



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 06 | JUNE 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

COLORADO BIRDING

Grouching in Gunnison
Is *Sisk-a-dee*-lightful

PAGE 14

FROM THE (NEW) PRESIDENT

DFO makes room for
the many ways we bird

PAGE 5

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Spring migration color from
DFO artist Joe's palette

PAGE 23

DFO NEWS NOTES

Update: Bye-bye birding
as we know it at Chico

PAGE 7

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Lazuli Bunting
Joe Chen



Joe Chen learned Chinese ink painting in middle school

but didn't take up birding until after college in his native Taiwan. A project design engineer in the computer field, he moved to Denver in 1999 and joined DFO in 2018.

ON THE COVER

Lazuli Bunting: However you say it, heavenly blue under western skies

Let's dispense with that pesky pronunciation business first: How do YOU say the name of the bird on the cover of this month's newsletter?

LAHZ-oo-lye Bunting? Luh-ZOO-lee? LAZZ-oo-lye? LAHZ-oo-lee? You can find pronouncer sound clips online for those and yet other ways to say it if you look hard enough. Me, I'd prefer to see one again, and soon. Such a beauty. eBird says I've seen Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*) 31 times in the past decade, the most recent late last August in — get this — my own east-central Denver backyard, two doors down from . . . busy East Colfax? A shocker for sure. He must've seen the feeder; there's no brush, weeds, or nearby stream to mimic the semiarid habitat that Lazulis prefer. But of course, in migration anything's possible.

And now we're in the thick of migration once more, so be on the lookout. Wanting some spring color for the newsletter cover after our long, gray winter, we asked DFO member and bird artist extraordinaire **Joe Chen** to paint us a striking seasonal visitor for this issue of *The Lark Bunting*. Joe tells us this was a "lifer" species on his first field trip after joining DFO in 2018: "I was amazed by its vibrant color."

The species is named for [lapis lazuli](#), a semiprecious gemstone prized for its rich blueness. "Lazuli" derives from words for "heavenly" or "sky," a fine description for the dazzling hue displayed by this and all other *Passerina* bunting males. (The Lazuli female, alas, is buffy brown, though thin whitish wingbars set her apart from her other drab bunting sisters.) The species' melodic scientific name, *Passerina amoena*, is Latin for "nice sparrow" or "pleasant sparrow." Although a finch and not a sparrow, the bird IS nice and pleasant on the eyes.

Uncommon east of the Front Range, this western beauty winters in Mexico and summers west of us all the way up into the borderlands of British Columbia. In western Colorado, Lazuli Buntings will breed in brushy surroundings as high up as 10,000 feet, favoring scrubby patches, thickets along streams, even pinyon-juniper woodlands and sagebrush steppes. Fun fact: *Birds of the World* says the males are tireless singers that compose their own breeding-ground songs, mixing syllables and borrowing riffs from others to create new and individual tunes.

The one I saw at my feeders last August exhibited another unique Lazuli characteristic noted in *Birds of the World*: the beginnings of a patchy, "prebasic" molt, with smudges of his rust-orange breast coloration on his blue head and back. Presumably, he was southbound for one of two molting "hotspots" in southern AZ-NM and northern Sonora, MX to finish feather shedding and replacement before continuing on to winter in western Mexico.

Although Lazuli Bunting rates "Species of Least Concern" status nationally, some populations are in serious decline, including in Colorado's Southern Rockies region. One likely reason: Increasing populations of Brown-headed Cowbirds in some areas have severely hammered the buntings' success at fledging young because of the cowbirds' rampant brood-parasite egg-laying in Lazuli nests.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Lazuli Bunting: However you say it, heavenly blue under western skies
- 5 From the President**
DFO's new birder-in-chief:
How do we love birding? Let us count the ways
- 7 DFO News Notes**
- 10 Monthly Programs**
- 11 DFO News**
Members re-elect and add new DFO leaders in April vote
- 12 Hawk Watch**
Wind-whipped wildfire tests Hawk Watch
- 14 Field Trips**
Sisk-a-dee-lightful: A pre-dawn date with our own Gunnison Sage-Grouse
- 19 Conservation**
Bird flu update: Daunting test for Colorado rehabbers
- 22 Last Look, Last Word**
Brush, stroke, and hue: Spring's colorful palette on the wing . . . and the page

The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

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Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Wednesday, May 31



**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

DFO's new birder-in-chief: How do we love birding? Let us count the ways

Sharon Tinianow

Hello, DFO! I hope you are enjoying spring birding wherever you are. As I step in as president for our truly remarkable organization, I'm thinking about the ways we are birders, and how we complement one another. There may be nearly as many ways to be a birder as there are birds, but for openers, let's talk today about three.

From time to time, I've birded in the company of people who know not just the number of species on their life list, but also how many they've seen this year AND on the field trip we're on at that very moment. Some plan their travels largely around what birds they can add to their lists. We know them (some of us ARE them) as "listers," right? Very organized and methodical, listers taught me how to use eBird's "explore" feature, an invaluable tool to find good places to see birds whenever I'm away from home.

Other times, I've birded among folks who seem to enjoy the other birders as much as the birds we see. Chatting in the field as birders do, their wide-ranging conversation doesn't stop with the birding information we share. It is obvious they are also forming friendships that reach beyond the birds. Partly by being in the company of "social birders," I have found new friends myself.

Me? I think I belong to a still another broad group — call us "casual birders." I don't keep or update a life list, but I know which birds I have seen, and when I see a new "lifer." I don't chase rarities, either, though if I happen to be in a place where a rare bird has been reported, I'll certainly look for it. Visiting somewhere new, I do not arrive with a "target species" list of what I hope to see. When birder friends from Ohio came to visit us in Denver, we took them birding in the foothills. One of them asked about the target birds for the day. My casual-birder reply: "Whoever shows up."

The great thing about Denver Field Ornithologists is that our club has room for every kind of birder. Life lister, year lister, county lister? Good for you! Social birder at home in

the group? Welcome! Here to learn how to identify more birds? Folks on our trips are there to help. Or, like me, open to whatever presents itself on a birding outing? We'll walk together and help each other take in the many benefits of time spent in nature.



Tinianow at a DFO event
Patrick O'Driscoll

Besides, I'm betting none of us is just one kind of birder or other. I may be casual overall, but I am also a patch birder, visiting south-central Denver's Washington Park at least once a week through the year, *always* with binoculars. Yes, very focused, but enjoying the seasonal progressions of waterfowl and songbirds. I celebrate the spring return of Black-crowned Night-Herons and Snowy Egrets to the island in Grasmere Lake. I look for the Bald Eagle who visits Smith Lake every winter. (It may or may not be the same bird, but it's almost always there sometime each winter.) I listen for the calls of the Say's Phoebe and other songbirds stopping over during migration. Knowing this one place so deeply, enhances my connection to it.

Continued on page 6



DFO field trippers in 2019
Patrick O'Driscoll

FROM THE PRESIDENT *cont from page 5*

And like many, if not most birders I know, I'm birding all the time, wherever I go — including my own backyard. (Sound familiar?) The sight of very common species still delights me as much as a glimpse of a rarity does. I enjoy the chatter of House Finches and the acrobatics of Black-capped Chickadees at the backyard feeders. It's a red-letter day in my book whenever an American Goldfinch shows up. The first time I hear the song of a Spotted Towhee in spring? Why yes, I DO celebrate.

But the rewards of my “casual” birding aren't just the things with feathers. When I'm out birding, nature shows me more: the plants (particularly wildflowers in bloom), the mammals we come across occasionally, the insects that show up. Once while birding, I encountered a woman foraging for boletes, the earthy mushrooms of early summer. Now I look for fungi, too, though I am neither bold enough nor knowledgeable enough to harvest them yet. But on birding trips now, I am often lagging toward the rear because so much else captures my attention.

That includes the scenery. I am awestruck by the Mountain West — the Western Slope's aspen forests, Mesa Verde's dry scrublands, eastern Colorado's prairie grasslands. It's the same in the landscapes outside and beyond our state. Our planet's diversity of life and variety of landforms simply astonish me.

Does all this make me a generalist, maybe a nature nerd? I don't know, but within my first 15 minutes inside any natural area or space, I tend to breathe a deep sigh that says: *I'm home*. Birding in this multifaceted way restores me. And in DFO, I am pleased to find other people who feel the same way.

Some years ago, I attended a day-long birding workshop in Ohio that ended with a bird walk. When we returned to the parking lot, the leader said something like, “Could there be anything better than being in this place with all of you, who appreciate its beauty so completely?” That is how I feel at the end of any birding trip, every birding trip.

I wish the same for all of you. So let's get out there. Happy birding, one and all!

Sharon Tinianow, who joined DFO in 2016, was elected club president in April 2023. A former editor of *The Lark Bunting*, she began birding in an ornithology class in college. Sharon retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.



UPDATE: BYE-BYE BIRDING AS WE KNOW IT AT CHICO BASIN RANCH

As outlined in our article in the [April issue of *The Lark Bunting*](#), the future of unfettered, go-when-you-like birding at state-owned Chico Basin Ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties is virtually dead after 2024, given the Colorado State Land Board's hardline stance on access for non-ranching uses. Unsettled, however, is just how onerous the state's new limits on birding will be in 2025 and beyond. The board's staff and representatives of Aiken Audubon, the Colorado Springs chapter of National Audubon, are closer to terms on a restrictive birding lease but are still talking on thorny particulars.

The 86,000-acre ranch is one of Colorado's richest locales for birds (more than 350 species recorded) and a popular DFO field trip destination. For more than two decades, it has been

leased by [Ranchlands](#), an eco-friendly livestock operator whose no-hassle, open-gate policy welcomes birders year-round.

But once that lease expires at the end of 2024, the land board will exert complete control over non-ranch activities. Already, the state is expected to restrict birder access to no more than 10 weeks total a year in overly narrow windows of spring and fall migration, with an unreasonable 20-birder daily quota and an absurd mornings-only time limit before birders must leave the property.

Last month, the [land board website](#) indicated a "request for proposals" (RFP) for prospective ranching lessees (including Ranchlands) was "coming soon." As this issue of *The Lark Bunting* prepared to publish, that RFP was imminent. The board seeks "competitive proposals" for up to five 10-year leases not just for ranching but also "recreation" (including birding) and "hospitality" (guest ranch tourism). It says it will accept bids through July 27. The board has said interested applicants can bid on any and up to "all five lease offerings." That latter option superficially resembles the current single-lessee arrangement with Ranchlands, but the planned constraints on birding are light-years away from current practice.

"I presume we'll have a birding contract before summer," said **Linda Hodges**, conservation chair and negotiator for Aiken Audubon. "But I have no info about what 2025 will look like." Stay tuned for more downbeat updates.

DFO'S FIRST VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DAY JUNE 4 @ ROCKY MOUNTAIN ARSENAL

Since our organization launched in 1935 as the Colorado Bird Club, Denver Field Ornithologists has been blessed with dedicated volunteers who have kept our enterprise going and growing. In the 88 years since then, much has changed — and our volunteers continue to keep us innovating and improving for our members. So, on the morning of **Sunday, June 4**, DFO will host its first **Volunteer Appreciation Day** at the visitor center of Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

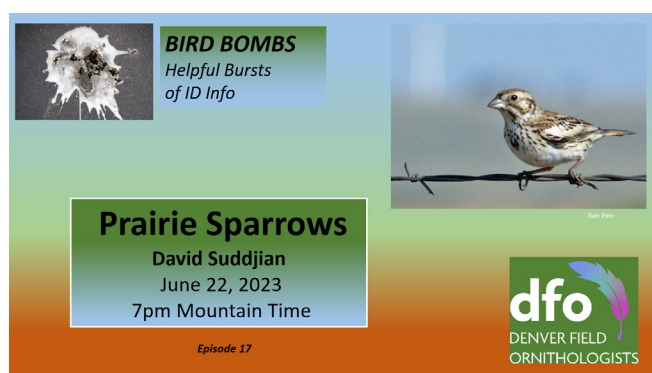
The event begins at 8:30 a.m. MDT with DFO member-attendees treated to breakfast snack bags and coffee in the visitor center, with the appreciation program at 9 a.m. After that is a 10 a.m. owl program by [Nature's Educators](#), Colorado's own wildlife education outreach organization, featuring an array of awesome birds.

Continued on page 8

This free event is limited to active DFO members, but you must register. Visit the DFO [Better Birding Workshops page](#) to do so. Come help us celebrate the volunteers (perhaps including YOU?) who make DFO such a tremendous birding organization.

LITTLE SPARROWS ON THE PRAIRIE? BIRD BOMBS AWAY!

DFO's popular BIRD BOMBS series of bird ID mini-webinars via Zoom starts the summer with "Prairie Sparrows" on **Thursday, June 22, at 7 p.m. MDT**. This session will focus on identification of Colorado's grassland sparrow species. [Click here to register](#) for a detail-packed half-hour with BIRD BOMBs creator and DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian**, with time for Q&A afterwards.



DFO AWARDS GRANTS TO FIVE FOR SCIENCE, EDUCATION

Five avian research projects ranging from a population study of colonial nesters at Wheat Ridge's Tabor Lake to the effect of habitat quality on Flammulated Owl fitness in Colorado's Pike National Forest have won 2023 grants totaling about \$9,100 from DFO's Research, Education & Conservation Grant Fund. The grantees include three graduate students conducting separate bird-related research at the University of Colorado Boulder, another student researcher from Colorado College in Colorado Springs, and an environmental interpreter from the City of Wheat Ridge.

On recommendation from the club's Grants Committee, the DFO Board voted unanimously in February to approve the grants. The grantees and their affiliations, project titles and grant amounts include:

- **Jack Doneika**, Colorado College, [Estimating the effect of habitat quality on gene flow genetic diversity and fitness in Flammulated Owls](#), \$2,000
- **Susan Bennett**, City of Wheat Ridge, [Tabor Lake Bird Population Study](#), \$1,600
- **Sara Garcia**, University of Colorado Boulder, [Assessing Environmental Heterogeneity Among Barn Swallow Nesting Sites](#), \$2,000
- **Ajay Patel**, CU Boulder, [Exploring the geographic consistency of the genetic basis of spatial cognition in mountain chickadees](#), \$1,500
- **Haley Kenyon**, CU Boulder, [The effects of color pattern differences on between-species aggressive interactions in a Colorado Front Range avian hybrid zone](#), \$1,950

The grants, awarded since 1994, assist Colorado scientists, educators and others with projects in three areas: education in the knowledge of birds, research in ornithology, and conservation of birds and their habitat.

CFO'S MAY 20 BIRDING CHALLENGE BACKS PINYON JAY RESEARCH

There's still time to register your team for a competitive day of birding at the peak of spring migration for an important bird conservation cause. On May 20, the Colorado Field Ornithologists' Colorado Birding Challenge sends out teams of 2-4 birders across numerous Colorado counties to tally the most species in a day. This year's challenge already is underway with an expanded format for participants who can't join in on the official count day because of other commitments. **Chuck Hundertmark**, vice president of CFO, says they can enter as "non-competitive" teams and do their big day of birding on any day in May. And in this case, "team" includes solo birders.

Competitive or not, all participants are asked to solicit donations or per-species pledges of financial support. Beneficiary this year is research to find and protect Pinyon Jay breeding colonies and vital surrounding habitat to identify them as critical for the species long-term survival. The population of this iconic species of the Intermountain West's pinyon-juniper forests has plunged since the mid-1960s, an estimated 85 percent loss.

Continued on page 9



The county-based challenge aims to collect birding data on the same date for as many of or all of Colorado's 64 counties. Since some counties have more bird species than others, CFO has created a handicapping system to set "par" levels for each county that equalize the competition. Visit CFO's [Colorado Birding Challenge webpage](#) for details and registration.

DFO SETS NEW HIGH FOR FIELD TRIPS IN A MONTH

This spring, our club led an April shower of 31 field trips, the most outings ever in a single month. DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian** reports that 24 of the month's 30 days had at least one field trip, and some days had 3-4. The eBird monthly statistical report that Suddjian generated for DFO in April shows trip leaders submitted 187 checklists from 15 Colorado counties. Those checklists covered a combined 168 avian species. The February performance topped a previous high of 30 field trips and 162 species last October. "We could have had even more trips, but weather got in the way a few times," Suddjian noted in announcing the new milestone. "Thank you to our fine field leaders who made it possible. Eighteen different DFO leaders led trips in April 2023." [Click here for an eBird trip report](#) with the results of all those April outings.



FRIENDS OF MARILYN RHODES CELEBRATE HER LIFE JUNE 25

Last November, master birder, Audubon field trip leader and DFO member **Marilyn Rhodes** of Evergreen died unexpectedly. Seven months later, Marilyn's friends plan a bird-centered celebration of her life at **Genesee Mountain Park** on **Sunday, June 25**. The tentative schedule begins at 9 a.m. with a bird walk to the top of the mountain, followed at 11 a.m. by a program of speakers, a eulogy and audience reflections and memories. A potluck picnic lunch follows at noon, and music and storytelling will begin at 1 p.m. At the time of her death, Rhodes was active in both Denver and Evergreen Audubon. She described herself on her Twitter page as "Wildlife lover/advocate, environmentalist, photographer, gardener, politics/news junkie, Hillary supporter, (and) retired lady of leisure with 4 dogs and 2 cats."

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's March, April programs

The DFO website contains a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring lecture programs on the Zoom platform. If you could not “attend” our most recent programs live, click the links below to view them as originally delivered.



zoom

Thanks to DFO historian **Kris Haglund** for curating and posting the program videos on the DFO website on the [Past Programs](#) page.



MARCH 27

How Historical Redlining Led Denver's Cooper's Hawks to Live Where They Do

Alyssa Davidge

WATCH ONLINE

Ally Davidge, a graduate assistant in the University of Colorado Denver's Department of Integrative Biology, discussed her research into an intriguing subject: How racially discriminatory human practices within city neighborhood development in the 20th century led more of Denver's increasingly urbanizing Cooper's Hawks to occupy “the best neighborhoods” and fewer hawks to live and hunt in declining ones. As a forest species, Cooper's favors “large tracts of land that contain good quality trees. This is where they like to live, even in cities,” Davidge told her Zoom audience of about 75 viewers. Neighborhood choice and preference “matters for people, of course, but it also matters for Cooper's Hawks.”



APRIL 24

Birdsong and Habitats: Updates from DFO-funded Avian Research

Olivia Taylor (L) and Leah Crenshaw

WATCH ONLINE

Recipients of grants from DFO's [Research, Education and Conservation Fund](#) are asked to report back in person or in writing to the DFO membership the following year about how their projects went. Each April, oral presenters can fulfill that duty at that month's evening program session. At the April 2023 program meeting, two of the 2022 awardees did so via Zoom to an audience of about 30 viewers: **Leah Crenshaw**, a master's thesis student in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, and **Olivia Taylor**, an undergraduate student in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Crenshaw's research project, “Analyzing grassland bird song and success at a landscape level: The impact of landscape characteristics on Western Meadowlarks,” explored how landscape changes in Colorado's Pawnee National Grasslands may affect birdsong and individual fitness among Western Meadowlarks there.

Taylor's research project, “Character displacement of Mountain Chickadee song where they co-occur with Black-capped Chickadees,” focused on whether and how geographic isolation in chickadee populations influences evolution of birdsong. Her study area was the canyons above Boulder and the CU campus.

Members re-elect and add new DFO leaders in April vote

Patrick O'Driscoll

Denver Field Ornithologists has a new president: **Sharon Tinianow**, a 7-year member of the club and DFO vice president since 2021. She was elected in April in the annual membership vote online for officers and board members. Tinianow succeeds **Susan Blansett**, who served two years each as president (2021-23) and vice president (2019-21).

Two other previous DFO officers also were elected: Secretary **Nate Bond**, who had been appointed in 2022 on an interim basis, and Treasurer **Kathy Holland**, a 2021 appointee who was first elected last year. All three will serve 1-year terms, with the option of running again next year and beyond.

Also elected were several members of the club's governing body, the DFO Board of Directors. They include **Cyndy Johnson**, appointed an interim board member earlier this year and also chair of DFO's Membership Committee; **Roger Koester**, board member since 2020 and chair of the DFO Finance Committee; **Janet Peters**, chair of the DFO Hawk Watch Committee and a first-time board member; **Courtney Rella**, also a first-time board member and a volunteer elsewhere in raptor education, seasonal bird monitoring and wildland restoration; and **Bill Turner**, a longtime board member and DFO's manager of monthly programs. Board members serve 3-year terms and also can be re-elected.

Tinianow, a Denver resident, has served in several roles since joining DFO in 2016. Among various projects during her vice presidency, Sharon led task forces to revise DFO's Policies & Procedures manual and to create the

club's new "feather" logo. She also served as chair of the Communications & Outreach Committee and acting chair of the club's Conservation and Better Birding Skills committees. Sharon also was editor of this newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*, for three years (June 2017-March 2020). She first became a birder when she took an ornithology course as an undergrad at Kent State University in Ohio. She moved to Denver in 2012 and is now retired from the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History.

A total of 148 members cast ballots. The 2023 election results do not include a new vice president, as no one volunteered to serve in that post. If a prospective candidate does come forward or is recruited sometime soon, the DFO Board can appoint an interim vice president to serve until the next election in April 2024.

All DFO members in good standing are eligible to serve in these club leadership positions, as well as on DFO committees and in other volunteer roles. If contributing some of your time, energy and ideas to DFO interests you, visit the "[VOLUNTEER TODAY](#)" page on the club website. You can check off or indicate what tasks or roles interest you, and you'll be contacted by a DFO representative to discuss further.





HAWK WATCH

Wind-whipped wildfire tests Hawk Watch

Mike Fernandez

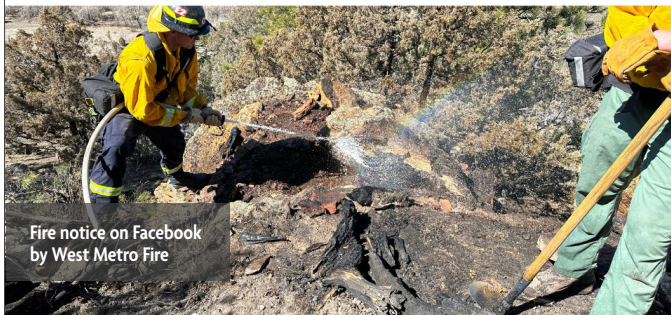
Just four weeks into the 2023 spring DFO Hawk Watch season, unexpectedly severe and dangerous weather had DFO's volunteers anxious and on edge at our counting station atop exposed Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County.

On Thursday, March 30, strong winds hampered viewing with gusts that kicked up debris, scattered dust clouds across the eastern horizon, and cut short the day's counting at noon. The next day, forecasts of gale-force wind led to cancellation of the March 31 count for safety reasons. (Readings later showed even higher, more dangerous conditions that day: sustained winds of 60 mph with gusts of more than 80 mph.)

The daily Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch report ahead of April 1 appeared to promise a return to a normal day of hourly counts of migrating birds of prey, as well as added notations of non-migrating birds, human visitors and better weather: "Tomorrow, 4/1, should see very calm winds from the east for at least the morning . . ."



Hogback Fire: 100% contained



Continued on page 13

But our team did not know that the high winds were about to down a power line near the ridge, sparking a 44-acre wildfire later on March 31 that spread within inches all around the DFO team's viewing post. Those two days of worsening winds triggered a week-long wait, in prime raptor-migration season, to return to our counting duty.

As West Metro Fire Rescue attacked what became known as the Hogback Fire, daily Hawk Watch reports from the sidelined counters filled in the timeline. Here are some excerpts:

SATURDAY, APRIL 1

"Matthews-Winters Park and the Dakota Ridge trail to the Hawk Watch are closed until further notice due to an active wildfire on the hogback ridge. The fire burned up to the (viewing) site . . . We will provide updates each day when possible."

SUNDAY, APRIL 2

"Access to our site is still closed due to the fire. As of yesterday afternoon the fire was not fully contained, and the trail has burnt downed trees and fire debris."

MONDAY, APRIL 3

"The fire is now 100% contained. (Jefferson) County is limiting access to the area due to ongoing trail cleanup of fallen trees. They are allowing the Hawk Watch team access to complete the count beginning tomorrow."

TUESDAY, APRIL 4

"No count conducted. A winter storm dropped several inches of snow and created blizzard conditions in the area. All scheduled volunteers should plan on counting beginning tomorrow."

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5

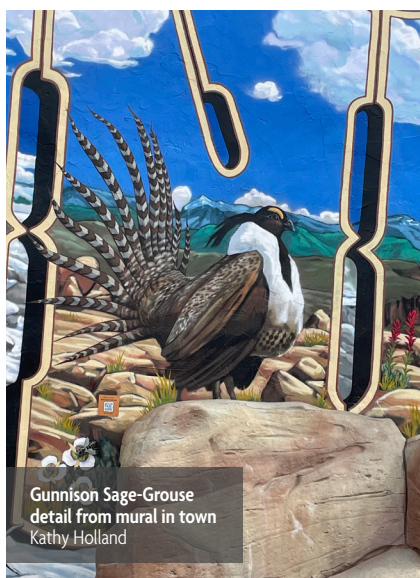
"Today was our first day back on the ridge . . . Our site is intact, but we can see the burn scar surrounding the platform. The fire burned 44 acres along the ridge . . . (We) enjoyed a sunny morning with mild temperatures and winds out of the west . . . A shift in winds brought enough snow to drastically decrease visibility. We ended the count at (4 p.m.) due to the low visibility."

Returning to the ridge, the Hawk Watch team found how close a call it had been. Everything around the rugged and rocky observation post burned, right up to its edges. The fire's heat melted the Hawk Watch information sign. More than a month later, the smell of wildfire smoke remains strong.

But Dinosaur Ridge is resilient. Vegetation regrowth has already begun, and the blackened burn scar is turning a stunning emerald green. Ground birds are back, including two local friends, a Rock Wren and a Spotted Towhee. The daily migrating raptor counts are back up in encouraging numbers, too. Best of all, no DFO hawk watchers were hurt, thanks to the sensible call by **Emma Riley**, our wise young count leader, to shut down and evacuate the ridge hours before the wildfire took off.



*A DFO member since 2014, **Mike Fernandez** edits the mid-month DFO Digest and is assistant editor of The Lark Bunting. A neighborhood and schools advocate for 40 years, he is a retired Interior Department communications manager.*



Gunnison Sage-Grouse detail from mural in town
Kathy Holland



DFO member Graham Ray scopes for sage-grouse
Sharon Tinianow



DFO sage-grouse crew, L to R, Sharon Tinianow, Kathy Holland, Archer Silverman (front), Graham Ray, Susan Blansett, Nate Bond



Pre-sunrise view from trailer-blind
Sharon Tinianow

FIELD TRIPS

Sisk-a-dee-lightful: A pre-dawn date with our own Gunnison Sage-Grouse

Sharon Tinianow

Colorado's Gunnison Sage-Grouse is a rare bird, indeed. Habitat destruction has reduced its numbers by 87 percent. Just 4,000 individuals remain, in seven populations in southwestern Colorado and southeastern Utah. The largest population returns to the same spot each year about 20 miles east of the species' namesake Gunnison, CO.

And that spot — the [Waunita Watchable Wildlife Area](#) — is where a small group of DFO members met with other birders on a chilly, pre-dawn morning in April, all hoping to see these rarities perform their annual mating rituals.

Our hosts were from [Sisk-a-dee](#), a nonprofit organization that coordinates the Gunnison Sage-Grouse Watchable Wildlife Program in partnership with Colorado Parks & Wildlife, Western Colorado University and the Gunnison Basin Sage-Grouse Strategic Committee. Founded in 2000, Sisk-a-dee takes its name from the Shoshone word for this extraordinary species.

The [Gunnison Sage-Grouse](#) was only recognized as a separate species from Greater Sage-Grouse in 2000. Like Greater and Lesser Prairie-Chickens, sage-grouse congregate every spring on traditional breeding grounds, called leks, where the males engage in elaborate, chest-puffing displays to attract females to mate.

Gunnison Sage-Grouse leks occupy openings in the sagebrush steppes, with room enough for complex mating displays in which males fan their tail feathers and inflate bright yellow air sacs, all accompanied by grunting vocalizations. Female birds, which are about two-thirds the size of the males, select those they deem most attractive and mate with them. The females then go off alone into the surrounding sagebrush to find nest sites, having nothing more to do with the males.

DFO Treasurer **Kathy Holland** arranged for our club group visit to the Waunita lek outside Gunnison, an experience we shared with 11 other birders. We met in the pre-dawn darkness on April 21 outside the Holiday Inn & Suites on the east edge of town. Our guide, a student from Gunnison's Western Colorado University nearby, delivered a few guidelines about our destination and how to behave when we got there. Then we formed a car caravan to travel 19 miles east on U.S. 50 to the viewing site.

Continued on page 15

Emerging from our cars at Waunita, we were instantly awestruck — not by the still-distant birds, but by a cloudless, moonless sky, black and spangled with a zillion stars. Conditioned by urban life, I had forgotten what it was like to see not just the Big Dipper, but the entire Milky Way!

Gathering up spotting scopes, backpacks and blankets or sleeping bags for warmth against the 16-degree cold, we made our way to the viewing trailer. Inside this metal blind, we chose spots on two long benches and settled in. Our combined body heat and handwarmers made the wait for dawn tolerable for a while. Fortunately, there was no wind.

Just before dawn began to break, panels on the side of the trailer facing the lek were raised, and we began to scan a distant meadow. The birds had been seen recently about a half-mile away, in an opening in front of a fence. As we continued to scan, the melodious singing of Song Sparrows came to life from willow shrubs. A Western Meadowlark joined the dawn chorus.

And then, just as the eastern sky turned pink, there was movement. Black dots became black birds with white chest feathers. We were beginning to see them: Gunnison Sage-Grouse! They scurried one way, then back. They puffed their chests, stuck their tails in the air and strutted. Soon there were a dozen, then more, sort of bobbing up and down. A few females joined the displaying males.

As the sky grew lighter, the view got better. Too far away to get good pictures, a few of us tried digiscoping with our smart phones. But once the sun cleared the top of the mountain, the show was over. The birds flew off. We packed up and exited the trailer into a chilly spring morning, surrounded by sagebrush and birdsong.

Babbling continuously, a Sage Thrasher popped up long enough for some decent photos as the Song Sparrows and meadowlarks continued their chorus. As we took in the spectacular Gunnison Valley scenery, we smiled, laughed, and thanked our guide.

Back in town over a wonderfully hot and well-earned breakfast, we shared impressions and photos together, marveling over the whole experience — seeing such distinctive birds, in their unique habitat, at their ageless ritual. What a thing!

Sharon Tinianow, who joined DFO in 2016, became club president in April 2023. A former editor of The Lark Bunting, she began birding in an ornithology class in college. Sharon retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History

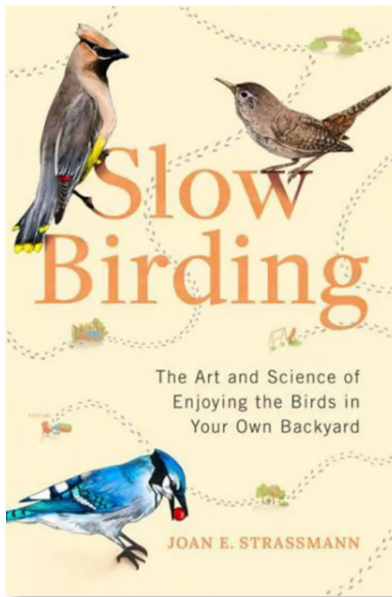
If you'd like to go . . .

Sisk-a-dee's 2023 viewing season for Gunnison Sage-Grouse is almost over and booked out. For information about how to plan a trip next year or beyond, visit the [Sisk-a-dee website](#). If and when you go, here is some useful advice for a successful trip:

- **Plan ahead early.** The viewing trailer holds about 16 people, and the lek is only active between March and May
- **Dress warmly.** April in Gunnison feels like winter. Hand warmers help, as does a blanket or sleeping bag to ward off the cold during the wait for first light
- **SIT warmly.** The benches are cold; a stadium-style seat cushion helps
- **BYO Scope.** Spotting scopes are a must. The grouse are far too distant for binoculars
- **GO before you go!** There are no restrooms at the trailer; even if there were, you must stay put inside until the sage-grouse leave the lek. Avoid caffeine or drinking too much of anything before leaving town

For a good look-and-listen to the mating display of the Gunnison Sage-Grouse, two bird websites have video clips:

- [Cornell Lab's All About Birds guide](#)
- [National Audubon's field guide](#)



BOOK REVIEW

Did you say Merganser? No, meander . . . and not a bad way to go birding

Slow Birding: The Art and Science of Enjoying the Birds in Your Own Backyard

By Joan Strassmann

TarcherPerigree / Penguin Random House (2022)

Available in Audible, narrated by the author

352 pages

Jill Boice

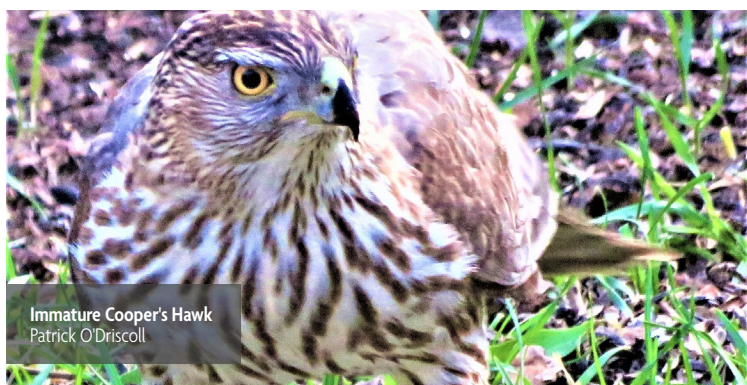
Here is a book to warm my heart. I have always favored slow, meandering bird walks and patch birding. In *Slow Birding*, **Joan Strassman** passionately calls on us to focus further on local birds, and to take our time. She brings together scrupulous research and a readable narrative about 16 common species. Her goal is to share “what animal behaviorists have figured out about birds” so that we understand the “biological underpinnings” of their behavior.

Each chapter delves into several aspects of one species’ traits and describes research exploring what its behavior really means, sometimes with surprising conclusions. Strassmann relates tales from the scientists about their interest in that bird and how the research has evolved. She details their patient, painstaking processes, and the range of technologies now in use is quite astonishing. Each chapter ends with suggested activities for the slow birder.

The first chapter is about Blue Jays. Strassmann writes that this bird’s mutualism with oak trees — that is, a shared dependence upon each other by bird and tree — changed our continent as Ice Age glaciers receded. She explains that in the 1930s, **Joseph Grinnell**, a prominent ecologist and field biologist, found that Blue Jays carried away and buried large numbers of acorns for later use, thus helping spread the tree species. In the 1980s, Virginia Tech biologists **Susan Darley Hill** and **Carter Johnson** followed Grinnell’s lead and carefully studied the foraging habits of Blue Jays on their campus. They found that 11 trees in their study produced 246,000 acorns, more than half of which (54 percent) were carried off by jays to cache. A few years later, another pair of researchers determined that Blue Jays readily found their buried acorns. These studies helped establish a broader appreciation of bird intelligence.

In the chapter on House Wrens, we learn that species is among many that may raise young from several mates together. Strassmann introduces us to **Charlie Thompson**, who has studied the lives of House Wrens for 40 years. His team in Illinois now has a network of 820 nest boxes and data from them has contributed to many other studies. One such study, by Towson University scientists **L. Scott Johnson** and **Brian Masters**, found that 15 percent of the chicks they observed, bled and banded were NOT fathered by the male tending the nest — that is, they were the product of “extra-pair liaisons.” With Thompson’s nest-box network, they collected robust data to back their findings: 521 broods with 3,123 chicks!

Continued on page 17



Welcome to new DFO members

William Brookshire of Littleton; Nicole Callaway, Denver; Jill Engel-Cox, Golden; Zoe, Sebastian and Derek Freed, Lakewood; Janiece Gratch, Lakewood; Emma Hamilton, Denver; Tally Kerr, Falcon; JoAnn Potter Riggle, Eagle; Robert Rolland, Denver; Josh Mattison and Archer Silverman, Denver; and Robert and Jennifer Tonge, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Nicole Callaway, Tally Kerr, and Bob and Nancy Stocker

Friends of DFO

Alice Turak, and Diane Wagner

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Zoe, Sebastian and Derek Freed,
and Bob and Nancy Stocker



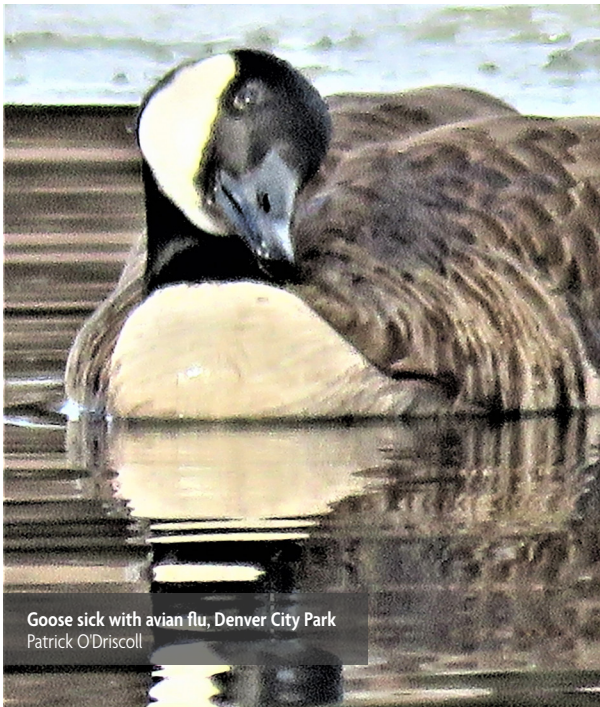
BOOK REVIEW *cont from page 16*

My favorite chapter is about Cooper's Hawks. I had known that the pesticide DDT, in widespread use after 1945, had affected many bird species, and Bald Eagles perhaps most famously. I had not known, however, that DDT brought Cooper's Hawks to the edge of extinction. DDT wasn't banned until 1972, a decade after **Rachel Carson's** *Silent Spring* warned of its danger. But studies begun in 1980 on these then-increasingly rare hawks still found DDT in their eggs, though fortunately not enough to thin their eggshells as it had eagles'. Today, Cooper's has rebounded and is commonly seen near our bird feeders in search of a songbird meal.

I believe this accumulated, careful research about behavior, food choices and habitat will help create more effective management and conservation planning for birds. We already see that in the use of abundant citizen-science data gathered in eBird. This is one area where I find Strassman's book lacking. She doesn't connect the scientific knowledge forward to suggest how we might use it to protect these species in the long term. Perhaps that is understood, but I'd rather that she had tried to help us make that leap.

Slow Birding is not the kind of book you sit down and read from cover to cover. I like that you can pick chapters about birds in your own area, and there is much more to browse, both forward and back. Birders of any level are bound to find material here to enrich their enjoyment of birding.

Jill Boice, who joined DFO in 2001, leads occasional slow field trips. She is also a volunteer raptor monitor at Cherry Creek State Park.



CONSERVATION

Bird flu update: Daunting test for Colorado rehabbers

Michael Tincher

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has challenged bird rehabilitation facilities greatly — not only in how to care for infected birds, but also how to protect birds already under facility care and the humans who provide that care. They must follow biosecurity protocols every step of the way, from picking up sick birds to final disposition of their remains. Unfortunately, in almost all cases of HPAI, birds succumb quickly to the virus or won't survive their advanced neurological state or deteriorating condition and must be humanely euthanized. To date, only a few birds have recovered to be released back into the wild.

As of early April, Colorado had recorded 226 confirmed cases of avian influenza in wild birds. The actual number is significantly greater, but we lack an official count of all the likely casualties. A particular mass die-off might involve 2,000 birds, but not every individual can be tested. Thus, if 10 test positive for HPAI, that's 10 confirmed cases, not 2,000, but the event would still be attributed to bird flu.

Since spring of 2022, the [Rocky Mountain Raptor Program](#) in Fort Collins has admitted 46 raptors that have tested positive for HPAI. Most were admitted from fall of 2022 through winter 2022-23, and most of these patients were Red-tailed Hawks and Great Horned Owls. One of those hawks was cleared of the virus, successfully rehabilitated and released.

This disease is dealt with far differently in commercial poultry flocks. A confirmed positive case forces immediate quarantine and euthanizing of entire flocks to prevent spread because the virus is so highly transmissible in closer quarters. Affected facilities must then be thoroughly decontaminated before new poultry stocks can be brought in. More than 6 million chickens and other poultry in commercial Colorado facilities and backyard pens have had to be destroyed.

Spillover of HPAI infections into Colorado's wild mammal populations is also a concern. Red foxes, skunks, raccoons, mountain lions, black bears and bobcats have been infected. None of those species, however, has been documented as having spread the disease further.

The vast majority of Colorado infections were detected between late summer 2022 and early March 2023, which coincided with cooler temperatures and fall migration. Fortunately, the HPAI virus does not survive well in the heat, dryness and stronger ultraviolet radiation of a typical Colorado summer. New avian flu cases have fallen significantly since early March, but an uptick is expected as many birds pass through with spring migration.

Here's good advice for birders and anyone out in nature right now: If you encounter any wild birds or other wildlife that appear "off" — with signs of seizures, loss of balance or too easily approachable by humans — contact your nearest wildlife rehabilitator or local office of [Colorado Parks & Wildlife](#). If you find a dead migratory bird that appears to have fallen out of a tree or looks otherwise in good body condition, consider it suspect and possibly a case of HPAI. A single dead bird along a busy road isn't likely to be a victim of avian flu, but if you encounter more than three dead birds in one place, please report it to Parks & Wildlife, too.

Michael Tincher is rehab and research coordinator for the [Rocky Mountain Raptor Program](#), which since 1987 has rescued, treated and released sick and injured birds of prey in the northern Front Range, northeast CO and eastern WY. A member of the Raptor Research Foundation, he joined the RMRP in 2004.

Avian flu mortality among wild birds in Colorado

Patrick O'Driscoll

Exact counts for wild-bird deaths in Colorado from avian influenza are hard to come by. State agencies monitoring the epidemic rely on reports from the public, including birders like us, to track numbers. But official statistics usually only include cases confirmed by pre- or post-mortem testing, which are far fewer than anecdotal reports.

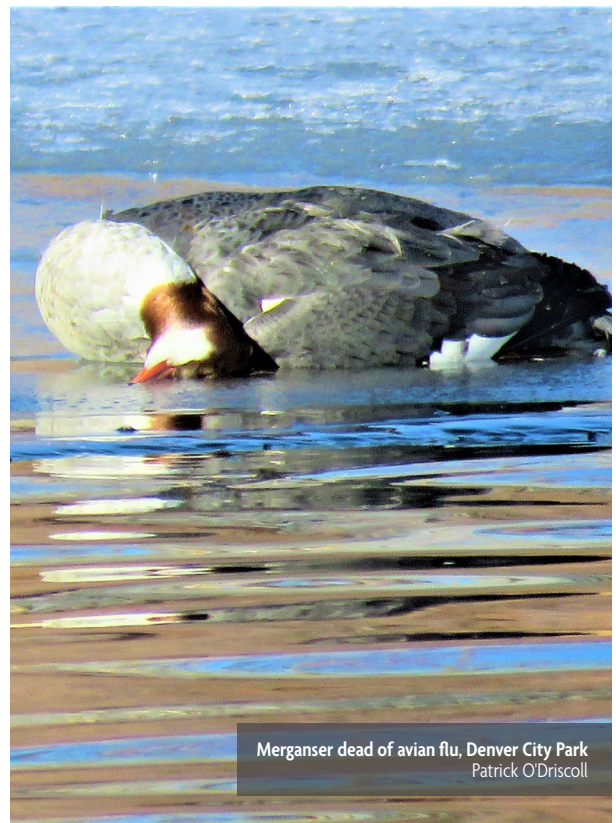
Colorado Parks & Wildlife has made wild-bird mortality estimations for 2022, the year the disease first swept into the state, affecting wild populations, commercial poultry farms and backyard pens. The tally outlined below estimates that as many as 10,800 wild birds in 16 species, the vast majority of them waterfowl, died of avian flu last year.

Courtney Rella, a new DFO Board member whose own volunteer work with birds and wildlife has included helping Parks & Wildlife collect reports of birds sick or dead of avian flu, asked the department to provide a summary of avian flu cases in wild birds. In reply, CPW wildlife pathologist **Karen Fox** sent the following list. “This is an estimate of mortality based on confirmed cases, as well as the reports of suspects that we gather from the public,” Fox explained. “When I have a confirmed case in a combination of species/county/season, I do not test additional birds but I do add any suspects from that species/county/season to the estimated mortality total.”

Added Rella: “It goes to further support how much our vigilance and reporting is necessary throughout the state.”

Here is the CPR wild-bird mortality estimate list for 2022:

- Snow Goose — 8,000-10,000 birds
- Ross's Goose — 2
- Canada Goose — 600
- Cackling Goose — 11
- Common Merganser — 100
- Wood Duck — 4 (also positive for West Nile Virus)
- Blue-winged Teal — 2
- Mallard — 3
- American White Pelican — 8
- Great Horned Owl — 21
- Turkey Vulture — 3
- Bald Eagle — 6 (including 1 eaglet)
- Red-tailed Hawk — 29
- Cooper's Hawk — 1
- Ring-billed Gull — 1
- American Crow — 11



Merganser dead of avian flu, Denver City Park
Patrick O'Driscoll

Club Quarterly: DFO business update

Editor's note: Denver Field Ornithologists' Board of Directors meets four times a year. The Lark Bunting publishes this quarterly synopsis after the August, November, February and May meetings. Minutes, financial reports and committee reports to the board are available to members on the ["DFO BUSINESS" page](#) of the club website.



DFO BOARD FEBRUARY 2023 MEETING

The quarterly meeting of the DFO Board took place on Feb. 26 via Zoom, 2 p.m. to 4:35 p.m. MST. All 16 board members and club officers attended.



MINUTES OF NOVEMBER MEETING

After unanimous approval of the minutes of the November 2022 meeting, Secretary **Nate Bond** outlined a new format to expedite processing of the official record for board meetings. Draft minutes will be emailed to board members and officers to edit via Google Docs within two weeks after the meeting, with email approval thereafter to save time at future meetings.



TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer **Kathy Holland** reported that she has opened an interest-bearing account with \$20,000 in DFO funds to manage club finances, locked in for one year on a trial basis. In discussing DFO's tax-exempt nonprofit status, she said the club has filed two Form 1099s for the 2022 tax year. As annually in previous years, a financial reviewer has gone over the club's books and "things look good," with a follow-up report to come. During discussion of budgets, Finance Committee chair **Roger Koester** noted that increased spending year-to-year is closely tied to increased contributions from members and other donors. He cautioned care and close monitoring to changes in income to ensure fiscal responsibility.



SCIENCE/EDUCATION GRANTS

Grants chair **Elaine Wagner** reported on five projects recommended for funding in 2023 from the DFO Research, Conservation & Education Grants Committee. The combined total of \$9,100 in fund awards reflects an unexpectedly large balance bolstered by rising donations and, in particular, one \$3,000 donation. All but two project proposals for 2023 will receive grants. Wagner said grant submission proposals are available for reading in the members-only area of the DFO website.

During discussion, Holland noticed that the grants line item in the budget was \$7,000, not \$9,100. Koester suggested that grants funding be listed separately from the rest of the DFO budget because of odd timing. It was noted that the Grants Committee has \$11,966 in designated assets (including extra donations and rollover funds from previous years), which enables giving more grants. The board unanimously adopted the Grants Committee's recommendation for \$9,100 in total funds to five grant proposals for 2023.



HAWK WATCH @ DINOSAUR RIDGE

Hawk Watch chair **Dave Hill** noted a successful Hawk Watch program on Feb. 25 and a highly anticipated "Hawks on the Wing" program set for March 1, which also was the formal starting date of the 2023 spring Hawk Watch @ Dinosaur Ridge counting season. He then offered a motion from the Hawk Watch Committee for the board to fund \$1,275 for four in-classroom education programs for schools in the 2023-24 academic year, to be presented by Hawk Watch partner Nature's Educators. Extensive board discussion followed.

Vice President **Sharon Tinianow** noted that Hawk Watch already had applied unsuccessfully for an identical grant from Denver Audubon's Lois Webster Fund. She questioned the timing of the request outside the board's previous November budgeting cycle for this year. Hill said feedback from the Lois Webster Fund was positive but that there were more projects needing funds than dollars available. Other discussion touched on Hawk Watch's significant budget increase (\$5,000) since 2022, in part because of greater 2022 donations for the project. But treasurer Holland noted the \$1,260 contributed so far for 2023 is well below what's expected by the end of this year. Grants chair Wagner noted that in previous funding discussions, education grants hadn't been a top board priority.

Continued on page 21

Koester said Hawk Watch also could apply for a grant from DFO's Grants Committee, whose purview includes education, not just research and conservation. It was also noted there's still time ahead to return to this issue in budgeting for next year. After discussion, Hill withdrew the motion for now.



COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH

Board member and newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** reported that *The Lark Bunting* seeks a member-volunteer to write a short review each issue for the previous monthly evening program. He also welcomed all feedback about the newsletter's content, issue to issue — but then expressed frustration at a noticeable lack of it thus far, either negative or positive.

Tinianow, acting C&O Committee chair, discussed the possibility of switching online platforms for committee and other small DFO meetings from Zoom to Google Meet. DFO's Zoom account requires one of three club facilitators to run most meetings, but Google Meet requires no separate moderator for small group meetings and is free of charge. Zoom would still remain DFO's platform for larger monthly evening programs. After positive reaction from committee chairs, Tinianow said she will explore Google Meets further and report back.

BETTER BIRDING SKILLS

The Better Birding Skills Committee will seek to work with Colorado Parks & Wildlife to develop DFO workshops around specific birding habitats, to be hosted by members with interest and knowledge in each type of ecosystem. The effort is targeted for mid-summer, and members with specific habitat knowledge and interest can contact Tinianow via email.

FIELD TRIPS

Field Trip chair David Suddjian celebrated DFO's very busy February, normally a slow birding month. (*For a detailed report on how DFO's "February Funniness" went, see the article in last month's May 2023 issue of The Lark Bunting on the newsletter's [archives page](#) on the DFO website.*) Suddjian also called attention to the Field Trip Committee's efforts to develop a collaboration with Aiken Audubon in Colorado Springs to promote, register and lead joint field trips in the near future.



ELECTIONS

Election chair **Mary Geder** reviewed the pending list of candidates for the DFO Board and officers election in April, noting member **Mary Cay Burger's** retirement after 20 years on the board and member **Sue Summers'** previous withdrawal. Those declared as candidates for election or re-election

Continued on page 22

at that time included Tinianow for president (up from vice president to succeed **Susan Blansett**), Bond for secretary (appointed in 2022 and seeking election) and Holland for treasurer again. Board candidates included Koester (re-election), **Cyndy Johnson** (interim appointee for election) and **Bill Turner** (re-election). Geder was still trying to recruit a candidate for vice president. In that vein, **Karen Drozda** suggested that board members and officers keep an eye out on DFO field trips for prospective volunteers for club leadership positions. Given that past DFO tradition and practice has been for the vice president to step up to the presidency after two years, there was discussion of being less rigid about that to encourage prospective VP candidates to come forward.

CONSERVATION

Conservation chair **Steve Ryder** reported on several ongoing topics of Conservation Committee discussion and work:

- Support of “Cats Indoors” promotion to curb domestic feline predation on birds
- Support for preserving Denver’s defunct Park Hill Golf Course site as open space vs. commercial and housing development (the subject of an April 4 citywide vote)
- The fate of birding at the popular Chico Basin Ranch hotspot in El Paso and Pueblo counties once a new ranching lease — and onerous state government restrictions on non-ranching activity — take effect in 2025. *(For more detailed background, read the article in the April 2023 issue of The Lark Bunting on the newsletter’s [archive page](#).)*

In addition, Tinianow asked Ryder to clarify a note in his committee report about having signed on to an “environmental platform” developed by The Nature Conservancy, apparently without DFO Board involvement. Ryder said he would send a link to that platform to all board members for review and further discussion.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership chair **Cyndy Johnson** said the committee was working through the club’s roster to ensure that all members who may have forgotten would be notified to renew

membership for 2023, as year-by-year DFO memberships expire at the end of December.

PROGRAMS

Programs manager Bill Turner noted the winter-spring season of programs was underway in January, with previously scheduled evening sessions on tap for the fourth Mondays in February, March and April. He also teased a special guest for the first fall monthly program in late August: Celebrated Colorado landscape photographer **John Fielder**.

NEW BUSINESS + MISCELLANY

Goodbye Mary Cay

The board and officers voiced warm appreciation for Burger’s 20 years of DFO Board involvement and numerous other forms of volunteer service, including years as DFO Membership chair

Volunteer Appreciation

Tinianow announced a save-the-date calendar entry for a **DFO Volunteer Appreciation Event** on **Sunday, June 4, 9-11 a.m. MDT**, at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. Besides putting out a call for volunteers to help put on the event, she also floated the idea of creating a system of volunteer awards beyond DFO’s highest member honor, the Ptarmigan Award, which recognizes extraordinary service to the club

The board’s next quarterly meeting is scheduled for **Monday, May 22** via Zoom.





LAST LOOK, LAST WORD

**Brush, stroke,
and hue: Spring's
colorful palette
on the wing . . .
and the page**

Patrick O'Driscoll

It's peak spring migration across Colorado! We're fanning out, by the ones and twos and dozens, to greet, observe and revel in seasonal bursts of avian visitors. Our best eyes, and our best photographers, are on the case. Who knows what new state-record birds might emerge before our relentless, wide-eyed lenses?

Amidst our semiannual hubbub, *The Lark Bunting* pauses this month for a less hectic and more calming look at Colorado's returning feathered friends. Join us as we mark this busiest birding month of May with a visual stroll through an art gallery of spring birds. From this month's newsletter cover bird (Lazuli Bunting) to our back-page beauty (Western Tanager), all were brought to life with paint on paper by DFO birder, field-trip warrior and artist **Joe Chen** of Denver.



Continued on page 25



Tree Swallow
Joe Chen



Bullock's Oriole
Joe Chen



Lark Sparrow
Joe Chen

LAST LOOK, LAST WORD *cont from page 24*

If you visit the Denver Field Ornithologists' [Facebook Group Page](#), you've seen Joe's work before. Since joining DFO in 2018, he has chosen a single bird after every field trip to preserve in a painting and share it online. He figures he's painted 250 to 300 field-trip birds so far. Joe keeps the originals in 15 folio-binders (and counting), and occasionally he frames one or another as gifts.

"People still ask me after the trip what am I going to paint. I say, 'I don't know.' When I get home, I think about it and reflect on it," he says. "And then, just popping something into my mind." Once he has the bird in front, Chen reaches back into memory, and the details begin to emerge.

"Sometimes I get lucky and can use my cellphone to take a picture of the bird," he says, "But usually I try to keep the bird as close as possible in the mind as I remember. Where the bird was — this kind of tree, or walking on the ground, or standing on top of a post. An impression." He turns to a field guide only "for reference — to make sure I've got all the parts, the picture correct."

When he's done, it's all there: the violet and green of the swallow, the brightness of the Bullock's Oriole, the sharp glare of the Burrowing Owl, the vivid face of the Lark Sparrow, the Mountain Bluebird's blue, the Common Yellowthroat's yellow.

Enjoy them here, and out there. Good spring birding, everyone.



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
**GOOD MIGRATION
BIRDING!**



Western Tanager
Joe Chen