>
1986	Mar 2 – Apr 19	no		0		0
1987	Feb 24 – Apr 29	Apr 5 – May 3	No	0		0
1988	Unknown	Mar 7 – Mar 24	No	0		0
1989	Unknown	Feb 18 – Mar 24	Mar 27	2	Jun 15 – 18	2
1990	Feb 12 – 15	Feb 16 – Mar 20	Mar 21	2	Jun 13 – 21	2
1991	Feb 9 – 15	Feb 16 – Mar 18	Mar 19	3	Jun 7 – 10	3
1992	Jan 27 – Feb 12	Feb 13 – Mar 19	Mar 20	3	Jun 10 – 17	3
1993	Jan 14 – Feb 4	Feb 5 – 14	Feb 16		Eagles off nest - change to new nest site	
	Feb 20 – Mar 4	Mar 5 – Apr 10	Apr 11	2	Jul 1 – 5	2
1994	Jan 15 – Feb 14	Feb 14 – Mar 26	Mar 27	3	Jun 14 – 20	3
1995	Jan 12 – Feb 14	Feb 15 – Mar 23	Mar 24	2	Jun 16 – 20	2
1996	Jan 16 – Feb 19	Feb 20 – Mar 25	Mar 26	1	Jun 17 – 20	1
1997	Jan 15 – Feb 21	Feb 22 – Apr 3	No	0		0
1998	Jan 20 – Feb 17	Feb 18 – Mar 23	Mar 24	1	Jun 16 – 19	1
1999	Unknown	Feb 12 – Mar 18	Mar 22	2	Jun 14	2
2000	Unknown	Feb 17 – Mar 23	Mar 24	3	Jun 13 – 16	3
2001	Unknown	Feb 15 – Mar 21	Mar 22	3	Jun 12 – 17	1
2002	Unknown	Feb 14 – Mar 21	Mar 22	3	Jun 13 – 14	2
2003	Feb 15 – Mar 7	Mar 10 – 26	No	0		0
2004	Jan 30 – Feb 27	Feb 29 – Apr 3	No	0		0
2005	Dec 2 – Feb 23	Feb 24 – Mar 28	Mar 29	2	Jun 23	2
2006	Jan – Feb 23	Feb 23 – Mar 31	Mar 31	3	Jun 17 – 29	3
2007	Jan – Feb	Mar 1 – Apr 2	Apr 3	3	Jun 23 – Jul 5	2
TOTAL				38		34

Spring Birding Festivals and Tours

Mountain Plover Festival:

Join us April 25-27 for the Second Annual Mountain Plover Festival in Karval, Colorado. Activities include birdwatching, wildlife viewing, western entertainment, and an antiques, arts, and crafts fair. Karval Community Alliance will provide the Country Hospitality. Tour local ranches and enjoy delicious food including a chuckwagon dinner and an ice cream social. For more information, view the brochure on our website at www.rmbo.org or the Karval Community Alliance website at www.karval.org.

Bent on Birding: Bent County Birding and Heritage Festival:

On May 17th, Las Animas/Bent County Chamber of Commerce is hosting the Bent County Birding and Heritage Festival. Enjoy birding, petroglyph, dinosaur, and wildlife viewing tours throughout the day, followed by a chuckwagon dinner and presentations on raptors and local history. It's all topped off by a visit to a Black Rail listening area. Call 719-456-0453 or go to www.bentcounty.org for information and registration.



B. Smith, CDOW

Monitoring Database Goes Online

David Hanni, Monitoring Division Director

This month, RMBO's Monitoring Division will make data from 11 years of point counts and section surveys available to partners, members and the public online. The move is part of a major effort by the division to make regional monitoring data available to organizations and individuals working on bird conservation. A link to the website can be found at www.rmbo.org.

While RMBO's mission is conservation of birds and their habitats, Division Director David Hanni notes that the data may also be useful to recreational birders. They will be able to check the RMBO website for the regional distribution of particular species or find out what species have been detected on particular public lands. Visitors can also query the site for a map showing the distribution of a particular species.

The RMBO Avian Data Center is being developed by Chandman Sambuu, the division's information technology manager. In addition to the website, the division makes monitoring data available through

the Avian Knowledge Network (AKN) at Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. RMBO is a regional node for the network. Other nodes include PRBO Conservation Science, Klamath Bird Observatory, and the U.S. Geological Survey.

Hanni explained that the regional nodes maintain more detailed monitoring data than the AKN database. Once a year, a "digger" harvests selected data from the regional nodes to integrate into the AKN database. The nodes are also working on analytical tools that can be used by all of the nodes. Each node is working on one or more specific tools.

Monitoring is the largest of RMBO's operating divisions. During the breeding season, dozens of field technicians from the

division conduct point counts in Arizona, Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, New Mexico, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. In addition to the RMBO data, the database stores information collected by other individuals in a similar method within the region.

The Monitoring Division's cooperators include the Colorado Division of Wildlife, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management, Playa Lakes Joint Venture, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Partners in Flight, Oklahoma City Zoo, Wyoming Department of Game and Fish, and Colorado Natural Heritage Program.

RMBO AVIAN DATA CENTER

a partner of Avian
Knowledge
Network



Thank You 2007 RMBO Volunteers!

Susan Allerton	Art Dahl	Dillon Hartley	Connie Kogler	Duane Carr	Kevin Smith
Larry Arnold	Bill Day	Dustin Hartley	Nic Korte	Mark Niemeyer	Sarah Smith
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Jerry Craig	Anna Hartley	Silja Knoll	Bob Moston	Paul Slingsby	
Mike Crosby	Christian Hartley	Kris Koff	Sue Mozian		

Education through Bird Banding

Amanda Morrison, Education Coordinator

In 2007, RMBO's Education Division reached 4,132 participants at seven education and bird banding stations around Colorado. Spring banding stations included Chico Basin Ranch near Fountain, Willow Creek at Lamar Community College in Lamar, Audubon Center at Chatfield State Park in Littleton, and the Environmental Learning Center in Fort Collins.

A summer station also operated in the town of Ward in partnership with the Colorado Youth Program. Fall banding stations included Barr Lake State Park in Brighton and Ridgway State Park near Paonia. Thanks to Nebraska Prairie Partners, a cooperative effort of RMBO and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, RMBO's 8th and newest banding station was operated by the Outreach Division last September at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center just south of Scottsbluff, NE. Thanks also to The Nebraska Environmental Trust for their financial support.



Amanda Morrison

Releasing a banded American Robin.



Amanda Morrison

Students observe the banding process.

Banding stations provide valuable information about the seasonal movement of migratory birds. They also give visitors, particularly school groups, a chance to see birds up close and learn about their use of habitat. Mist nets are used to capture birds, which are then measured, weighed, and have other important information collected about them before being released back into the wild. Data collected is sent to the Bird

Banding Lab at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland, where it is entered into a database jointly managed by the U.S. Geological Survey and the Banding Office of the Canadian Wildlife Service.

RMBO's banding stations are operated under permits from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and state permits. A qualified bird bander, operating under the observatory's banding permit, directs the handling and processing of birds at each station. An educator explains the banding process to visitors and helps them learn about the various birds captured that day. Volunteers assist with management of the mist nets, extraction of birds from the nets, recording data, and serving as educators.

All educators hold a true passion for and extensive knowledge about birds. Typical education program participants include school groups, home school groups, scout groups, and birding groups. We welcome interested visitors to drop by a station to learn about the important work being done.

If you are interested in helping with one of the banding sites, contact Amanda Morrison at (303) 659-4348, ext 16#.

Thank You!

RMBO would like to thank the following partners who made our 2007 Education and Bird Banding stations a success:

Colorado Division of Wildlife
Chico Basin Ranch
Playa Lakes Joint Venture
Black Canyon
of the Gunnison Audubon
Colorado State Parks
Wildcat Hills Nature Center
Nebraska Game & Parks
Commission
Scientific & Cultural Facilities
District
The Denver Foundation

Banding Stations Need Your Support

In order to keep the banding stations operational, support from RMBO's members and friends is critical to sustain the programs that reach thousands of school kids every year. Here's what donations at certain levels will support:

Bander for one week - \$1,000
Educator for one week - \$589
Replace mist net - \$65

Donations at any level will help support RMBO's education programs, and can be sent to:

Rocky Mountain Bird
Observatory
PO Box 1232
Brighton, CO 80601-1232.

2008 RMBO Volunteer Opportunities

If you'd like to help with one or more of the activities listed below, please call Starr Nicely at (303) 659-4348.

Position: Office help

Duties: Filing, word processing, data entry, office organization, mailing, telephoning

Required Skills: General office

Location: Ft. Collins and Brighton

Time Commitment: Various, 1 day/week preferred.

Position: Data entry

Duties: Assist RMBO biologists by entering data from monitoring and banding stations into a database

Required Skills: Data entry in Microsoft Excel or Access

Location: Ft. Collins

Time Commitment: By arrangement

Position: Colony Watch

Duties: Monitor a specific colony of a colonially-breeding bird species

Required Skills: Ability to recognize the colonial birds and follow a simple monitoring protocol

Location: Various locations throughout Colorado

Time Commitment: Anywhere from an hour to several days depending on size of colony and number of species involved

Position: Outreach/public relations

Duties: Represent RMBO at events, such as Fall Bird Festival, or meetings of civic groups; help organize or produce such events

Required Skills: Knowledge of RMBO organization and activities, public speaking ability

Location: Most opportunities are near Brighton or Fort Collins

Time Commitment: Two to four hours various times throughout the year

Position: Educator

Duties: Teach educational programs, primarily for children

Required Skills: Training will be provided in program content and teaching techniques, but general

knowledge of ecological processes and some teaching experience are helpful.

Must enjoy working with children, be enthusiastic and flexible

Location: Barr Lake State Park, Dinosaur Ridge, RMBO headquarters in Brighton

Time Commitment: At least 5 hours/month; programs are approximately 2 hours in length and occur in the morning

Position: Banding Assistant

Duties: Assist a certified bander in processing birds

Required Skills: Ability to identify bird species helpful but not required; manual dexterity important

Location: Barr Lake State Park

Time Commitment: 5 hours per banding session during three months in the fall

Position: Bald Eagle Watch

Duties: Observe, report, and monitor nesting activity on known bald eagle nests

Required Skills: Ability to observe bald eagle behaviors with binoculars or spotting scope from car or viewing blind; training date is Jan. 26, at 9am.

Location: Various along Front Range from Fort Collins to metro Denver

Time Commitment: 1-4 hours per observation date, must observe 8 or more times throughout nesting season (Feb – June).

Position: Communications/PR Coordinator

Duties: Plan and implement a program for promoting RMBO, the organization and its activities, through the media and other avenues

Required Skills: Knowledge of basic public relations techniques and opportunities, especially along the Front Range; writing and communicating ability

Location: Could be at either RMBO office or at volunteer's home

Time Commitment: Intense at the

beginning to prepare the plan; several hours weekly afterwards

Position: Spanish language interpreter/translator

Duties: Translate educational programs to Spanish-speaking children; provide written translation of letters and other materials in Birds Beyond Borders program

Required Skills: Written and spoken ability in Spanish and English

Location: Brighton, Denver for program translation; written translation at volunteer's preference

Time Commitment: Various

Position: RMBO librarian

Duties: Inventory, catalogue and organize RMBO library

Required Skills: Organizational ability; no library experience necessary

Location: RMBO headquarters in Brighton

Time Commitment: At volunteer's discretion

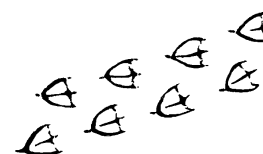
Position: Property maintenance

Duties: Maintain building and grounds of Brighton headquarters (mowing, painting, etc.)

Required Skills: Basic knowledge of home and property care

Location: RMBO headquarters in Brighton

Time Commitment: As need arises—once or twice a month



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New Member Renewal

Please send me information about planned giving.

I am interested in volunteering.

Please make check payable to Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and mail with this form to:

RMBO
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P.O. Box 1232
Brighton, CO 80601

MEMBERSHIP QUESTIONS?

Call (303)659-4348 or e-mail starr.nicely@rmbo.org

THANK YOU for supporting Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory and western bird conservation!

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Short Sleeved T-Shirt (ash, white)	\$15.00
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Shirt Sizes: S M L XL 2X (LS white T-Shirt also in Youth Large - compares to Adult XS)

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\$0.00-25.00..... Add \$4.95
\$25.01-75.00... Add \$6.00
\$75.01-125.00..Add \$8.00

Sub-total: _____

Shipping: _____

TOTAL: _____

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City/State/Zip: _____

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