

White River National Forest Rosy-Finch Color Banding Project began in 2006-2007 at Snowmass, in 2011 Keystone joins the project.

Brown-capped Rosy Finches are found only in the Southern Rocky Mountains and are virtually endemic to Colorado particularly on US Forest Service lands. They don't migrate; rather they flock down to lower elevations during stormy weather, roving sometimes in groups of several hundred. Rosy finches raise their young in the alpine tundra during a narrow window of time (July 22-August 22). Their nesting habitat, like all rosy-finches, is limited to vertical cliffs and crags in the alpine tundra where they breed in loose colonies.



Brown-capped Rosy-Finch

Photo by Glenn Giroir

The Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory has ranked Brown-Capped Rosy-Finches # 2 in monitoring priority for its Monitoring Colorado Birds Program. Rosy-finches are poorly monitored by traditional point count techniques and require innovative monitoring techniques.

During the 2006-2007 winter seasons, White River National Forest biologists were invited to utilize the Snowmass bird feeder project and established a winter rosy-finch banding station to assist the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory in their monitoring effort. Bird feeders at Sam's Knob are used to lure flocks of rosy-finches. Birds banded here in Pitkin County will be outfitted with red aluminum color bands.

A licensed bird-bander outfits the rosy-finches with individually numbered aluminum Fish and Wildlife Service bands as well as color bands representing the county of capture. The public is invited to observe this process and asked to report all sightings of the color marked birds. Volunteers are on hand to interpret the banding function and process. We feel this is a great opportunity to provide an educational experience for adults and children alike while participating in much needed research with a bird species that lives almost exclusively in Colorado.

In 2011 the expanding project includes Summit County with a second rosy finch station on Keystone Mountain. Any birds banded here in Summit County, Colorado will be outfitted with green aluminum color bands.

What better way to explore the concept of climate change than in the alpine where we are already experiencing increases in temperatures. Frequencies of dust emissions in the region have already accelerated alpine snowmelt dates, potentially leading to an advance in the initiation of rosy-finch annual breeding. These changes will likely cause a shift in the distribution of rosy-finches. While it is unlikely that management directed at rosy-finches alone could lessen threats to this endemic species, they have the potential to act as catalysts for citizen involvement in addressing policy designed to mitigate the causes of global warming.