



April 7 chapter meeting topic: Bear Creek Watershed

The Bear Creek Watershed defines Evergreen Audubon: Our bluebird monitoring and breeding-bird surveys, activities at the core of our citizen science, occur at the heart of this stunningly diverse landscape.

The watershed is defined by the alpine tundra and treeless vistas of Mount Evans to the west, then continues down through lodgepole pine, ponderosa pine, aspen and juniper to the red sandstone monoliths and semiarid plantscapes surrounding Morrison.

Finally, it flows through Lakewood and Denver to the South Platte River.

As striking as the physical features of the Bear Creek Watershed are, it is the water flowing down through our Evergreen world that has defined and shaped the landscapes, plants and animals that surround us.

That precious and limited water will be of even greater significance to the future health of our community, human and nonhuman.

How we manage and adapt to varying water resources within a changing climate will demonstrate our stewardship and define the livability of the Bear Creek Watershed.

Evergreen Audubon members and others in our Evergreen community will have the opportunity to better understand our role in the stewardship and care of the water resources of the Bear Creek Watershed at the next Evergreen Audubon Chapter Meeting on Thursday, April 7.

Russell Clayshulte, manager of the Bear Creek Watershed Association, will present “Bear Creek Watershed—Expect the Unexpected.”

We will meet at Church of the Hills, 28628 Buffalo Park Road in Evergreen. Doors open at 6:30 p.m.

Please come to socialize with your fellow Evergreen Audubon members and meet guests from our community prior to a brief business meeting and an-

nouncements at 7, followed by Russell’s presentation.

The hydrology of a watershed like Bear Creek can be very complex even under expected conditions. The Bear Creek Watershed Association has available more than 100 years of stream-flow records.

A clear long-term trend of declining flows, shifting weather patterns and earlier spring runoff is evident in the data record.

This changing hydrology has a profound influence on water quality within the watershed. The association also has a 25-year water-quality record. In the past decade, the Bear Creek Watershed has experienced both extreme drought and flood events.

The average inflow into Bear Creek Reservoir from Turkey Creek and Bear Creek combined from 1987 to 2014 was 27,100 acre-feet per year. In 2015, 118,925 acre-feet flowed through the reservoir.

Putting that into perspective, the mean annual flow in the South Platte River at Waterton, 1926 through 2015, was 119,450 acre-feet.

These emerging extreme trends don’t appear to be predictable, but there may be an opportunity for the association and member water providers to better understand how climate changes will affect the watershed in the near future.

Water providers are also developing source-water protection plans to better

Continued on page 6



Observations on the Third-Saturday Bird Walk in February prompted a conversation about the abundance, or lack thereof, of the usual suspects at feeders this winter. View the conversation in Bird Business on page 3. Above, a Steller’s Jay at 8,000 feet in Marshdale. *Photo by Jackie Cirvello*

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Meetings first Thursday, 7 p.m., Church of the Hills, 28628 Buffalo Park Road, Evergreen, except January. Meetings in June, July and August are held at Evergreen Nature Center.

What were you doing 25 years ago? The Migratory Bird Act was already 75 years old, Evergreen Lake House wasn't built yet, Interstate 70 through Glenwood Canyon was almost complete, Willie Nelson sold his house in Evergreen, "Dances with Wolves" won the Oscar, and Debbie Marshall had just left her job as managing editor of the Canyon Courier to start her own firm.

Debbie then became the designer of *The Dipper* newsletter, serving under several different editors over the years until she took over as editor herself a few years ago. A few hundred issues and countless hours later, Debbie has finally decided to retire.

Words, especially when addressed to an editor, just can't capture my appreciation for her contribution and commitment to the newsletter. Evergreen Audubon will be thanking Debbie for her years of service with a gift certificate from the Blue Quill Angler. Debbie loves to fish; if you see her out on a stream, don't forget to thank her in person.

That said, I am sad to announce that this will be the last issue of *The Dipper* in its current format. At the same time, I am excited that our new communications director, Mendhi Audlin, with help from all of us, will keep *The Dipper* alive. It will be in a form that is based on the new website design.

Please be patient with us as we work out all the details of getting you the Evergreen Audubon news in a timely and searchable fashion. I've only been reading *The Dipper* for five years, but I'm sure you'll all agree, it's been a wonderful publication and resource. Be assured, we plan to keep it that way.

With Evergreen Nature Center just a few weeks away from opening (Saturday, April 23), we are closing in on hiring a new director. I believe you'll be very pleased with our choice. My special thanks to Heather Johnson, Melissa Leasia, Donald Randall and David Walker for helping me with the search committee.

We had many wonderful candidates and lots of great ideas were discussed during the interview process. It's going to be a fantastic season!

The March chapter meeting with Alistair Montgomery's photography program was packed (close to 60 people), with lots of new faces. We hope some of the newcomers will consider becoming members of Evergreen Audubon to help sustain our programs, activities and the Nature Center. Of course, thank you to all our current members.

Rhodes will lead 3rd-Saturday walk in April

Join Marilyn Rhodes, Audubon master birder, for the Third-Saturday Bird Walk on April 16 from 7:30 a.m. to noon.

This month participants will go to Red Rocks Park and Bear Creek Canyon to check on raptors, followed by a look around Genesee for early ponderosa forest breeding activity.

Bring water and a snack. Meet at the Bergen Park Park-n-Ride at 7:30.

These walks are for Evergreen Audubon members and their guests. Non-members won't be turned away, but will be encouraged to join Evergreen Audubon.

To reserve a space, please register at www.EvergreenAudubon.org and click on the Event Calendar tab. For more information, call Marilyn Rhodes, 303-674-6580.

- Chuck Aid
Director of Bird Monitoring

Owls and eagles on the nest now

It's April, but Great Horned Owls have been busy at their nests for two months. Golden Eagles were on their nests as early as the beginning of March. And Red-tailed Hawks began to lay eggs early in March as well.

Of the birds familiar to us, most don't even think about breeding until April. So why do these large birds of prey begin this annual event so early?

Simple. It takes a long time to raise a baby hawk or owl to the size at which it can fend for itself. Even though both parents are hunting for and feeding them, such large birds grow slowly.

So by beginning to nest early, the hawks and owls fledge their young by the time spring arrives. This is just about the time young rodents and rabbits are leaving their nests in great numbers.

The young birds, though inexperienced in catching their own meals, have a lot of potential prey to make their hunting a bit easier and their survival more likely.

Bluebirds are back!

On Feb. 27, Dave Wald posted, "We (Dave and Roel Snieder) spotted four brilliant (likely all males) Mountain Bluebirds at about noon today in Elk Meadow. They were about halfway up the Founders Trail. Glad to see them back!"

On Leap Day, Susan Blansett shared, "We also saw several Mountain Bluebirds while attending Hawkwatch training on the Hogback south of Golden.

Kathanne Lynch offered, "Sylvia and Bill Brockner call these late-February Mountain Bluebirds 'scouts.'

"They work their way up the foothills from south of Pueblo late in February each year and stay around for a few days. They head back south and stay away during the March snows, then return in late March."

On March 5, a week after Dave's observation, Mark Meremonte reported, "Mountain Bluebirds (one apparently female) in Elk Meadow. All utilizing muellin stalks for foraging insects. Sure looks like they are settling in instead of scouting."



Mountain Bluebird. Photo by Marilyn Rhodes

Carol Slaughter questioned Mark, "Utilizing how? Are they on the ground scratching or sitting on the stalks or what?" Mark responded, "Yes, using mullein stalks as perches to hunt for insects."

Lynne Price also commented, "The day after Dave's report, I also saw bluebirds around the old barn on Noble Meadow. I didn't know the stalks they had in their mouths were for insect foraging—great information!"

Third-Saturday Bird Walk South Platte River

Chuck Aid reported that on Feb. 20, 17 participants went down along the South Platte just north of Commerce City.

"I had initially scheduled this trip thinking that Colorado would be in deep-freeze mode in late February, and that all the local waterfowl would be concentrated along the river when the reservoirs were frozen solid.

"Well, of course, we weren't in deep-freeze mode, and in fact the weather was glorious, and there's open water everywhere. So, we didn't get the avian concentration I had anticipated, but we did find 26 species, and even had a few highlights.

"Before getting to the highlights, I want to share what we didn't see. Perhaps the weather was just too nice—it can happen with birds that sometimes you actually want a little inclement weather causing the birds to have to feed more actively.

"Anyway, on this beautiful day, a few of the birds we did not see, but which one would expect to see in this area were:

Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Song

Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco and House Finch.

"Really, in midwinter one should see more than 30 species in this area. So, we kind of struck out, except we had some pretty cool birds, nonetheless.

"So, the highlights were, first, that we had great looks at the waterfowl we did see, and people really had the opportunity to get a handle on those species.

"We had a singing **Marsh Wren**, a rare occurrence this time of year (both the bird, and the fact that it was singing).

"We also had a single **Double-crested Cormorant**, a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, and a few **Yellow-rumped Warblers**—these are species that are only around in low numbers during the winter, or they may not be present at all.

"Perhaps the most interesting observation was of a **Cooper's Hawk** perched on a midstream boulder and diving into the water in an attempt to get a muskrat.

"On a personal note, I've had a calling **Northern Pygmy Owl** in the vicinity of the Blue Creek Cub Creek confluence."

Yard Birds

Mike Foster responded to Chuck's report and triggered a series of reports from around the area.

"I'm interested in one particular aspect of Chuck's good report: the absence of flickers, **Downy Woodpeckers**, and **Song Sparrows**! I have noticed the

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

same thing at Lair o' the Bear, where I'm doing a long-term survey this year, also at Bear Creek Lake Park, and Prospect Park (aka Wheat Ridge Greenbelt), places I visit regularly.

"I'd like to hear from other birders about their findings of flickers, Downys, and **Song Sparrows**. Are you noticing the same lack? Any ideas of why? Do mention locations please.

"By the way I've had good luck with the waterfowl you missed last week, at Prospect Park, the Platte River at 88th Avenue and around Carson Nature Center, so I'm not so concerned about them as about the others mentioned."

Soda Creek

JoAnn Hackos responded, "The low numbers of birds at our feeders has been really disturbing this year. We have resident pairs of Downy and Hairy woodpeckers, but our regular flicker hasn't been around for several weeks now.

"We do a Feederwatch, so have good records.

"In general, our species count is down about four species this winter. The junco numbers have been especially low unless we are having a snowstorm. That hasn't been true in previous years.

"Very few pink-sided, white-winged, or Oregon in comparison to last year or earlier. At 7,800 feet we don't get Song Sparrows."

Lookout Mountain

Inga Brennan posted, "For me on Lookout Mountain, it's been just the opposite. I regularly have a pair each of Downys, Hairys and flickers. And I always have lots of juncos—more Oregons than usual. I also get at least three **Red-breasted Nuthatches** regularly.

The thing that is different this year is I am having goldfinches often, and that never used to be. So numbers are good here."

Pahoa, Hawaii

Even old pal Sherman Wing chimed in, "Mike, I would be interested to hear more about your Lair o' the Bear study. Though I don't reside in Colorado, I

like to keep up with what's happening at that site. I've birded many hours there.

"Chuck, this season in Hilo, I've recorded five of the species that you missed. The **Belted Kingfisher** was the biggest surprise vagrant here."

Sun Creek

Barbara Klaus shared, "This year has been a very lean year at my feeders on Sun Creek Drive in Evergreen. I am signed up for the Feederwatch with Cornell, but have had precious little to report.

Chickadees, both kinds, are here, as are juncos, but the Downys that used to visit often last year are gone, as is the occasional Hairy. Even finches are way fewer.

"Initially I attributed it to the fact that there was construction on my road for about two months, or that I had fairly severely pruned my adjacent bushes, but now I think maybe it's something else."

Golden

Susan Blansett reported, "At my backyard feeders in Golden, and in the many times I've walked the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt this winter, I have noticed fewer flickers and Downys than 'normal.'

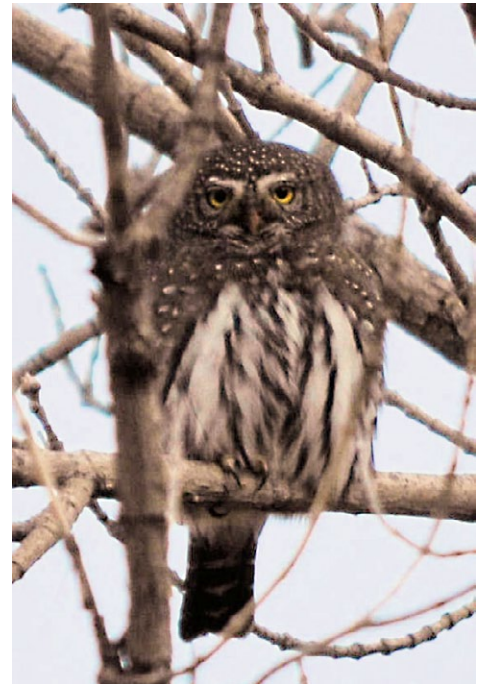
"We typically will have several flickers in the neighborhood and visiting my feeders; this winter it's been only two birds that I can tell.

"Our resident pair of Downys is here, but I see them less often. This may be attributable to the loss of an old apple tree in our yard, which is near the house and one feeder, and for many years provided shelter and a great staging area for the birds.

"But my main feeder area is away from the apple tree and has two pinyon pines and a dense grapevine nearby for staging.

"I have enjoyed stronger numbers of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** and even a **Brown Creeper** this winter — don't know if that has anything to do with the woodpecker numbers.

"I very seldom get **Song Sparrows**, but have had fewer **White-crowned Sparrows** than normal this year as well."



Northern Pygmy Owl. Photo by Marilyn Rhodes

Alderfer/Three Sisters

Melissa Leasia confessed, "I guess they've all come over to our house. We have plenty of Downys, Hairys and flickers. We have plenty of juncos—all types. We have plenty of nuthatches—fewer pygmys than other years but we make up for it with lots of white-breasted and red-breasted.

"Fewer **Pine Siskins** than we've had in the past but **Lesser Goldfinches** for the first time. Our **Cassin's Finch** came back yesterday. Our two creepers have thoroughly picked over a ponderosa near our front deck every day for weeks. **No Song Sparrows**. We're at 7,605 feet near Alderfer/Three Sisters Park."

Indian Hills

David Walker spoke up, too, "I'm in Indian Hills and daily have Downy, Hairy and Flicker. Rare visits from **Song Sparrow**. Most common nuthatch is pygmy."

Squaw Pass

Fran Enright lamented, "The feeders that I have have been shunned by the birds (8,500 feet). It is remarkably quiet. I have resident birds and see them on

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

occasion but it seems the only takers at the feeders are the deer.

“I have a **Cooper’s Hawk** who works these feeders regularly but there would have to be a convention of them to explain the dearth of activity. With fewer birds are they getting pickier?”

“I have a friend about a half-mile away who has juncos but I have not had one this winter. All that being said, the Christmas Count was pretty good.”

Upper Bear Creek

Larry White added, “For the past couple of weeks we’ve noticed a decrease in the number of birds at our feeders.

“I speculated that with warmer temps, snowmelt and extensive areas of bare ground on our southern exposures, the birds (especially the seed eaters) were out foraging in the native habitats.

“Our local vegetation was very lush and productive last summer with the above-average record precipitation.

“Well, this idea was supported by our feeder count this morning after 10 inches of new snow. There were more birds at our feeders and even the **Oregon** and **Pink-sided Juncos** were back. Lots of **House Finches**, too.

“The flicker, Hairy and Downy woodpeckers have been regular daily visitors to our feeders all winter and have started drumming.

“**Pygmy Nuthatches** are always around. They roost in cavities in the ponderosa pine snags that we have created on our property.”

Mark Meremonte, also from Upper Bear Creek, concurred with Larry. “We too received about 10 inches of snow. Have flicker, Downy, Hairy too. Always six to 10 pygmys.

“**Mountain Chickadees** abundant with a **Black-capped** once in a while. Have been frequent **Brown Creeper(s)** this season, which is wonderful.

“Juncos usually only come around when snow on ground. Intermittent male crossbill, few **Pine Siskins**, and fewer than normal **House Finches**.”

Greystone

Carol Slaughter commented, “I live at



Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Photo by Marilyn Rhodes

7,800 feet above Greystone Mansion and my report would echo Joann’s. Don’t know if the three pesky **Steller’s Jays** have anything to do with it.”

Wild Evergreen

Great Horned Owls Have Hatched! Great Horned Owls are year-round residents here.

In North America, when much of the continent is battling ice, snow and bone-chilling cold, it may seem like a very bad time of year for a bird to nest. But to the Great Horned Owl, January and February are ideal months to breed, nest and incubate eggs.

The most widely distributed owl of the Americas, the Great Horned is found throughout the continental United States as well as in Alaska. Its range extends southward into Mexico and Central and South America.

Breeding and Nesting

Great Horned Owls mate for life. Territories are maintained by the same pair for as many as eight consecutive years.



Great Horned Owls. Photo by Marilyn Rhodes

However, these owls are solitary in nature, only staying with their mate during the nesting season. Average home

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5

ranges are approximately 2.5 square miles.

The mating ritual begins as early as October with the pair hooting at each other or dueting.

They do not build a nest of their own but utilize the nests of other birds such as the hawk, crow and heron.

They are extremely aggressive when defending the nest and will continue to attack until the intruder is killed or driven off.

Red-tailed Hawks and Great Horned Owls often inhabit and feed in the same territories.

But because the owls are nocturnal and the hawks are diurnal, the two species tend to eat different prey, so do not compete with one another.

The female owl lays one to five eggs and incubates the eggs for about 30 to 37 days. Eggs usually begin to hatch in March.

After the young hatch, they are fed by both parents and are brooded for another two weeks. They can't fly well until 9 to 10 weeks old.

They fledge at 45 to 55 days. Young birds will not mate until they are about 2 years of age.

Families remain loosely associated during summer before young disperse in the autumn.

They are permanent residents and don't migrate as a rule, except when there is a lack of food.



Great Horned Owlets. Photo by Marilyn Rhodes

Diverse Diet

Nocturnal predators, Great Horned Owls feed on practically any living thing—from fish, frogs and scorpions to squirrels, skunks and ducks to bats, house cats and small dogs.

They will even take down large raptors including hawks, ospreys and other owls.

The adults have no enemies but may be killed in confrontations with other Great Horned Owls, eagles, Northern Goshawks and Peregrine Falcons. They can live up to 13 years.

Behavior

Its binocular vision allows it to see in

Continued on page 7

April 7 chapter meeting: Bear Creek Watershed

Continued from page 1

preserve and protect future water supplies.

Nearly all models predict the strongest El Niño on record to continue in 2016. Forecasters say it could substantially influence Colorado weather, but even this event is not meeting expectations.

The unexpected hydrology requires the association to have an adaptive watershed management plan.

Russell Clayshulte has a unique van-

tage point on stewardship of the Bear Creek Watershed. For the past 40 years, Russell has been focused on water quality, particularly environmental, biological and hydrogeology.

After obtaining a master's of science in biology at the University of Guam, he spent 12 years as a marine biologist and water resources specialist. He then became the environmental resource manager/director with the Denver Regional Council of Governments for more than 16 years.

Russell owns and operates a small water and environmental resource consulting business, RNC Consulting. He has more than 29 years of experience in the environmental and water resources fields, including testifying before the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission in more than 135 rulemaking and informational hearings.

Russell understands the complicated legal and hydrological intricacies of Colorado's water resources.

- Ed Furlong, Director of Education

After reviewing the tale of Mabel, the goshawk in “H is for Hawk,” I decided it was time to learn more about goshawks.

A few years ago, a Northern Goshawk was the first bird of the year at our feeders in Soda Creek, appearing on Jan. 1. From time to time we see a gray ghost land on a ponderosa pine with a clear view of the bird feeders. The feeder birds either fly off in a panic or freeze.

Scott Rashid has been studying Northern Goshawks in and around Rocky Mountain National Park since 1998. He conducts research on raptors and rehabilitates injured birds.

He is director of the Colorado Avian Research and Rehabilitation Institute, www.carriep.org.

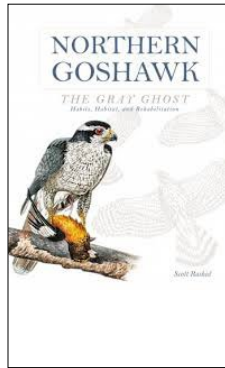
Rashid’s 2015 book on the Northern Goshawk follows his earlier books: “Small Mountain Owls” and “The Great Horned Owl: An In-depth Study.”

Compared with “H is for Hawk,” Rashid’s account is rather “matter of fact.” He explains the goshawk’s anatomy, comparing it with two other accipiters, the Cooper’s Hawk and the Sharp-shinned Hawk. He discusses the hawk’s vocalizations, courtship, hunting and food habits, nesting, nestlings and fledging, giving the reader a detailed portrait of the woodland predator.

Fascinated by goshawks since high school, Rashid describes the intense aggression that the goshawk exhibits, whether hunting for prey or defending its young. Apparently, he has been attacked frequently enough that he has learned to hold his tripod over his head when he attempts to observe nesting birds.

They are equally relentless while hunting. Their prey includes nearly every kind of bird found in RMNP, including Gray Jays, Steller’s Jays, Mountain Chickadees, American Robins, Clark’s Nutcrackers, Ptarmigan, Dusky Grouse and more. They also favor squirrels of all types. And they are not averse to hunting domestic chickens and waterfowl.

The goshawk’s maneuverability is legendary. We have witnessed them



Northern Goshawk, The Gray Ghost: Habits, Habitat, and Rehabilitation, Scott Rashid, Schiffer Publishing, Atglen, Pa., 2015.

spiraling up the trunk of a ponderosa in pursuit of a bird, amazingly missing every horizontal branch in their path.

Rashid describes the goshawk’s tendency to place its stick nest near meadows and hiking trails, although these are obviously nests they are easier for a researcher to locate.

He surmises that they use the trails as paths back to their nests and the open meadows as opportunities to hunt ground squirrels, snowshoe hares and other small mammals.

In 2011, Rashid was investigating a report of a large hawk attacking hikers along a trail in the national park. As he approaches the area, he hears the familiar aggressive call, *kak-kak-kak-kak-kak-kak*, of the female. She is defending the two downy chicks in her nest.

Then, she is joined by the male, whose *kak-kak-kak-kak-kak-kak* is deeper. The male flies toward Rashid, carrying a golden-mantled ground squirrel. Surprisingly, the male drops the squirrel nearly on top of Rashid, as if on a bombing run toward a target.

Rashid moves away to get a photo. When he returns to the spot, the squirrel is gone. The male goshawk had returned to pick it up so that he could deliver it to his waiting mate.

One of the benefits of reading “The Gray Ghost” are the photographs. Clearly, Rashid is able to get close to the hawks and their nests. He has fantastic shots of male and female adults, nestlings and juveniles. He noticed Gray Jays harassing fledglings—until the adults appeared. The jays appeared to station a lookout that gave out a warning call to its friends.

Northern Goshawks apparently have few predators. First among those is the Great Horned Owl. Rashid finds nestlings and juveniles that have been taken by owls. He also reports on accounts of fishers and raccoons taking goshawk nestlings.

Rashid ends his account by describing his experience rehabilitating goshawks that have been injured or stricken with the West Nile virus. Because of their aggressive nature, they are difficult to handle during rehabilitation. But, they also survive and recover and are happily released back to the wild.

If you would like to know more about one of our local, although rarely seen, birds, I recommend “The Gray Ghost.” The photographs alone are worth the price.

It might even be possible to meet Scott Rashid on location in Rocky Mountain National Park. He does an occasional program, often through the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies.

BIRD BUSINESS

MARILYN RHODES, ASGD MASTER BIRDER

Continued from page 6
low-light conditions and makes it into a versatile hunter. It can turn its head 270 degrees without moving its body.

The Great Horned Owl can take prey two to three times larger than itself! It is a fierce predator and has an amazing 500 pounds of pressure in its sharp talons.

The Great Horned Owl has a wingspan of about 4 feet. Loosely packed feathers and fringe on the ends of the feathers help to make the owl silent as it flies.

This year, I’ve observed Great Horned Owls nesting as early as Jan. 20. The first hatchlings were reported on March 13.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 7	EA Chapter Meeting	7 pm <i>Doors open at 6:30</i>	Church of the Hills
April 9	ENC Setup	10 am–2 pm	Nature Center
April 16	Third-Saturday Bird Walk	7:30 am–noon	Red Rocks/Bear Creek
April 17	EA Communications Happy Hour	6 pm	Lariat Lodge Brewing
April 23	Nature Center opens for season		
April 23	Mountain Area Earth Day Fair	10 am–3 pm	Evergreen Lake House
<i>Save the Date:</i>			
Aug. 26	Evergreen Nature Center Bash & Benefit		Hiwan Golf Club

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Audubon Rockies Office, <http://Rockies.Audubon.org>

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I/we would like to join the Evergreen Audubon. I/we may participate in all chapter activities, receive the newsletter electronically, and vote (two Family members may vote) on chapter issues. Dues remain locally.

Date _____

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Artwork: Sylvia Brockner, Mildred Keiser

Book Review: "Northern Goshawk"

Feeder Debate

Dipper Changes Coming

IN THIS ISSUE

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