

## Watchable Wildlife

By Pattie Logan

For the Colorado Division of Wildlife website

It is cold and dark as I pad out on my deck in my slippers, cup full of birdseed to replenish the bottomless feeder. Dawn breaks and the first sparrow flits up on my porch rail, head swishing side to side, checking to see if the coast is clear. Within seconds 15 more appear and swarm the bird feeder. This is how I begin each day - in the company of the wild. I am not alone.



Female Mountain Bluebird

More than 66 million U.S. residents say they participated in watching wildlife in 2001, according to a new report by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Here in Colorado there are 1.2 million of us who observe, feed and photograph wildlife. That's nearly 40% of the state's residents.

Watching wildlife is one of the ways people interact with the natural world today. "Attachment to wildlife used to come through hunting and fishing a generation ago, now people are as likely to make the connection through wildlife viewing," says Bob Hernbrode of the Colorado Division of Wildlife. "More people participate in wildlife watching than hunt or fish in our state."

Wildlife watchers are split evenly between men and women and cross all levels of income and education. But there are far fewer minorities participating than whites. The USFWS report shows four percent of the Hispanic population participated, 2% of African Americans and 2% of Asians.

Watching wildlife is big business. I spend about \$250 dollars a year on birdseed, sugar and feeders for the sparrows, humming birds, woodpeckers and occasional songbirds that visit my backyard. I've spent thousands on trips to see grizzlies, manatees, wolves and raptors. My contribution is a drop in a large bucket of 38.4 billion dollars spent on watching wildlife in 2001, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report. Money was spent on hotels, binoculars, cameras, landscaping, memberships, books, magazines and big-ticket items like campers. In Colorado we add about 1.7 billion to that pot.

At home and on trips birds are the most popular wildlife to watch, followed by mammals. But insects and spiders have their fans too, especially butterflies, which are gaining in popularity. Nearly 14 million people spent time watching these smaller members of the wild kingdom, according to the report.

In backyards and beyond, watching wildlife has become a touchstone to the natural world. As another dawn breaks I replenish my feeder and await the arrival of my winged friends, knowing there are at least 66,099,999 other Americans who share the joy and wonder of connecting with wildlife.