

## Field Trips

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*Continued from page 3*

### **First Creek at Denver Open Space Sunday, June 17**

**6:00 AM - 11:00 AM**

Patrick O'Driscoll

Email: patodrisk@gmail.com

Phone: 303-885-6955

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

### **Northeastern Colorado Mon, June 18 - Tues, June 19**

**4:30 AM - 7:00 PM**

David Suddjian

Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com

Phone: 831-713-8659

Trail Difficulty: Strenuous

Maximum Participants: 10

### **Genesee Park (Denver Mountain Parks) Saturday, June 23**

**6:30 AM - 11:30 AM**

Karen Drozda

Email: drozforte@aol.com

Phone: 303-388-0891

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

Maximum Participants: 11

### **Denver City Park (Denver County) Sunday, June 24**

**6:30 AM - 11:00 AM**

Patrick O'Driscoll

Email: patodrisk@gmail.com

Phone: 303-885-6955

Trail Difficulty: Easy

### **Rocky Mountain National Park (Larimer County) Sunday, June 24**

**8:00 AM - 1:30 PM**

Candice Johnson

and Mary Cay Burger

Email: candice.johnson@

childrenscolorado.org

Phone: 303-329-8131

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

Maximum Participants: 12

*Continued on page 6*

## April Program Review: Francis Commercon

*By Dave Hill*

Blending his twin passions for birding and the Mandarin Chinese language with his experiences living among the Dai people of southwestern China, Francis Commercon delighted the crowd at DFO's April 16 general meeting with stories of the human dimensions of bird conservation.

Commercon, a senior at Colorado State University and co-founder of the campus's student birding club, went to China in 2017 for his honors thesis. It was an opportunity to pursue his love of birding and fascination with language. He grew up in a household speaking both English and French, and he enjoyed the complexities of language. In sixth grade, he took a mandatory class in Mandarin Chinese and was so delighted to learn Chinese language codes that he continued to study the language.

Commercon's passion for birding began in elementary school, too. Lacking accessibility to personal electronic devices and living in an area with abundant open space, he spent much of his time exploring the natural world. His identity and evolution as a naturalist led him from Denver Audubon's beginning birding class to leading trips for DFO. Throughout his teens, Commercon participated in numerous citizen sciences projects, from bird banding and HawkWatch to the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas and bluebird box monitoring. Along the way, he developed the values of a bird conservationist.

He further refined those values by getting involved in other conservation issues. He wrote about habitat degradation at Chatfield State Park and studied the maintenance of healthy ecosystems in the Fort Collins area, where he is in college. Learning about rainforest deforestation, overhunting, and the bush meat trade in the world's most ecologically diverse habitats caused him to ponder the values underlying these human behaviors.

His honors thesis work centered on the rural village where he stayed for seven months in China's Xishuangbanna Prefecture, which is bordered by both Myanmar and Laos. The Dai culture is one of 13 ethnic minority groups in China (most Dai people are Buddhist). He told his DFO audience that they live in one of the country's most biodiverse areas, home to 37 percent of China's bird species.

Yet, they also live amid deforestation caused by expanding cultivation of natural latex for the auto industry. Although it has substantially changed the land, Commercon said the farmers seemed unconcerned about those changes and their effect on the environment. Overhunting has resulted in a 34 percent loss of the area's wildlife diversity. Commercon recalled that when he voiced his concern, a captive and mistreated owlet was given to him. But he

*Continued on page 5*

*REVIEW, continued from page 4*

also paid cash to save a hawk, a species hated by local people because it catches and eats their chickens. He later freed the bird, fearing serious repercussions if he had been seen releasing it.

Commercon said he tried to understand the local values by polling the people of his village. They told him they would be unhappy if the number of birds declined, because they regard birds as pretty creatures with pleasant songs. The village's hunters were passionate about nature and cared more about wildlife than did others in their community. He thought these hunters might perhaps serve as the seeds of a local conservation movement.

As he continued to research the factors that influenced the village's behavior, he focused on the consumption of meat, both wild and domestic. Commercon found that the local hunters ranked wild birds as safer to eat than chicken, cattle, or pork. Most villagers agreed, ranking free-living animals as the safest, tastiest, and most nutritional of all meat sources. The consensus seemed to be that wildlife tasted better and, of course, was free.

He also found that social influences favored hunting. Commercon spoke of a villager who had arrow-killed several large fish and, upon returning home, gave a feast for his friends. Every villager wanted to be his friend.

He also asked villages about whether they saw recreational value in wildlife. When he asked people if hunting was fun, he found that, even without likelihood at times of catching anything, people found the pursuit of prey and being out in the woods were what made the experience enjoyable – not unlike the way birding is enjoyable to birders like us.

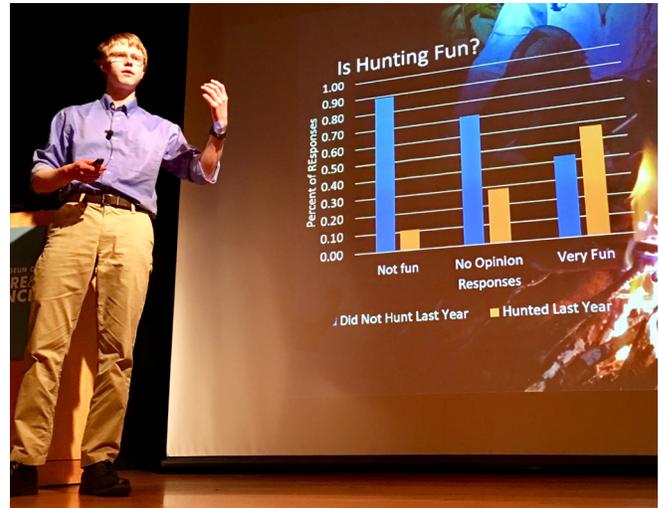
Commercon's last story was about one of the village's richest men, who was catching birds and selling them in the songbird trade. After Francis expressed his concern about one of the man's captive birds, the man drove 20 minutes away to release it. Commercon said the man obviously wanted to be his friend, and changed his behavior because of the social pressure of Francis's disapproval.

In conclusion, Francis said he found that the best way to develop pro-conservation behavior is through social pressure and social influence. Humans have a need to fit in and be a part of a social community. And, a community is needed to encourage wildlife conservation. With other village concerns, like street cleanliness, everyone helps out. They work together to improve their living conditions. The people feel pride and assume responsibility for something they own and manage. That same pride and sense of responsibility can be directed toward conservation issues.

Commercon's experience suggests communities on opposite sides of the world can be unified in their conservation values. Now, his journey continues as he completes his education and continues to explore conservation values.

[See Commercon's presentation on video at the website!](#)

Attending programs in person is the best way to enjoy the wonderful speakers that DFO gets for these monthly programs. But, if you can't make it for any reason, you will find most of our past programs over the last several years recorded on video and posted at this site.



Francis Commercon presented at the April DFO Meeting.  
Photo credit: Dave Hill