

THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

WATCHING BIRDS SINCE 1935

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Bird watching has been the primary endeavor of the Denver Field Ornithologists (DFO), originally the Colorado Bird Club (CBC), since its inception in March of 1935 (Finch, 2002). To facilitate the formation of the Colorado Field Ornithologists that would cover all of Colorado, the Board met and voted March 18, 1964 to change the "Colorado Bird Club" name to "Denver Field Ornithologists" (Colorado Bird Notes, 1964). This premier Colorado birding organization has been in continuous existence for 68 years, and has always been associated with the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (previously the Denver Museum of Natural History). The Museum's support and DFO involvement in their Bird Exhibit and Colorado bird collections has been mutually beneficial. Many DFO members over the years have volunteered at the Museum (Echelmeyer et al, 2003). From 1961, and perhaps as early as 1957 and as late as 1964, the Colorado Bird Club was affiliated with the National Audubon Society, but never as an Audubon Chapter. In 1965, the Denver Field Ornithologists was offered Chapter status, but DFO members voted to follow its original bird watching mission and not the broader mission of the Audubon Society.

The mission of DFO as defined in the present bylaws is identical to that in the original bylaws published in 1943 (Colorado Bird Club, 1943) as stated in the DFO *Mission Statement*: "The Denver Field Ornithologists' objective is to promote interest in the study and preservation of birds and their habitats and to support local and national organizations to protect birds and their habitats". This mission is carried out primarily through regularly scheduled field trips to identify and count bird species in birding areas mainly in eastern Colorado and to publish these records in *The Lark Bunting*.

Regular DFO monthly meetings are held in the VIP room at the Museum the first Wednesday of the month, September through May, except for December. The meetings consist of informal birding fellowship and book sales beginning at 7 pm and followed by the formal program at 7:30 pm. Member and guest speakers present timely talks on wide-ranging topics, mainly about Colorado birding, that make the programs popular and well attended. Meetings are open to the public.

DFO has four officers - President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary - each elected for a one-year term. The Vice President has the special duty of arranging the monthly programs. The Past President may serve as an ex-officio officer. The officers are assisted by six Board Directors, two elected each year to serve for three years. Executive meetings of the Board are held generally in April and November. The Board appoints the

Lark Bunting Editor, Field Trip Schedulers, Historian, Colorado Rare Bird Alert Coordinators, and Book Store Operator.

Field Trips

In the early years of the Club, half-day field trips were held from April to November on Saturday, starting at noon because most people worked Saturday morning (44-hour week), but trips were taken all day on Sunday. Since 1965, the field trips have been held each Saturday and Sunday throughout the year, except for the latter half of December when Christmas Bird Counts take place; some three-day trips are scheduled on long weekends. In most years, about 100 regular field trips are scheduled. In the typical year 2001, 57 volunteer leaders led 95 field trips on 104 days of birding, observing 280 species, birding 1,048 hours, driving 7,800 miles, and walking some 350 miles (Schofield 2002). This normal birding year was carried out in 64 different birding spots in Colorado and three in Wyoming. In addition, DFO conducts the annual Denver Christmas Bird Count as well as the spring and fall counts to Barr Lake State Park, Barr Lake periphery, Castlewood Canyon State Park, Chatfield State Park, Cherry Creek State Park, Rocky Mountain Arsenal, and Waterton Canyon. The field trips are mainly east of the Continental Divide from mountain tundra to foothills and to the high plains habitats ranging north to south from Wyoming to New Mexico in Colorado and occasional ones on mesas and valleys on the western slope, and in Nebraska, Kansas, and Wyoming. Several West Slope trips are popular. The number of birds for each identified species in each of the trip areas are recorded and reported in *The Lark Bunting*. Over the years, this has developed into a very large important published Colorado bird database, and recently the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory has computerized it. All DFO field trips are open to the public free of charge; it is a great opportunity to learn about birds and bird watching and to meet friendly, helpful birders.

Christmas Bird Counts

DFO, and its predecessor the Colorado Bird Club, have participated in the National Audubon Society's annual Christmas Bird Count at least since 1951 (Colorado Bird Club, 1951-1952). An earlier Jefferson County count was carried out in 1937 (National Association of Audubon Societies, 1938). The annual Denver Christmas Bird Count (DCBC) has been conducted in the present count circle since 1954 (Schottler, 2003). The center of the Denver count circle is located just east of I-470 and about a half-mile north of Ken Caryl Road in Jefferson County, and it encompasses a variety of habitats from plains to foothills, including Chatfield State Park, Marston and McLellan Reservoirs, several miles of the South Platte River, Red Rocks, North Turkey Creek, and Mt. Falcon Park. The results of the DCBC are published in *The Lark Bunting*. The 2003 DCBC will celebrate its 50th year in the same count circle.

The Denver Urban Christmas Bird Count (DUCBC) began in 1988-89 and is sponsored by the Audubon Society of Greater Denver, and DFO is a major participant. The center of the DUCBC circle is near 12th and Dayton Streets in Aurora north and east of the DCBC. The count area includes a ten-mile section of the South Platte River, Cherry

Creek State Park, the south half of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, and Lowry Airbase. The results are published in *The Lark Bunting*.

The Idaho Springs Christmas Bird Count was started in 1951 by the Colorado Bird Club (Colorado Bird Notes, 1953) and continued by DFO. The center of the count circle was the junction of U.S. 6 and 40; it included Idaho Springs at its east edge and Echo Lake, Silver Plume, Berthoud Pass, James Peak, and Central City around the circumference. It became increasingly difficult for DFO to count the circle, and in 1969, the Evergreen Naturalists took it over and changed the name to Evergreen/Idaho Springs Bird Count. The center of its circle was moved easterly to include Evergreen but not to intersect the Denver circle. The results of this count are not published in *The Lark Bunting*.

The Lark Bunting

In the early days of the Colorado Bird Club, yearly summaries of the Club's activities were published giving the lists of officers, members, field trips, and periodicals in their library located at the Denver Museum of Natural History. In October 1953, the yearbook was replaced by *Colorado Bird Notes*, Bulletin of the Colorado Bird Club, volume 1, number 1. In October 1965, DFO began publishing the "Monthly Report of Field Observations of the Denver Field Ornithologists", volume 1, number 1, replacing the *Colorado Bird Notes*, which DFO continued to publish intermittently until mid-1967. The new report gave for the first time the results of the previous month's Colorado field trips that included lists of bird species and the numbers of individual birds observed, the names of leader and observers, distances driven and walked, and weather. This format follows one promoted by Jack Reddall (Reddall, 1991; Echelmeyer et al, 2003). The first use of the name *The Lark Bunting* was in volume 7, number 3, December 1971: *The Lark Bunting*, Monthly Report of Field Observations of the Denver Field Ornithologists. *The Lark Bunting* regularly contains an announcement of the program for the next month's meeting, the schedule of trips for the next month, a brief summary including names of observers for the previous month's trips, and a table showing the species names and number of birds recorded. These data form a valuable, very large published database. The table also shows the results of the weekly trips of the "Tuesday Birders", a new popular informal group made up mainly of retired folks. In recent years, a table showing additional reported sightings has been included. Copies of *The Lark Bunting* are available in the library of the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. The present editor is Veronica Holt veronica.holt@att.net.

Colorado Rare Bird Alert

The statewide Colorado Rare Bird Alert sponsored by DFO, and since 2002 cosponsored by Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, was established in 1983 to replace the existing telephone tree. The DFO/RBA is one of the best, if not the best, in the country because it is updated regularly, often daily, especially during migration seasons and for particularly rare species as soon as possible. The phone number and access to the alert to report sightings is 303 659-8750; the RBA Coordinator will update if warranted. Membership in DFO supports the DFO/RBA.

Ptarmigan Award

The Ptarmigan Award is presented to DFO members selected for their outstanding service to the Denver Field Ornithologists and to the study of birds in Colorado. The Award was initiated in 1988 to recognize Ruth Wheeler, the only living 1935 Charter member of the Club, and to Thompson Marsh, prominent Denver birder and leader of DFO field trips. The Award consists of a framed certificate and a framed photo taken by Duane Nelson of a pair of White-tailed Ptarmigan in a winter scene on Guanella Pass. Subsequent recipients of the award are Jack Reddall, Harold Holt, Hugh and Urling Kingery, Robert Andrews, Robert Righter, Patty Echelmeyer, Robert Spencer, Duane Nelson, Catherine Hurlbutt, Lynn Willcockson, Warren Finch, Glenn Hageman, and Karleen Schofield.

Education Endowment Fund

In September 1994, the Education Endowment Fund was established in the will of artist and DFO member Mary Hope Robinson, who left \$15,200 to the Denver Field Ornithologists for that purpose. Since then memorial and member contributions have been added to the Fund; receipts to the Fund have totaled over \$24,000 through 2002. Accumulated yearly interest since 1994 totals more than \$7,000, which has been dispersed for grants to various organizations and individuals for educational bird projects (Hageman, 2002). The fund contributed to the publication of the Birds of Barr Lake and surrounding areas (Andrews et al, 2002). Grant proposals must be made to the CFO Treasurer by January 31 of each year and the awards are announced in May. Personal contributions to the fund may be made by check to DFO designated for the fund and sent to the Treasurer, Glenn Hageman.

Membership

Membership in DFO supports bird watching as an active sport and the various activities of DFO, such as monthly meetings, field trips, DCBCs, RBA, and the Educational Endowment Fund. Members receive the monthly *The Lark Bunting*. At the end of 2002, there were 393 members. Regular family membership dues are \$20 and student membership (age 18 and younger) is \$5. A Membership Application Form is in *The Lark Bunting* and on the DFO website: <http://www.dfobirders.org>. Fill out the form and include a check made out to DFO and send to the Treasurer, Glenn Hageman, 448 South Leyden Street, Denver, CO 80224-1249. He may also be contacted by phone 303 322-6589 and email hageman1650@earthlink.net.

In April 2002, the DFO Board voted to form a twinning relationship with the Angus and Dundee Bird Club in Montrose Basin on the east coast of Scotland, website: <http://angusbirding.homestead.com/ADBC.html>. This will provide both DFO and ADBC opportunities to exchange educational birding experiences (Holt, 2002) - and when you go to Scotland, the opportunity to go on one of their field trips.

Invitation

Birders of Colorado, especially in northeastern Colorado, are invited to join, support, and take part in the Denver Field Ornithologists activities. DFO has become an important part of Colorado birding to enjoy, learn more about bird beauty and songs, explore new places to bird, share our birding interests, meet old and new birding friends, and most importantly to benefit the birds.

The detailed reviews of an early draft of the manuscript as well as later correspondence by Patty Echelmeyer, Hugh Kingery, and Dick Schottler were especially helpful in making the report more readable, complete, and accurate, as were specific comments by Glenn Hageman, Toni Rautus, and Robert Righter.

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