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1990 Spring Compendium of Wildlife Appreciation Opportunities

Colorado's Wildlife Company

COLORADO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

 Nongame and Endangered
Wildlife Program

 Watchable Wildlife Program

Hearken! It's Spring.



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striped chorus frogs



Spring Courtship

I'm (croak) in the Mood for Love

The throaty melody of hundreds of frogs croaking at the edge of a pond on a spring evening is an earthy, familiar sound heralding the end of winter and the arrival of spring.

Triggered by warming water temperature, amphibians emerge from hibernation ready for courtship. Hormonal production, which stimulates breeding behavior, is a response to water temperature, lengthening daylight, and renewed feeding. Male frogs and toads move to their home ponds, stake out a territory, and begin to call. Air sacs beneath the skin of the throat inflate to amplify the sound, which is made with the mouth closed. Vocalizations are species-specific, so females can locate mates of the appropriate type amidst a cacophony of croaking. The calls of different species are also easily discernible to the human listener (see related article).

On a spring evening, settle down near a stream or pond, or drive any country road near a waterway and listen for the amphibian three-part harmony. **Listening sites: Walden and Sawhill Ponds in Boulder; Walter Walker Wildlife Area near Grand Junction; the wetlands area around Deer Creek west of Chatfield Reservoir, south of Denver; the Russell Lakes and San Luis Lakes State Wildlife Areas in the San Luis Valley.**

May I Have this Dance?

While frogs and toads sing along the shores of the state's lakes and reservoirs, out on the water one of the most spectacular mating rituals of spring is taking place — the dance of the western grebes.

Grebe courtship resembles a ballet as the two long-necked waterbirds (they're neither ducks nor geese) glide serenely on the water's surface. The male and female (you won't be able to tell boy from girl, but the grebes know) begin by swimming directly at each other. Upon meeting they entwine necks, bodies circling in a slow pirouette. Gliding side by side like mirror images, the two flick their heads repeatedly to the side, then curl their long necks back to touch their wings. Finally, the two birds rise up together and run across the surface of the water.

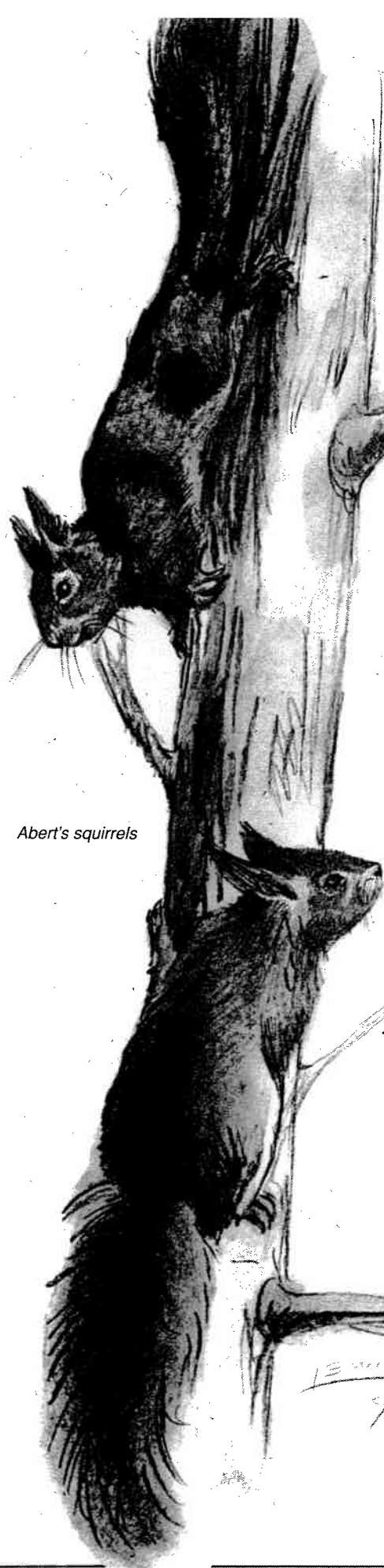
You may have to watch this ritual in stages. Wait until you see two grebes swimming near each other, then settle down with your binoculars. The climactic scamper across the water's surface happens so fast that if you look after you hear splashing, you've missed it. **Look for grebes on tree- or marsh-lined lakes where they build floating nests in the shallows, specifically Barr Lake State Park near Brighton; Highline Reservoir northwest of Grand Junction; the Monte Vista Wildlife Refuge in the San Luis Valley; Rifle Gap Reservoir near Rifle. Almost any large body of water at lower elevations is an appropriate site to look for grebes.**

An equally enthralling courtship dance is performed by the greater sandhill crane. Each spring, on their way to northern nesting grounds, thousands of the large, red-capped wading birds gather in the San Luis Valley, where they dance with seeming abandon to a wild and mystical love song only they can hear.

Bowing, hopping, dropping their wings, then leaping high into the air, not only pairs of birds but sometimes hundreds dance at the same time. And the cranes don't just dance in silence; they try to attract attention to themselves with loud calls. Associated with each call is a stereotypical movement in the dance. Above the dancing flock echoes a riot of trilling and calling, making for a very social event.

The 1990 Monte Vista Crane Festival is scheduled for March 24 - 25, but the birds

Abert's squirrels



western grebes



may be seen in the Monte Vista area into April. If you see a white crane among the flock, you will have been lucky enough to spot one of the few foster whooping cranes hatched in sandhill crane nests. Biologists estimate that although the whooping crane population has reached about 200 birds, only thirteen whoopers currently survive of the eighty-five foster fledglings hatched since 1975. For information, contact the Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge at (719) 852-4382.

Love at First Sight

While the frogs are singing and the birds are dancing, the spring-breeding mammals of Colorado (primarily rodents and small animals with short gestation periods) largely dispense with the finesse of courtship. Except for some chattering and chasing around, mammals seem to get right to the point.

Though solitary most of the year, male Abert's squirrels congregate during spring in the vicinity of a female's nest. When she appears, the dominant male approaches her, followed by the subordinate males. Then begins a "mating chase." She runs on the ground, and the males follow at a distance. She jumps on a tree trunk and freezes; they freeze about a meter away. She moves; they move. This goes on all day as the female becomes more receptive to the males. Although posturing and vocalizing are indistinguishable from standard squirrel alarm behavior, if you see a mass movement of tufted-eared squirrels among the ponderosa pines, you're probably witnessing the Abert's dating scene.

Another resident of the pine forest, the female chickaree or pine squirrel, has little taste for romance. Usually highly intolerant of the males of her species, she is receptive to mating for only one day each spring. On that day, the female chickaree will cease her angry scolding and allow males into her territory. So listen for silence; when the pine forest grows quiet this spring, for heaven's sake don't interrupt! **Abert's squirrels are found in forests of mature ponderosa pine; the chickaree live among mixed spruce, fir, and pine forests throughout Colorado.**

Identifying Frog and Toad Calls

With a good ear, you can distinguish the different amphibian voices calling on a spring evening.

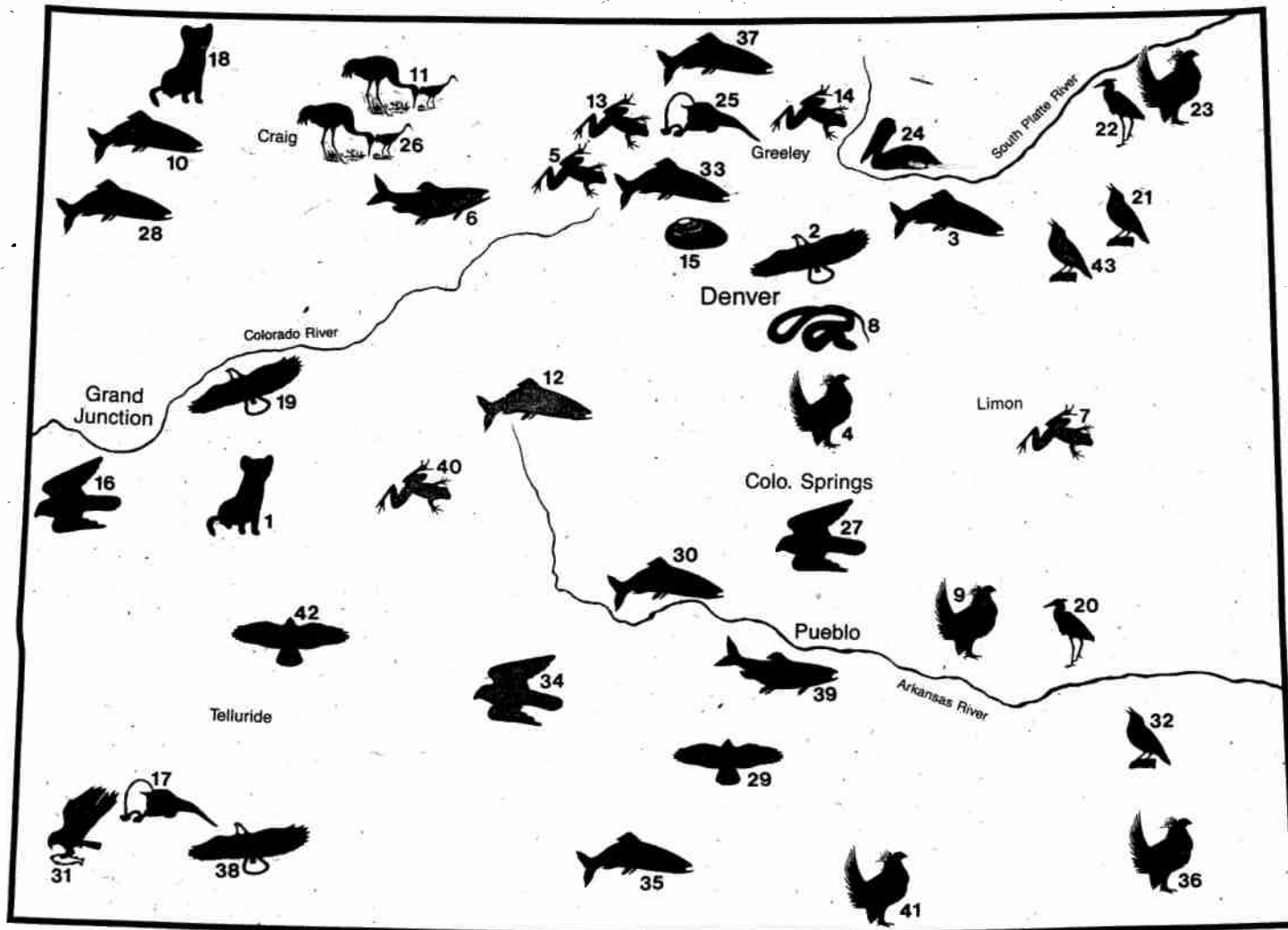
1. **Northern cricket frog** - this voice sounds like two stones clicking together.
2. **Chorus frog** - sounds like someone running their thumb down the teeth of a comb, rising in pitch.
3. **Leopard frog** - a low sound like a motorboat, mixed with chuckling and grunting.
4. **Spadefoot toad** - a brief, distinct, duck-like sound.
5. **Western toad** - a soft chirping, like the cheeping of a baby chick.



Income Tax Check-off Accomplishments 1988-1989

by Judy Sheppard and Jim Bennett, Nongame Wildlife Specialists, Colorado Division of Wildlife

The following projects were supported totally or in part by donations to the Nongame Income Tax Check-off. The people of Colorado contributed \$514,799 (an average of \$8.07 per contributor) to the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program from their 1988 tax returns. This money was matched with federal dollars. The map shows where we spent your money, and the following legend briefly describes each project. THANK YOU FOR HELPING COLORADO'S WILDLIFE LAST YEAR. WE'RE HOPING FOR YOUR SUPPORT AGAIN THIS YEAR!



Map Legend

- | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|----|--|----|--|----|---|
| 1 | Statewide participation in black-footed ferret reward program in cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (ongoing). | 6 | Surveyed, stocked, enhanced habitat, and researched the effects of angling on Colorado River cutthroat trout in the headwaters and tributaries of the Colorado River. | 11 | Monitored breeding of greater sandhill cranes in Routt County (ongoing). | 28 | Standardized monitoring program for endangered Colorado River fishes in the Yampa, White, and Colorado rivers. |
| 2 | Bald eagle nest watch at Barr Lake State Park using 185 volunteers in cooperation with Colorado Bird Observatory (ongoing). | 7 | Small grants cooperative projects with Natural Areas Program statewide (ongoing). | 12 | Surveyed, stocked, enhanced habitat, and researched effects of angling on greenback cutthroat trout in the headwaters and tributaries of the Arkansas River. | 29 | Sponsored the fourth annual Nongame Photo Contest, statewide participation. |
| 3 | Surveyed habitat and monitored common shiners and northern redbelly dace in tributaries and off-channel areas of the South Platte River near Denver/Fort Morgan. | 8 | Published <i>Colorado's Wildlife Company</i> , a quarterly newsletter in cooperation with DOW's Watchable Wildlife Program (ongoing). | 13 | Initiated recovery efforts for the threatened wood frog and its habitat in north central Colorado above Rocky Mountain National Park (ongoing). | 30 | Surveyed habitat, transplanted, and monitored for southern redbelly dace in Arkansas River tributaries. |
| 4 | Monitored population and managed habitat for plains sharp-tailed grouse in Douglas County (ongoing). | 9 | Transplanted, monitored populations, and managed habitat for lesser prairie-chicken in Pueblo County (ongoing). | 14 | Surveyed to define biological status of leopard frogs and the predatory bullfrog east of Fort Collins (ongoing). | 31 | Monitored osprey productivity in southwest Colorado. Planned for 1990 introduction to Fort Collins. |
| 5 | Surveyed for abundance, distribution, and trend data for amphibians in high altitude areas near Grand Lake. | 10 | Researched interaction between endangered fishes (Colorado squawfish, humpback chub, razorback sucker, bonytail) and non-native sportfish in the Yampa River through Dinosaur National Monument (ongoing). | 15 | Assembled records and data to develop state species list of mollusks in cooperation with University of Colorado. | 32 | Revised and updated the Colorado Bird Distribution Latilong Study in cooperation with Colorado Field Ornithologists statewide. |
| | | | | 16 | Monitored breeding success of peregrine falcons statewide in cooperation with U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service. | 33 | Surveyed, stocked, enhanced habitat, and researched the effects of angling on greenback cutthroat trout in the headwaters and tributaries of the South Platte River. |
| | | | | 17 | Continued river otter recovery efforts; transplanted river otter and researched monitoring and habitat needs on the Dolores River (ongoing). | 34 | Inventoried peregrine falcons statewide in cooperation with the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Forest Service (ongoing). |
| | | | | 18 | Evaluated potential black-footed ferret habitat in Moffat and Rio Blanco counties in cooperation with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (ongoing). | 35 | Surveyed, stocked, enhanced habitat, and researched the effects of angling on Rio Grande cutthroat trout in the headwaters and tributaries of the Rio Grande. |
| | | | | 19 | Conducted statewide survey of wintering bald eagles (ongoing). | 36 | Monitored population, and managed habitat for lesser prairie-chicken in Baca County (ongoing). |
| | | | | 20 | Surveyed least terns and piping plovers for population trends and distribution along the Arkansas River in cooperation with Colorado Bird Observatory (ongoing). | 37 | Created and maintained brood fish program for greenback cutthroat trout at the Bellvue-Watson Research Hatchery in Fort Collins. |
| | | | | 21 | Assisted in surveying breeding birds statewide in cooperation with Colorado Bird Atlas Partnership (ongoing). | 38 | Monitored bald eagle nesting; banded young eagles statewide (ongoing). |
| | | | | 22 | Surveyed least terns and piping plovers for population trends and distribution along the South Platte River in cooperation with Colorado Bird Observatory (ongoing). | 39 | Surveyed habitat, monitored populations, transplanted common shiners and southern redbelly dace in tributaries and off-channel areas of the Arkansas River. |
| | | | | 23 | Monitored population and managed habitat for greater prairie-chickens on the South Tamarack State Wildlife Area (ongoing). | 40 | Surveyed to determine status of neotenic tiger salamanders in high altitude waters near Crested Butte. |
| | | | | 24 | Monitored the breeding population of white pelicans at Riverside Reservoir (ongoing). | 41 | Transplanted and monitored population for plains sharp-tailed grouse on Raton Mesa (ongoing). |
| | | | | 25 | Monitored previous river otter transplant sightings throughout the state (ongoing). | 42 | Researched response of sharp-shinned hawks to aspen cutting practices on the western slope in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service and Colorado State University. |
| | | | | 26 | Monitored greater sandhill crane staging areas in Routt County in cooperation with Colorado Bird Observatory (ongoing). | 43 | Studied upland game and nongame bird responses to: pesticides used in wheat farming, grazing in the alpine ecosystem, the Conservation Reserve Program, sand-sage-bluestem prairie renovation, and prescribed burning in the big sagebrush ecosystem. |
| | | | | 27 | Reintroduced peregrine falcons to the Eastern Slope in cooperation with U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, U.S. Air Force Academy, Denver Museum of Natural History, and Colorado Wildlife Federation (ongoing). | | |

Do Something

Keep Your Eyes Peeled



Wild!

Colorado taxpayers have until April 15 to **Do Something Wild!** by making a voluntary contribution to the Division of Wildlife's Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program using the Nongame Check-off on your state tax return. **It's deductible!**

The DOW obtained more than half a million dollars last year in voluntary contributions that were used to leverage additional money through matching grants from the federal government. These dollars are used to help peregrine falcons, river otters, squawfish, and other nongame, endan-



gered, and threatened species in Colorado. To help, just write in the amount you wish to contribute from your refund (or add to your tax payment) on Line 4 of the short form (Form 104A) or Line 24 of the long form (Form 104).

Thanks from all the critters . . . Rabbit! Who!? You!

P.S. The Nongame Check-off has been approved by the House of Representatives. It's waiting to be heard by the Senate. Once it receives the Governor's signature, we'll be good for another five years. All seems to be going well. 🐾

Baby Animal Orphans?

Every spring caring people call the Division of Wildlife requesting advice and help for the baby animals they find: tiny rabbits in a nest abandoned by the mother, an orphaned fawn alone in a meadow, or a coyote pup wandering around with no family in sight. All too often well-intentioned humans take these wildlife babies home with them, convinced the baby will not survive without human intervention. In reality, this kind of misdirected kindness sentences the animal to death or lifelong separation from its natural environment.

Natural patterns of behavior have evolved over centuries because they enable the species to survive. In short, Mother Nature knows what she's doing. Wildlife babies are born in the spring because that gives them the best chance to grow and develop before winter sets in again. Whether ungulates with longer gestation periods and fall breeding, or birds and small mammals with shorter gestation periods that breed in the spring, it all works out so that wildlife is born when food is abundant and warm weather most dependable.

Wildlife mothers are devoted to the survival of their offspring. Because she must feed herself to produce milk, and later to find food for her young, the mother must leave her babies from time to time. But she knows exactly where they are; wildlife mothers simply do not lose or abandon their offspring. However, most wildlife mothers are not aggressive (moose and bear are notable exceptions), and they are forced to watch, silently hidden, when humans "rescue" their babies by carrying them off to the city.

What happens then?

It is illegal to take wildlife from their natural homes, but more importantly, it is detrimental to the animal's survival. Baby wild animals

often are afraid of humans. They can go into shock. They usually will not eat or drink, and even if they will, human caretakers are unable to give them what they need.

Even if the well-intentioned rescuer takes the animal to a veterinarian, the Humane Society, or the Division of Wildlife, few facilities are able to care for wildlife over an extended period of time. Although it has been done in isolated cases, most wildlife raised by humans cannot be released successfully to the wild. They do not know how to survive, they haven't been taught to protect themselves from predators or hunters, and they don't even know how to find food for themselves.

If the animal can't be released to the wild, its alternatives are limited: a cage or confinement for educational study, use in research, life in the zoo, or death. None of these alternatives are acceptable when 99 percent of the time, the baby animal's mother was feeding nearby or its den was just over the hill, and it never should have been removed from its home in the first place.

What if you find a baby animal?

Look and enjoy them from a distance, but leave them alone. Trust that the patterns of nature are working well and should be respected, not altered by humans. If you find the mother dead and know the babies are alone, mark the location but leave the animals where they are. Call the Division of Wildlife office nearest you. 🐾

Northeast Region:

Wildlife watchers mark your calendars! Several **greater prairie-chicken** viewing tours in eastern Colorado will be sponsored by the Division of Wildlife (DOW) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in April and May. Call TNC for scheduling and reservations, 444-2950. • Take yourself to the **sage grouse booming grounds** in North Park, best viewed in April and May. Self-guided tour brochures are available from the DOW regional office in Fort Collins (484-2836).

DOW biologists will guide several wildlife watching tours this spring: check out the **sage grouse booming grounds** in North Park on April 28 - 29; explore DOW properties along the South Platte River near Sterling for **snakes, frogs, waterfowl, songbirds, birds of prey, deer, and small mammals** on May 19 - 20; experience the Tamarack riverbottom with its **songbirds, shorebirds, upland gamebirds, waterfowl, deer, and small mammals** at Red Lion State Wildlife area east of Sterling on June 30. Call Bud Smith, DOW Northeast Regional Office, 484-2836.

Northwest Region:

The regional office has **sage grouse** viewing information, 248-7175.

Southwest Region:

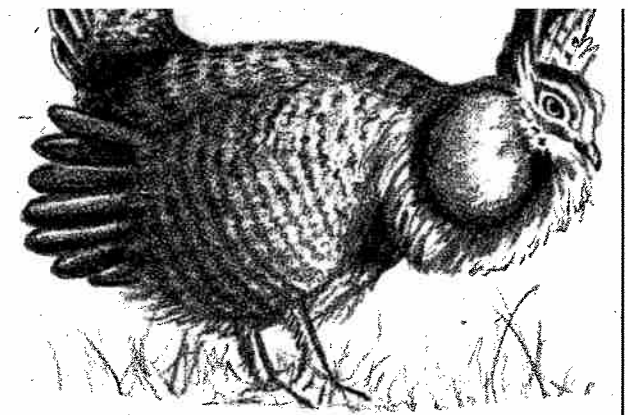
Russell Lakes State Wildlife Area offers an excellent opportunity to view **waterfowl and shorebirds** as soon as the ice goes off. Russell Lakes SWA is eight miles south of Saguache. • Monte Vista and Alamosa National Wildlife Refuges are great places to view **cranes, geese, ducks, shorebirds, snakes, and frogs**. The refuges are seven miles south of Monte Vista and four miles southeast of Alamosa. • The Lone Dome State Wildlife Area, below McPhee Dam and southeast of Dove Creek, harbors **turkey, deer, and many varieties of songbirds**. Float trips through the rugged Dolores Canyon give rafters unique opportunities to see **desert bighorn, bear, otter, turkey, and deer**.

Central Region:

Guided nature tours and wildlife viewing are always rewarding at Barr Lake Nature Center, call 659-1160. • The Mt. Evans road will be open in June. You might be able to see **bighorn sheep ewes with their lambs and mountain goat nannies with their kids**. Give them lots of space by watching through binoculars and spotting scopes.

Statewide:

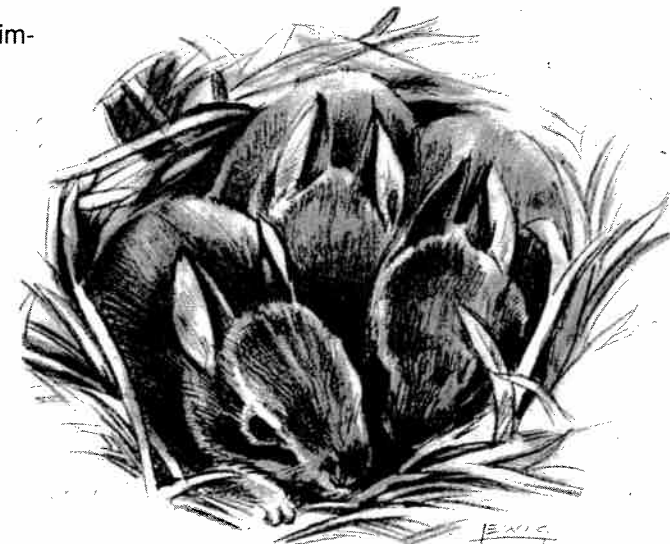
Late spring is a good time to watch **cranes and waterfowl** as they start north. • You'll start to see **newly hatched ducks and geese** from local flocks. The hatchlings will be happier if you enjoy watching them from a distance with binoculars and spotting scopes. • April is not too late to watch Colorado's **grouse** species. Call the DOW regional office in your area for information. • Spring is also a good time to see **warblers** flying north. Look for them in trees next to lakes, rivers, and streams throughout Colorado. 🐾



greater prairie-chicken

Calling All Parts of Colorado

PHOTOGRAPHERS, **two spring wildlife photography workshops** will be offered through DOW: **Perry Conway** will teach a workshop at Ponderosa Lodge west of Salida on April 20, 21, and 22 (limited to 20 participants); **Wendy Shattil and Bob Rozinski** will offer their workshop at Mount Blanca Gamebird and Trout Lodge in Blanca, Colorado, May 17, 18, and 19 (limited to 16 people). Call Bob Hernbrode, 291-7271.



baby cottontail rabbits

Intermediate Birding Class, Denver Audubon Society, on April 7; Denver Audubon Society Annual Dinner and Silent Auction on April 20; call 757-8376. • **American Birding Association Convention** in Fort Collins on June 18 - 24; call 1-800-634-7736. • **Urban Wildlife Photo Club photographic exhibit**, Jefferson County Conference Center on Lookout Mountain; call 721-1991.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED for **bald eagle** watch and **least tern and piping plover** surveys. • Also offering a **Bird Banding Workshop**. Call Colorado Bird Observatory, 659-4348.

Don't forget to visit the new **urban wildlife display** at the Denver Museum of Natural History, opening March 16.

TEACHERS register before April 20 for the **Outdoor Adventure Workshop** taking place June 10 - 16 at the Ponderosa Lodge west of Salida; earn three semester hours of graduate credit with the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Call any regional DOW office or Carol Bylsma in the Denver office, 291-7262. 🐾 🐾


Nongame Wildlife Posters



juvenile burrowing owl
from group of
five on poster

A winning photograph of burrowing owls by D. Robert Franz of Morrison is now available for purchase as a poster after being chosen for top honors in the fourth annual Nongame Photo Contest sponsored by *Colorado Outdoors* magazine and the Colorado Division of Wildlife's Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program.

To receive a 15" x 20" limited edition poster of the winning photograph, "Burrowing Owls," send \$5.50 to the Nongame Fund, Colorado Division of Wildlife, 6060 Broadway, Denver, Colorado 80216. You may also purchase the poster in person at any of the Division of Wildlife regional offices (Denver, Fort Collins, Colorado Springs, Grand Junction, and Montrose) for \$5.00.

Posters of previous first-place winners ("Bohemian Wax-wing," "Barn Swallows," and "Ferruginous Hawks") are also available for \$5.50 each postpaid. Proceeds from sale of all posters benefit the Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program. 

Colorado's Wildlife Company

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