

Rocky Mountain Outdoors

The Newsletter of Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers



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Hawking for Raptors

by Ron Hellbusch

Holding the sleek form of a colorfully feathered raptor and cautiously releasing it to the free air is a rare feeling of exuberance few people have the opportunity to experience. Our group led by wildlife biologist Scott Hutchings and wildlife naturalist Nelda Gamble, had that rare experience recently on a "Hawking" trip in Eastern Adams County.

"Hawking", the wildlife biologist's jargon term used for the trapping and banding procedure to collect data on raptors is both a scientific endeavor as well as a rare outdoor encounter. "The objective of hawking", Scott explained "is to band raptors for scientific purposes".

Banding of birds by the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) is a customary bird management program for a variety of birds. Biologist that capture and band birds must have both state and federal banding permits. "Light weight aluminum bands", Nelda stated as she demonstrated the procedure "are attached to the legs of raptors, as well as songbirds and waterfowl, to allow wildlife technicians to track the migration, destinations and the life span of birds".

Our group traveled along remote county roads north and east of Barr Lake State Park, within eyesight of Downtown Denver, and east of Longmont, a short 30 miles north of Denver in search of perched and resting raptors.

Once a bird was spotted perched on the top of a telephone pole, or in the high reaches of a large tree, vehicles were stopped at a safe distance to avoid flushing the bird from its resting site. Scott would then drive by the perched bird and without stopping, drop the wire cage trap and mouse on the roadway within 100 feet of the bird.

Scott described this particular trap used as a "bal-chatri trap, which originated in India." It is approximately three feet in length, two foot wide, and six inches deep. Inside the bal-chatri trap, Scott placed a small mouse as bait material. The top of the trap was laced with monofilament string (like fishing line) configured in snare loops. The monofilament loops encircle the talons of the striking raptor when it swoops down on the mouse and trap.

"These traps as well as other bird traps and waterfowl traps are approved by the FWS", Scott explained. The design and actions of the trap assures no injury results to the raptors. Other traps commonly used by wildlife biologists includes the bow trap, rocket net traps, dho-gaza (another trap from India). Each is designed specifically for the type and size of bird or waterfowl, Scott pointed out.

Our hawking group covered some five miles before spotting a smaller bird that attracted Nelda's interest. We stopped to hear

~ continued p. 5

From the President



Barb Laine,
RMOWP President

What is RMOWP?

Looking back at the 30 years Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers & Photographers has existed – or at least the 20-some years in which I have been active in it – the organization has evolved, grown, shrunk, and evolved some more. It has had times when practically all members were writers, with a few serious photographers, and periods of just the opposite. At times it seemed that almost everyone was involved with hunting and fishing, while at other times hikers and tree huggers seemed to dominate.

Today we have a good mix – photographers, writers, artists, hunters, hikers, bird watchers, anglers, environmentalists – you name it. And I think we can all learn from one another.

RMOWP is, by definition, an organization comprised of people involved in or at least interested in the crafts of writing and photography, with an emphasis on outdoor subjects. We have our differences – for instance, our membership includes avid hunters as well as those who find blood sports abhorrent – but the common element that binds us together is our love of the Great Outdoors and a desire to make a living by communicating this to others.

What do I personally get from RMOWP? For one thing, I love the people, and look forward to each conference to see old friends and meet new ones. I've also made some excellent business contacts and gotten important tips in informal discussions, what businesspeople call networking. Equally important is what I've gained through what we might consider the "official" reason for RMOWP's existence: it's educational aspects.

I look to RMOWP field trips to provide fodder for my pen and film. This has frequently been the case in the past and I fully expect more in the future as we continue to meet in interesting locales throughout the Rocky Mountain region. I also look to RMOWP to offer information on topics to help me hone my craft – newsletter articles on what's new in a field – workshops on technological advances such as digital photography – seminars on such topics as how to properly conduct research – critique sessions to help me improve my writing and photography skills. These are just mentions of what RMOWP has been providing its members through the years. We, as an organization, should continue these efforts while striving to do more.

As president, my goals include helping to make the annual conferences even more informative and useful to all professionals in our field, while retaining the fun factor and camaraderie we all enjoy. I also want to encourage regional groups to form and meet to explore a topic in depth – perhaps through a field trip to a newly-accessible outdoor recreation site. And third, I want to see the organization grow – not by gathering warm bodies to simply boost the numbers, but by deliberately seeking out those individuals with a strong interest in outdoor writing and photography who will both benefit from and contribute to our meetings, and who can appreciate what this organization is all about.

Sharing and learning have been the hallmarks of RMOWP since its beginnings, and as we continue to work together I am confident that Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers & Photographers will continue to prosper.

Barb Laine

RMOWP President

ALL ABOUT US

About RMOWP

Formed in 1973, the Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers, Inc. is a regional non-profit organization of professional and aspiring communicators, dedicated to the improvement of communicating the outdoor experience in the Rocky Mountain west.

Visit our website at mowp.org for more information about the mission, activities, and membership of RMOWP.

"Dedicated to the improvement of communicating the outdoor experience."

RMOWP Organization

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Barb Laine

Vice President
Jack Olson

Secretary
Anne Sullivan

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Lee Carr

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Interim Newsletter Editor

Maryann Gaug

Webmaster

Cindy Stone

Medical Advisor

Dr. Beto Gutierrez

About the Newsletter

RMOWP publishes the Rocky Mountain Outdoors newsletter bi-monthly.

Share your outdoor media, writing, & photography expertise, experiences, and achievements with fellow members. Help showcase and improve the talents of members. Keep us informed of important issues affecting the outdoor lifestyle and media profession. We'd love

to get craft improvement and any other relevant tips, articles, and photos!

Send articles and photos to the interim editor, Maryann Gaug, at:

maryann@rmowp.org
P.O. Box 2842
Silverthorne CO
80498-2842
Phone: 970-468-6219

Next Newsletter Deadline

January 10 2004

Please send submissions to be received by this date for the January/February 2004 issue.

Cover title bar photo:

Beautiful fall colors in the Rockies near Durango, CO. Photo courtesy of Durango Area Tourism Office at durango.org.



Editorial Note

All URLs in the newsletter are shown without the "www." prefix to save space; unless otherwise noted, assume that you need to include the prefix when entering the URL in your browser address.

MEMBER NEWS & EVENTS

By-Laws Changes Enacted

Enclosed in this newsletter are the new By-Laws of RMOWP. As mentioned in the last newsletter, the proposed changes were passed at the annual meeting of the membership, with a few word changes. Here is a brief synopsis of those changes.

Classes of Members decreased from 6 to 3, replacing Active & Associate with Individual, & making Life & Honorary sub-heads of Individual.

Several changes resulted from the above, including voting eligibility; and there were a few clarifications and corrections.

Term limitation was removed from secretary & treasurer; and an audit committee was created to oversee the treasurer.

Amendments to the by-laws are now possible by written ballot.

~Barb Laine



Welcome Another New Member !

Dan England of Greeley, CO has recently joined our group. Dan's specialty is writing about hiking, backpacking, and mountain climbing, but he writes about several other topics too. He is an outdoor and environmental writer for the Greeley Tribune, and is also a member of OWAA. Welcome Dan— we're glad to have you!

Be Photo Workshop Coordinator for 2004

We need a volunteer to take charge of organizing the workshop and start making plans for the next one.

Payment for this position is \$600 (dependent on workshop taking place). John Catis has written up the activities involved in planning and implementing the workshop, and can fill you in on how to make it a success. He has tentatively reserved the YMCA of the Rockies for next June.

This is a great leadership opportunity and wonderful event to be involved in. Contact Barb Laine at barb@rmowp.com or 505-758-8922 or Jack Olson at jack@rmowp.com or 303-777-8998 immediately if you are interested.

Help Make Hunting Dreams Come True

Blue Wonder™ Gun Care Products will be hosting Hunt of a Lifetime hunts for two young victims of life threatening diseases this fall and would like to invite the outdoor press to participate.

The first event is scheduled for **December 1-4** and will be held on the Rio Bonito Ranch near Junction, Texas. The young hunter sponsored will be Coby Anderson of Rockport, Texas. Coby is 16 and has leukemia. Though his cancer is in re-

mission he has serious respiratory problems along with growth deficiencies and will have these problems for the rest of his life. Through all of this Coby has not given up and is a true champion, he loves to hunt, fish and be outdoors.

The second event is scheduled for December 12-15 and will be held on the Duff Ranch near George West, Texas. The young hunter will be 13-year old Joshua "Josh" Bordes from the Beaumont, Texas area. Josh has Medulloblastoma, a malignant brain tumor, and has already undergone surgery to remove a large tumor from his brain. His cancer is in remission; but he suffers from growth deficiencies due to the chemo and radiation treatments. This hunt will be extra special because 2 years ago Josh had been scheduled for a hunt that never took place; Blue Wonder™ Gun Care Products is taking the steps necessary to insure that this young man is not disappointed again and does indeed get to go on his dream hunt!

For more information about these or other Hunt of a Lifetime events or to find out how to participate in these events please contact RMOWP member Denny Vasquez at 832-200-8005, or James Carrico at 409-752-2329.



MEMBER ARTICLE

her explain it was a Loggerhead Shrike. Not a falcon, and smaller than the typical raptor, it was still a valuable banding opportunity since it is the subject of research and pursues similar food sources as raptors.

The caravan drove on while Scott carefully dropped the wire trap containing one small mouse near the perched bird. We parked the cars a quarter mile from the perched bird and patiently waited. Within minutes the loggerhead shrike sprung from atop the high telephone pole, cupped its wings and dived like a F-14 toward the active mouse moving about in the wire trap. The invisible snare loops entwined the bird's small talons. We raced to the trap.

Scott and Nelda softly cupped the robin size bird in their hands and began the task of recording physical features of the bird.

Tail feathers were measured for length, as were its wing chords (length of the wing from the wrist to the end of the longest flight feather). The bird was weighed and the two inspected the color and shades of the body and wing feathers. "Size of feathers, and shades of colors observed on wing and tail feathers, tell us the age of the bird", Nelda explained. Once morphological data were recorded Scott released the Loggerhead Shrike to the air and our group moved on, carefully scanning the sky.

A couple of hours passed when Scott spotted an American Kestrel setting on a tall power pole. Scott repeated the same exercise, dropping the small mouse filled wire trap at the edge of the gravel road. We all sat with anticipation for 15 minutes observing the falcon surveying the surrounding fields, occasionally focusing on the mouse in the trap and then, moving its piercing eyes to other subjects.

Without any warning, it lifted from its perch and glided down and directly to the wire cage, where the snare secured its talons. We raced to the trap. The wing and tail

length was recorded, as was its weight. We were told the color shades and unique orange colors around its eyes and black beak made this a rare find. Once examined and photographed, the colorful kestrel winged its way across the adjoining field and out of sight.

A variety of eastern plains raptors are trapped and banded for research, including the American Kestrel, Swainson's Hawk, Prairie Falcon, Red-tail Hawk, even the Great Horned owl and Burrowing Owl. Timing of the hawking research is critical since many species migrate through Colorado as opposed to being year around residents.

Raptors are predominately meat eaters feeding on field mice, small rabbits, snakes, prairie dogs and smaller birds. Large insects like grasshoppers are consumed as well.

Many state wildlife agencies provide programs for volunteers to take an active role in Hawking research. A call to your state wildlife or game and fish offices will provide connections to agencies that conduct raptor-hawking research.

For those residing in the Mile High State, the Colorado Division of Wildlife at 303-297-1192 and the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory at 303-637-9220 can give guidance for those seeking volunteer opportunities or Hawking field trips.

Keep an eye on the sky. The next eagle, hawk, or falcon you see soaring high above you might be wearing a band. You may wonder just where its travels have taken it and what destinations may still lie ahead, but you will know it is protected and monitored.

This article was previously published in Ron's column "The Outdoor Scene" in his local newspaper and is reprinted here with permission.

"Many state wildlife agencies provide programs for volunteers to take an active role in Hawking research. A call to your state wildlife or game and fish offices will provide connections to agencies that conduct raptor-hawking research."

MEMBER NEWS & EVENTS

2004 Conference Set for Durango, Colorado

Block your 2004 calendar now with these dates!

Conference co-chairs Jack Olson and Lee Carr have confirmed that the 2004 annual conference will be held in Durango on July 7-10. As in 1986, our last visit to Durango, the conference headquarters will be at Fort Lewis College.

You will be pleasantly surprised with the reasonable room rates. Since there are so many possible activities available, Jack and Lee would love to hear from you concerning your desires. Check out www.durango.org for a broad array

of ideas.

The same goes for workshop subjects: give us ideas on what would be most beneficial for you and we will try to get the best presenter on the subject. Contact Jack at 303-777-8998 or jackolson1@aol.com and Lee at 970-856-4251 or dlcarr328@earthlink.net. You may also reach them and any board member at their RMOWP email address (*firstname* @rmowp.org).

~ Lee Carr



— Wanted !!! —

Someone who enjoys working with other people and is interested in meeting more RMOWP members...someone who has creative ideas and wants more exposure for their writing and editorial skills...someone who is comfortable working with a computer...someone who wants to be all that they can be as...**newsletter editor!**

Maryann Gaug has volunteered to be interim newsletter editor so Cindy Stone can concentrate on our website. Maryann's also a Board member and on the awards committee so she may only be able to take this on short-term—that's where you can step in!

Newsletters come out every other month and the editor gets a small stipend. Being editor is a great way to get to know more members and be involved with communication for our group.

Now get off your easy chair and call or email Barb Laine at 505-758-8922 or barb@rmowp.org, or email Maryann Gaug at maryann@rmowp.org and volunteer to be newsletter editor. You'll be glad you did—and your fellow members will too!

MEMBER NEWS & EVENTS

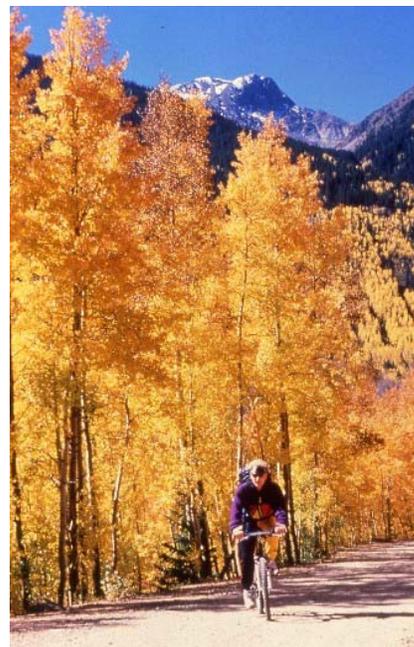


So many wonderful things to do in Durango during the RMOWP Conference in July 2004 you'll have a hard time deciding! Some ideas to wet your whistle include fishing and boating on beautiful Vallecito Lake (opposite page); riding the Durango Silverton line, shown releasing steam over Crawford Bridge (at right); or bicycling through the gorgeous Rockies of the Durango area. Photos courtesy of the Durango Area Tourism Office at durango.org.

Picture Yourself... as Photo Workshop Coordinator!

We need a new photo Workshop Coordinator for 2004. Interested?

Contact Jack Olson at 303-777-8998 or jack@rmowp.org or Barb Laine at 505-758-8922 or barb@rmowp.org.



Membership Update

For your information, our regular membership stands at about 95 members, and our supporting membership is at 32.

We have gained several wonderful and interesting new members this past year. We have also lost several due to some members choosing not to renew; but also due to major clean-up of our accounting and collection of dues by President and former treasurer Barb Laine, and of the membership data by webmaster Cindy Stone.

Remember to promote RMOWP whenever you can to keep bringing new members into our fold. We all benefit from having a broad and solid base of members to count on for

keeping our community and activities going, as well as bringing more talented and experienced, and aspiring new and enthusiastic, outdoor communicators into the group.

Our board is always working to attract new members and keep everything running well for all of us, but every effort on your part also makes a big difference in building the collective strength and benefit of RMOWP. If you have ideas and suggestions for how to make the group better, or how to continue attracting new members, or would like to volunteer for the various roles and activities of RMOWP, contact President Barb Laine!

What's the Secret...?

Password? Just like when we were kids, eh? The next username and password will be set to *birdsofa* for username, and *feather* for password. The new access codes will be set about December 1.

RMOWP Newsletter Editor
Cindy Stone
1352 Chardonnay Dr
Richland WA 99352-7303

Address service requested



We're on the web at
www.rmowp.org

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RMOWP Calendar

2004

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|---------------|---|
| April 17 | Board Meeting at President
Barb Laine's in El Prado NM |
| July 7-10 | RMOWP Conference
Durango CO |
| October 15-17 | NMOWPA Conference
Aztec NM |

2005

- | | |
|------|------------------------------------|
| June | RMOWP Conference
Silver City NM |
|------|------------------------------------|



*Contribute to
your
newsletter!*

Communicate With RMOWP !

Share your outdoor media, writing, & photography expertise, experiences, and achievements with fellow members. Help showcase and improve the talents of members. Send articles and photos to the interim editor, Maryann Gaug, at:

maryann@rmowp.org
P.O. Box 2842
Silverthorne CO 80498-2842
Phone: 970-468-6219

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