

WILD NEWS

Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge

Nature Program Calendar

July - Sept 2005

Burrowing Owls—Here Today, and Tomorrow?

By Jennifer Keyser



Every summer Refuge visitors have the opportunity to see one of our most interesting raptors – the burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*). These ground-dwelling birds with distinctive long legs and large yellow eyes stand just 9 to 11 inches tall and weigh about 6 ounces. Males tend to be paler in color than females. The sexes are about the same size and both have brown upperparts with white spotting on the back, wings, and head. Owl encounters are memorable, for if you happen to be near enough for them to notice, their warning call and piercing gaze will greet you.

Burrowing owls usually arrive at the Refuge during the first week of April. They come to breed in Colorado, mainly from wintering grounds in West Texas and New Mexico. Peak breeding activity occurs in April and May, and also in June when chicks emerge. After emerging from the burrow, the young learn to hunt and are still dependent on adults. Nests and productivity vary greatly from year to year based on availability of food. Burrowing owls feed on a wide variety of prey including beetles, grasshoppers, mice, frogs, snakes and small birds. When conditions are good, the Refuge has about 40 nests. While clutch size can range from 1-11 chicks, the number of young hatched averages between 3 to 6 per successful nest.

Burrowing owls don't dig their own burrows; they nest in existing ones, particularly those of prairie dogs. The two species coexist well. The relationship is actually beneficial for the owls. Nest success is greater for birds that inhabit active prairie dog colonies, presumably because the prairie dogs help warn the owls about any dangerous predators in the area. The owls also benefit by having the multiple burrows for escape which prairie dog towns provide.

Burrowing owls are considered a "threatened" species in Colorado. Their conservation status makes it crucial that the Refuge and other places provide safe habitat to ensure the continued survival of one of the Refuge's key species.

(The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Noelle Ronan, Service Wildlife Biologist. Please contact her at Noelle.Ronan@fws.gov for further information on burrowing owls.)

Sources:

Personal communication with Noelle Ronan, Wildlife Biologist, Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, May 2, 2005.
Colorado Division of Wildlife Website. http://wildlife.state.co.us/species_profiles/burrowingowl.asp

Nature Programs

JULY – SEPTEMBER 2005

Reservations are required for these FREE popular programs. Space is limited. **Call 303-289-0930 to register.** Please dress for the weather and all children must be accompanied by an adult. Assistance dogs are welcome.

JULY

Song Dogs

Saturday July 2 6:00 - 8:00 pm

The coyote's howl is called the song of the West. Hear barks, yelps and howls as coyotes call out during evening hours on the Refuge.

The Magic of the Monarch

Saturday & Sunday July 2 & 3
1:00 - 3:00 pm

This special Ranger talk presented by a Refuge naturalist will cover the

migration of the monarch butterfly and how they depend on milkweed for their survival.

The Marsh Zone

Saturday July 16 1:00 - 3:00 pm

Wander through the *Marsh Zone* with wonder and waders! (Waders provided). On this animal-search adventure, discover the residents that live in the marshes and try some critter-trapping techniques.

Going Batty

Saturday July 23 8:30 - 10:30 pm

Venture out into the night with Biologist Noelle Ronan to discover the facts about bats and why they are so important to us. A mist net demonstration allows you to see these wonderful creatures up close!

It's A Bug's World, After All!

Sunday July 24 10:00 am - noon

Summer is sizzling on the short-grass prairie as lively insects bustle.

Now Showing Photo Gallery "Seasons of Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR"

Photographer Dave Showalter's photo display is available for viewing in the Refuge Visitor Center. Don't miss this spectacular collection, illustrating the month to month changes on the Refuge. A personal showing with interpretation will be held on Aug 13, 9:00-11:00 am. Reservations required. Space is limited. Call (303) 289-0930.

E-News

Help us save paper and mailing costs! If you would prefer to receive an electronic issue of WildNews instead of the mail copy, please send us an email with your address to rockymountainarsenal@fws.gov.

Wild Rides

Two hour trolley – tram wildlife viewing tour. Reservations required.
Saturdays and Sundays
9:00 am - 11:00 am

► Save The Date ◀

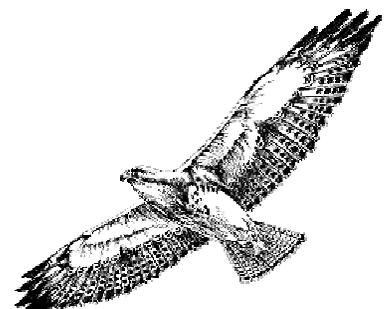
In celebration of National Wildlife Refuge week, the annual Bluestem Banquet will be held on October 11, 2005 at 6:30 pm at the Denver Airport Marriott Gateway Park. Call 303-289-0820 for more information.

Uncover their fascinating features and distinctive habits up close!

Going Sky High

Saturday July 30 4:00 - 6:00 pm

Eyes to the sky! Search for some of the Refuge's magnificent birds of prey and learn handy raptor identification tips.



► Please Note ◀

The Refuge will be closed on July 9 & 10. Our apologies for the inconvenience.

AUGUST

Goin' To Town

Sunday Aug 7 8:00 - 10:00 am
Prairie dog towns dot the Refuge landscape. Biologist, Eric Stone, will lead an interesting and instructive tour through some of the towns. Find out why prairie dogs are a keystone species!

Let's Get Aquatic!

Saturday Aug 13 10:00 am - noon
Be a wetland ecologist for a day! Aquatic specialists will teach six different trapping techniques for fish and aquatic invertebrates. This is a rare, one-time opportunity to help us monitor the health of our lakes. Waders will be provided. Space is limited - register early!



Pedal Pushers

Sunday Aug 21 6:00 - 8:00 pm
Pedal pushers are still in vogue! Pedal your way across the Refuge on this leisurely, naturalist-led evening bike ride. See the prairie make a fashion statement with splashes of color from blue flax, scarlet globemallow, and blanket-flower. Helmets are required. Fat, puncture-proof tires and water bottles are strongly recommended.

Friends of a Feather

Saturday Aug 27 8:00 - 10:00 am
Take a journey through woodlands, wetlands, and prairie looking for late summer birds. See Swainson's hawks, burrowing owls, western tanagers, and northern orioles before they migrate for the fall.

SEPTEMBER

Refuge Campfire

Saturday Sept 3 7:00 - 9:00 pm
Bring the entire family for an evening of songs, stories, and activities around the first-ever Refuge campfire. Refreshments provided. Please dress for the weather.

Family Fishing Fun

Saturday Sept 10 9:00 am - noon
Get your line wet at Lake Ladora and Lake Mary. A day of the excellent fishing! Arsenal Anglers will be on hand to offer their expertise and assistance. Poles, lessons and fishing supplies will be provided.

Moonlit Hayride

Sunday Sept 18 6:00 - 8:00 pm
As the sunset fades, watch the prairie transform from twilight into night. Let the sights and sounds of the night pervade!

KidFest Fall Celebration

*Sunday Sept 25
1:00 - 3:00 pm*

Kids, kick off the fall with this "wild" adventure just for you. Activities for the day include:

- Wildlife Memory Game
- Lake Mary Scavenger Hunt
- Kid-friendly wildlife tour
- Honker the Blue Goose!

*All children
must be accompanied by an adult.*



Celebrate National Public Lands Day

*Saturday Sept 24
8:00 am - 4:30 pm*

Free Fishing!
Anglers 16 years and older must have a valid State of Colorado Fishing License. Enjoy the Refuge!

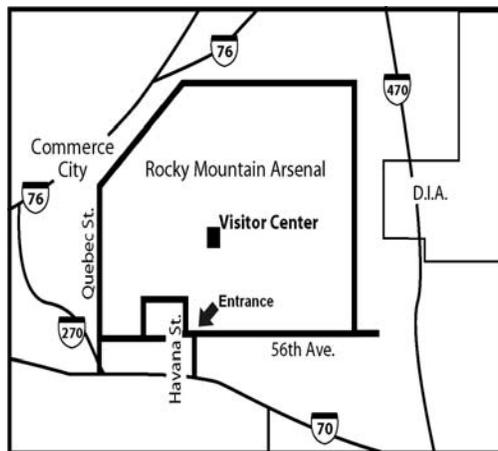
2005 Catch and Release Fishing Season

*April 9 - October 9, 2005
8:00 am - 4:30 pm*

Every Saturday & Sunday
Call 303-289-0930
or check the website
for details.

DIRECTIONS

Enter the Refuge at 56th Avenue and Havana Street. Proceed 1.5 miles to the Visitor Center to check-in.



Wild Treks Drop-In Program

*Fish are jump'n, birds are sing'n,
flowers are bloom'n!* Reservations not required to hike the trails. Saturdays and Sundays 8:00 am - 4:30 pm.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge
Commerce City, CO 80022-1748

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