

Rocky
Mountain
Conservancy

QUARTERLY

Winter 2015

WINTER'S REST

by Erik Stensland

I wonder what I am doing here. Have I taken a wrong turn, like Alice in Wonderland, becoming lost in a world where nothing is real? Above me fake stars twinkle in a sky that never grows dark, while nearby, clusters of plastic trees dot a flat and lifeless tile landscape. Gaudy symbols of wilderness have been planted in the middle of a modern, concrete world where they serve as little more than quaint reminders of the beautiful and expansive natural world from which we've come. They approximate the idea of wilderness but miss its very essence.

I'm on a visit to Minneapolis, wandering through America's largest shopping mall, the Mall of America. It is truly a surreal experience. Around me shoppers hurry back and forth, focused and intent: they have important tasks to do, places to be and things to buy. The air is filled with the strains of *Jingle Bells* while vendors of pizzas, popcorn and perfumes vent their odors into the hallways. Lights glitter, colors flash and noise fills the air: all the sights, smells and sounds scream for attention and assault the senses. There is no subtlety, no peace and no mystery. The only wonder is that of shoppers wondering if the next purchase will fulfill their dreams.

This massive and glitzy mall offers everything one could possibly want and yet I cannot find here that which I

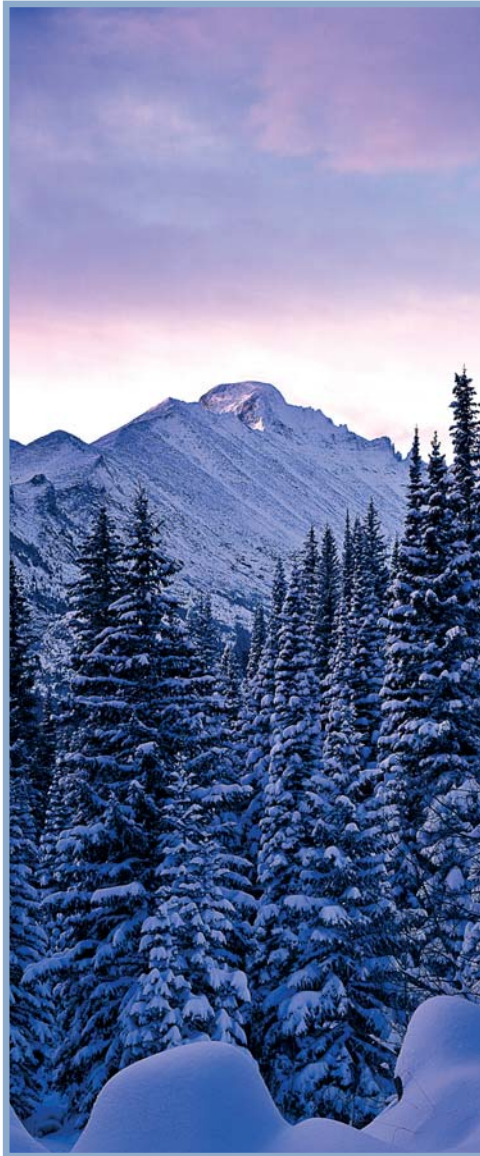
most desire, that which costs nothing and yet is worth everything: peace, stillness, tranquility. Apparently, there is no way to box these up to sell. Yet, back home in Rocky Mountain National Park, these treasures are abundant. A gentle walk on any trail offers them generously, as well as so much more.

The truly meaningful things in our world are the things that we are least likely to notice. Goodness, truth and beauty are never brash, but gentle and subtle, making them easy to overlook. Not only can they be ignored, they can even be destroyed in our manic pursuit of progress. Yet it is these quiet things that we most need in life.

All year long, our lives are like the winter winds, rushing and restless. Unable to slow down long enough even to think, we strive and race and push as if our lives would shrivel up without constant activity. We leave no space for silence and contemplation. As a result, we live with no reflection or thought for where we are heading. We race blindly onward leaving untold damage in our wake; to ourselves, to others and to this world in which we live.

Nature knows a better way which it will gladly teach to those who take the time to listen. Notice how the tenor of the mountains changes as the first snows arrive in the Rockies. The frantic pace of autumn comes to an end and the world slips into a lower

(*Winter's Rest* continued on page 2)





February Tundra Sunset by Erik Stensland

(Winter's Rest continued from page 1)

gear. Trees and grasses no longer stretch skyward to collect the sunlight, bears and squirrels no longer roam the forest for food and the rushing waterfalls slow to a trickle. Even the elk walk at a more sedate pace, no longer bugling and sparring with one another to proclaim their dominance. A gentle hush settles over the world, a deep quiet that permeates our bones.

There is an almost holy hush amongst the sleeping ponderosa.

For the next five months the animals and plants accept the harsh winter world, waiting patiently for the warm spring sun to return. They know this is a period of rest, these creatures of the forest, in tune with the seasons and with their own frailty. They do not strive against the wind, as we humans tend to do, but let the winds bluster while they withdraw, recover and

prepare for another year.

What if we, as fellow inhabitants of this natural world, took a similar approach? What if we became aware of the changing winds and adjusted our pace accordingly, making additional room in our lives for rest, reflection and silence. Then perhaps, when spring returned, we would find ourselves more alive and human than ever before.



“Photography is a way for me to communicate my deepest feelings about our natural world. To me, nature is more than a random collection of mineral elements and organic growth; it is a story which tells us who we are. Today people flock to the mountains, deserts and oceans to connect with a deep longing and desire that they feel in the presence of untamed nature, a yearning that is hard to put into words, an almost spiritual connection with these wild places.”

Erik Stensland is a native Minnesotan who moved west and ultimately settled in Estes Park. Here, he has plenty of opportunities to explore his deep love for the mountains through photography. His gallery in Estes Park, Images of Rocky Mountain National Park, features his stunning landscape photography. His images also can be viewed online at www.imagesofrmnp.com.

Photo (left): Erik Stensland



RMNP Centennial Film to Premier January 17, 2015

In celebration of the park's 100th Anniversary, Rocky Mountain National Park, the Rocky Mountain Conservancy and Fall River Productions are proud to announce the January release of their new film "Rocky Mountain National Park: Wilderness, Wildlife, and Wonder."

This film, commissioned by the Rocky Mountain Conservancy, combines stunning visual imagery, engaging storytelling, and inspirational interviews with the park's ranger staff to show the evolution of the park's wilderness, wildlife and stewardship over the past 100 years.

Created by Fall River Productions co-owners Alexander Ho and Brian Biggs and written by local historians Jack and Lulie Melton, the new Centennial film is presented in three parts: Wilderness, Wildlife, and Wonder. Each section reflects the park's Centennial slogan, Honor the Past, Celebrate the Present, Inspire the Future, through the use of historic imagery and the creative use of videography and still photography.

"We were so pleased and honored to be chosen to make this film and have truly enjoyed nearly a year of filming in the park," said Ho and Biggs. "With the help of our wonderful writers and enthusiastic rangers, we are proud of the final film and are excited to share it with all the fans of Rocky Mountain National Park."

The film will be released on January 17, 2015, at the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center and on January 26 in Grand Lake. The film then will be shown at the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center and Kawuneeche Visitor Centers throughout the year.

Cover photo credits

(Upper): "Bighorn Ewe" by Conservancy Member Jim Ward, Estes Park, CO; (Lower) "Snowy Sunrise on Longs" by Conservancy Member Erik Stensland, Estes Park, CO.

Please send high-resolution images to nancy.wilson@rmconservancy.org by December 1 for publication in the 2015 Spring *Quarterly*.

Photos are always appreciated! Scenery, wildlife and wildflowers greatly enhance this publication, so get out there and take a hike! *Thank You!*

Ask Nancy

Quarterly Editor Nancy Wilson attempts to unearth answers to any questions asked by Conservancy members and park visitors. If you are curious about something in or about the park, email nancy.wilson@rmconservancy.org or write: Nancy Wilson, Rocky Mountain Conservancy, PO Box 3100, Estes Park, CO 80517.

What enables delicate lichens to grow and thrive in exposed areas with extreme weather conditions, like freezing rain, sustained snow cover and drought?

Lichens are essentially a mutualistic relationship generally between a fungus and a green algae or a blue-green cyanobacteria (often called blue-green algae). The fungal hyphae grow on the outer surface and have a material in them called chitin, which is the same substance that makes the hard exoskeleton of insects. As such, it provides protection against the elements. The algae, in turn, photosynthesizes, making sugars that feed both the algae and the fungus. In addition to the protective chitinous layer on the outside of the lichen, many lichens grow relatively flat on rocks and other substrates. While this isn't the case for all lichens, this also helps protect them against harsh winds. Regarding their tolerance to drought, lichens can absorb water very quickly as well as retain that water for extended periods of time. This allows the algae to continue producing sugars for as long as possible after a rain event. Even if it isn't raining, they also typically absorb moisture from fog, dew or simply just the air. — *Jim Bromberg, RMNP vegetation program supervisor*

What is happening with the park's boreal toad population and the research studying this rare and elusive creature?

The boreal toad is currently listed as an endangered species in the state of Colorado and is one of five amphibians native to RMNP. It has been petitioned for federal listing with a decision expected by September 30, 2017. Boreal toad populations and breeding success has declined in its native habitat over the last 30 years, and the species is now absent from much of its historic range within the park. Amphibian surveys and park records collected since 1915 document boreal toads breeding at 20 sites and present through observation at four additional sites. In recent years, the number of breeding sites has greatly decreased. During the past 10 years, breeding has only been documented at five sites within the park. *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (Bd), a fungal pathogen which causes a fatal skin disease in amphibians, has been credited as the cause of the recent and rapid declines of boreal toads within RMNP.

Park staff, in coordination with the U.S.G.S., has been monitoring the known boreal toad breeding sites and actively searching for new sites while implementing a reintroduction project near Red Mountain Trail on the west side of the park. RMNP toads are also part of the captive breeding program at Colorado Parks and Wildlife Native Species Hatchery in Alamosa, CO, which supports boreal toad reintroduction efforts. The park participates with the Boreal Toad Recovery Team which is currently revising the recovery plan for the species. Through these conservation actions we hope to improve the status of boreal toads in the park and across their historic range. — *Mary Kay Watry, RMNP supervisory biologist*



Mountain chickadee

Photo: Phyllis Holst

The Kawuneeche Valley in Winter: It's For the Birds!

by Mandy Cluck
Seasonal RMNP Interpretive Ranger,
Colorado River District

The sun sparkles brightly atop the freshly fallen flakes. The sky is a perfect bluebird color, not a cloud in sight. The soft sound of snow gently swishing underneath my skis is the only sound to break the silence. I could glide along like this forever, gazing at the mountain splendor on either side of me. Then I hear it: the *dzee dzee* buzzing sound from just off to my left. I quickly raise my binoculars and look toward the sound, and see a flitting from an Englemann spruce. The flashing of black and white is familiar, I fix my sights on it, and sure enough, it's a mountain chickadee!

Visitors to the Kawuneeche Valley in winter often are surprised to find that Trail Ridge Road is plowed for ten miles, providing access to trails that have been tracked by cross-country skiers or snowshoers. (Beware! Snowshoeing on ski tracks is a punishable offense!) People might also be surprised to know that there are many birds that make this valley their home throughout the winter.

Fairly common throughout the year, the mountain chickadee is easily recognized by its frenetic hopping in trees, distinctive white eyebrows, and black on its head, through its eye, and under its chin. In the range of petite in size, with its diminutive beak, it can easily

be classified as cute. Chickadees are known as gleaners, feeding on insects and spiders, and occasionally conifer seeds. These small birds often are found in small groups.

Often found in the company of chickadees is the white-breasted nuthatch, most noted for its ability to climb a tree trunk head-down and hang upside down from the branches. A little larger than the chickadee, it sports an all-white face and breast, a long beak and black atop its head. This lively forest resident is a cavity-nester that feeds on seeds and insects.

Keep your eyes peeled for another fairly common sight in the winter – the flash of yellow that might be a pine siskin. These small, brownish spotted birds are sometimes found in

very large groups foraging for seeds that have fallen to the ground.

Echoing through the forest on a brittle snowy morning, downy and hairy woodpeckers can be heard drumming into the trees. Very similar in coloring with an overall black and white pattern with a red patch on the head of males, the main distinction is their size; the hairy woodpecker is obviously larger and the downy has a more striated pattern on its body.

The dark-eyed junco is also found in the forest or brushy clearings in the winter. It's a flashy little sparrow notably marked by white outer tail feathers that flash bright white in flight, a charcoal-colored head, and a rusty patch on its gray or slate-colored back. Also frequently seen in winter are white-crowned sparrows, rosy finches, Cassin's finches and pine grosbeak.

Count yourself lucky if you catch a glimpse of the rare and strange-looking red crossbill. A bright spot of reddish-orange on a winter's day, this bird's beak overlaps the upper and lower mandibles creating a unique and confusing facial feature. This bird feeds by inserting its bill into conifer cones and forcing the scales open to get to the seeds inside. Because of a readily available food supply year-round, crossbills will sometimes begin nesting as early as January.



Bohemian waxwing

Photo: Gregg Thompson

Two birds that often are overlooked (but wrongfully so!) are the American crow and the common raven. These iridescent black corvids are two of the most intelligent of all bird species, able to learn and retain information, count, solve puzzles and recognize human faces. They are among the most heavily studied birds. Fairly similar from a distance, they can be distinguished from each other by their tails and beaks: the raven has a wedge-shaped tail while the crow's is flat and short. The raven also has a large, humped beak. Other relatives of the crow that often are seen in the Kawuneeche Valley are the Stellar's jay, gray jay, Clark's nutcracker and black-billed magpie.

While visiting this area in the winter, be sure to travel just south of the valley to an area along the Colorado River to Pine Beach in the Arapaho National Recreation Area, just off the islands of Shadow Mountain Reservoir. Here, open areas of water that have not frozen over host mallards, goldeneyes, buffleheads and mergansers that can be seen dabbling or diving in the shallow water.

Continue south another ¼ mile to Green Ridge to an entirely different habitat along the Colorado River. Park at the end of the campground and snowshoe or ski down the road to the Double A Barn. You're still in the National Forest, but across the bridge

In order to see birds it is necessary to become a part of the silence.

— Robert Lynd



Photo: Jim Ward

is the boundary of Rocky Mountain National Park. Here, a perennial favorite, the ouzel, or American dipper can be seen. Also found along the Colorado River Trail in the Kawuneeche Valley, this unique bird is small, round-shaped and charcoal gray and forages in the rapids of the river, feeding on small invertebrates among the rocks underwater. It can be seen bobbing or bouncing on rocks or logs, then dipping quickly under the surface of the water for a tasty morsel. It's a very entertaining bird to watch!

Also in this National Forest area are bald eagles. Usually closed in mid-winter as a protected area, these impressive raptors nest along this portion of the river and in the back of Columbine Bay, on Lake Granby. Eagles often are seen soaring overhead,

searching for fish in the river, ducks or small mammals.

Last but not least are Bohemian waxwings that occasionally are found in this area near the Park-Forest Service bridge. I discovered them by accident a few years ago in March when snowshoeing in this area. There were hundreds of them, and they were making the most beautiful trilling sound as they flew above the river catching insects. These birds summer in Alaska and Canada, and can be seen here only for a few weeks in mid-March. They are a lovely buff color with black masks, yellow wing tips and yellow tips on their tails.

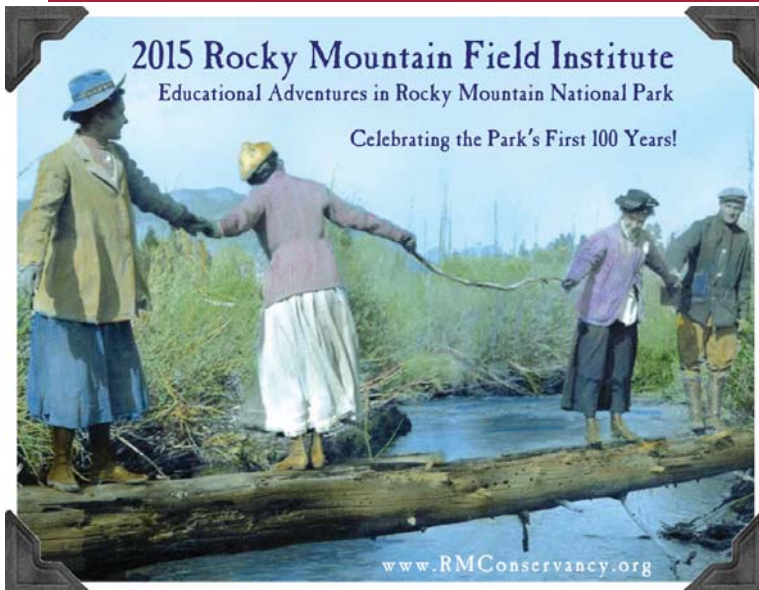
Here's to hoping that you now have birds on the brain and are champing at the bit to explore the west side of the park! Binoculars and a good bird book are all you need, my favorites being *The Sibley Guide to Birds* and the National Geographic Society *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Another useful tool is the iBird Pro Guide to Birds phone app. Not only is it a pocket-sized bird guide, it also plays a variety of songs which is very useful when you can hear a bird but not see it.

So, grab your binoculars, don your parka and strap on your snowshoes. The mountains beckon and the solitude of a snow-covered landscape is awaits. The Kawuneeche Valley in winter – it's not just for the birds.



American dipper

Photo: Putney Nature Images



Rocky Mountain Field Institute Celebrating Rocky's First 100 Years with Centennial Programs

Visit www.RMConservancy.org for the entire listing of 2015 classes

Or:

Download a pdf version of the catalog!
(Look for your catalog to be mailed in January!)

2015 Field Institute Centennial Series Highlights

Rocky Mountain National Park: The First 100 Years

June 27–28

Instructor: Mary Taylor Young

See billion-year-old rocks, a game drive wall used by prehistoric hunters, Apache Fort, site of an early Indian battle, and the location of the 1915 Dedication Ceremony. Discover the “phantom” Big Thompson River park entrance and old entrance road. Explore early ranches and the remnant of a guest lodge, and witness the changes floods in two different centuries have left on the park.

Rocky Mountain National Park: A Centennial History

July 27

Instructor: Dr. James Pickering

Review the “national park idea” and the six-year-long campaign to create Rocky Mountain National Park; then, visiting the sites associated with the park’s first century, including early farming and ranching, the great lodges and resorts, inholdings and famous summer visitors, the building of Old Fall River and Trail Ridge Roads, the Civilian Conservation Corps and much more! The contrast between “then” and “now” will be highlighted through the use of historic photographs.

100 Years of Environmental Change in RMNP

August 17

Instructor: Dr. Ellen Wohl

Examine a broad-stroke history of environmental change in the park, including the history of mining, water engineering, recreational development and tourism, atmospheric inputs of dust and nitrates, wildlife management, and climate change.

Native Americans & the Wickiups of Rocky

July 19

Instructor: Curtis Martin

The first residents of the Rocky Mountains, the highly mobile Ute and Arapaho Indians, built shelters for themselves called “wickiups,” conical wooden structures sort of like small tipis. A number of these fragile features still can be found in Rocky Mountain National Park and elsewhere in Colorado. Learn about wickiups and the people who made them and participate in building a replica wickiup.

Enos Mills’ Wildlife: Then & Now

July 20

Instructor: Jared Gricoskie

One of Enos Mills’ biggest contributions was his observation of wildlife in the Rocky Mountain region. Explore the park while looking at the changes the park has faced since Enos’ time, including the extirpation of wolves and grizzly bears, the reintroduction of elk and their impact over the past 100 years, and bighorn sheep population declines. Hear stories of mountain bluebirds, pikas, and other animals that graced the pages of his works, including one of his favorites, the beaver.

Centennial Celebration Series

Ancestral Technology: Primitive Life Skills — June 6

RMNP: The First 100 Years — June 27-28

100 Years, 100 Wildflowers of RMNP — June 27–28

Native Americans & the Wickiups of RMNP — July 19

Enos Mills’ Wildlife: Then & Now — July 20

RMNP: A Centennial History — July 27

Photographing the “Small Wonders” of RMNP — Aug. 6–8

Sketchbook Journaling in Watercolor — August 10–11

100 Years of Environmental Change in RMNP — August 17

History of Stewardship in Rocky — August 31



Photo: Lisa Thompson

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Park Puzzler

by RM Conservancy Member Joel Kaplow

Across

- 3. Visible from many miles away, this RMNP monarch has a different appearance from every angle it is viewed. At 14,259 feet, ___ Peak is the northernmost four-teener in Colorado.
- 5. Just north of Estes Park is Lumpy Ridge, with all its rounded, granite domes. A prominent formation called Twin ___ will pop out at you if you use a little imagination.
- 7. The best place to spot moose is on RMNP's west side, especially in the ___ Valley where it's wetter, and willows abound.
- 9. Moose will typically lose their antlers during this month, well after mating season is over, and start growing new ones in April.
- 11. A male weasel or a ___, its close cousin, is properly called a "hob."
- 12. Dozens of park area landmark names are on the map thanks to three ___ Indians who were taken on a tour of the area in 1914. They revealed, for the record, how they and their ancestors referred to these sights.
- 14. Making lemonade out of lemons, the CDOT is redesigning Rte. 36 after the flooding of September, 2013, and will include a bike path where there was none before. Some backing is coming from Great Outdoors Colorado, the agency which allots funding from the Colorado Lottery. Bicyclists will soon be much safer riding from Estes Park down to ___.
- 18. At 13,425 feet, the park's eighth-tallest, ___ Mountain is found in its namesake subrange, which is itself within the Front Range, a subrange of the Rocky Mountains.
- 20. The third-tallest in the park, ___ Peak stands at 13,579 feet, sits to the west of 3-Across, and is easily spotted from Denver. (2 wds)
- 21. The term "terciel" refers to a male hawk or male ___, its close relative.
- 22. When mating season begins, a bull moose will dig out a shallow basin with its hooves, fill it with urine, dip his antlers and wallow in it to announce his presence olfactorily. This bowl is called a ___ pit.

Down

- 1. The term "___" applies to a female weasel, squirrel, rabbit, deer and even a mouse.
- 2. Deer and elk antlers are solid, and they fall off and grow back annually. In contrast, ___ are hollow and, unless broken off, stay permanently on the animal, such as bighorn and antelope, and show annual growth rings like trees.
- 4. The RM Conservancy's Next ___ Fund is there to, simply put, connect kids with nature. Outdoor activities are designed to educate and help foster the idea of stewardship in these young people.
- 6. Resembling an Eastern temple somewhat, 13,497-foot ___ Peak is RMNP's seventh-tallest.

- 8. The bulbous muzzle of a moose has complex inner channels that prevent inhaling or swallowing ___ while munching on subsurface aquatic plants.
- 10. The sixth-tallest peak in the park is 13,502-foot ___ Mountain, named for a Wisconsin governor who was appointed to several political posts. He rode on the Georgetown Loop in 1886.
- 13. At 13,560 feet is ___ Peak, RNMP's fourth-tallest, named for a Bostonian geologist known for surveying Yellowstone NP. He climbed 3-Across in 1871.
- 15. ___ Mountain is the fifth-tallest in the park at 13,514 feet. Its name is derived from the Y-shaped gulley system on its southeast flank.
- 16. *Alces americanus*, or just plain moose, is the largest member of the deer family and the tallest mammal in North America. A male can weigh up to 1,600 pounds and can measure up to ___ feet at the shoulder.
- 17. The term "___" applies to a male weasel, squirrel, rabbit, deer or mouse.
- 19. Very prominent when viewed from the east, Mount ___ stands at 13,911 feet and is RMNP's second-tallest peak. It was named for an experimental agriculturist who moved to Greeley.

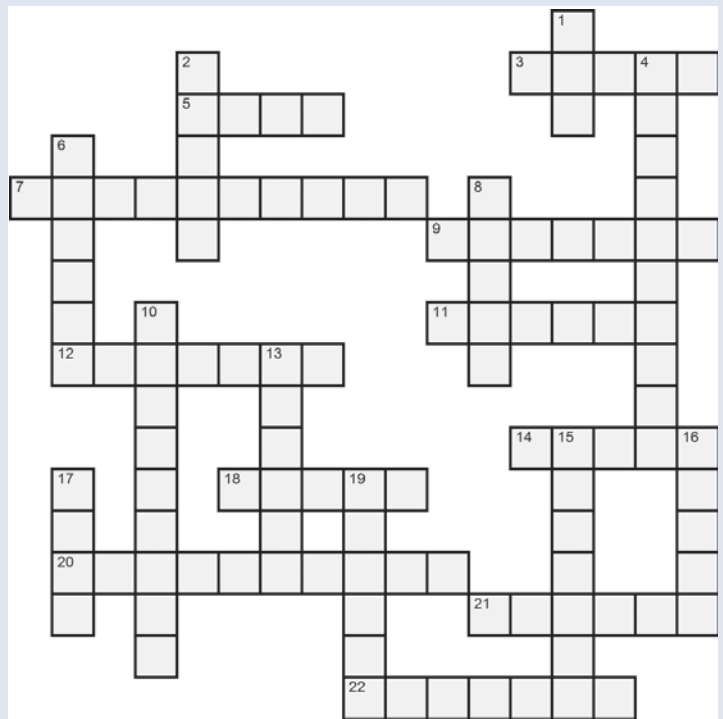


Photo: Crystal Brindle



Surviving Winter Conditions:

WILDLIFE IN WINTER

by Kathy Brazelton
RMNP Interpretive Ranger

I love winter. The crisp blue skies, the fabulous powder for skiing or snowshoeing, and the brittle, star-studded nights. But I'll quickly confess that I am grateful to be sitting by my fire with a mug of hot cocoa at the end of the solstice day – my puny human body doesn't have what it takes to

survive for long in winter conditions. So how do the animals of Rocky Mountain National Park get through the season of cold and dark? They have many wonderful adaptations to do so, commonly referred to as the "ates": migrate, hibernate, insulate and congregate are a few.

Hibernate: The ability to simply shut down or greatly reduce the body's systems to save energy is a miraculous adaptation. There are various degrees of hibernation. The marmot is a true hibernator, entering the den in late September and not emerging until April. Their body temperature drops to about 36 degrees F, with heart rates and respiratory rates dropping drastically as well. With reduced body functions, their stored body fat is able to meet their survival needs. Black bears, on the other hand, don't actually hibernate. Instead, they enter a torpor, or deep sleep, with heart rate and respiratory rates dropping, but not to the level of a marmot. Their sleep can be considered an adaptive hypothermia, with their brown fat (a special type of adipose tissue) supplying up to 8,000 calories a day to prevent the loss of lean muscle.



Photo: Lyn Ferguson

Coyotes have exceptional hearing and are tuned-in to the slight sounds of small animals burrowing in the packed snow.

Migrate: Seasonal movements allow animals to leave the conditions that have become too harsh for them. Some animal migrations are altitudinal, like most elk and mule deer moving from the higher country down to their winter ranges. Mountain lions follow the prey species to the lower areas. Some migrations are cross-country, including up to 2/3 of North American songbirds moving to warmer regions, and monarch butterflies leaving for the Mexican highlands.

Insulate: Some animals, such as ptarmigan, grow extra feathers on their feet. Others, such as coyotes, grow a thicker fur coat to provide needed insulation. Still others simply allow the snowpack itself to protect them from plunging temperatures and cold winds. Snow may feel cold to our touch, but it is a top-notch insulator. Grouse often will fly into a powdery drift of snow allowing the snow itself to provide a “blanket” for the night.

The snow has yet more secrets: beneath the snow lies a hidden world called the subnivean layer where temperatures are stable at 32 degrees F once the snow cover has reached a depth of six inches or more. Not only does this provide insulated warmth for small non-hibernating creatures, it also offers some protection from predators – at least, except from those with excellent hearing like foxes and owls. When you are out on a snowshoe trip, imagine the voles and mice eating old grass in a well-developed system of tunnels nearby!

Congregate: Two is company, and three’s a crowd. How about 37? That is how many pygmy nuthatches I counted popping one-by-one out of a small hole in a tree one frosty morning. They had huddled together for warmth in the tree cavity to survive the night. Small rodents also will occupy shared dens when temperatures plunge.

Animals trying to adjust to the rapid changes caused by a quickly warming climate don’t have the evolutionary luxury of finding ways to survive. Scientists are asking questions about how quickly new adaptations might develop.

Another cool adaptation is practiced by black-capped chickadees which are active throughout the winter months. They make it through harsh winter weather by going into “regulated hypothermia” – they can lower their body temperature 12 to 15 degrees below their normal daytime temperature to conserve energy during freezing nights.

The wonders of animal adaptations go on and on. These intricate strategies have developed over hundreds of thousands of years. Animals trying to adjust to the rapid changes



Photo: Jim Ward

caused by a quickly warming climate don’t have the evolutionary luxury of finding ways to survive. Scientists are asking questions about how quickly new adaptations might develop. Can a snowshoe hare, with fur color that changes from brown to white for winter camouflage, survive if it turns white while its surroundings have no snow? How long – how many generations – might it take for natural selection to adjust the timing of snowshoe hares’ color changes to better match increased snow-free conditions? These and other questions keep us curious about our natural world and, I hope, keenly aware of our impact on our planet. Step out into the park and see what you can observe this winter!



Photo: NPS/Ann Schonlau



Photo: Putney Nature Images



Hotshots on the Have Lake Fire in 2014 on private timberland on the Olympic Peninsula.

Alpine Hotshots bring leadership, experience to RMNP & Community

by RMNP Fire Management Staff

Rocky Mountain National Park's fire management program is one of only two national park fire programs to host a hotshot crew based at a national park site. Despite their rarity, as a national resource, the Alpine Interagency Hotshot Crew's sphere of influence reaches well beyond the local unit to provide leadership training and specialized operation skills throughout the region and nation.

An interagency hotshot crew (IHC) is a multi-skilled, professional, 20-person wildland firefighting crew with the mission to "provide a safe, professional, mobile and highly skilled hand crew for all phases of fire management and incident operations." These crews provide the boots on the ground for the highest priority incidents in the country, and are trained to demanding physical fitness standards and for difficult assignments under the most extreme conditions.

Combine the physical demands with the time and commitment required and the percent of those qualified and willing to do this job drops precipitously. While typical fire crews may be off-site on assignments 30 days or so during fire season, this year the Alpine crew was available national-

ly for fire assignments for 173 days, of which they were assigned to fires for 105 days. They traveled 82,000 miles to fires from the Southwestern U.S. to the Pacific Northwest and California. During those 173 days, they had 31 days off. And 2014 was a slow year.

In addition to their commitment to serve as hotshots, crew members also are dedicated family and community members. When they are in-station at Rocky, Alpine crew members provide assistance and support to manage fires and other incidents in and around the park. This was evident during the 2012 Fern Lake Fire and the 2013 flood. During the Fern Lake Fire, Alpine crewmembers not only filled key leadership roles in incident command, they also demonstrated a more compassionate side. When the fire first ignited, Alpine crewmembers were alerted to two busloads of third-grade students that were on a field trip in the Fern Lake trail cor-

ridor. The crewmembers raced up the trail to evacuate and calm the children who were near the fire. Then, later in December, after many homes were evacuated as a result of the fire, those same Alpine employees went to the local elementary school to talk with and calm the children who were upset because of the fire.

During the 2013 flood, the crew played an integral part in recovery efforts by placing sandbags around the Estes Valley Public Library, working with the National Guard to deliver food in the Pinewood Springs area, and shoveling the mud along the river walk in downtown Estes Park with other Rocky staff.

"Rocky Mountain National Park, which has been home for the Alpine IHC for 22 years, and all our surrounding communities benefit from having this resource of talented and dedicated people," said RMNP Fire Management Officer Mike Lewelling.

This winter will mark the third year of an outreach and education program the Alpine IHC has conducted with Eagle Rock High School, an value-driven, alternative school for students from all over the United States. Students in the program not only learn about fire management and fire's role in the ecosystem, but also about physical fitness, teamwork and, most importantly, the Alpine crew's core values of duty, respect and integrity.



On the Myrtle Fire in the Black Hills National Forest in 2012, just outside of the Wind Cave National Park entrance.



Volunteers with a section of the elevated causeway they were building on the Fern Lake Trail.

Group Volunteers Making a Difference in Rocky

by Zephyr McConnell
RMNP VIP Group Coordinator

Rocky Mountain National Park has a thriving volunteer program that enables the park to accomplish many critical projects. A special branch of the volunteer program welcomes enthusiastic groups that are motivated to apply their talents to significant needs in the park. From building trails to removing exotic plants, a variety of opportunities are available that are both engaging and educational. It's a unique activity that offers groups a chance to work together toward a common goal to benefit the park and the visitors that enjoy it.

Make no mistake – volunteer activities have no small impact. By the end of August, 2014, the park logged approximately 11,822 cumulative work hours through the efforts of more than 858 volunteers.

This year, volunteer groups came from all over the United States, as well as a group from Costa Rica. Local school groups and corporate work day groups were involved in many park projects, including less physically demanding jobs such as working in the park green-

house, transplanting plants, as well as more physically demanding projects involving long hikes into the backcountry to assist with trail maintenance or stacking logs for fire mitigation.

This season, the National Smokejumper's Association volunteered to repair a section on the Fern Lake Trail just before The Pool that experienced a huge landslide last fall. Most of these retired smokejumpers had fought fires back in the day and had moved on to other careers. They fondly remembered the hard days working on the fire line and wanted to direct their energy toward improving park trails. This was their second season volunteering with the Trail Crew at Rocky.

During one week in June, the smokejumpers built a section of elevated causeway on the Fern Lake trail where the trail was especially low and wet. Elevated causeways involve building log or rock walls that raise the trail above normal trail grade to keep hikers' feet high and dry while also helping to prevent erosion of the surrounding area. Once the walls are built they are filled in with crushed stone

and dirt to fortify the walking surface.

Because of minimum impact wilderness ethics, the project was done almost entirely with hand tools in the field. The group used crosscut saws to notch the wood, and some park visitors, especially the younger ones, loved to watch the volunteer group sawing the logs with the crosscut and wanted to give this "antique" tool a try. The group was more than happy to take a break and let the budding trail builders give it a try.

The new section of trail was completed by the end of the week – just one more project completed in Rocky Mountain National Park by its amazing volunteers!

If you'd like to bring a group to work in Rocky, check out the park's website at www.nps.gov/romo/supportyourpark/group-volunteer.htm or call 970-586-1330 to speak with someone in the park Volunteer Office. We'd love to hear from you!



The work looked so fun it enticed some young hikers to try their hand at notching with a crosscut saw.



RMNP Fund News

Colorado Gives Day

Once again, we had a tremendous response to Colorado Gives Day on December 9! Dozens of Rocky Mountain National Park fans, some brand-new to our growing Conservancy team, gave a total of more than \$17,500 via the GivingFirst.org website — a new record! Most gifts will be directed to our Next Generation Fund, which supports youth education at a cost of at least \$500,000 annually. We had lots of fun on Facebook, too, posting plenty of compelling, inspirational photos. It is always thrilling to see how much you love Rocky Mountain National Park and how much work we can accomplish together. Thank you! Tune in next year for another great opportunity to give to Rocky!



Annual Appeal Update

We hope you have received invitations to support the Conservancy through our Annual Appeal campaign. This is the one time of year that we ask everyone in our community to do what you can to support our work. If everyone gives a gift, small or large (all gifts make a difference!), we will be poised to have a stellar year supporting the park during its 100th birthday year! As of today, we have received more than 707 gifts totaling \$128,215. That is tremendous — thank you!

If you have not yet made a gift, there is still time. You may remember that our priority fundraising projects for this year include the Next Generation Fund, our Conservation Corps and the Trail Improvement Fund. Give what you can to the project closest to your heart. As always, gifts to Best Use allow us the flexibility to apply your gift to the greatest need, when needed. For information on any of these projects (and others!) visit www.RMConservancy.org.



RMNP License Plate Petition Update

In November 2013, we launched a petition to gain support for a Rocky Mountain National Park Group Special Colorado license plate. In order

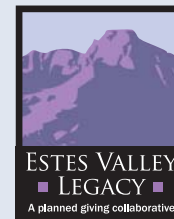
to bring the bill to the Colorado State Legislature to a vote in the January session, we needed to secure 3,000 valid signatures in support of the initiative. Once again, you stepped up to the plate. As of press time, we had gathered nearly 4,000 signatures. Thank you for your support!

The signatures are just the first step in a lengthy application process. Our application will need approval from the Colorado Department of Revenue. Then it will proceed to the Colorado State Legislature as a bill with the support of a legislative sponsor. The Legislature will then vote on the bill.

Find complete information about the license plate at our website. Please watch our Facebook page and your email for updates as we move this project forward. We'll keep you posted.

Estes Valley Legacy: A Planned Giving Collaborative

Programming and resources available in 2015!



In early 2015, the Estes Park Nonprofit Resource Center will launch the newly formed Estes Valley Planned Giving Collaborative. The purpose of the Collaborative is to provide information and assistance to individuals who donate to Estes Valley nonprofits to help them maximize the tax benefit of current and future gifts, including estate gifts. The Rocky Mountain Conservancy is proud to be a Founding Member of the Collaborative!

Once the Collaborative's website is launched, you will enjoy:

- educational programs regarding planned and estate giving
- full access to a Gift legacy website
- private, unbiased, confidential planned gift counseling
- access to professionals to assist with making planned donations

By pooling our resources, the Collaborative will give Estes nonprofits, and our members and donors, a wide range and depth of knowledge allowing us all to maximize and sustain our charitable missions in the future. We hope you will find it a convenient, valuable, objective tool as you plan your estate. Once the website is complete, those resources will be available to everyone, not only to those in Estes Park. If you have questions about this new resource, or about estate planning in general, please contact: Julie.Klett@RMConservancy.org

Estes Valley Legacy Preliminary Educational Program Calendar

Tuesday, February 3, 7 – 8:30 pm, Estes Valley Library
Giving Feels Good – Timing, Size and Method – Marsha Yelick

Tuesday, May 26, 11:30 – 1:00 pm, First Western Trust
Planned Giving for local CPA's Attorneys (Sphere of Influence) – w/CE credit (to include Fiduciary Review) – a collaborative approach to one's Estate Plan and What's New in Estate Planning.

Tuesday, May 26, 7 – 8:30 pm, Estes Valley Library
Giving Feels Good – Timing, Size and Method – Marsha Yelick

Thursday, July 16, 7 – 8:30 pm, Estes Valley Library
Giving Feels Good – Timing, Size and Method – Marsha Yelick

Thursday, August 27, 4:30 – 6:00 pm, First Western Trust
Inheritance Strategy – How to not outlive your money

Wednesday, Oct. 14, 7 – 8:30 pm, Estes Valley Library
Giving Feels Good – Timing, Size and Method – Marsha Yelick



Rocky Mountain Conservancy

The Rocky Mountain Conservancy expresses special thanks to the following people for their donations toward projects in Rocky Mountain National Park:

September 11, 2014 – December 16, 2014

748 gifts ~ total donations \$279,739

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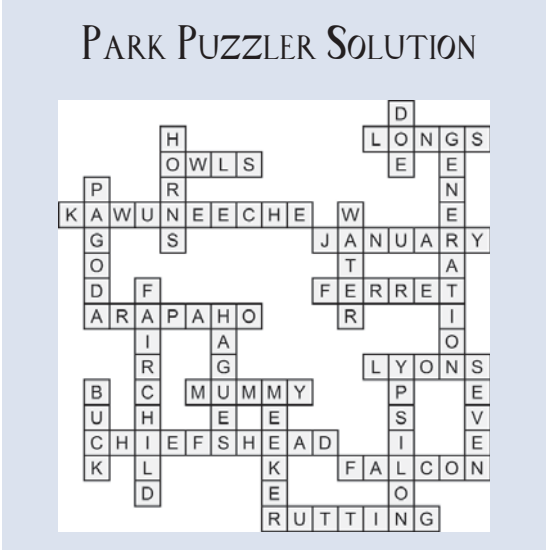
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You know those deep blue Colorado skies everyone talks about? Yup. They're for real. (Photo: Norma Andersen)

Nature Notes

Ahhhh, winter in the high country. The grasses are brown, the trees are bare, and the snippets of color, like the plump rosehips and red willow branches, are a welcome respite for the eye. It's been a weather smorgasbord of late, with a taste of bitter chill and high winds and a more generous helping than usual of calm days — is it the calm before the storm? Time will tell. In any case, the Winter Solstice heralds increasingly longer days....Park Volunteer **Keith Stephenson** was hiking along Lumpy Ridge where he found the white tail of a black-tailed weasel on the trail, apparently the victim of a tale of predation despite its winter cloak of invisibility....Keith, and his wife, **Jackie**, were about two miles from the Fall River entrance where they stopped to offer a lift to a young guy walking west. He shoved a huge backpack through the car door, climbed in and off they went. Oh yes: This was about 2:30 p.m. on a Tuesday ... last March. "Where are you headed?" they asked the seemingly intrepid adventurer. "Oh, west," he replied. "On this road?! Where exactly west are you going?" Keith asked, incredulous. "To where this highway intersects with U.S. 40. It's the quickest way to get to Interstate-15 North in Utah. I told my mom I would be home by Monday," the young man answered. "And where is home?" Keith ventured to ask. "Calgary," was the answer. "You know, don't you, that this road, Trail Ridge Road, is closed in 8 more miles?" Keith asked. "Oh, no problem," the guy said. "I've got camping stuff and some food here in my backpack." Keith paused. "And that Trail Ridge Road is covered with deep snow for most of its 50 miles, 12 miles of it above treeline?" Long pause. "Oh ..." "Look," Keith said. "We will do you a favor. We will take you back to the east edge of Estes Park and you can catch a ride east to I-25 and start north to Canada." "Well, if you think that's best," the young man said, "but, I must phone Mom to cancel that dental appointment on Friday.".....Retired Resources Management Specialist **Jeff Connor** spotted a northern shrike near Lake Estes in December. This is a bird that winters in the Estes area and breeds farther north. It hunts small rodents and birds and occasionally will impale them on a tree to feed on them later. Hmmm, the latest in holiday tree decorations?.....Conservancy Director of Development **Julie Klett** observed a beautiful red fox alongside Highway 34 in Estes Park in the late afternoon and watched as it very intently stalked an unsuspecting vole. The fox snagged it with the grace and precision of a ballet dancer and proceeded to chomp and swallow in one gulp.....Julie also had a close encounter when she backed out her door with an armful of packages at her home in Estes Park. She heard a loud "huff" and the clattering of hooves behind her, and when she turned around, she realized that she'd almost bumped into two huge 6- and 7-point bull elk that were hanging out by her door.....CRD Facility Management Systems Specialist **Debbie Mason** was driving on Highway 7 out of Estes Park in early December when she got the best view of a bobcat that she'd ever seen. The medium-sized creature was crossing the road, and, with plenty of time to see the animal as it slowly loped, then walked across the highway, she easily spotted the tufts on the ears that are one of the hallmark identifiers for bobcats — as opposed to a big dog.....RMNP



Photo: Phyllis Holst

The park is a veritable playground for winter activities! Snowshoes make hiking easier in deep snow, giving access to stunning backcountry winter adventures with few other people around. Many of the more front country places can be packed by previous hikers or wind-blown enough to not need snowshoes for much of the season, especially at lower elevations. Backcountry skiing is another great winter sport in the park. Strap on your skins (don't forget your helmet!) and hike up the slopes for a sublime downhill whoosh or take a peaceful glide through the quiet hills — there's nothing quite like it!

Interpreter **Kathy Brazelton** and retired wildlife biologist **Gary Miller** co-noted that there was evidence of heightened beaver activity near Sprague Lake this fall. The "busy little beavers" had been harvesting aspen at the T-intersection near the picnic area and stables and the naturalists surmised that it was likely that the beaver had a bank burrow along the stream in that vicinity....While fishing the Colorado River one day, Conservation Corps Manager **Geoff Elliot** was surprised when a beaver swam up next to him and smacked its tail on the water. This happened to be his Birthday Weekend trip and he felt as though he'd just been given a gift....Geoff also encountered a large bighorn ram, three ewes and a lamb while fishing the Big Thompson in early December, and he came upon thirty turkeys on Fall River Road one day, blocking his way in to work. (I have to ask: why do wild turkeys seem to emerge from the wilds right before Thanksgiving? Do they have a death wish? Are they taunting us and unwittingly triggering a primal impulse buried deep within us — or, at least, me? Perhaps this is a question for...ASK NANCY!).....Looking forward to spring, take a deep breath and notice — really see — the beauty in winter around you. Challenging sometimes? Yes. But worth it!