



ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATURE ASSOCIATION

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QUARTERLY



CONNECTING TO ROCKY

by Alex Drummond

Hiking with friends the other day in the Sawatch Range near Monarch Pass we climbed to a ridge above treeline and were amazed to see that we could see Pikes Peak 70-plus miles to the east and the same distance to Mt. Uncompahgre in western Colorado's San Juan range. The full east-west view spanned about 145 miles.

Not bad, I thought, considering that for a six-foot person standing on a beach the ocean surface curves out of view in fewer than ten miles. I remembered, and explained to my friends, that I'd once determined—through actual viewing—that with four linked vistas one could see all the way across Colorado. I couldn't remember exactly which peaks gave the connected link; was it the Snowy Range in Wyoming to Longs Peak, Longs to Pikes Peak, Pikes to Uncompahgre, and west into Utah's Abajo Range? Or is one of the mid-state fourteeners, Grays Peak, Mt. Elbert or Snowmass Mountain, part of the link? Or perhaps it was Mt. Blanca and the Spanish Peaks farther south, with views into New Mexico?

I can't remember for sure and I obviously need to recheck details. Mt. Meeker might block a view of Pikes

from Longs, for example. But not to fuss right about now. There is a combination, maybe more than one, of four chosen views that can span the state – a geographic tidbit I find fascinating. And since the peaks aren't going anywhere anytime soon, each of you readers can work on a solution as you drive, bike or hoof your way around Colorado's high country. Homework assignment number one.

Next subject: wouldn't it be fun to shade in on a map the full viewing circumference of just Longs Peak, or let's say, any bit of any terrain within Rocky? Wherever you can see the slightest smidge of peak or ridge that you know is within the park, you plot your viewing point on a map. You're at a roadside produce stand east of Greeley, for example, and your gaze wanders west and up. The produce person holding out your bag of beets, jiggling it for you to take, says "Whatcha starin' at?" "I'm looking at Rocky, my favorite national park," you can answer, as you turn back to your purchase. The same process applies to miles and miles up and down I-25, all those Front Range towns strung north to south and crowding west to the foothills, where the view starts to get spotty, including much of Denver and its suburbs, and many places farther east.

It gets decidedly more complicated as you start looking for bits of the park sticking up as you travel through the

(Overlook, continued on page 2)

(Connections, continued)

mountains. You get windows, peepholes and unexpected glimpses of a summit in Rocky showing through a gap in a ridge, or a sudden complete vista as you round a bend in your car. For every place you see a bit of Rocky you mark the site on a map when you get back home. That's homework assignment number two. Now let's imagine all getting together over a big table and coloring in Rocky's total viewing area on a single map—the large solid fan to the east and the dots and corridors punctuating the mountain areas. And let's agree in advance: the result will be impressive.

What if the view from each of those places you discover makes you suddenly want to drop everything and go there? You're on top of Mt. of the Holy Cross, say, and can't resist taking off for Longs Peak. Quick-step down the trail to your car at the trailhead, drive via Leadville, Copper Mountain and I-70 to the Central City turnoff and along miles of curvy Peak-to-Peak highway to the Longs Peak trailhead; you park, don your hiking boots again, and you're off for the Boulderfield. That's quite a saga and lots of miles. Quite a bit more of a saga if you decide to walk all the way, which, mind you, is fully doable. Back home you trace the route you took on a map, with the distances color-coded for each mode of travel, including the line of sight. Map's title: "All Routes Lead to Rocky."

One thing will be dramatically apparent: seeing something and getting there can be two very different things. Figure out the line-of-sight distances and you'll be astonished how short they are compared to land-surface distances. That's the nature of mountains, of course. Longs Peak to Mt. Evans, is only 45 air miles; by road it's 63 miles just down to Pikes Peak; Longs to Grays and Torreys: 43 air miles. To the Wyoming border, 53; to Mt. Elbert, 88 air miles. And so on. Recite those distances to a friend groaning under a heavy pack

or to a friend groaning under \$4-a-gallon gas prices and maybe they'll say how nice it would be just to hitch a ride on the back of a crow. Crows who know how to get places, anyway. Then you can enjoy a good chuckle wondering why the path a crow flies is called a beeline rather than a crowline.

But how about raising the ante and imagining getting to Rocky via water connections – and from anywhere, not just places where bits of the park stick up over ridges or horizons. Fancy some onlookers in New Orleans watching you putting on a wet suit at a riverside dock and climbing into a kayak. "Where you off to?" they ask. "To Rocky Mountain National Park," you answer. "You know, Colorado." "Yeah, right," they say. But off you paddle, with mythically powerful upstream strokes and dodging those leaping Asian carp that have been known to bean a person and shouldn't be there in the first place. Up the Mississippi to St. Louis, up the Missouri to Omaha, along the Platte all the way across Nebraska and into Colorado, branching near Greeley into the Poudre or up the Big Thompson, amazed that either choice will take you right into Rocky. If you don't mind paddling uphill.

Let's say you take the Poudre River. You end your trip beside Poudre Lake at Milner Pass and are lolling with your boat on the shore as folks driving up and down Trail Ridge, waving, some stopping. "Where'd ya paddle from?" a guy asks. "From New Orleans," you say. And instead of snorting, "Yeah, right," he actually sticks out his hand for a shake. Less, maybe, for your achievement than for Rocky itself. "I always knew this park was a special place," he says. "Water all the way from New Orleans to here!" Just then, another guy in wet suit comes over the brow of the hill from the west. "You, too?" the driver asks. "Where'd you paddle from?" "From a confused estuary where the Colorado River flows into the Pacific, up through melon fields in California's

Imperial Valley, along a bunch of canals, finally into the Colorado River proper, up rapids with some big leaps over some dams, over flat water across some huge lakes, more rapids, canyons and mountains. Water for 1,450 miles brought me right here to Rocky, with my final thrash a tough one up Timber Creek."

The guy in the car lines the two boaters up, snaps a picture, and has it posted on Facebook before either one can take a swig from his canteen. "Daddy, can you really paddle here from two different oceans?" the guy's kid asks. "There's water all the way," he says. "The rest is equal parts muscle and imagination." Hmm, perhaps he's wiser than he first let on.

And let's do one final map: a map called "People Who Care about Rocky." A map for national park lovers all over the world. Start by reading down the list of RMNP Fund donors in each issue of this Quarterly newsletter: people in Michigan, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, Texas, New York, Minnesota, Tennessee, Florida, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Nebraska, New Jersey, and Colorado, Colorado, Colorado, by the dozen. Oregon, Indiana, Kentucky... you get it – there are lots of people in every state. Put a colored pushpin for each donor on a map, run a colored thread from each pin to Rocky, and BAM! Those maps of flight routes in the pouch by your airline tray table pale by comparison. It's a great map to see the world full of people who love this place, who want to see it thrive and are willing to pitch in to help. Now, that's geography plus humanity, which goes clear back to the national parks' founding vision.

A former science writer and an avid outdoor person, Alex Drummond led the first crossing of Colorado by ski in 1978. His biography of Enos Mills (Enos Mills: Citizen of Nature) is well known throughout Colorado. In recent years he has turned his attention to poetry.



WELCOME TO ROCKY'S NEW CHIEF OF INTERPRETATION, RICH FEDORCHAK



Rocky Mountain National Park has announced the selection of Rich Fedorchak as the incoming Chief of Interpretation for Rocky Mountain National Park. Rich will take Larry Frederick's position, beginning on January 13, 2013.

Rich currently is the NPS Partnership Program Training Manager, stationed at the NPS Mather Training Center in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Rich has been there since 2005 and it is his eighth NPS assignment.

Before coming to Harpers Ferry, Rich served as the Chief of Interpretation at Grand Teton NP in Wyoming; the Assistant Chief of Interpretation at Zion NP in Utah; and as Interpretive, Law Enforcement and Backcountry ranger at Lassen Volcanic Park; Carlsbad Caverns NP; San Antonio Missions NHP; and Mount Rainier and Glacier national parks.

Rich has degrees in Park Management from the University of Massachusetts, and in Environmental Interpretation from the University of Idaho. Rich has a 16 year old daughter who will attend school in Estes Park. His wife, Sheri, also works for the federal government. They will reside in Estes Park.

Rich has an excellent reputation throughout the system with both NPS and partner organizations. Larry Frederick will be hard act to follow, but Rich will be a great addition to the staff.

Welcome!

Cover photo credits

Cover photos (clockwise from lower left to upper right): "Horseshoe Park," by Dick Orleans, Estes Park, CO; "Post-ablutions Pygmy Owl," by RMNA Member Dick Coe, Estes Park, CO; "Attention, Class!" by RMNA Member Cynthia McKee Brady, Oklahoma City, OK. Please send photos or high resolution scans to nancy.wilson@rmna.org by March 1 for publication in the 2013 Spring *Quarterly*.

Photos are always appreciated! Scenery, wildlife and wildflowers greatly enhance this publication so take a hike and carry your camera with you! Think simple and high contrast for best reproduction results. Thank You!

Ask Nancy

[RMNA Quarterly Editor Nancy Wilson will attempt to unearth answers to any questions asked by RMNA members and park visitors. If you are curious about something in or about the park, write: Nancy Wilson, RMNA, PO Box 3100, Estes Park, CO 80517. Or email her at nancy.wilson@rmna.org]

Little birds, like pygmy nuthatches and chickadees, are so small - how do they stay warm in sustained frigid temperatures?

During the winter, birds can grow twice as many feathers as needed for summer but they still have to shiver almost constantly to increase their body temperature in cold weather. This shivering process is called thermogenesis. The constant shivering produces heat five times that of normal which help them maintain this amazingly high body temperature. They also fluff up to trap air between their feathers and bodies to create a natural layer of insulation, and sleep with their bills under their wing feathers to breathe warmer air. And, of course, they seek shelter out of the wind and cold. Some, such as chickadees and pygmy nuthatches, huddle up together in natural shelters such as bushes. Nesting boxes become adhoc roosting boxes in the winter as well.

What causes those iridescent clouds sometimes seen in the winter?

This is a fairly uncommon phenomenon, most often observed in altocumulus, cirrocumulus and lenticular clouds, and very rarely in cirrus clouds. Iridescent clouds are a diffraction phenomenon caused by small water droplets or small ice crystals individually scattering light. Larger ice crystals produce halos.

Along Bear Lake Road in the spring I see a lot of pine trees with many clusters of brown needles on the branches. Is this from a dry winter, or are the trees responding to other stressors?

The damage observed on regenerative pines in the Bear Lake Road corridor is commonly referred to as winter desiccation. It is highly dependent on winter weather patterns, but particularly common at high elevations. It commonly occurs when the warm sun encourages leaves (needles) to transpire but the roots are in frozen soil and unable to replace moisture. The portion of the tree covered by snow is not damaged. Shallow-rooted trees are most susceptible; mature trees have a root system that reaches well below the freezing depths. This was a very common occurrence last winter from low snow pack and can also be observed in the subalpine krumholtz throughout the park.—*Brian Verhulst, RMNP Forester (Acting)*

I love feeding the birds, but why is it legal to do this, or is it, really? They say not to feed other animals like elk, deer, chipmunks, ground squirrels and so on, so why can we feed birds? It seems like a double standard.

Inside the park it is illegal to feed any wildlife, including birds, so no bird feeders of any type are allowed in park housing areas or elsewhere. There may be some discrepancies in this when it comes to inholders (private landowners who have a house inside park boundaries). They most likely fall under state regulations on private land. The park currently has researchers that have been studying humming-birds and using hummingbird feeders to attract the birds for banding and measurement purposes. These researchers are working under a research permit and the feeders are placed out of reach of bears. Having a bird feeder at home outside the park is perfectly legal. In the Estes Park area it is advised to take feeders inside at night so black bears are not tempted. In addition, the state manages wildlife outside the park and has regulations about feeding wildlife, such as deer and elk, that are based on relative dependency and hazards to humans.—*RMNP Resources Management Specialist Jeff Connor*

FERN LAKE FIRE BEHAVIOR UNPRECEDENTED IN PARK HISTORY



*A Skycrane
patrols Moraine
Park*

by RMNP Fire Management Team Members

Firefighters from across the country battled the Fern Lake Fire in Rocky Mountain National Park for two months before the spread of the nearly 3,500-acre blaze was temporarily halted by an early December snowstorm. The high-elevation winter fire, which eventually drew a national Type 1 Incident Management Team to Estes Park, is unprecedented in park history.

The Fern Lake Fire started Tuesday, October 9, 2012, about three miles west of Estes Park, Colorado, in steep and rugged Forest Canyon. The cause is believed to be associated with an illegal campfire. The investigation remains open.

In response, park officials immediately established a Type 3 incident management team and evacuated two busloads of students on a field trip in the area. They also checked backcountry records to determine if any backpackers were in the vicinity.

The next day, a specialized team was ordered to handle long-term fire planning. A Boise, Idaho-based National Incident Management Organization (NIMO) team assumed command of the fire on Friday, October 12. With fire season over in some areas, crews and equipment were in short supply. In fact, following standard practices, the Alpine hotshot crew based in Rocky Mountain National Park had

been disbanded for the winter just two days before the fire started.

Largely inaccessible, Forest Canyon had been untouched by fire for at least 800 years. A long-term drought had left fuels tinder-dry. Mountain pine beetles had killed half the trees in the canyon, with every compromised tree posing a hazard for firefighters. The typically windy conditions in the canyon only increased the danger from falling limbs.

“We knew right away it was going to be a long-term event,” said the park’s Fire Management Officer Mike Lewelling. “We knew we’d have a limited ability to fight the fire directly because of steep terrain, beetle-killed trees and high winds. When there’s a combination of winds and dead trees, we don’t insert firefighters. If someone had gotten hurt it would have taken too long to evacuate them. Too risky.”

Single-engine air tankers were part of the initial attack, but since the fire area serves as a municipal watershed, use of fire retardant was restricted.

Snow fell on the fire area four days after the fire was discovered, moderating fire behavior. The NIMO team returned control of the fire to local officials on Sunday, October 14. During the following days, periodic snowfalls temporarily slowed fire growth. Then, temperatures warmed and humidity dropped, bringing

the fire back to life and continuing to grow to the north and east.

“When it snowed, we were able to release people,” said Lewelling. “And when it cleared up, we’d order more help again.”

The goal was to keep the fire north of the Big Thompson River in Forest Canyon. Firefighters were able to reach spot fires north of the fire and suppress them. The sites of previous hazardous fuels reduction projects, geared to thin trees and burn or remove excess fuels, served as anchor sites for carrying out indirect attacks. Helicopters were sometimes on hand to help, but they were often grounded because of high winds.

A week before Thanksgiving, 4 to 6 inches of snow fell on the fire. The day before Thanksgiving, with no smoke visible, all fire closures were lifted. But on Thanksgiving morning, firefighters patrolling on Trail Ridge Road, near the Forest Canyon Overlook, saw torching trees and fire burning through patchy snow. The Fern Lake Fire had come back to life yet again. With conditions worsening, managers began ordering resources, including a Skycrane heavy helicopter, air attack, three hand crews, several engines and a contingent of Boise smokejumpers to fill management roles.

On Friday afternoon, November 30, a high wind warning was issued for the fire

area and grounded air resources. The next morning, at about 1 a.m., with northwest winds gusting and holding at 70 mph, the fire spotted (jumped and created a spotfire) to the south of the river. When the winds then switched to the west, the fire was perfectly aligned to move eastward toward Moraine Park.

Remarkably, the fire made a three-mile run in just 35 minutes, at times spotting a mile ahead of itself.

Just after midnight, two engines and a handcrew assigned to the fire began a firing operation to prevent the fire from sweeping through a wind funnel on the east side of Moraine Park. Without their actions, Lewelling said, the fire would have crossed Bear Lake Road, crossing the park boundary.

Hazardous fuels reduction work probably saved Kaley Cottages, too. Thick fuels had been removed from a large area, so a spotfire there only ignited a grass fire, which was easier for firefighters to extinguish.

Because of the rapid rate of spread, an evacuation order was recommended by the Type III Team, in conjunction with NPS Visitor Protection Rangers, for residents in the Highway 66 corridor and the NPS housing area and implemented by the Larimer County Sheriff's Department and the Estes Park Police Department. A pre-evacuation order was implemented in the areas of High Drive and Marys Lake Road.

With the town of Estes Park at risk, the Type 1 Incident Management Team (IMT) was ordered early the same day. Type 1 teams handle the most complex emergencies in the nation. The Great Basin IMT 2, headed by Paul Broyles, assumed command of the fire the following day at 6 p.m.

In the fire off-season, resources were even harder to secure. Nevertheless the Type 1 organization grew to 608 people by Wednesday, December 5th, with 16 crews, 45 engines, five water tenders and five helicopters assembled to fight the fire, an unusually large arsenal for a late-season fire. Two airtankers had earlier flown in from California, but were released when sustained high winds kept them grounded.

Crews laid down an elaborate grid of fire hose around the multiple buildings of the YMCA of the Rockies, which can accommodate thousands of guests. Helicopter water drops peaked at more than 31,000 gallons on Thursday, December 6. On the southern flank of the fire, helicopters avoided dropping water on active fire in a steep canyon, or "notch," to the west of Steep Mountain to allow the canyon's chimney effect to burn out its fuels. Crews could then safely engage the fire when it reached the canyon rim.

From October 10 through October 23, 103,700 gallons of water were dropped on three separate days. From November 8 to



November 30, a total of 38,400 gallons of water was dropped on six separate days. From December 2 thru December 6, 106,300 gallons of water were dropped on four separate days. One drop of retardant from a heavy air tanker was made on December 4 but was ineffective due to high winds. Due to continuing high winds, further air tanker drops were not utilized.

On Friday, December 7, as a winter storm approached from the west, crews worked to secure lines on the southern perimeter and patrolled the contained northern flank. By mid-day on Saturday, December 8, heavy snow and treacherous conditions forced crews to retreat from the firelines because of safety concerns. With the snow cover preventing further fire spread – and more snow on the way – many crews and other resources were released.

On Monday, December 10, at 6 p.m., Rocky Mountain National Park resumed command of the fire, and the Type 1 team was demobilized.

While fire managers believe the snowfall has helped to keep the fire within containment lines, it is still burning in the deep layers of accumulated dead trees and other forest debris. They plan to remain vigilant. Unburned vegetation in Forest Canyon may continue to burn and smoke from deep within the containment lines and will be visible for months.



Fern Lake Fire in relation to the town of Estes Park



by Rachel Brooks,
Olson Family Fellow

Driving a bus with 14 passengers up Trail Ridge Road as part of the Rocky Mountain Field Seminars *Journey to the Top* touring program was just one of my many tasks this year as the Olson Family Fellow. The tours

were an exceptionally unique experience of Rocky Mountain National Park – both for me and for the program participants, and the road mirrored the winding path of experiences I had during the course of my tenure, including a few narrow ledges and precipitous heights!

This was the second year that the Rocky Mountain Nature Association Field Seminars program offered adventure tours by bus. *Elk Expeditions* was the spearhead of the program in 2011 when the bus was newly acquired, and *Journey to the Top: A Trail Ridge Road Bus Adventure* was added in 2012.

Journey to the Top was an immediate success, and twice a week I reveled in the scenery of the park as I drove and shared the wonders of Rocky Mountain National Park with visitors from all over the country. With me was RMNA instructor David Adams, a former middle school science teacher. Together, we took participants on all-day trips, and we didn't just stick to the road. We encouraged people to walk the paths, to read the wayside exhibits and take in the views. We hiked around the Alluvial Fan and learned about the vast and sweeping effects of the Lawn Lake Flood.

The tour includes lunch at the Alpine



ROCKY MOUNTAIN FIELD SEMINARS A Busload of Adventure!

natural history information. Each evening as the sun went down to the sound of bugling elk, Kevin brought out elk skulls of all sizes to engage the participants in another aspect of the elk of Rocky. A total of 12 tours were conducted with only the rare open seat.

Hold on for *The Grand Lake Safari*, yet another bus adventure scheduled for 2013. This tour will travel over Trail Ridge Road from the east side of the park to Grand Lake and back. It's going to be a full day packed with scenery, wildlife and learning, with the natural history of the west side as an

added feature. Sign up early for this one – it's sure to be a winner!

Due to the popularity of these bus tours, next year RMNA is offering 39 *Journey to the Top* tours, and 18 *Elk Expeditions* tours. The next Fellow will be busy! As for me, I will remember fondly my summer in the park, driving, teaching about the wonders of Rocky, and also for the opportunity time and again to witness the joy and the connection people make to the park through learning and a direct and personal experience. That was truly the gem.

Rachel Brooks has completed her Olson Family Fellowship with RMNA and will be working with the park's Environmental Education program for the next few months to get even more experience with park educational efforts. Good luck, Rachel!

Visitor Center, and afterward, at Medicine Bow Curve, we took the group on tundra walks to identify some of the hardy flowers and to sit on the tundra in silence, laying down to feel the temperature difference and the lack of wind. We had many idyllic afternoon tours but we never saw Julie Andrews. I'm sure for many of us the impulse to burst into song was lurking just beneath the surface. It was a gift to share such a special place with people who would not have experienced it on their own. For many participants the bus tour venue was ideal because "we can sit back, let you do the driving and learn something at the same time." The bus is a comfortable ride, it's true, the instruction is excellent, and the opportunity to see elk, pika, marmots and the occasional bighorn sheep much enhanced.

By the end of the summer, RMNA had conducted 26 *Journey to the Top* adventures by bus. Once the leaves began their colorful autumn display the phone at the Field Seminar Center was ringing off the hook for *Elk Expeditions*. As we encountered harems of female elk or the lone 6-point bull, veteran naturalist Kevin J. Cook waxed eloquent about elk behavior, biology and myriad bits of



BRING ALONG YOUR SNOWSHOES FOR THESE BEAUTIFUL WINTER MEMBER HIKES!

Take a hike in the park with Membership Manager Curtis Carman, and special park guests, for monthly hikes in Rocky throughout the year.

Join a group of like-minded individuals on a hike in the park to various sites in Rocky Mountain National Park while learning more about RMNA, RMNP and each other. Limited to 15 people per hike, outings explore a different area in Rocky Mountain National Park each month. Come with your questions about current RMNA projects, park management issues and natural history stories.

Call Curtis Carman at (970) 586-0108. Or, email him at curtis.carman@rmna.org

- Winter Schedule:* **January 25 - Snowshoe hike to Emerald Lake**
February 23 - Snowshoe hike to Mills Lake
March 29 - Snowshoe the Ouzel Falls Trail



Photo: RMNA Member Vicki Beough

Park Puzzler by RMNA Member Joel Kaplow

ACROSS

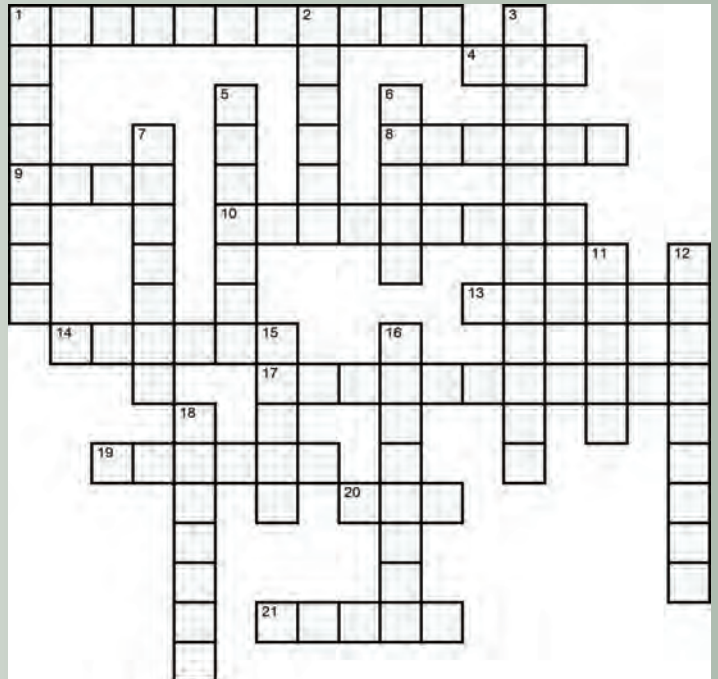
1. Colorado has tons of bodies of water named "Lost Lake." RMNP has one on the north side that drains into the North Fork of the ___ River. (2 wds)
4. About ___ percent of the adult female deer in RMNP have tested positive for chronic wasting disease, aka CWD.
8. ___ Valley is the only place in the park where downhill sledding and sliding are permitted. It opened in 1955 as a commercial ski resort, and was closed in 1991.
9. The remnants of ___ City, a mining town that began in 1879, can be found in the northwest part of the park.
10. \$80 is the going rate for the America the ___ Pass, which allows access to all U.S. national parks and federal recreation lands for one year.
13. The ptarmigan is the smallest member of the ___ family.
14. The 7-mile-long valley south of the high portion of Trail Ridge Road is ___ Canyon.
17. One potential problem for winter visitors is ___. Technically, this is when a person's core temperature drops below 95° F, resulting in shivering and disorientation.
19. RMNP's Fall River Road is not open much of the year. This is because it is not ___, like Trail Ridge Road, to keep it open.
20. Though the rule is not necessarily adhered to, pet owners in RMNP are required to have their critters on a leash not more than ___ feet long.
21. On Saturdays in January and February, rangers lead a free ___-country ski tour on the park's west side.

DOWN

1. ___ Lake Road is still undergoing a facelift, but should be finished this year. (2 wds)
2. Longs Peak is connected to ___ Mountain by a serrated ridge called Keyboard of the Winds.
3. There were some tense moments last June, as the Woodland Heights fire, which destroyed 26 homes, came to within a stone's throw of the park's ___ building.
5. There is a new innovation in avalanche safety equipment. Backpacks equipped with inflatable ___ help keep the victim higher up in the snow, and

are now saving lives.

6. North America is home to three different ptarmigans: the willow, rock and Colorado's ___-tailed.
7. Aspen reproduce by seed and another strategy. Their horizontal roots can sprout shoots that are called ___.
11. Colorado has tons of mountains named "Sugarloaf." RMNP has one located in its ___ Range.
12. RMNP is Colorado's second national park. ___ National Park, created in 1906, is 9 years older. (2 wds)
15. About ___ million people visit RMNP every year.
16. ___ Mountain, named in 1949 for Enos' brother, is located east of the park's Little Matterhorn. (2 wds)
18. Timber Creek and ___ Park are the two RMNP campgrounds that remain open during the winter.



RED SQUIRREL, PINE SQUIRREL OR CHICKAREE: THIS SQUIRREL ADAPTS

by Jeff Connor

Twenty-five years ago, on my hikes through the lodgepole pine and lodgepole/spruce/ fir forests of Rocky Mountain National Park, I was always enthusiastically greeted by the pine squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*), locally known as the chickaree. Invariably, this smallest of forest squirrels was running across the ground or over a log and up a tree with a pine cone in its mouth. From their lofty perches the squirrels chattered their alarm to let everyone in the area know that I was there and demanding that I move on.

In *Rocky Mountain Mammals*, biologist David Armstrong identifies this squirrel as a red squirrel. Here, in the Southern Rockies, that name doesn't seem to fit because they are usually more of a dark grayish brown in color. No matter the name, pine squirrel, chickaree or red squirrel, it is a wide-ranging species occurring from Alaska to Labrador and southward through the United States.



A lodgepole pine forest, prime habitat for pine squirrels. Photo: NPS

The pine squirrel's habitat requirements are pretty simple: closed canopy mature conifers capable of producing quality seeds and a shaded environment to provide cover from predators and to facilitate foraging. Also needed is a forest that maintains a cool microclimate for the favorable preservation of pine cone middens, the squirrels' food stash of pine cones buried in piles of scales from cones that have already been eaten.

In the mid-1990s, a landscape-changing event began that has affected where chickarees now are found. Due to a variety of environmental factors, the mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) population went from endemic to outbreak levels within a few years. Dense forests of older lodgepole pine favored by the pine squirrel were altered by the death of thousands of trees attacked by millions of beetles. In some places, beetles rapidly killed as many as 90% of the larger lodgepole pines. In these areas, the squirrels' food supply diminished, the opening of the canopy most likely made them more susceptible to predation, and the altered microclimate had an impact on pine cone middens.

Little research exists on how pine squirrels responded to the beetle outbreak. In a 2005 assessment of the pine squirrel for the Rocky Mountain Region of the U.S. Forest Service, Dr. John Koprowski found significant decline in areas with greater than 40% mortality of spruce trees, but continued survival in suitable patches. He noted that remaining squirrels fed on abandoned cone caches and insects.

In 2003, pine beetle outbreak reached the southwest corner of the park and lodgepole pine began dying through the Kawuneeche Valley. By 2006, beetles began to attack lodgepole pines in the Cache La Poudre, Big Thompson and North St. Vrain watersheds on the east side of the Continental Divide. Killing higher elevation trees first, the beetles quickly reached lower elevation areas that also included ponderosa pine. Entomologists Sheryl Costello of the U.S. Forest Service and Dr. Jenny Briggs of the U.S. Geologic Survey, working in the park, wondered if beetles originating in lodgepole pine would switch to ponderosa pine as a food and breeding source. Their research quickly showed that they did.

With dying lodgepole around them,



Photo: RMNA Member Jack Hailman

squirrels continued to collect cones and supply middens, but their food supply diminished as the canopy opened. Squirrels had to move or perish. John Koprowski mentions that the pine squirrel was known to move a few kilometers to more favorable habitat when necessary due to beetle outbreaks or wildland fires. But I noticed that some hiking trails that previously had many scolding chickarees now had large numbers of dead lodgepole with few squirrels. The woods were quiet, but not for long. I began to hear the calls and drumming of the three-toed woodpecker (*Picoides tridactylus*), formerly rare in the park. Woodpeckers were feeding on beetles; one species taking advantage of an opportunity while another had to move – a classic example of species adaptation to changing conditions. I also noticed more hairy woodpeckers (*Picoides villosus*) along the way.

In 2010, in the large ponderosa pine near the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center, I became aware of the chattering of a pine squirrel. I stopped and turned around thinking, "what are you doing down here so far from lodgepole, spruce and fir?" I had never seen pine squirrel in the more open ponderosa pines at lower elevations before.

To date, pine squirrels still are living around the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center. Is this energetic little creature competing with the squirrel normally associated with ponderosa pine, the Abert's (*Sciurus aberti*)? Did the pine squirrel move into vacant habitat, or does it co-exist with the Abert's?

I posed the question to Dr. Christy McCain from the University of Colorado who studies small mammals from the lower foothills into the park. She mentioned that she had seen a lot of pine squirrels in ponderosa pine since her move to Colorado five years ago. And while she is not sure about the distribution of the pine squirrel before the beetle outbreak, she pointed out that Armstrong's *Mammals of Colorado* states that it occurs at elevations from 1,830 to 3,660 meters along the Front Range, which includes ponderosa pine habitat. McCain also noted that she had seen pine and Abert's squirrels both in the same and adjacent trees.

Have pine squirrels permanently abandoned areas of dead lodgepole pine? I think not. Research in the park led by Dr. Monique Rocca and Dr. Bill Romme of Colorado State University documented many understory lodgepole pine not killed by the beetles, with plenty of young seedlings that

will someday become cone producing trees. And patches of mature trees that were not killed still are occupied by pine squirrels.

Also of interest here: Dr. Joe Koprowski noted that the ability of the pine squirrel to use remaining forest patches and persist through secondary succession is likely the result of their long evolutionary history of association with coniferous forests.

Will a pine squirrel born in a tree cavity in a ponderosa pine near the visitor center decide it likes its new home and stay? Will an Abert's squirrel out-compete a pine squirrel and retake occupied territory, or co-exist with its energetic cousin? While the Abert's squirrel is less boisterous than its cousin and not known to defend a territory, and, in addition, it is sporadic in distribution and given to fluctuations in abundance, the introduction of new variables creates myriad levels of



Photo: RMNA Member Gene Putney

change. So, stay observant. Take a walk in the woods. For those who like to wander, it certainly is an interesting time.

Jeff Connor is the Resources Management Specialist for Rocky Mountain National Park.



A LIZARD REVELATION AT LUMPY RIDGE

At this year's BioBlitz in Rocky Mountain National Park, National Geographic Young Explorer, Neil Losin, set off on a mission to confirm the identity of a near-mythical beast. For more than a decade, rock climbers have occasionally reported sightings of a small lizard amidst the rocky cliffs of Lumpy Ridge, but its identity remained unknown. Early on the morning on August 24, Losin set out to find the elusive creature.

Climbing up Lumpy Ridge, where some of the earlier sightings had been made, Losin brought his fishing pole, fitted with a mini-lasso, and a camera, and set out to catch some lizards. Losin's task was challenging, as the lizard is only about three inches long and perfectly camouflaged with the highly-textured, gray, brown and pink granite of Lumpy

Ridge. He was, however, successful, and on the second day of BioBlitz, Losin returned with more equipment and additional photographer colleagues to complete his study of the critters.

Determining the true identity of the mystery lizard took a little more time. With the help of herpetologists from the University of Colorado-Boulder and the University of Northern Colorado, Losin learned that, "My initial identification was correct, in one sense — *Sceloporus undulatus erythrocheilus* is the designation used for this species in the most recent field guide to the herps of Colorado." But assigning a name to the animals turned out to be a bit more complex.

According to Losin, "The taxonomy of *Sceloporus* has been revised substantially in the last 10 years, thanks mostly to the work of Adam Leache at the University of Washington. Dr. Leache's taxonomy (which is based on DNA sequences, not just morphology) places *S. u. erythrocheilus* into its own species called *Sceloporus tristichus*. Dr. Leache has confirmed that this is the most likely species in this area of Colorado. The accepted English name for

S. tristichus is plateau fence lizard (*Sceloporus tristichus*)."

The plateau fence lizard is common throughout the southern United States, ranging from Arizona east to Florida and as far north as parts of South Dakota and Pennsylvania. Although the lizard is known in the lower elevation areas of Colorado, it is considered to be a relatively new inhabitant to Rocky Mountain National Park. There is no way to know why these lizards have shown up in the park. A warming climate may have allowed the lizard to expand its range. Alternatively, a hiker, rock climber, or vehicle may have accidentally helped introduce them into the area.

Rocky Mountain National Park continues to be dynamic and exciting! Keep your senses sharp – you never know what unknown creatures may be basking in the sun or lurking in the crevices.

This article was adapted from an online article posted by Andrew Howley of National Geographic Staff in Explorers Journal on September 27, 2012. For the original post and other BioBlitz stories, go to <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/tag/bioblitz/>

Highlights of Service to Interpretive Sales Outlets

Throughout Colorado and into Wyoming, the Rocky Mountain Nature Association has been extending a helping hand, assisting as many as 54 State Park, Forest Service, BLM and U.S.G.S. visitor centers and interpretive areas with product sales to support their educational missions. For every purchase at these sites a percentage of the profits are earmarked for special projects prioritized by each public lands area. Take a tour through some projects accomplished with the help of RMNA funding:

Golden Gate Canyon State Park (\$5,477 since 2008)

Golden Gate Canyon State Park has been working with RMNA for many years. The aid money they received from RMNA sales has helped turn the visitor center into one of the most impressive in the State Parks system. Most evident is the extensive taxidermy animal collection featuring a black bear, mountain lion and 4-month-old kitten, several Great-horned owls and other birds of prey, and an adult cow elk. Their most recent acquisitions are a long-tailed weasel and a porcupine. Most of the animals are from road kill via the Colorado Parks & Wildlife Division. In addition, many other educational items have been purchased to augment their interpretive programs, including two Skins and Skulls kits, activity backpacks containing field guides, nature journals, binoculars and magnifying glasses, that are loaned out to the public, and a redesigned sew-on patch for the Junior Ranger program.



Eldorado Canyon State Park (\$13,700)

The visitor center at Eldorado Canyon State Park was built in 2001. Construction overruns required that some features of the visitor center be eliminated and the anticipated climbing wall was never built. Since then, the park has saved

RMNA aid funds from year to year to build this climbing wall and finish this final feature of the Visitor Center. The end result is a real climbing wall with bolt-on holds to change the difficulty rating. The hope is to offer additional information about “traditional” free climbing in the park in the near future.

Colorado State Forest State Park

(\$4,839) This state park produced a new Trail Guide of summer and winter recreation trails, bought a new birdseed storage shed to house the seed for their many feeders that attract an amazing assortment of local birds, and purchased a valuable painting of the Nokhu Crags hung in the visitor center.



Grand Mesa Visitor Center (\$720)

With no phone system at the site, the new laptop for the Grand Mesa Visitor Center on the Grand Mesa Scenic and Historic Byway has greatly improved communication between the Forest Service office and the visitor center, as well as with RMNA. It enables important campground and road closure information to be passed on to visitors.

Mueller State Park (\$12,000)

This State Park used aid funds for exhibit repair at the visitor center.

Eleven-mile Canyon State Park (\$750)

Check out this nice collection of endangered species taxidermy!

South Park Ranger District (\$2,213 in 2012)

Among other activities and programs, this past year the South Park Ranger District partnered up with the Boys & Girls Club of South Park and implemented the *Wish to Fish* program, an award-winning eight week program striving to provide kids with knowledge, field experience, and fun-filled days that will prepare them for a lifelong interest in areas of fisheries management and fish culture. A wide range of topics were covered, such as fish handling, electrofishing, macroinvertebrate sampling, stream ecology, water quality testing and fishing. There were four main goals to the program: to identify native and non-native fish; to increase students’ knowledge about water quality indicators; to increase students’ comfort working in group settings; and to promote a healthy and active lifestyle. Strong bonds were created between the kids - it was a very successful program.

National Historic Interpretive Trails Center (\$5,000)

The 10th Anniversary celebration August 3 - 4, 2012, at this site in Casper, Wyoming, was attended by more than thirty re-enactors from around the state and compensated, in part, with RMNA aid funds generated at the site’s RMNA book sales outlet. The pioneer camp included a trading post, snake oil salesman and military telegraph line repair crew. It featured historic period music and interpretive presentations including black powder firearms demonstrations and Dutch oven cooking lessons. The site’s Pony Express cabin is progressing through all-volunteer work sessions conducted by the National Pony Express Association Wyoming chapter members. These activities and permanent enhancements to the BLM’s interpretive programs at the Trails Center have been made possible through use of RMNA aid funds since 2005!



The American Conservation Corps: Reflections on a Summer Well Spent

by Steve Coles, American Conservation Corps manager

Each spring a new group of eager young faces fills the Field Seminar Center on the first day of training for The American Conservation Corps (ACC). From all over the country they arrive; so different yet so alike. By noon they're all wearing the same uniform, and by 8:00 a.m. the next day you'd think they had known each other since childhood.

Following two weeks of training and field work it is clear they have begun an amazing transformation. Slowly at first, then, gathering speed, the commitment to something larger than the world they've known takes place. By mid-week it is showing up in the way they walk and in their conversations. They seem stronger, visibly taller and more focused. Each one is having "the best summer of my life."

As progressively tougher field work increases in proportion to the shrinking season, something else happens. Looking at each person carefully, I see each face glowing through the dust, sweat and soot. An air of confidence grows in step with the growing list of completed trail projects. In the final week, evaluation essays release an almost seismic flow of emotions. I'm honored to be the first to read them and I'm delighted to share a couple with you here.

LET US KEEP YOU INFORMED ABOUT PROJECTS YOU SUPPORT!

We use email to keep Members and Donors informed about RMNA fundraising projects, special promotions, news, membership events, seminars and more. Drop us a line at curtis.carman@rmna.org so we can keep you in the loop! As always, we promise we won't share any personal information with anyone — ever.

Stay connected with RMNA!

"...If I have learned one thing from ACC, it is that we should take a cue from our younger selves, take a break from our complicated grown-up answers and our beautiful screens, our cars and our keyboards, our text messages and game consoles, And go play in the dirt. We should step back, and look at our choices, Use our hands, our hearts, our voices, To keep the national parks and forests, To protect the world for those born after us..."

Carol Skelton, 2012 Estes Park Crew

"The cover letter for the ACC states that crew members will spend the summer "outdoors living in the Rocky Mountains, building lifelong friendships, learning about the natural environment, networking with people in the National Park and Forest Services, and protecting and preserving Colorado's public lands." They should add that crew members will spend the summer finding themselves and developing into the person they've always wanted to be." Anna Burke, 2012 Red Feather Crew

I couldn't have said it better myself.

RMNA's Facebook community has grown to 3,600 fans.
Are you one of them?

Facebook is a fun way to stay in touch with the RMNA community. We post fun facts, news and fabulous photos! We invite you to share your park photos and stories with us. Join us today at: [facebook.com/RockyMountainNature](https://www.facebook.com/RockyMountainNature)

facebook



The Shadow Mountain crew working on a major bridge on a west side trail.

Major Projects ACC Crews Accomplished This Year

Estes Park Crew:

- ◆ Restored wheel chair accessibility at Bear Lake Trail that had been lost to erosion over the years.
- ◆ Completed construction of the Alberta Falls — Lake Haiyaha connector trail

Shadow Mountain Crew

- ◆ Constructed a major trail bridge
- ◆ Removed 885 hazard trees that blocked or prevented trail use

Rawah Wilderness Crew

- ◆ Prevented erosion by using hand saws to remove 185 wind-felled trees that blocked trails and created detours
- ◆ Restored 29 miles of trail to Forest Service standards

Red Feather Crew

- ◆ Installed 20 back country trail guide signs to identify and correct confusing and misidentified trail connections.
- ◆ Improved trail drainage in the Lyons Gulch area while evacuated from assigned areas due to the High Park wildfire.

Happy New Year!

With the New Year come new opportunities for the Rocky Mountain Nature Association. We're looking ahead to some exciting changes for 2013 that will allow us to not only follow through with our commitments to our partners, but also increase communication with our members and donors and bring a fresh look to our programs, products and services.

We're going full steam ahead with the purchase of the Johnson Property on the park's west side, with only \$180,000 left to raise (*hint, hint*)! And, we're continuing to raise funds for the Next Generation Fund to support programs and projects connecting our young people with nature. As part of this, the American Conservation Corps program will continue with four crews, working hard in the national park and forest service areas.

A new website is a top priority for RMNA this year. Moving toward greater ease of use and a smoothly integrated shopping cart system to facilitate buying books, seminars and other educational materials is our goal. We're also planning to take care of some much-needed infrastructure for RMNA, including replacing our outdated phone system, a couple computers and purchasing a new vehicle for our retail department.

With the amazing popularity of the *Journey to the Top* and *Elk Expeditions* bus tour seminars this year, we're expanding our Field Seminars bus tours to offer more tours and a new program – Grand Lake Safari! If we can, we'll purchase an additional 12-passenger van to help transport seminar participants in the park, thereby eliminating the need for so many people to use their own cars.

In addition, we're planning on the completion of a beautiful new donor wall in the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center, where memorial donors and other contributors can be recognized for their support. It will be located on the lower floor of the visitor center, at the entrance to the park auditorium.

And to cap it off, we're spearheading a new effort to increase the number of new RMNA members by 30% in 2013. Why? Because a membership with RMNA is one of the most important connections we can make with the people that love Rocky Mountain National Park – it's through membership that people not only learn about the park, but make a lasting commitment to its future. Help us out and introduce at least one friend to this circle of park supporters this year.

Charley

Best wishes for a wonderful 2013!

Colorado Gives Day a Great Success!

Wow! What a tremendous day we all had December 4, 2012, on Colorado Gives Day!

Dozens of Rocky Mountain National Park fans, some brand new to RMNA, gave a total of more than \$15,000 via the GivingFirst.org website. This is a tremendous outpouring of support for this organization and for Rocky Mountain National Park! Most of it will be directed to



the Johnson Property Acquisition (*see update below*). We had lots of fun on Facebook, too, posting little known facts about RMNA's many projects over the years, along with plenty of compelling, inspirational photos. It is always thrilling to see how much you love Rocky Mountain National Park in the work we all do together. Thank you! We hope to see you again next year!

Johnson Property Acquisition Update

The acquisition of the Johnson Property, a 3.89 acre parcel on the park's west side, remains our top fundraising priority. At this moment, more than 500 of you have donated more than \$197,000 toward the \$400,000 goal. Wow!

We are making progress, but we'll need everyone's help and contributions to be able to purchase the property for permanent protection. The seller has extended the deadline for purchase from the original October 2012 date to February of 2013. There is still time to support this project, but it is quickly running out.

Please consider making a



special donation to this rare and important project to make a lasting gift to the future of Rocky Mountain National Park, one that will benefit visitors, wildlife and habitat forever. Join the Johnson Property Acquisition team today by pitching in what you can.

Thank you!

RMNA Annual Appeal Report

We're hoping that all of you have received an invitation to support RMNA through our Annual Appeal campaign. This is the one time of year that we ask each of you to do what you can to support our work.

As of today, we have received more than 421 gifts totaling \$76,294. If you are thinking about it, there is still

time to make a gift before the end of the year to receive a tax break benefit. **Act now!**

Please give what you can to the project closest to your heart. For information on any of these projects (and others), visit www.rmna.org and click on Park Projects.



The Rocky Mountain National Park Fund

*expresses special thanks to the following
people for their donations to RMNP projects:*

September 21 - December 9, 2012

593 Gifts - Total Donations: \$100,729

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PARK PUZZLE ANSWERS



Rocky's 100th Anniversary Logo Design Unveiled

The 100th anniversary of Rocky Mountain National Park is quickly approaching! To kick off planning efforts for the year-long centennial celebration, the Rocky Mountain Nature Association and Rocky Mountain National Park have selected a 100th Anniversary Logo. During the summer, the 100th Anniversary slogan, Wilderness, Wildlife, Wonder, inspired close to 100 designs for the Rocky Mountain National Park 100th Anniversary Logo Contest. Designs

submitted from all over the country depicted aspects of Rocky Mountain National Park's rich cultural and natural history. From Native American imagery to mountain skylines, the designs submitted for the contest represented the variety of powerful images people through time have associated with Rocky Mountain National Park. The contest entries were rated by several panels including an employee committee, a community committee which included RMNA Executive Director Charley Money, and the park management team. The winning logo was designed by Carol Welker, a graphic artist based out of Dallas, Texas, with family ties to the Estes Park area (Pat Welker, her mother, is an RMNA Member and has, in fact, worked for RMNA in the past!). Her striking design will soon be available for interested

parties to use to tie their product or event to the Centennial Celebration (special rules apply). Festivities will kick off on September 4, 2014, the 99th Anniversary of the park's public dedication in Horseshoe Park. The Centennial Celebration will continue until September 4, 2015, providing ample time for communities and organizations to link existing events to the commemoration and celebrate their connection with Rocky Mountain National Park. For information on 100th Anniversary planning, or to be added to our 100th Anniversary mailing list to receive updates on planning and events, email ROMO_100th_Anniversary@nps.gov. For more information on logo use, please visit http://www.nps.gov/romo/planyourvisit/100th_anniversary.htm.



For comments or questions contact:
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Proof of life. Animals such as elk, deer, bear and porcupine eat, scratch and abuse the trunks of aspen trees on a regular basis.

Photo: RMNA Member Gary Quay, Gainesville, FL.

NATURE ASSOCIATION NOTES...

Though we shouldn't be surprised, the winds on the east side of the park seem abnormally gusty, and the temperatures quite frigid to boot, altogether coming off very much like winter....Huge herds of elk are frequently seen on both the east and west sides of the park this time of year as they hunker down in the long grasses or along the trees for the shelter they provide. Bull elk wander around in groups of 3-5, understated in their solitary wanderings, but sporting beautiful antlers for those that can discern them amidst the willow branches on which the elk browse.... RMNA Development and Outreach Manager **Julie Klett** observed what appeared to be a flock of snow geese flying high over the town of Estes Park in November....RMNA Field Seminars Manager **Rachel Balduzzi** watched a huge bighorn ram with two ewes and a couple of lambs behind the Field Seminar Center in early December. He was obviously in the throes of testosterone and feeling his oats. Weighing at least 350 pounds and sporting an impressive full curl, he makes his presence known with a lot of bush thrashing and loud bleating. When Rachel tapped on the glass of her office window the ram stared her down and bleated at her as a challenge. He spends a fair amount of time pacing the hillside, daring anything to interfere with him. At one point he walked down alongside the building on the sidewalk and posed in an aggressive stance into the wind. Sheep commonly are seen in this area from October through December and from March through May....Former Seasonal Interpretive Ranger **Don Irwin** was hiking by himself to Sky Pond several years ago, and although he did not have an early start, by the time he reached the Mills/Loch junction, he had the trail essentially to himself. As he hiked along the edge of the Loch, he began to meet hikers returning from destinations further ahead. He even entertained the thought that he might actually get to have Sky Pond all to himself! As he approached the steep section below Timberline Falls, he encountered just one more couple before the trail ahead was free of hikers. After scrambling up alongside the falls and leaving the sound of the rushing water behind him as he maneuvered around Lake of Glass, he was still by himself. All was quiet except for the scraping of his boots on the rock. He was counting himself exceedingly lucky, when, imagine his surprise then when he approached Sky Pond and looked up to see the lake surrounded by brown- and saffron-robed monks meditating in complete silence. It was both jarring and breathtaking in the same instant. The Buddhist Conference was taking place at the YMCA of the Rockies and this group had risen early to meditate in a very special spot. This vivid image will long remain in his memory....RMNA American Conservation Corps Manager **Steve Coles** reported coming upon two large bull elk that were sparring and shoving each other around in the middle of Fall River Road in late November. Then, RMNA Volunteer **Ruth Hess** heard bugling that same morning, confirming that the rut wasn't yet quite over, despite

the lateness of the season.....RMNP Resources Manager **Jeff Connor** said that some local birders reported seeing common redpolls at Lily Lake in early December. He noted that it's pretty early in the winter for redpolls. Redpolls are an arctic finch that wander south in the winter and are considered irregular to rare in Colorado, especially along the Front Range foothills. While Colorado is basking in heat and a lack of snow, up in Alaska and Canada they are having some of the coldest temperatures on record for this time of year, causing some species to move south earlier than usual. Keep your eyes peeled!.....Jeff also spotted a bobcat one morning in late October when he arrived to work in the park. The bobcat was wandering through the park utility area parking lot in the predawn light, apparently hunting for the rabbits that often hang out under the vehicles. While he never did see the bobcat in the act of catching a rabbit, he did notice that a certain rabbit he used to see scampering about was no longer around.... Also interesting (although not in the park), in late November near Jeff's house in Boulder, a black bear killed and ate a neighbor's pet goat — noteworthy because of the unusual occurrence of a black bear on the move in November....RMNA Membership Manager **Curtis Carman** saw a gaggle of wild turkeys on Old Fall River Road in early December. Smart birds, eh? Waiting to walk until after Thanksgiving....In late July, Colorado River District Systems Specialist **Debbie Mason** was out and about on west side roads when she saw a car pulled over on the side of the road. She drove past thinking elk, deer, moose, whatever. Her husband, **Tom**, noticed that there was no "whatever" about it — it was a black bear. This one was black in color (not all are black - cinnamon, brown and blonde are other color variants), and very possibly the one that had been hanging around the visitor center acting in a very un-bearly manner. This time, however, it was being (mostly) a wild bear. It approached an empty cabin, climbed up on the porch, checked the empty hummingbird feeder then moved on. It even stopped in the yard and dug something up before moving off toward the woods. In Debbie's 20 years on the west side she's only seen 2 or 3 bears, so this was very special....A New Years' wish for all: may that special sighting be yours this year!



American magpie searching for food.

Photo: RMNA Member Gene Putney
 This shot was taken in Moraine Park in late October when this colorful bird was shuffling through the snow in search of seeds or nuts, or whatever else might be lurking under there. It used its beak to push the snow from side to side (obviously!) and Gene caught it as it was off-balance, using its wings to steady itself.