

## WHO/WHERE WE ARE

**Lakewood, CO:** Pam Sponholtz, Project Leader; JoAnn Wise, Budget Admin

**Buckley Air Force Base, Aurora, CO:** Krystal Phillips, Wildlife Biologist, Dustin Casady, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

**Peterson, Schriever, Cheyenne Mtn Air Force Bases, Colorado Springs, CO:** Max Canestorp, Wildlife Biologist

**US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO:** Brian Muhlbacher, Biological Scientist; Melissa Whittingslow, Wildlife Biologist; R. Joe Murphy III, Forester

**Rocky Mountain National Park, Estes Park, CO:** Chris Kennedy, Fish Biologist

**Warren Air Force Base, Cheyenne, WY:** Alex Schubert, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

**McConnell Air Force Base, Wichita, KS:** Laura Mendenhall, Fish and Wildlife Biologist

**Pueblo Chemical Depot, Pueblo, CO:** Clark Jones, Wildlife Biologist

**Gunnison, CO:** Cole Brittain, Aquatic Biotechnician

# Colorado Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office



JUNE 2017

## Species Conservation & Management

**Canada Goose Management** Dustin Casady and Taylor Cassidy traveled to F.E. Warren Air Force Base to assist Alex Shubert and Taylor Hackemack with the removal of resident Canada Geese. Over the past three years, Canada goose removal efforts have reduced the resident goose population from over 200 individuals to less than 10 individuals. The removal efforts have allowed grass to begin grow again around the base lakes, has led to a noticeable improvement in water quality of the lakes, the golf course employees reported that fecal matter on the golf course has been virtually eliminated, and fishing patrons have commended USFWS on there not being goose fecal matter all over the fishing docks. Overall the removal project has been a success and has improved base operations.



**Fish Survey** Taylor Hackemack and Alex Schubert began using a new 60 foot seine to sample fish at North Pearson Lake on F. E. Warren AFB. In one seine pass they captured 2 largemouth bass, 11 sunfish, and 157 yellow perch. Fish data collected with this new seine will aid in fish manage-

ment decisions in the future with the purpose of keeping the angler satisfaction high at all base lakes.

**Aquatic Species Conservation** Chris Kennedy continued working on the Draft Planning Aid Letter for U. S. Army Corps of Engineers ecosystem restoration project on the South Platte River. The intent of the project is to restore the aquatic, riparian and wetland habitat along two miles of river through Denver. The letter provides Fish and Wildlife Service guidance on implementing the project.

**Peregrine falcon monitoring** Max Canestorp checked to see if a peregrine falcon that nested on Cheyenne Mountain AFS in 2015 and 2016 returned to the area this year. One bird was observed on each of three visits, but the site of the eyrie hasn't been identified yet.



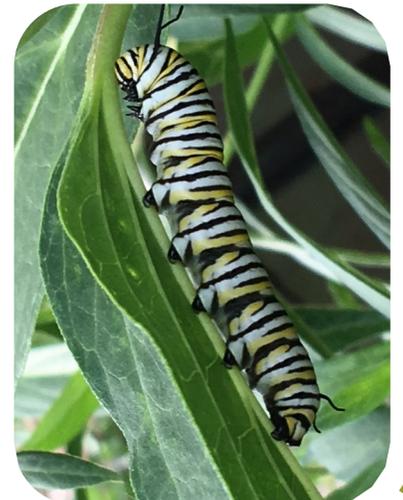
## Region 6 Priority: Reverse the Declining Trend for Monarch Butterflies and other Endemic Pollinators

**Monarch Butterfly Lessons** Laura Mendenhall and Nicole Brown presented 2 lessons on Monarch butterfly ecology for the McConnell AFB Child Development Center and the McConnell AFB School Age Program. The team was able to show the kids a Monarch butterfly chrysalis and a milkweed plant, both from the recently-planted pollinator gardens on base. They reviewed the life cycle of a Monarch butterfly, explained why planting Kansas wildflowers was important, and detailed how McConnell AFB is

able to provide Monarch habitat in its existing flower beds.

**Native Seeds Experiment** Alex Schubert will continue to monitor experimental native grass and forb seedings at FE Warren AFB. Information obtained on the success rate of the various plant species seeded will be used in the future to revegetate various parts of the base with native plant species.

**Monarch butterfly larvae feeding on swamp milkweed at McConnell AFB.**



# Habitat Conservation & Management

“Spraying for these species is not recommended due, in part, to the potential for negative impacts to other Lepidopteran species.”

*Forest Pathogens Status Review* Max Canestorp prepared a memo addressing the presence/absence of Douglas-fir tussock moth and western spruce budworm in Cheyenne Mountain AFS forests. The tussock moth is not present and the budworm may be present in limited populations. Spraying for these species is not recommended due, in part, to the potential for negative impacts to other Lepidopteran species.

*Defensible Space* USAFA NR, including Joe Murphy, is working with the Wildland Fire Center to reduce fuel loads and create defensible space along the southern and western boundaries.



**An advancing head cut on lower Kettle Creek threatens habitat and infrastructure.**

will then be chipped and spread or hauled off site.

*Erosion Issues* Brian Mihlbachler met with engineers from Auxilio Management Services to conduct a site walk of lower Kettle Creek where channel stabilization and habitat restoration is needed to protect infrastructure and riparian habitat. Auxilio is currently evaluating design options that will reconnect the stream with its floodplain and provide channel stability to control erosion and reestablish habitat.

Identified roads and property lines will have all woody vegetation (mainly gambel oak) removed to a distance of 50 feet on either side of the line. This work will be done both mechanically and by hand with chainsaws and chippers. The residual material



## Region 6 Priority: Cutthroat Trout Recovery

*Cutthroat Trout Workshop* Pam Sponholtz along with Bill Rice (Region 6 Fish Passage Coordinator) and Bill Noonan (Colorado lead for Partners for Fish and Wildlife) presented information at the Cutthroat Trout workshop held by the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) under its Working Lands for Wildlife Program. NRCS is hoping to provide on the ground funding to private landowners to help conserve and restore cutthroat trout populations across the west.

*Fish Hatchery Detail* Chris Kennedy did a four week detail at the Leadville National Fish Hatchery working with the Federally threatened greenback cutthroat trout. Work focused on spawning and developing a broodstock through genetic matrixing. Spawning was conducted on several occasions with fish on hand at the hatchery and with wild milt which was brought in from Bear Creek. Over 151,000 eggs were fertilized over the course of the detail. In addition over

427,000 Carr Creek cutthroat trout eggs were collected.

*Restoration* Chris Kennedy worked a strategy to restore native cutthroat trout within RMNP. The strategy will compile data on a number of variables for each body of water within RMNP which currently contain fish. Each waterbody and drainage will then be ranked on their potential as candidates for restoration projects.



**Biologists from Federal and State Agencies visit Carnero Creek during NRCS cutthroat trout workshop**



**Pikes Peak Whittlers group at USAFA.**

*Noxious Weed Treatment Certification* On June 15 Melissa Whittingslow finished all requirements needed to get her Certified Supervisor certification for pesticide application. This will allow Melissa to spray noxious weeds and treat the fishing lakes on the US Air Force Academy when needed.

*Aspen Management* The Pikes Peak Whittlers (PPW) group

assisted NR with Aspen Management at Farish. The aspen stands at Farish are currently in a renewal project. Aspens are “sprouters” and must regenerate with a stand replacement event (fire, clear cut, etc.) to stay productive and healthy. With our exclusion of fire, these stands have not been able to replace themselves in a healthy manner. To combat this NR has clear cut and

fenced two different aspen stands at Farish. These stands still need to be thinned to encourage growth and mimic natural conditions. The PPW will come and thin these units by removing a certain amount of the understory to release the stronger saplings. They will then put these cuttings to use as canes, walking sticks, and numerous other finished products.

# Partnerships & Accountability

“[...]as part of an international effort to examine western Burrowing Owl migratory patterns and breeding site fidelity.”

**Zoological Collections Manager, Curtis Schmidt, instructs Nicole Brown on species ID.**



in order to prepare for this season's small mammal surveys. Of the 18 small mammal species found in Sedgwick Co., many appear similar if not identical to the untrained eye. Zoological Collections Manager, Curtis

**BASH Working Group** The semi-annual Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard workgroup meeting convened in early June at Buckley Air Force Base. Dustin Casady and Krystal Phillips met with other members to discuss current and future work being done to reduce the chance of a bird aircraft strike. Discussions focused on maintenance needs of the wildlife barrier that surrounds the installation and the future removal of the Lake Williams dam.

**Burrowing Owl Tracking** Four satellite transmitters were affixed to two male and two female Burrowing Owls on Pueblo Chemical Depot in June. Carl Lundblad, a Phd candidate from the



**Clark Jones holds a tagged Burrowing Owl.**

University of Idaho, trapped and fitted the transmitters to the four Burrowing Owls as part of an international

effort to examine western Burrowing Owl migratory patterns and breeding site fidelity. Burrowing Owls in southeastern Colorado are heavily dependent on black-tailed prairie dog burrows for shelter and nesting locations. Pueblo Chemical Depot supports large numbers of black-tailed prairie dogs, which in turn provide ideal habitat for the owls. These transmitters are capable of providing detailed location data up to two years after they are deployed due to their small size and use of solar-powered recharging. Two transmitters were also deployed in 2015.



## Region 6 Priority: Collaboration with State Agencies, Tribes, & Private Landowners

**Bat Monitoring** Clark Jones and Colorado Parks and Wildlife representatives Ed Schmal, Gretchen Holschuh, Carie Tucker, and Rachel Flanagan conducted bat monitoring on Pueblo Chemical Depot in June. Monitoring activities included deploying automated acoustic monitoring devices, mist netting, and swabbing for disease testing. Acoustic surveys will continue into July, with another round of mist netting scheduled for mid-August. Little is known about the bat community on the depot and this is the first inventory and monitor-

ing effort for bats on the depot in over a decade.

**Reservoir Coordination** Brian met with representatives of Colorado Springs Utilities (CSU) to discuss the future of Stanley Reservoir; a popular off-base hiking, camping, and fishing destination accessible from the Academy. The state has determined the dam is at risk of possible failure, therefore CSU is draining the reservoir. The reservoir is not part of CSU's potable water delivery infrastructure, so the expense of refurbishing the dam to meet state stand-

ards may not be warranted. The US Forest Service and Academy hiking trail to the reservoir typically has several hundred users per month.

**Section 7 Consultation** Brian continued working with CO Ecological Services on a Section 7 consultation requested by the City of Colorado Springs for their planned channel stabilization work on Monument Branch, which includes designated critical habitat areas on and off the Air Force Academy.

Schmidt, was on hand to point out diagnostic features to aid the McConnell team in quickly keying out trapped species. By the end, Mendenhall and Brown felt

confident they could collect quality data in the field.

**National Get Outdoors Day** Taylor Hackemack assisted with the National Get Out-

doors Day activities in Denver. Over 300 visitors to the booth learned how to identify pelts and skulls of animals found in the area as well as received a lesson in

# Leadership in Science & Technology

*Chemical Use Discussion* Brian Mihlbachler met with Academy Public Health, Environmental, and Civil Engineering staff to discuss the approval and use of pesticides, herbicides, and rodenticides on base. Mitigating potential impacts on non-target organisms and reducing chemical use was determined to be a high priority.

*Firearm Proficiency* Melissa Whittingslow, Max Canestorp, Dustin Casady, Taylor Cassidy, Joe Murphy, Alex Schubert, Clark Jones, and Cabel Patterson all completed their 2017 firearm proficiency testing held at

the Fort Carson Gun Range. According to DOI policy on use of firearms by non-law enforcement personnel, employees who use firearms during their course of work need to show they are proficient with the firearms they use. Many of these individuals help guide hunts, disband injured animals, and dispose of animals that cause hazards on airfields and need to use firearms for this work.

*Pesticide Applicator* Melissa Whittingslow got her Certified Supervisor

certification for pesticide application. This will allow Melissa to spray noxious weeds and treat the fishing lakes on the US Air Force Academy.



**Cabel Patterson fires a rifle during the firearm proficiency test.**



## Region 6 Priority: Reverse the Declining Trend of Grassland Nesting Migratory Birds.

*Avian Point Counts* Clark Jones conducted avian point count surveys in June on Pueblo Chemical Depot in grassland habitat types. These point counts are intended to examine species diversity and abundance in response to climatic shifts and changes in ecological disturbance. Shifts in precipitation and the decrease in prairie dog numbers on Pueblo Chemical Depot have resulted in measurable impacts on the avian community. This

year several Dickcissels were detected which have not been documented breeding on the depot previously. These birds may be responding to shifts in the vegetative structure on the depot as a result of decreases in prairie dog numbers and/or changes in regional precipitation. Gaining a better understanding of local population dynamics is important for informing management decisions to address grassland bird conservation.

*Grassland Migratory Bird Survey* Taylor Hackemack completed a grassland migratory bird survey with ornithologist Nick Van Lanen of The Bird Conservatory of the Rockies. During their point count surveys, they confirmed two burrowing owls on Base, as well as other grassland birds such as horned larks, grasshopper sparrows, and western meadowlarks.

**“The se Point Counts are intended to examine species diversity and abundance in response to climatic shifts and changes in ecological disturbance.”**

## ...More Partnerships



**Laura Mendenhall showing kids how to handle a green sunfish.**

*Stormwater Management* Brian provided District 2 City Councilman David Geislinger a presentation and tour of stormwater issues on the Academy. The Councilman’s district is the main contributor of off-base stormwater affecting the base’s eastern streams and riparian habitat. The councilman was very understanding of the need for the City and Academy to work together to protect habitat, water quality, and the aesthetics of the installation.

*Hazard Trees* Joe Murphy is continuing to work with Farish Recreation Area and Famcamp to ensure mitigatable hazards are removed. Murphy completed a Hazard Tree Analysis of the Farish Campground area and assisted in identifying trees that needed to be removed from Famcamp.

*Fish Stocking* Melissa Whittingslow and Cabel Patterson stocked Farish Recreational Area with 1,000 Lbs. of Rainbow trout. Natural Resources on USAFA supports the recreational fishing program for Farish as well as

the USAFA fishing lakes. All the Lakes at Farish are stocked monthly from May to October.

*Ecology Club* Laura Mendenhall and Nicole Brown led 6 McConnell AFB homeschool students in the first session of their summer Ecology Club series held in collaboration with the McConnell AFB library. The students learned about riparian habitat and urban streams and helped remove trash from a stretch of riparian buffer.