



# THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 10 | OCTOBER 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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**dfo**  
DENVER FIELD  
ORNITHOLOGISTS



American Avocet  
Belmar Park, Lakewood  
Jim Esten



A DFO member since 2014, **Jim Esten** is photo editor of

*The Lark Bunting*. He took photos on and off for 35 years before getting his first digital camera in 2001. He didn't focus on birds until 11 years ago while visiting his sister in Florida. He is retired from network IT service.

## ON THE COVER

### American Avocet: That gracefully upturned bill isn't its only charm

The cover of this month's issue of *The Lark Bunting* bids an affectionate autumn "So long" to the American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*). This strikingly tall and colorful wading shorebird of western wetlands is already southbound for winter in Mexico and Central America. Our cover bird was caught on camera at Belmar Park in Lakewood by **Jim Esten**, photo editor of this newsletter.

Our only avocet ([there are just four kinds in the world](#)) does not nest in high numbers here. But the eastern two-thirds of Colorado comprises a sizable south-central portion of the species' breeding territory. Its boldly patterned mix of black, white and cinnamon-peach breeding plumage atop pale bluish legs is a refreshing counterpoint to the mostly gray-brown ranks of the more than a dozen other shorebird species found in the state.

In two words, it's a graceful bird, which is exactly where its name comes from: avosetta, Italian for "graceful bird." As its scientific name suggests, the outer third of the American Avocet's long bill has an elegant *recurve*, or upturn. (ID tip: The male's bill is slightly longer, but the female's is more upturned.) Avocet mates also run a few steps together with their bills crossed right after copulating. But Cornell's *Birds of the World* and other sources tell us those aren't the avocet bill's only remarkable feature or use.

If you have observed them foraging the shallows of ponds, marshes and lakeshores, you've probably seen their side-to-side sweeping of those bills through the water as they wade forward. Like scythe-wielding grain farmers in the days before mechanical mowing, they swing slightly open bills back and forth — "scything" — to catch crustaceans and water insects.

Another I-didn't-know-THAT fact: American Avocets sometimes make like Brown-headed Cowbirds and lay eggs in someone else's nest (though only of other avocets, who won't know the difference). This brood parasitism can be tit for tat, however: Some terns and the Black-necked Stilt, the avocet's spindly legged close cousin, have been known to lay eggs in avocet nests.

Those nests, BTW, are in the open with no shading foliage, which leads to another fun fact: Avocet parents keep the incubating eggs from overheating by dipping their bellies periodically in water. Still another cool detail: the chicks leave those nests within 24 hours of hatching. They're born with the innate ability to walk, swim and dive to escape predators — though on land, they also hide in adorable multileggedness beneath parental wings. (Adult pecks on the head also teach the chicks to crouch whenever an avocet alarm call goes out for a nearby predator.)

As go our wetlands, so goes the American Avocet. Although its population is "least concern" stable, existential threats to the species include continued loss of wetlands to development and degradation, and contamination by selenium pollution from irrigation practices and methylmercury concentrations in seasonal wetlands.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor



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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.).

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- 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](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com).

**Next deadline: Saturday, September 30**



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## **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

# Keeping abreast of bird news: the sad, the bad — and we hope, some glad

### Sharon Tinianow

News headlines are seldom “good news.” Most of the time, what makes the newsfeed, the telecast, or the front page is the sad, the unfortunate, and the downright devastating. I know a few folks who won’t read news first thing in the morning because it starts their day on a negative note. Some have stopped reading the news at all.

I can empathize, but to not stay abreast of what’s going on in the world, the nation and here at home feels irresponsible. Hard as it sometimes may be, paying attention to what’s happening in our world is a duty, not an option. Playing ostrich (the proverbial “head in the sand”) denies one the opportunity to reflect, to learn and to be stirred to action. In that spirit, let me draw your attention to a few recent headlines from the world you and I share, the realm of birds and birding.

First, the sad: **John Fielder**, the prolific photographer of Colorado’s many amazing landscapes, died Aug. 11 at age 73 after a battle with pancreatic cancer. For all of us who cherish our state’s wild and scenic places, it’s a tragic loss. There will be no new Fielder images or opportunities to see and hear him in person. (Had his condition not worsened this summer, we would have welcomed him live via Zoom for a special DFO monthly program in August.) I feel privileged to have heard Fielder speak on two occasions. He shared many tales about how he captured the magnificent scenery of Colorado. His book, *John Fielder’s Best of Colorado*, is one of my resources for planning home-state road trips.

His stirring works of photographic art will live on, thanks to his generosity this year in donating more than 6,000 of his images to History Colorado for the enjoyment of and use by the people of Colorado. Fielder did so to inspire us to be advocates for wild places. In an opinion-page essay in *The Denver Post* last January to announce his gift, he wrote this: “Humanity will not survive without the preservation of biodiversity on Earth, and I have been honored to use my photography to influence people and legislation to protect our natural and rural environments.” His images were partly responsible for the passage of the 1992 Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund Initiative and the Colorado Wilderness Act of 1993. Fielder’s donation and its purpose align with DFO’s mission to protect birds and their habitats.



*Continued on page 6*

Photos top to bottom:  
**John Fielder (1950-2023)**  
Pawnee Buttes with clouds (John Fielder / History Colorado)

What's more, before he died, Fielder acted as curator of an exhibition of his work now on display in the History Colorado Center in downtown Denver. You can read about the exhibit and also explore (and even copy) Fielder's donated works on the "[Revealed: John Fielder's Favorite Place](#)" page on History Colorado's website.

Second, the bad news: A new article in the scientific journal *Communications Earth & Environment* announced the "catastrophic," nearly complete failure of the 2022 Emperor Penguin nesting season in one region of Antarctica because the sea ice shelf collapsed before the young had fledged. Such a widespread failure of sea ice is unprecedented — yet another impact of climate change on a bird species. You can read the article free [online at the journal Nature's website](#).

While Emperor Penguins have adapted to local sea ice failures by moving to more stable locations nearby, they cannot move when the failure is on a regional scale like this one. Young birds, not seaworthy until they fledge, drown when sea ice breaks up too early.

This species' outlook is bleak. If current warming trends persist, more than 90 percent of Emperor colonies will be quasi-extinct by the end of this century. Even though each of us can reduce our contribution to atmospheric carbon, individual actions won't be enough. There is no quick fix. It is easy to feel powerless to help.

Which leads, thirdly, to some (perhaps) glad news: At a recent meeting of DFO's Conservation Committee, chair **Courtney Rella** told us of a learning opportunity that can help prepare us to take action to address climate change. It's a free seminar offered by the Boulder County Nature Association and the Center for Sustainable Landscapes and Communities, and it focuses on the complex and intertwined effects of climate change on the water cycle between Earth and the atmosphere. It is scheduled for Saturday, Sept. 23, 9 a.m.- 3 p.m. at the Sustainability, Energy and Environment Complex at CU Boulder. You can learn more about it and sign up on the [nature association's website](#) to attend.

This is just one of many learning opportunities that can prepare us to take on climate change directly. DFO's most recent monthly program with Colorado naturalist and author **Mary Taylor Young** is another example. (If you missed her live Zoom presentation Aug. 28, the recording is available on the [Past Programs page](#) of the DFO website.) We need to educate ourselves about the issues if we are going to advocate for meaningful change.

All these news stories fall under the broader topic of conservation, a DFO priority. What's good for the environment is generally good for the birds, too. I am happy to share that the news from DFO is good. The Hawk Watch Committee had a great year counting and observing migrating raptors from atop Dinosaur Ridge. You can catch up with the 2023 results on the [Hawk Watch page](#) of the DFO website. Please consider volunteering next spring and donating to support our Hawk Watch efforts.

With the Conservation Committee reactivating under Rella's leadership, look for bird-related conservation articles in upcoming issues of *The Lark Bunting*. You can learn more about what the committee is up to on the [Conservation page](#) of the DFO website as well.

While you stay abreast of the news, I know you'll find time to enjoy some fall birding as southward migration picks up. Don't forget to sign up for DFO's excellent monthly programs in September, October and November, as well as the next popular "BIRD BOMBS" mini-webinars on bird identification. Let's all continue to learn, be inspired, and act together.

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**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.



Emperor Penguins (Ian Duffy via Wikipedia)



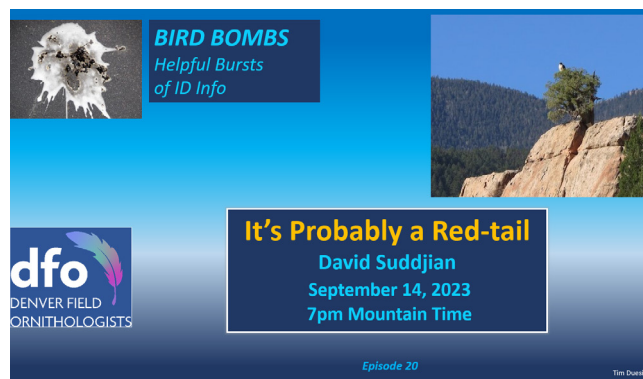
# DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to [patodrisk@gmail.com](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com).

## RED-TAILED? BUTEO ID IS NEXT "BIRD BOMBS" TOPIC SEPTEMBER 14

What's the most-heard guess among birders about a Colorado raptor just spotted in flight? "It's probably a Red-tailed." That's also the title of DFO's next free BIRD BOMBS bird ID mini-webinar, which will go off on **Thursday, Sept. 14, at 7 p.m. MDT** via Zoom. **It's Probably a Red-tail** will focus on our most common, ubiquitous, highly variable and challenging hawk, which serves as an ID gateway for our many Buteos and other raptors. Why is this birding wisdom so right on? [Click here to register](#) for this free webinar to find out! You can also check out DFO's video library of almost 20 past BIRD BOMBS mini-webinars on the [BIRD BOMBS page](#) of the DFO website.



## POTLUCK MEMORIAL FOR DFO'S PATTY ECHELMAYER IS SEPTEMBER 23

Friends and admirers of the late, beloved **Patty Echelmeyer**, DFO past president (1968-70) and field trip leader: Mark your calendars for a "celebration of life" and potluck on Saturday, **Sept. 23, 4-7 p.m. MDT** in **Prospect Park**, 4005 Kipling Street in the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt. Patty's family will host the potluck (5 p.m.) at the park picnic shelter and provide main course and drinks (lemonade, water, soda). Guests are asked

to bring a side dish or dessert, and memories of Patty! Please RSVP to Patty's grandson **Justin Fosha** at 970-531-8490 or [jfosha@gmail.com](mailto:jfosha@gmail.com).



## DFO'S AUGUST FIELD TRIP RESULTS: 19 OUTINGS, 184 SPECIES

DFO field trips visited 20 Colorado counties in August, and the most abundant bird seen on our 19 outings was the state bird (and this newsletter's namesake), the Lark Bunting (1,745 individuals reported). For a full rundown on DFO's August trips, read this eBird report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/149145>. Lark Buntings were the most numerous of 184 total species recorded on 108 eBird checklists. Meanwhile, several new trips were recently added to DFO's September field trip calendar, including Cherry Creek and Roxborough state parks and Lair O' the Bear Park in Jefferson County. Check out all the upcoming trips on the DFO Website's [Upcoming Field Trips](#) page.

## BANDING HUMMINGBIRDS . . . ON BOULDER'S KGNU RADIO?

At the peak of hummingbird season in the foothills of Boulder County, certified hummingbird banders **Steve** and **Deb Bouricius** see at least 15,000 hummers *a day* at three dozen feeders\*\* in their yard and a neighbor's yard in Peaceful Valley,

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CO. In July, Boulder County Audubon held a [hummingbird banding workshop](#) led by the Bouriciuses and fellow bird bander **Scott Rashid**. KGNU Community Radio's *How on Earth* science show was there to record "a truly extraordinary episode" for listeners. You can listen to "A Hummingbird Extravaganza" at the radio station's [online archives](#).

*\*\* And how much sugar water do the Bouriciuses produce daily to fill their feeders at peak season? Nine GALLONS.*

## DENVER AUDUBON'S 12TH ANNUAL HOOTENANNY SEPTEMBER 30

HOOTenanny Owl & Music Festival, Denver Audubon's largest family event of the year and only owl festival in metro Denver, is set for **10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 30** at **Audubon's Kingery Nature Center** south of Chatfield SP off South Wadsworth Boulevard. The festival will include three live owl demonstrations from Nature's Educators, crafts for kids, a "hidden owl" scavenger hunt in the center's Native Plant Gardens, owl pellet dissections, live folk music from the local band Nearly There, and educational booths from nonprofit partners including Colorado Parks & Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service, and Bird Conservancy of the Rockies. "Early-bird" ticketed admission is \$12 adults/teens 13 and up, \$8 children ages 3-12, and free age 2 and under. To register and buy tickets, go to the event's [registration page](#) online.

## BIRD CONSERVANCY MARKS 35 YEARS WITH NIGHT FOR THE BIRDS OCTOBER 6

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' biggest fundraising event of the year, "A Night for the Birds," is scheduled for **Friday, Oct. 6, 6-9 p.m. MDT** in the **Denver Museum of Nature & Science**. The live event will feature games and trivia, hors d'oeuvres, guest speakers, and live and silent auction. Proceeds, of course, support the conservancy's mission to conserve birds and their habitats with integrated work in science, education and land stewardship. To buy tickets (\$60) for this fundraiser, visit the event's [ticketing website](#).

## BIRD-FRIENDLY SE COLORADO RANCH SHOWS HOW TO SURVIVE WILDFIRE

In April 2022, 9,000 of May Ranch's 15,500 acres were scorched by the Big Sandy Creek wildfire, which whipped the southeast

Colorado cattle spread near Lamar with 60 mph winds. But sustainability measures put in place years earlier by the May family are paying dividends in swift recovery of a model prairie landscape. Native grasses, healthy wetlands, and abundant birdlife — from Lesser Prairie Chicken and Burrowing Owl to Long-billed Curlew and the rare Black Rail — all have made the ranch a leader in the conservation ranching movement. They and endangered Black-footed Ferrets coexist with the Mays' herd of purebred Limousin cattle. The positive outcome after a potentially disastrous grassland fire is chronicled in a feature-length article, "AFTER THE FIRE," in summer 2023 issue of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *Living Bird* magazine. The article was written by **Michael Booth**, a longtime Denver news reporter who covers environment issues for *The Colorado Sun*, the Denver-based e-newspaper. [Click here](#) to read the complete story, with photos, from Cornell's *All About Birds* news website.



## WHO'S WHO OF COLORADO RAPTORS @ BARR LAKE OCTOBER 14

The Brighton-based [Raptor Education Foundation](#) and Colorado Parks & Wildlife are teaming to present a new course on the state's birds of prey: The Who's Who of Colorado Raptors. The course is scheduled from **9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Oct. 14** at the **Barr Lake SP Nature Center** and will be presented by CPW senior volunteer raptor monitor **Karen Metz** and foundation president **Anne Price**. Audio-visual enhancement will include photos by Metz and a dozen of the foundation's live raptors for up-close viewing, comparisons and picture-taking. Coffee, tea and other morning refreshments will be provided. Questions? Contact organizers at 303-680-8500. The course cost is \$70 for early-bird registration through Sept. 15, and \$80 thereafter. To register, go to the [course sign-up page](#) on the foundation website.





## FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

# Owls of Northern Colorado

Scott Rashid

Monday, September 18

7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Whoohoo knew? . . . that 11 of the 19 species of owl found in the US occur in northern Colorado? Who else but **Scott Rashid**, that's hoooh. The veteran Colorado owl researcher, bander and rehabilitator will tell a DFO audience all about them at our next monthly program meeting via Zoom on **Monday, Sept. 18 at 7 p.m. MDT**. *(Please note: This program is on the **third Monday** evening because the usual fourth-Monday date in September conflicts with the Yom Kippur holiday observance.)*

In "Owls of Northern Colorado," Rashid will discuss the natural history of each of these species, touching on their habitat preferences, courtship, nesting, feeding, fledging and beyond. (For the record, those magnificent 11 owl species are Barn, Boreal, Burrowing, Eastern Screech, Flammulated, Great Horned, Long-eared, Northern Saw-whet, Northern Pygmy, Short-eared and Snowy.)

Rashid may know them better than anyone in the state, having worked with owls here for more than 30 years. As creator and director of the nonprofit [Colorado Avian Research and Rehabilitation Institute](#) (CARRI) in Estes Park, he and his team have placed more than 130 nest boxes for the various cavity-nesting species they study. Many of those nests have cameras, enabling the researchers to monitor nesting activity without bothering the birds.

Rashid founded CARRI in 2011, rehabilitating injured and orphaned birds in and around Estes Park and Rocky Mountain NP. CARRI operates a banding station each fall, capturing and banding both Northern Saw-whet and Boreal owls after dark. Since 2007, Rashid and his team have captured more than 350 Northern Saw-whets and 20 Boreals. His DFO presentation will include images and videos of their banding process as well as of adults feeding young, owlets in their nests, and the prey their parents bring them.

Besides his field research, Rashid has been painting, illustrating and writing about birds for nearly 35 years. His avian passion was sparked in his boyhood years in Wisconsin. In college, he developed a unique painting style that combines Cubism and Realism. His Cubist side shows multiple views of his subjects in each painting, but his Realist side seeks to make them identifiable and, well, realistic. The one-of-a-kind result depicts birds in a way singularly distinctive in the art world.

Two years after receiving his state and federal bird banding permits in 1992, Rashid created a banding program at the YMCA of the Rockies outside Estes Park. It still operates today, the most popular program at the largest YMCA in the world, with thousands of guest-visitors each year. Nine years ago, Rashid and his volunteers banded their 10,000th bird there. In 1994, he became a licensed bird rehabilitator, caring for injured birds and returning hundreds back into the wild, including raptors, songbirds, hummingbirds and corvids.

Since 1998, when he began studying Northern Pygmy-Owls in Rocky Mountain NP, Rashid has located 18 different nests in and outside the park. His first book, *Small Mountain Owls*, was the first ever published about it and Northern Saw-whet,

*Continued on page 10*

Flammulated and Boreal owls. In 2004, he located the park's first Flammulated Owl nest. He also has found Northern Saw-whet Owl nests inside and outside the park, and confirmed that the Boreal Owl nests in the park.

Since 2014, CARRI's Barn Owl research project has increased the species' numbers and proved the birds' huge benefit in preying on small, destructive rodents. In addition, with help from CARRI members, Rashid has built and placed more than 135 nest boxes for American Kestrels across a 72-mile stretch from Arvada to the Wyoming border.

His other books include *The Great Horned Owl: An In-depth Study* and *Northern Goshawk, the Gray Ghost: Habits, Habitat, and Rehabilitation*, both published in 2015, and *Exploring the World of the Barn Owl: (An intimate look into their secretive lives)* in 2019.



Scott's painting of four kinds of owls  
Scott Rashid

## FEEDBACK

# YOUR VIEWS

*The Lark Bunting* welcomes your feedback — criticisms and compliments, praise and scorn, and anything in between. Email yours to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at [patodrisk@gmail.com](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com) or text him at 303-885-6955.

## Patty E: "A walking hug"

I am writing this as I sob for the loss of **Patty Echelmeyer**. I had not heard of her passing until I read your remembrance (*The Lark Bunting*, [September 2023, p. 14](#)), and I hadn't spoken to her since last fall.

Patty and **Bill Echelmeyer** went to college with my folks and re-connected at a Penn State alumni function in Denver back in the '50s. Mom and Patty were best friends right up until Mom passed away in July 2021.

The joke of our families was that our parents raised us in the back of a station wagon, as nearly every weekend we were out looking for arrowheads, going to state parks, birding, junking or rambling. **Randy** and **Keith** [Patty's daughter and son] were like brother and sister to us three Walker kids.

When I returned to Denver as a college student, Patty was always there for me. When I was an adult, she took me under her wing to Tuesday Birders and other field trips to fuel my birding fire. Patty was truly my spirit mother. Thank you for the lovely tribute.

I know she and **Bob** [Buttery] were so happy together. Her Christmas card last year had a picture of them together. They were so darn cute. Patty was a walking hug!

**Tamie Walker Bulow**

Harlingen, TX

[DFO president, 2005-07]



Abby Burk

## FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

# Water Flows Together: Opportunities for Birds and People in 2023

Abby Burk

Monday, October 23

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



Tree planting restoration work along Dolores River  
Abby Burk

Water connects us all, humans and birds alike. Clean and reliable water supplies and healthy, flowing rivers are essential both to people's ways of life in Colorado and to the 400-plus species of birds that spend some or all of the year within its borders.

But with rivers so essential to Colorado's future, their stewardship falls to humankind alone. It touches all water uses, and users, including avian wildlife. All of us, whether birders or not, have roles in sustaining this water future for all life.

Against that sobering backdrop, join **Abby Burk** of Audubon Rockies for an engaging October evening program about our state's freshwater ecosystems, current issues involving Colorado water, and what it all means for birds and people. Burk's Zoom presentation, "Water Flows Together: Opportunities for Birds and People in 2023," is set for **Monday, Oct. 23 at 7 p.m. MDT.**

Burk is senior manager of the Western Rivers program for Audubon Rockies, the Fort Collins-based regional office of National Audubon for Colorado, Wyoming and Utah. In this role, she says, she is "committed to advancing riparian habitat and stream resiliency through advocacy and action." She professes a lifetime of love for rivers, particularly the Colorado River and its tributaries.

Her talk comes in a pivotal year for water planning in Colorado. In January, the state water board released an updated [Colorado Water Plan](#) that highlights water conservation as a necessary starting point for meeting the state's water needs. During review of the draft plan in 2022, Burk and other advocates also pushed hard for making river health a priority. "Stream restoration clarity around water rights was front and center during the legislative session," Burk says. "We were on the front lines. But there's more work needed."

An expert in ecological management and "an award-winning educator and river corridor diplomat," Burk holds a bachelor's degree in biology and an interdisciplinary master's degree with concentrations in ecology and hydrology. She is an avid whitewater kayaker and enjoys time on western rivers as often as possible.

### NOTE:

The program originally scheduled for Oct. 23, *Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More* with **Tamie Bulow**, has been postponed until January 2024.

Watch here for details later this fall.



## FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

# Wildlife, Wetlands and the Everglades

Lauren Jonaitis and Stephanie Clements

Monday, November 27

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



Stephanie Clements  
and Everglades resident  
Tropical Audubon



Lauren Jonaitis  
Tropical Audubon

These are perilous times for the Everglades. South Florida's birding-rich "River of Grass" seems in constant turmoil, whether it's a hidden legion of alien, wildlife-killing Burmese pythons run amok or the unending power struggle over the control and quality of water and the threat of encroaching development across the region.

On the Monday after Thanksgiving, DFO's final evening program of the autumn 2023 season will explore the rich history and science of this vast, iconic landscape with two Everglades advocates from the [Tropical Audubon Society](#) of Miami. "Wildlife, Wetlands and the Everglades" (**Nov. 27, 7 p.m. MST via Zoom**) will feature Tropical Audubon senior Conservation director **Lauren Jonaitis** and Education & Advocacy director **Stephanie Clements**.

"You will gain knowledge about the birds and other wildlife who depend on the Everglades habitats and discover why this ecosystem is so important ecologically, culturally and economically to Florida," said Jonaitis, who works on the "project delivery team" for several Everglades restoration projects. She joined Tropical

Audubon last year to focus on expanding and amplifying the organization's role and reach across South Florida. Previously, she worked for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to reduce artificial light pollution effects on sea turtles and their coastal nesting habitat.

Jonaitis also worked in private industry as an environmental/coastal scientist, focused on permitting and dune restoration and maintenance. Currently, she is vice president of Policy for the Society of Conservation Biology North America. She is also the society's Communications chair. She holds a bachelor's degree in zoology from State University of New York at Oswego and a master's in conservation and population biology from Bowling Green State University in OH.

Clements oversees Tropical Audubon's flagship Ambassador Program, which cultivates volunteer environmental advocates across Miami. She is now working to broaden its membership among underrepresented and excluded communities. She earned her doctorate in biology from the University of Miami, where her dissertation focused on conservation of reptiles and amphibians in human-modified landscapes of Miami and Costa Rica. In her doctoral work, Clements studied both native and non-native reptiles and amphibians in the Everglades and other prominent South Florida ecosystems. She worked previously as an interpretive ranger in the National Park Service, field manager for an environmental advocacy group, and as a children's educational instructor at a zoo.



## MONTHLY PROGRAMS

# If you missed it: DFO's August program

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 program live, click the link below to view the recording.



# zoom

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



**AUGUST 28**

## **Bluebird Seasons: Witnessing Climate Change in My Piece of the Wild** Mary Taylor Young

**WATCH ONLINE**

**Mary Taylor Young**, a prolific Colorado nature writer and naturalist, discusses her climate change epiphany on a 37-acre ranchette she shares with her husband in southern Colorado. She recounts with photos how they built their cabin and a string of bluebird nesting boxes, and anecdotally observed changes on the landscape through the years: “The trees began dying . . . the meadows were dry and brown . . . the wildlife were changing.” More birds usually found farther south and at lower elevation. Fresh bear scat in January when bears should be hibernating. She realized clues to the “gathering storm” of global warming were within decades of nature journal entries since 1995. Those observations became her book, *Bluebird Seasons: Witnessing Climate Change In My Piece of the Wild*.





## FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

# In Focus: We need DFO birders birding pix!

Denver Field Ornithologists annually leads many hundreds of birders on memorable field trips across Colorado. Every outing's checklist is permanently recorded on eBird, often with photos of that outing's best bird sightings.

But what about pictures of the birders themselves? This new feature, ***Field Trips in Focus***, will share glimpses of DFO field trippers doing what we do. Our goal is to preserve in *The Lark Bunting* at least one photo of people birding on every DFO trip.

Want to help? Take a couple of shots of your fellow birders on your next DFO outing: hiking down the trail, stopping together to scope a choice bird, posing for a group snapshot, or just goofing in candid moments. We'll publish the best, including when and where and who was there — like *The Lark Bunting* used to do on printed paper long before eBird became our birding recordkeeper.

Here are some *Field Trips in Focus* shots for August. Now: **Email us your September field trip birder shots** — preferably .JPG or .PNG photo files, in focus, uncropped and unedited, with date/location of your DFO trip. Send to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at [patodrisk@gmail.com](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com) and CC: to photo editor **Jim Esten** at [jcesten@gmail.com](mailto:jcesten@gmail.com). Please write "Field Trips in Focus" in the subject field. Deadline is the last day of the month, so the next send date is **no later than Sept. 30**. Again, photos of field trip *people* only, please.

See you on the birding trail . . . and maybe later in the pages of *The Lark Bunting*!



### AUGUST 8 Summer Hummer Feeder Watching

#### Leader

David Suddjian

#### Participants

Virginia and Gary Gulakowski,  
Kelly Ducham, Linda Purcell,  
Billy Harris, Michelle Trotter,  
Nicole Iselin, Dave Prentice

Evening hummingbirds  
August 8 in David's Ken Caryl yard  
(David Suddjian)

*Continued on page 15*



AUGUST 20  
**Southeastern Colorado**

**Leader**  
David Suddjian

**Participants**  
Liza and Ajit Antony,  
Kenneth Stuckey, Joanna Chau,  
Robert Tonge, Patty Boyd,  
Jennifer Tonge, Jeff Dawson,  
Kelly Ducham, Archer Silverman

Archer Silverman scoping lifer  
Sanderlings August 20 at  
Upper Queens Reservoir  
(David Suddjian)



AUGUST 27  
**Northeastern Colorado**

**Leader**  
Joey Kellner

**Participants**  
Winston Liu, Liza and Ajit  
Antony, Courtney Rella,  
Joe Chen, Tim Smart,  
Susan Blansett, Mark Amershek,  
Diane Roberts, Patricia Cullen,  
Deb Piranian, Debby Miller,  
Angela Trnka

Scoping shorebirds and ducks  
August 27 on a Morgan County playa  
(Joe Chen)





Sunrise at ranch gate  
Patrick O'Driscoll



Ladder-backed Woodpecker  
Patrick O'Driscoll

## BIRDING / CONSERVATION

# Another blow: State to end open access at Chico this winter

**Patrick O'Driscoll**

The Colorado State Land Board's heavy-handed move to restrict future birding at Chico Basin Ranch has taken a yet more onerous twist. The board's staff will institute its drastic 10-weeks-a-year, mornings-only limit on birder access almost a full year sooner than previously stated. Bird-as-you-please access to the property will cease before the end of the upcoming winter of 2023-24.

Severe and questionable limits on birding visits to the 86,000-acre ranch, one of Colorado's richest birdlife locales, were not supposed to start until Jan. 1, 2025. That's the date a new 10-year ranching lease takes effect at the sprawling, state-owned property in El Paso and Pueblo counties. Separate new leases for recreational use (birding, hunting/fishing, hospitality, etc.) were supposed to take effect then as well.

But in email and telephone contacts this summer with Aiken Audubon of Colorado Springs, land board staff indicated they want the birding lease — and new rules with it — to start on March 1, 2024. That's 10 full months before the ranch's livestock and agricultural lease resets. This will abruptly end the present policy of anytime, self-guided access for birders barely two months into the final year of the current lease with Ranchlands, a Chico-based cattle company that welcomes birders on the property.

In fact, board staff wanted to end open-gate entry even sooner, as early as July 1 or Sept. 1 of *this* year, 16-18 months ahead of time. That September bombshell, dropped in a July email, caught everyone by surprise — Aiken, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (which conducts [spring and fall banding onsite](#)) and even [Ranchlands](#), a family-owned outfit that has allowed birders year-round at Chico Basin for decades. "That freaked us out," says Aiken conservation chair **Linda Hodges**, the club's liaison to the land board. "I told them this can't happen by that date. We couldn't get registration going by then." Her contacts at the land board now say they want a March 1 start date for new birding rules.

The land board's flimsy excuse for halting anytime birder access after Feb. 29, 2024 is so the next ranching lessee will know how the new birding rules operate ahead of taking over agriculture operations in 2025. (*One year ahead?*) But then, the board's rationale for limiting future birding to just 10 weeks a year was already dubious from the start. Board staff has claimed

*Continued on page 17*





## CHICO BASIN *cont from page 16*

the 10-week limit would “minimize conflicts” with the ranching operation. But that is a non-existent “problem”: Both Aiken and Ranchlands say no such conflicts have ever occurred. Birders at Chico Basin rarely even see livestock, ranch staff or vehicles, let alone get in their way.

To preserve some semblance of future birding at Chico Basin, Aiken had reluctantly consented to a 5-year, no-fee lease to manage birder reservations, user fees and services, with visits limited by the land board to only 20 people a day. (Aiken also has to split any proceeds with the Bird Conservancy.) But as an all-volunteer chapter of National Audubon, Aiken needs months, if not all of next year, to prepare. It must create a system to take reservations and manage visitors, carry two kinds of insurance, collect entry fees, provide portable toilets, signs and other services, and organize volunteers to oversee visits. Although DFO and others have pledged to support Aiken, the birding lease startup remains a heavy lift.

For more than two years, the land board timetable for new leasing at Chico Basin had counted down towards Dec. 31, 2024, the end of the current overall lease with Ranchlands. In a move to exert greater control, board staff has peeled away non-ranching activities (birding and bird banding, hunting/fishing, hospitality) from the next livestock/agriculture lease, activities that Ranchlands has managed without complaint for years.

The land board intends to award the 2025 livestock lease before the end of this year, at least 12 months before the current lease expires. Ranchlands is one of several bidders for that new 10-year ranching contract. But the move to start the non-fee leases for birding and banding 10 months sooner sent the Bird Conservancy scrambling to pay for its banding station work. Ranchlands, which covered those costs until now, no longer will because the land board interfered by pushing up the start of the bird-related leases.

Hodges said the land board had agreed to assign a birding lease to Aiken, but without specifics, leaving it up to board staff to figure out the details. She said that when she submitted Aiken’s application and fee for the birding lease, the paperwork specified a Jan. 1, 2025 starting date. But now a lease awaits Aiken signature, retroactive to Sept. 1 and effective March 1, 2024.

“The first season is going to be very trial-and-error for us,” Hodges said. “People thought they had another spring migration season out there unfettered, and now they don’t.” That includes DFO, which conducts several field trips a year at Chico Basin, a popular destination.

“We’re just going to do as best as we can to figure it out,” Hodges added. “It’s not what we hoped it would be, but we’re just trying to go with the flow, because getting ticked off about it isn’t going to get us anywhere.”

# Denver pre-teen is new face on a birding fast track: “I’m just a kid that likes birds”

**Patrick O’Driscoll**

One year ago this summer, a Denver boy took up birdwatching, another in the wave of newcomers to our field. Using an old monocular that day in August 2022, he spied four species in Denver City Park, a 4-minute bike ride from home. Then he joined eBird to post his first checklist.

Soon after, the pre-teen began his own birding blog. Not much later, he tried to start a birding club at school but got no takers. Undeterred, he began research on a [personal online field guide](#) to the birds of Colorado, which he figures will take 10-15 years to complete. (“It’s going to be more of a database, kind of like Cornell’s *Birds of the World*,” he says matter-of-factly.) Then in mid-December, what the boy first thought was a Song Sparrow in his backyard hedge sent him to the internet to make sure.

Two days before New Year’s, he reported back on an eBird checklist: “This little guy has been hanging around our house for around three weeks now. He took a little while to ID but the yellow beak and the orange stripes and the grayish cap gave it away. If you want to see him please come by.”

And so, for the next 10 weeks starting New Year’s Day, sixth-grader **Archer Silverman**, age 11, welcomed dozens of adult readers of eBird’s [Colorado Rare Bird Alert](#) to view his Denver winter rarity, a Fox Sparrow.

## Big year, bigger ambitions

The bird boy wonder was just getting started. Within a couple of weeks, Archer had begun his own Colorado “big year” — rather ambitious for someone who can’t drive a car until 2027. But “ambitious” seems to be his middle name. After setting a target of 300 species, he’s already at 292, with fall migration just underway.

Before turning 12 in April, he joined Denver Field Ornithologists. (He also got a scope for his birthday.) That month, Archer joined half a dozen adult DFO’ers on an overnight trip to view Gunnison Sage-Grouse. Then in May, he created a WhatsApp group for birders in City Park, his “patch” five blocks from home.

“I am definitely committed,” he says, like a fanboy talking [Pokémon](#), not pelicans. “Birding is basically what I’ve been doing a lot.” His parents and grandparents try to shuttle him to the birds when they can, but Archer is already a world-class networker for the rest. No bashful pre-teen, he bums rides and tagalongs with a growing network of grownup birders and friends.

“I’ll tell my husband. ‘God, Archer sends me texts twice a week asking to take him birding,’ ” **Kathy Holland** of Littleton says with mock exhaustion. “My husband says, ‘Well, he’s gotta try. You can always say no.’ ”



Archer Silverman at Plaster Reservoir, Broomfield  
Patrick O’Driscoll

*Continued on page 19*



## “Leaps and bounds”

Holland, who is also DFO's treasurer, went to see that Fox Sparrow last Jan. 5. Archer wasn't home, but his mom was greeting birders, sometimes with homemade cookies. Chatting with **Emily Silverman**, Holland offered to take her son birding sometime. Hours later, the boy phoned, and they met and birded two days later at Denver's Bluff Lake Nature Center. Over the next 10 days, Holland took Archer to see Long-eared Owls at Cherry Creek SP, Barrow's Goldeneye at Denver's Overland Park, and “lots of lifers” at Lake Pueblo SP. Days before his 12th birthday, she took him on that Gunnison Sage-Grouse trip.

“He knew some stuff, but there were so many birds he hadn't seen, and I knew where to look,” says Holland, who logged 362 species in Colorado last year. “He's gone forward in leaps and bounds since. He wants to get it right. He says he's studying birds for like two hours a day along with everything else he's doing. He's very enthusiastic, and he's infectious.”

Archer absorbs avian information like a sponge, and he converses easily with adult birders about, say, flycatcher field marks or the different subspecies of Snow Goose. (“There are two and they are basically impossible to distinguish from each other,” he declares, though he tries.)

Now a seventh grader at Denver's Hill Campus of Arts & Sciences middle school, he watches eBird alerts for rare birds he might be able to chase after class. In the evenings, “I try to finish my school work early and then go online and research about birds, range maps and all that.” On his bedroom wall are National Geographic bird migration posters. “It's kind of fun, there are so many birds on them that I can still look at and see a new one each day.”

Of her son, Emily Silverman says, “When he likes something, he really **LIKES** something. From the time he was born, he's always loved animals and ecosystems. His first sentence was, ‘I love animals.’ He has hundreds of little plastic animals, and he used to arrange them according to species and habitat in all these circles and lines.”

*Continued on page 20*



Archer in his new T-shirt



Updating his eBird checklist





Bird Boy Archer with Kathy Holland, 2nd from left, and other DFO folk on Gunnison Sage-Grouse trip

## Family, community support

Once Archer discovered birds, “you’ve never seen an 11 or 12-year-old get himself up early on Saturday to be in City Park,” Emily adds. His “spark” bird was a Trumpeter Swan cygnet, seen on a family vacation trip in 2022 to Sun River, OR. “During the 20-plus hours we were driving back to Denver, he was counting the birds out the window.”

After he found the Fox Sparrow in their yard, the response was heartening: “The more that we welcomed people,” Emily says, “the more the birding community welcomed us.” Not that Archer’s family — which also includes dad **Josh Mattison** and sister, **Solia**, age 9 — doesn’t encourage him, too. “I feel like the role of a parent is to embrace the interests of your kid,” Emily adds. “He goes birding with everybody in the family now. We’ve all jumped in. I wouldn’t say any of us have gotten the bug like he has, but having the Archer bug, I would do anything to support him.”

“Sometimes I go birding with my grandparents and my parents. They’re not super into birds, but they like to be with me,” Archer adds without a hint of ego. He also has two best friends who, his mother says, “are just amazing humans, too.” And last spring, Archer made friends with a 12-year-old birder he met while chasing a rare Golden-winged Warbler. They’ve birded together since, including to see the state-record Limpkin at Ramah SWA on July 4, the last morning it was sighted there.

Typical 12-year-olds aren’t looking much beyond next week or next month. But Archer Silverman envisions big things years ahead: Many more birding trips once he can drive himself, and then a gap year to do a “real” birding big year between high school and college. With higher education at least six years away, he dreams of Cornell and its famous Lab of Ornithology, maybe for a graduate degree in ornithology — but first, a bachelor’s degree in wildlife biology from Colorado State University would be fine.

Archer’s eBird profile begins: “I’m just a kid that likes birds.” Clearly, the kid’s already got grown-up ambitions. “I do want this to be kind of my life’s path,” he says. “I feel like this is what I’m meant to do.”



## DFO GRANTS PROGRAM

# 2023's DFO grantees tackle climate effects on Colorado species, habitat

### Patrick O'Driscoll

A bird study at a popular local park and several research projects on Front Range chickadees, swallows and upland owls are among the 2023 recipients of grants from DFO's Research, Education, and Conservation Fund.

Thanks to the generosity of DFO members and other donors, the five winning applicants are receiving a combined \$9,050 in financial aid. The grants, recommended by the DFO Grants Committee and approved last February by the DFO Board of Directors, are the largest single-year total since the fund was created in 1994.

The following are newsletter summaries of the awardees' research proposals. Each grantee is expected to report back to DFO members next year on project status and results.

### SARA GARCIA

PhD student in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology  
University of Colorado Boulder  
\$2,000

#### ASSESSING ENVIRONMENTAL HETEROGENEITY AMONG BARN SWALLOW NESTING SITES

(with co-investigators **Heather Kenny-Duddela** and **Rebecca Safran**)



Garcia's Barn Swallow research aims to analyze whether and how "site-level and nest-level environments" in Boulder County, and the related development of the birds' nestlings there, may vary across a range of urban and rural locations. Her project outline notes that Barn Swallows "are especially relevant for studies related to urbanization" because they are "highly mobile and prolific" in human-built

environments. (Boulder County populations have surged by 600 percent since the mid-20th century and are forecast to grow 1 percent annually over the next half-century, both "drastic indicators of increasing urbanization.")

At the same time, as aerial insect-eaters, they're also "highly sensitive to climate change as their environments change"; in such cases, the species has "been found to be decreasing in numbers." Preliminary data that Garcia collected last year (May-September 2022) already found variation related to temperature fluctuations at nest levels. Her project outline asserts that collecting more data for various "abiotic" or physical factors "is necessary to understand the degree of variation across these microenvironments." This year's work (March-October) includes monitoring swallow nest sites across the county. With booming urban growth, understanding how species that reproduce and live in these environments are affected is critically important.

### JACK DOMEIKA

Avian ecology researcher  
in Organismal Biology & Ecology  
Colorado College, Colorado Springs  
\$2,000

#### ESTIMATING THE EFFECT OF HABITAT QUALITY ON GENE FLOW, GENETIC DIVERSITY, AND FITNESS IN FLAMMULATED OWLS (*PSILOSCOPS FLAMMEOLUS*)

(with co-investigators **Maybellene Gamboa** and **Brian Linkhart**)



Domeika's research aims to use genomic sequencing to advance understanding of Colorado populations of Flammulated Owl (*Psiloscops flammeolus*), a small, elusive and highly unique migratory species vulnerable "to rapid climate change and an indicator species in old growth forests." He hypothesizes that the most fit males inhabit higher quality central patches of old-growth habitat — where, in turn, they attract more females willing to conceive and hatch young in couplings outside of traditional mated-pair relationships (known as "extra-pair paternity," or EPP). Any resulting

*Continued on page 22*

“positive relationship between fitness and habitat quality” would suggest high genetic diversity in the middle of broader nesting areas.

The idea is to quantify genetic diversity in Flammulated Owls “to better predict ecosystem health” and guide efforts to stop habitat fragmentation that can wipe out local populations. In this regard, as migrators, Flammulateds are “important indicators” of habitat health here in the West and in central Mexico where they winter. This makes their experience invaluable to those who manage fragmented landscapes.

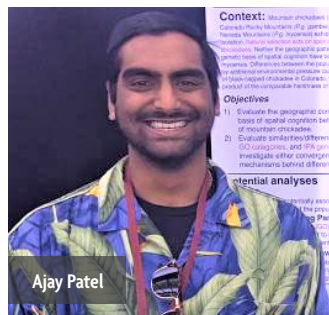
Colorado College’s Linkhart Ornithology Lab has gathered data on Flammulateds and their habitat in Pike National Forest for more than 40 years, with breeding and blood-sample data for more than 20 years. This project will extract genomic DNA from those samples in analyses of about 350 individual owls across breeding seasons. The end result will be “genomic libraries” of data to be sequenced and compared with habitat metrics to test the hypothesis that Flammulated males with prime central territories father more “extra-pair” offspring.

## AJAY PATEL

PhD student in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology  
University of Colorado Boulder  
\$1,500

### EXPLORING THE GEOGRAPHIC CONSISTENCY OF THE GENETIC BASIS OF SPATIAL COGNITION IN MOUNTAIN CHICKADEES

(with co-investigator **Scott A. Taylor**)



**Context:** Mountain chickadees in Colorado’s Rocky Mountains (e.g., golden-crowned kinglets) have been shown to have evolved different spatial cognition abilities in response to habitat fragmentation. However, the geographic consistency of spatial cognition has not been examined. Differences between individuals in spatial cognition could be a result of individual differences or a result of the geographic location of the individual.

**Objectives**

- 1) Evaluate the geographic consistency of spatial cognition in two populations of mountain chickadees.
- 2) Evaluate similar levels of spatial cognition in two populations of mountain chickadees.

**Potential analyses**

1) Compare the spatial cognition of individuals from the same population to those from a different population.

2) Compare the spatial cognition of individuals from the same population to those from a different population.

Patel’s research seeks to learn if “spatial cognition” — how birds learn about their environment and how to obtain food, water and shelter within it — can help predict how Mountain Chickadees in Colorado might adapt to changing climate and other future conditions. He says the genetics of spatial cognition in Mountain Chickadees have never been examined in the two geographic regions where different

subspecies occur: California’s Sierra Nevada range and points west, and regions east of the Sierra, including the Colorado Rockies. He also calls it an opportunity to evaluate “genetic parallelism” in distinct populations long isolated from each other (between 610,000 and 1.53 million years).

The project began capturing birds last spring at nest boxes in the long-running Boulder Chickadee Study area at CU Boulder’s Mountain Research Station in Nederland, CO. The aim was to sample as many as possible, then choose 50 for blood-sampling, banding and tagging with transponders. Those devices were linked to radio-ID-equipped feeder arrays far enough apart to draw different flocks of foragers to score for their spatial cognition traits. The species relies on these abilities to survive by caching plentiful seeds in fall for recovery in winter. Some Mountain Chickadees in higher, harsher environments have shown enhanced spatial learning and have larger memory zones in their brains (hippocampus).

## SUSAN BENNETT

Environmental interpreter  
City of Wheat Ridge, CO  
\$1,600

### TABOR LAKE BIRD POPULATION STUDY

(with Metropolitan State University, Denver project partners Biology Prof. **Christy Carello** [avian monitoring/student surveys] and Earth/Atmospheric Science Sr. Lecturer **Sara Schliemann** [student soil sample collection/analysis])



Years of habitat loss (human development), increased metro Denver population, and heavier use of Wheat Ridge Greenbelt have put the Tabor Lake colonial bird island and other rookery locations elsewhere at risk. Trees

on the rookery island are stressed and dying. In response, the City of Wheat Ridge plans habitat and trail restoration work at Tabor, a former gravel pit along Clear Creek Trail in the greenbelt. Before beginning work on the ground, the city is undertaking this research study to establish a bird population baseline around the lake.

*Continued on page 23*



Tabor's sizeable island is a communal nesting spot with safety and the lake's food supply (periodically stocked with fish) for Great Blue Heron, Double-crested Cormorant, Black-crowned Night-Heron and Snowy Egret. It has become a popular destination for birders, including those on DFO field trips. The city's work is meant to help update its Open Space Management Plan for the first time since 2002, while serving more residents and visitors and creating new education and conservation opportunities.

This research will document status of habitat, island rookery trees and soil conditions, bird population health, size and sustainability, ID possible island restoration methods, and will incorporate data from DFO Colonial Waterbirds Project, Tuesday Birders, and eBird to enhance understanding of bird populations in the area. Project partners from Metro State will create bird monitoring protocol to be incorporated into management plan, and they will sample and analyze island soil after breeding season is complete. Health of remaining island trees will be determined using International Society of Arboriculture assessment procedures.

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### HALEY L. KENYON

Post-doctoral associate in Ecology  
& Evolutionary Biology  
University of Colorado Boulder  
\$1,950

### THE EFFECTS OF COLOR PATTERN DIFFERENCES ON BETWEEN-SPECIES AGGRESSIVE INTERACTIONS IN A COLORADO FRONT RANGE AVIAN HYBRID ZONE

(with co-investigator **Scott A. Taylor**)



Haley Kenyon

Color patterns, vocalizations and other species-recognition cues mediate interaction among animals of the same and different species that inhabit the same area. Among birds that share habitat, color patterns diverge more

between species, but the effect of this difference on relations between them is poorly understood. Kenyon's work aims to compare and contrast such behavior among Black-capped and Mountain chickadees that coexist (and occasionally interbreed) along a 4,000-foot elevation gradient from Boulder up to CU Boulder's Mountain Research Station near Ward.

Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) and Mountain Chickadee (*Poecile gambeli*) have "striking color pattern differences," Kenyon said in her grant proposal for a project meant to understand if different color patterns affect aggressive interaction. "I will integrate results from robust field experiments, population surveys, and cutting-edge genomic analyses from Colorado Front Range populations." One experiment exposes 3D-printed models of both species to individual birds in the hybrid zone to see if the differences "influence species recognition in aggressive interactions, which have important implications" for acquiring mates and claiming resources (food, territory, nesting cavities).

The project also aims to understand better the effect that the presence of humans has on birds locally. Chickadee hybridization is thought to be enabled by more contact between the two species because of increased urbanization.



Black-capped Chickadee  
Patrick O'Driscoll



LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

**Fall migration: “The world moves . . .  
and we long to move with it”**

Least Sandpipers  
Jim Esten



### Patrick O'Driscoll

As their autumn exodus deepens, we present a Colorado gallery of birds on the move or about to depart. Our summer nesters and seasonal residents — as well as out-of-town passers-through who hatched and fledged their young elsewhere — are migrating south before winter descends.

“That such delicate creatures undertake these epic journeys defies belief,” Pulitzer Prize finalist **Scott Weidensaul** writes in *[Living on the Wind](#)*, a rich study of bird migration in the Americas. The migratory hawks, shorebirds, waders, flycatchers, warblers and so many others who have delighted us here since last spring are among an estimated 5 *billion-with-a-B* birds that undertake semiannual passages across hundreds and thousands of miles of the Western Hemisphere.



Swainson's Hawk juvenile at  
Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR  
Jim Esten



Pelicans at Cherry Creek SP  
Rob Raker

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Blue Grosbeak at Lagerman Reservoir  
John Salisbury





Wilson's Warbler in autumn  
rabbitbrush, Chatfield SP  
Jim Esten



Bullock's Oriole near Lyons, CO  
J. Maxwell Images of Nature

At the same time, we're about to welcome our own over-winter guests. For some flocks of geese, ducks and others from farther north or higher up, Front Range winters are balmy by comparison. "Bird migration," Weidensaul adds, "is the one truly unifying natural phenomenon in the world, stitching the continents together."

Swainson's Hawks that fledged young in Colorado this summer are kettling up for a 6,000-mile mass migration to wintering grounds in Argentina. Wilson's Warblers, seldom seen here during their springtime push north, are somehow more abundant now. One of their return flyways south for winter in Mexico and Central America runs right through Colorado.

On some level, how many of us wish we had wings with which to join them?

"Migrations speak to us, not just as observers of nature but as integral parts of it," writes **Mike Bergin**, creator of the [10,000 Birds](#) birding website and blog, "The world moves and, deep inside, we long to move with it."

For now, we silently sing: "So long, farewell, *auf wiedersehen*, goodbye" . . . but in anticipation, we add: "See you next spring."



Greater Yellowlegs in pond,  
Archdiocese of Denver grounds  
Jim Esten

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Counter-clockwise  
**Sandhill Cranes** (Jim Esten)  
**Marbled Godwit, Chatfield Reservoir** (Jim Esten)  
**Baird's Sandpiper at Laggerman Reservoir, Boulder County** (John Salisbury)  
**Solitary Sandpiper, Laggerman Reservoir** (J.Maxwell Images of Nature)







Fall migrant Wilson's Warbler  
taking flight, Chatfield SP  
Jim Esten

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