## **American Dipper Survey Along Upper Bear Creek 2019-2020**

Larry White. March 28, 2020:

From late March through early September 2019, four Evergreen Audubon members conducted surveys of American Dippers along Upper Bear Creek as a pilot study to help determine the distribution and breeding status of this fascinating and unique aquatic songbird. This year, we're hoping to expand the surveys and are looking for folks to monitor nest sites identified last summer and search for new ones. Following is a summary of last year's findings:

## **RESULTS OF 2019 SURVEY**

Our 2019 surveys focused on locating nests along Bear Creek upstream of Evergreen Lake. Portions of this stretch of the Creek are visible from Upper Bear Creek Road. We were fortunate to receive permission from several homeowners to survey stream reaches on their properties. However, due to lack of landowners' permission, other sections of the creek between Dedisse Park and the confluence of Yankee Creek were not accessible. We also conducted brief surveys downstream of Evergreen Lake in Lair of the Bear Park where dippers are known to have nested in previous years. In January 2020, we searched for wintering dippers downstream of Evergreen in several locations. Table 1 summarizes our nesting observations along with associated dates.

A total of 6 active nest sites were found between Dedisse Park and the Singing River Ranch headquarters. Of these, two nests were successful, producing at least 4 fledglings. Three nests were apparently abandoned for unknown reasons and one had an unknown outcome, although if abandoned, disturbance from regular angler use immediately downstream of the nest site is a possible cause. A helpful clue to the presence and abundance of dippers were their droppings on stream rocks. The droppings increased in abundance near nest sites as the breeding season progressed.

Based on total observations, we estimate a minimum population size of 6-8 adult dippers and 3-4 breeding pairs upstream of the Dedisse Park bridge. There are two stream reaches with possible nest sites where dippers were frequently observed on the property edges, but any nest sites could not be reached. For a rough comparison, during the Spring Bird Count on May 21, 1994, Evergreen Audubon birders observed 4 adults in the reach between the Lake and Singing River Ranch. Two nests were located, one with 3 young, probably at the known site under the Dedisse bridge, and another nest in the reach between Skyline Road and Witter Gulch. Based on some limited surveys and anecdotal evidence, we suspect that there may be limited or no nesting at higher elevations in the watershed and an upstream movement of dippers in late summer.

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Table 1: First dates of dipper breeding observations

Location	Build	Incb	Feed	Fledge	Comments
Lair-of-the Bear Bridges	3/23				No other survey. Outcome unknown but likely successful based on previous years.
Corwina Park			5/6?		Pair visiting nest under "Wood Slot Bridge" (R. Belak) – Outcome unknown
Gardens Bridge	4/14				Nest completed then abandoned
Dedisse Bridge	4/23				No activity observed after 5/4. Heavy angler use.
UBC Rd Bridge (near #31914)	4/23				No activity observed after 4/23. Pair often seen during May further upstream.
Golden Willow Rr. Bridge	5/26	6/6	6/26		3 fledglings
Spring River House Bridge	5/30				Nest probably abandoned
Sing River Lodge Bridge	5/30		6/15	7/3	1 fledgling

Floods and heavy sedimentation are known to affect dipper nesting. Upper Bear Creek flowed above average from June 7 to August 12 but never was above bank-full, ran clear, and, I suspect, never flooded or affected nest sites. The snowpack in the headwaters of Bear Creek was about 112% of normal, but snowmelt started later and lasted longer. I never observed prolonged periods of turbid water caused by heavy runoff from monsoon rains or upstream construction in the streambed as has occurred in previous years

During January 2020, I surveyed Upper Bear Creek downstream of the Dam for wintering dippers. I counted a total of 10 dippers as summarized on Table 2. The stream upstream of the lake was almost completely frozen and covered with at least several inches of snow eliminating the possibility of finding wintering dippers.

Table 2: Results of January 2020 Survey for Wintering Dippers

Date	Stream Reach	# of Dippers
1/22-25	Golden Willow Rd up to Singing River Ranch (Frozen)	0
	Golden Willow Rd to Evergreen Lake (Frozen)	0
	Downstream of dam to Episcopal Church	0
1/23	Kittredge Park Bridge	1
	Bridge above Switchback BBQ	1
	O'Fallon Park	2
	O'Fallon Park to COld Springs	0
	Lair of the Bear Park, Parking to Little Park	1

## **OUR PLAN TO CONTINUE SURVEYS SPRING & SUMMER 2020**

If you are looking to get outside with some focused birding along with "social-distancing" you may want to "adopt a dipper nest" to monitor, or perhaps search for unknown nest sites along Bear Creek. It's very entertaining and a joy to watch dippers swimming, diving and dipping in the flowing waters. It's especially a treat to see the recently fledged young out on the spray-covered rocks waiting to get fed.

Monitoring nests would involve visiting nest sites and stealthily observing dipper activity like courtship, nest building, feeding young, and fledging. This would require one to three visits a week. We are interested in nest success and number of fledglings produced, nest abandonment, and the effects from disturbance such as flooding, heavy sedimentation and turbid waters, or heavy angler use. In addition, we plan to start looking for nests downstream of Evergreen Lake. We know of nests in Lair of the Bear Park, but because of COVID-19 concerns and heavy recreation use at the parks, we may avoid that site. After June 15, the higher elevations of the watershed could be surveyed in the Mt. Evans State Wildlife Area and adjacent National Forest (provided that those areas are open to public use).

This is a great way to get outside to enjoy nature and become acquainted with this amazing bird (as long as you keep the safe distance from folks). If you are interested in participating in the American Dipper Survey, please contact Larry White <a href="mailto:larrywhite@msn.com">larrywhite@msn.com</a>.