

News from the Hoodoos

Greetings From the Desk of CoBA

President

What a wonderfully warm year we've been having so far. Corral Bluffs has been accessible for hikes often. As always happens the rocks & landscape have been sculpted into its 2026 shape. If you haven't been out lately you might want to plan a hike to see what has been exposed this year. Of course, this time of year, or for that matter any time, weather is key safety factor. We have had several hikes that had to be rescheduled due to weather, but when we got out it was great to share this world class Colorado Springs asset with the groups.

As a gardener, I do know we need moisture — just loved the gentle rain we got yesterday (3 March). We'll need moisture if we're not to have another fire danger year in our region.

The eagles are nesting, the deer are getting ready for birthing season, the fern bush is leafing out, the grasses haven't started to turn green, but the prairie is awakening due to the warmth. I have flowers blooming... I try to tell them it's too early, but you know that works about as well as singing to them! (continued page 2)



Winter 2026

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- Take a hike at Corral Bluffs with Ranger Mike
- Fossil discovery of ancestor to primates
- Search for "tigers"
- 1882 coal mine

Aurora Borealis over Falcon, as viewed from the top of Corral Bluffs on November 11.
Photo ©S. Milito 2025



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One of the wonderful parts of this area is the sunsets & sunrises... maybe we should consider sharing that with a hiking group.

We have a few new hike leaders in training; to complete their training we need to get them out on hikes — schedule a CoBA lead hike for 2026. Info on how to sign up for these hikes coming soon.

BTW the Ranger hikes are coming soon...see a link to Mike's schedule on the CoBA website.

Hoping to see you out here in 2026. Remember it looks different every time of the year.

-Jax Hilaire

Ramblings from the Ranger

Hello from the field!

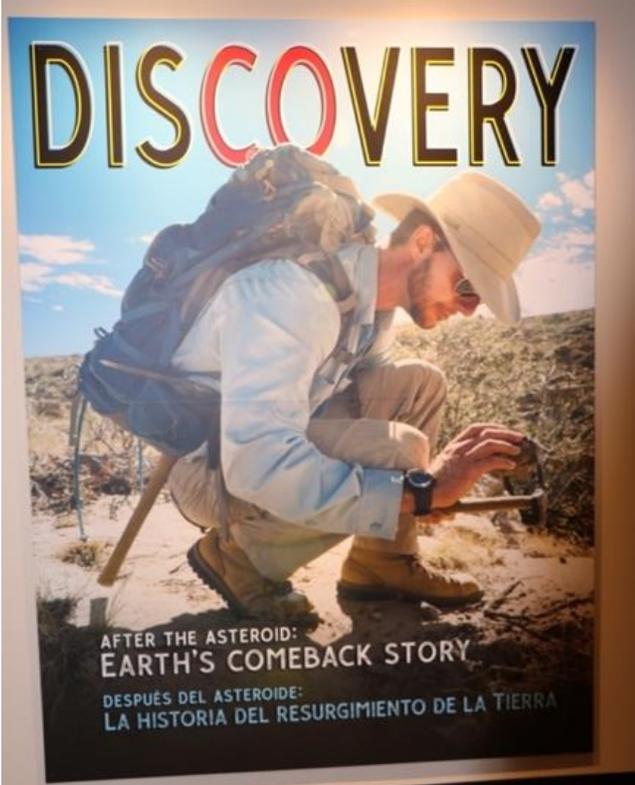
I'm excited to share that I will be leading hikes at Corral Bluffs on the First and Third Saturdays of each month through the summer and fall. On the last Saturday of each month I will lead hikes to Jimmy Camp Creek Park.

To sign up for a hike please go to the Corral Bluffs website, <https://www.corralbluffs.org/take-a-hike>

Read the information carefully and then follow the link to the City sign-up site.

I hope to see you out on the trail!

Mike



See it while you can! The Corral Bluffs exhibit, "After the Asteroid" at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science closes on April 15.

Stones and Bones

The first primates

Fitting in the palm of your hand, the tiny shrew-like mammal known as *Purgatorius*, was a prehistoric ancestor of today's primates. Fossils of the ankle bones show *Purgatorius* was a tree-dwelling animal, while fossil teeth have determined its omnivorous diet consisted of insects and berries.

Until recently, *Purgatorius* had not been found south of the badlands of Montana. After washing **four tons** of Corral Bluffs dirt to remove silt and mud in specially designed baskets at the Corral Bluffs Research Center, volunteers were able to use microscopes to pick through the clean sand and find the 2 mm long teeth. The teeth were subsequently identified by Denver Museum of Nature & Science paleontologists as belonging to *Purgatorius*. Three separate teeth have been found from Corral Bluffs to date.

In Corral Bluffs, *Purgatorius* appears at approximately 600 thousand years after the K-Pg asteroid event during which 75% of life on Earth went extinct.

Hundreds of hours of searching through sand grains by an army of volunteers equipped with microscopes and dental picks is yielding information about the smallest creatures that inhabited Corral Bluffs 66 million years ago. As is evident from the artist's reconstruction of the ecosystem in which *Purgatorius* inhabited, Corral Bluffs was a much different world at that time. Leaf fossils show the climate was subtropical, much like Florida today. Based on microfossils collected by the team, other types of mammals, crocodiles, several species of turtles, gar, lizards, and salamanders roamed the terrain along with *Purgatorius*.



Above: artist's reconstruction of *Purgatorius* in habitat. Credit: Andrey Atuchin, Denver Museum of Nature & Science.

Below: tiny molar tooth from *Purgatorius*. Photo credit: Dr Jordan Crowell, DMNS



Nature Notes

Speaking of tiny things...

The landscape and just about everything else at Corral Bluffs is subtle. It takes a close look to discover some of the truly amazing things, a few of which are Tiger Beetles, *Cicindela* spp. Most likely you will be walking along a sandy area in an arroyo or beside Jimmy Camp Creek and you'll barely see an indistinct insect run across the sand ahead of you. You won't even stop to think about it. But if you were to creep up on that seemingly insignificant bug, you would be surprised. It's a vividly colored, metallic sheened Tiger Beetle!

"*Cicindela* are alert, sun-loving tiger beetles exhibiting shorebird behavior. Run. Stop. Run. Fly a short distance if startled." So describes entomologist Eric Eaton, in the book he co-authored, *Kaufman Field Guide to Insects of North America*. Eric has participated in numerous bioblitz studies at Corral Bluffs and Jimmy Camp locations, identifying over 600 insects on the iNaturalist City Parks bioblitz observation lists. There are about 30 different species of Tiger Beetle in Colorado and 12 species have been observed at Corral Bluffs/Jimmy Camp.

According to Wikipedia, "Many tiger beetles have large bulging eyes, long slender legs, and large curved mandibles." Their legs are spiked or hairy looking. They scurry across the ground so fast that they need to stop often to allow their brains to catch up with the sensory input.

The name of this beetle comes from its aggressive tiger-like hunting techniques. Tiger Beetles are predatory insects, chasing after their prey and capturing it with their vicious mandibles. Prey include spiders, ants, flies, caterpillars and various adult insects and insect larvae. Tiger Beetles can also be preyed upon by robber flies, spiders, dragonflies and lizards.

On your next hike at Corral Bluffs, or any sandy terrain, keep your eyes on the ground. You may see a tiger!



Figure 2 Blowout Tiger Beetle



Figure 2 Festive Tiger Beetle



Figure 3 Green Claybank Tiger Beetle



Figure 4 Oblique-lined Tiger Beetle



Figure 5 Punctured Tiger Beetles



Figure 6 Tiger beetle preyed upon by spiders

All Tiger Beetle photos taken in Jimmy Camp Creek Park. ©S. Milito

Eaton, E. R., & Kaufman, K. (2007). *Kaufman Field Guide to Insects of North America*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

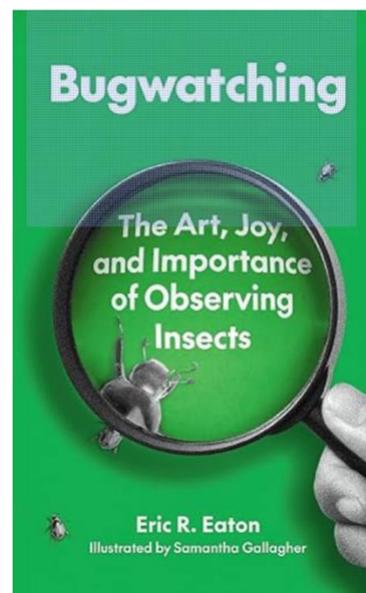
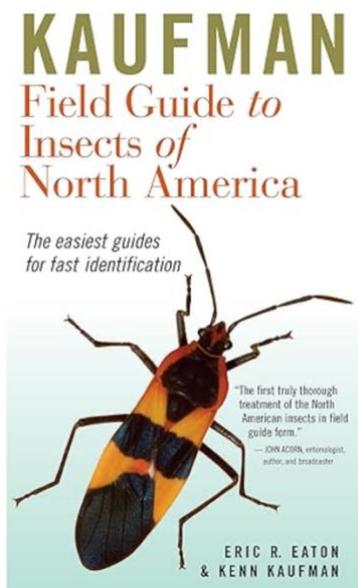
Tiger Beetle Tales.

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/news/2006/sep/071501.htm#:~:text=Tiger%20beetles%20are%20predators%20in,film%20of%20oil%20on%20water.>

Orion Magazine. Meet the beetles. <https://orionmagazine.org/article/meet-the-beetles/>

Springtime Tiger Beetles, Bug Eric. <https://bugeric.blogspot.com/2015/04/springtime-tiger-beetles.html>

Recommended Reading:



Days of Yore

Coal mining

Just across highway 94, even though it looks very much the same, the type of rock changes from the Denver Formation of Corral Bluffs to the Laramie Formation. The extinction of the dinosaurs and the age of the mammals are recorded in the Denver Formation, while the dinosaurs were very much alive during the deposition of the Laramie Formation (south side of highway 94). During that time, rivers were flowing into the Western Interior Seaway which was draining off the continent. Large swamps filled with wetland vegetation turned into layers of coal after millions of years.

In 1882, Matt France discovered coal seams only a few feet below the surface. This discovery led to the first major coal mine in the Colorado Springs region. A small town, Franceville, named after Matt France, grew around the mine. The mine operated from 1882 until 1965 when it was destroyed by flood.



In 2023 the City of Colorado Springs Trails, Open Spaces and Parks purchased 100 acres of land on Franceville Coalmine Road, just north of where Franceville and its accompanying mine were once located. A small historic coal mine known as the Clara Belle Mine is situated on this property. A four-acre, 25-foot-deep pond fills what was once part of the mining excavation project. A portion of the coal seam is still exposed.



The trees and vegetation around the pond have proven to be wildlife magnets. Mule deer, coyotes, pronghorns and 119 different bird species have been documented, including ducks, owls, hawks, warblers and sparrows.

Wild Horse Ranch is not yet open to the public, but guided hikes are arranged in May during the Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival.

Corral Bluffs Alliance Board of Directors

Jax Hilaire: President, Hike Leader

Dustin Knutson: Vice President

David Lumb: Treasurer

Sharon Milito: Secretary, Newsletter, Website, Hike Leader

Jennifer Heiny: Hike Leader

Rose DiCenso: Fund Raising, Hike Leader, Facebook page Admin

Bill Koerner

Christine Knutson



The following groups and organizations have spent extended time at Corral Bluffs

Denver Museum of Nature & Science

Smithsonian Institution

Colorado College

Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Colorado Natural Areas Program

US Fish and Wildlife Service

Aiken Audubon Society

Mile High Bug Club

Colorado Native Plant Society

Colorado Mycological Society

University of New Hampshire Earth Sciences

Corral Bluffs is a [Leave No Trace](#) site. CoBA supports the seven stewardship principals of Leave No Trace

- Plan Ahead & Prepare
- Travel on Durable Surfaces.
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find
- Minimize Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Others

