

Information about Birds

While some may see it as a vacant lot, the prairie dog preserve/proposed development site at Celestial Seasonings is a thriving community of wildlife within a well-balanced ecosystem. Although this relatively small natural area seems isolated, migratory and resident birds utilize these fields on a daily basis, no matter the season.

Black-tailed Prairie Dogs are the only prey observed captured by ferruginous hawks (*Buteo regalis*) during winter in Colorado, and they are also an important food source for bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) who start nesting in the winter. Both of these majestic raptors also feed on carrion, which makes them invaluable to the community for cleaning up roadkill and keeping rotting carcasses out of our water and food supply.

In the spring, many migratory birds depend on the prairie dogs as well as the land itself. Mountain bluebirds (*Sialia currucoides*) arrive and forage the prairie dog fields for insects; western tanagers (*Piranga ludoviciana*) rest in the safety of the surrounding trees before scouting out nest sites. The Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) is a long-distance migrant, arriving from as far as Argentina to hunt for mammals and reptiles in these fields. Prairie dogs are a consistent and reliable source of food for them, and there is a pair that have a nest near the LoBo trail. One survival strategy they have adopted is to hunt a little further from their home territory, to preserve the closer prey resources for when their young fledge and learn to hunt. They have also been observed eating snakes found in the open spaces nearby. It would be unfortunate to say the least, for these hawks to have survived the perilous journey all the way from South America only to find that the habitat that they were expecting to survive on has been destroyed. Swainson's hawks are not the only bird of prey to rely on this particular preserve. A pair of great horned owls (*bubo virginianus*) nested this year in a tree just south of Celestial Seasonings, where Pioneer Road accesses the open space alongside Sleepytime Drive. The three owlets have only just fledged and the young predators will need to use these hunting grounds to learn how to find and catch prey. One of these owls can eat around 1000 mice in one year, which is a lot of free rodent control. There is also a nest of common ravens (*Corvus corax*) on the roof of the Medtronic building directly across the street from the proposed development site. They have been observed feeding prairie dog meat to their five young. If the prairie dog preserve is destroyed, these birds will have to find somewhere else to live, and there is a lot of competition nowadays as natural habitat becomes more scarce and animals are forced to adapt to human interference. Critical wildlife could be lost as a result of developing this space.

Many species of songbird come to this space in the summer to breed, as well as shorebirds such as killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) who lay their eggs directly on the ground. Common nighthawks (*Chordeiles minor*) and barn swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) use the open sky above the preserve to chase mosquitoes, moths, and other insects considered to be pests by humans.

During fall migration, many birds rely on the prairie dog preserve for their last meal before heading south for the winter. Bald and golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) can be seen from the highway, feeding on prairie dogs and rabbits, while Cooper's hawks hunt smaller birds. When flying over the city, this is an ideal spot for any bird to stop and rest for the night before carrying on. Thousands of birds could potentially use the space in some way to ensure their survival during migration season.

Overall, development of any kind on this space will contribute to the already decreasing numbers of birds and wildlife found in Boulder County. There will absolutely be a noticeable, quantifiable change to the local environment if this space is not preserved.