



# THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 60 | ISSUE 10 | OCTOBER 2024

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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generous, stalwart

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**dfo**  
DENVER FIELD  
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Red-tailed Hawk  
Prospect Park  
Wheat Ridge, CO  
John Breitsch



## ON THE COVER

# Red-tailed Hawk: Everywhere, ordinarily — and every one, extraordinary



Birder, photographer and field trip leader **John Breitsch**, 60, succumbed to abdominal cancer in August. Born in New York state, he moved to Colorado

in his 30s, began birding at 40 and led his first DFO field trip after turning 50. He left his bird photos to DFO in a Flickr gallery at: [www.flickr.com/photos/breitschbirding](https://www.flickr.com/photos/breitschbirding)

### Patrick O'Driscoll

This month's cover bird makes a good trivia quiz answer, if the question is: *What native raptor is more widespread across North America than our three most common non-native bird species — Rock Pigeon, House Sparrow and European Starling?* I haven't double-checked with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, but the answer to a follow-up question may be the same: *What bird has more photo images on its [Birds of the World](#) home page than any other?*

For the record, there are 25 different images of Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) on the species' BOW front page. But when you're a bird with 12-16 subspecies, light, intermediate and dark morphs, an array of primary plumages (black, chocolate brown, rufous, pale white), and still more intergrades and regional variations, it takes a photo album to express the range. The species' wardrobe is endless.

Here in the West, Red-tails are polymorphic, varying widely and wildly in color and shade. We are also the home of the species' Krider's variant, a rare, pale, Plains ghost of a Red-tail whose tail is actually white. (A fine example of the subspecies has hung out through much of summer in and around Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR outside Denver.) Unlike most species, the Red-tail rates two full pages in *Sibley Birds* to cover just the basic array.

Every birder seems to have a story or two of memorable encounters with Red-tails in the field. For two decades, birders in Westminster and beyond enjoyed a virtually all-white, leucistic one that hung out near Legacy Ridge Golf Course until its death in August 2020. Myself, I'll always remember the Red-tail that **Chuck Hundertmark** and I happened upon in Denver City Park, early on a Saturday in February 2017. Hunched on the lawn barely 5 feet off the sidewalk, it ignored us, unruffled, as it finished its breakfast of an American Coot.

Common? Yes, certainly the most common hawk on the continent. I consider an eBird checklist anywhere beyond my backyard incomplete if there's not one on it. The species' most recent population estimate is a safe 3.1 million birds.

Uncommon? Yes, uncommonly *glorious*. Belly band or not (some don't have one), russet-tailed or not (juveniles' tails are brown and barred until year 2), Red-tailed Hawks *look* like hawks should look — fierce of eye, acutely alert, aggressively perched, ready for action. And their sky-dancing courtship aerobatics are just jaw-drop amazing.

To say nothing of its iconic, shrill scream — except I will. It's a goose-bumps call so primeval that Hollywood long ago co-opted it as the audio embodiment of "wilderness" or "outdoors" in hundreds of movies and TV episodes — even though directors regularly miscast it as the cry an eagle or other non-Red-tail. Nobody's perfect — but the Red-tailed Hawk seems about as perfect as a hawk can be.

**A note: This month's cover bird was photographed in Wheat Ridge's Prospect Park in 2012 by John Breitsch, a gifted photographer and DFO field trip leader who died this summer. The image is among more than 10,000 that John bequeathed to Denver Field Ornithologists. Read our memorial to John beginning on [page 12](#) of in this issue.**

**Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor of The Lark Bunting since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he leads occasional DFO field trips in his home patch, Denver City Park.





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*The Lark Bunting* newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at [dfobirds.org](https://dfobirds.org) except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

## PUBLICATION STAFF

### Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

### Assistant Editor

Mike Fernandez

### Photo Editor

Jim Esten

### Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

### Contributors this issue

Mark Amershek, Alison Bishop, Susan Blansett, John Breitsch, Joe Chen, Carly Crow, Jim Esten, Mike Fernandez, Jenyva Fox., Megan Heller, Steve Herbert, Cindi Inklebarger, Devin Jaffe, Rosanne Juergens, Joey Kellner, Alison Kondler, Felice Lyons, Barbara Breitsch Moore, Courtney Rella, Abby Santurbane, Samuel Shaw, David Suddjian, Sharon Tinianow, Robert Tonge, Bill Turner, Phil Waltz, Nadiyah Watts, Matthew A. Young, Gigi Zarzuela

## CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at [patodrisk@gmail.com](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com).

Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at [jcesten@gmail.com](mailto:jcesten@gmail.com).

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](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com).

**Next deadline: Monday, Sept. 30, 2024**



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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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### Zoom Coordinator

Jim Esten ([admin@dfobirds.org](mailto:admin@dfobirds.org))

## DFO ONLINE

### Website

[dfobirds.org](http://dfobirds.org)

### Facebook Group

[facebook.com/groups/dfobirds](https://facebook.com/groups/dfobirds)

### Instagram

[instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists](https://instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists)

## CONTACT

### Email

[dfocommsgroup@gmail.com](mailto:dfocommsgroup@gmail.com)

### Via website (at bottom of home page)

[dfobirds.org](http://dfobirds.org)

### US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland  
Treasurer, DFO  
351 E Caley Ave  
Centennial, CO 80121-2201

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### DFO Merch Store

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To reach DFO officers,  
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committee chairs,  
and other position holders  
directly, please contact them  
individually via the  
[DFO Leadership Page](#).





FROM THE PRESIDENT

## Member survey: Nobody's perfect, but you enjoy DFO a whole bunch



DFO birders on SE Arizona trip in May 2024  
Alison Bishop

### Sharon Tinianow

Back in July, members of Denver Field Ornithologists were invited to participate in a survey about important matters in our organization. Your responses gave the club's board of directors and committee chairs fresh insight into what you feel is important. This month, I want to share some of those insights and survey results with you.

At the outset, thank you for your great response. Typically, when organizations like ours survey their members, they hope to hear back from 5-10% of their membership. Your response rate to this survey was just above TWENTY-FIVE percent. Wow, such great news! It means that the trends we see in the data would likely hold up even if 100% of members answered the survey.

The questionnaire asked you about this newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*, and about DFO club communications in general. It also sought your opinions about the various activities DFO offers members. The survey concluded with an open-ended question asking if you had anything else you wanted to discuss.

From your responses, we can tell that a substantial portion of our membership enjoys *The Lark Bunting* in its current magazine-style form. Just over half of those who responded said they read every issue and another 24% read more than half of the 10 issues we publish each year. Asked to rate the various regular features of our newsletter, no more than 14% of respondents considered any of them "not great." That suggests wide enough appreciation for what we include in *The Lark Bunting* each month to continue delivering you previews of upcoming programs and events, birding essays, reports on major field trips, people profiles, and photo galleries of birds and birders.

In optional comments, members shared what they enjoy in more detail and suggested some new ideas for the newsletter. Some also suggested *The Lark Bunting* is too long to read each month. Our newsletter editor, **Patrick O'Driscoll**, will take all of your comments into consideration for future issues.

Your survey feedback also helped the DFO Communications & Outreach Committee decide to move to a new two-pronged format for future news communications.

Beginning in 2025, *The Lark Bunting* as you know it — a digital magazine published on the DFO website — will be issued as a quarterly journal instead of 10 times a year. It will focus on themes and topics tied less to upcoming deadlines and milestones and more to feature looks at birding issues, people, places and species that DFO and Colorado are about.

At the same time, we will begin a digital newsletter, delivered monthly via email like the current *DFO Digest*, that focuses on immediate, time-sensitive and forward-looking matters. This more easily accessed e-newsletter will contain program previews, calendar reminders of DFO events, need-to-know news updates on key topics, local birding news and other timely information.

*Continued on page 6*



The survey also found that overall, DFO members are satisfied with the multiple ways they receive information about our club. That said, far more of you rated the newsletter, email digest, and DFO website as “valuable” than social media, DFO items on the COBirds list-serv, and monthly meeting announcements. This suggests that members think the primary focus should remain with the newsletter, digest and website.

To no one’s surprise, survey respondents ranked field trips No. 1 in importance to them, followed by the DFO website, *Lark Bunting* newsletter, “BIRD BOMBS” monthly bird ID webinars, monthly evening programs on Zoom, the Hawk Watch project, and DFO’s grants fund. The way they ranked these features and activities reflects how members feel about the club’s mission. One comment summed it up succinctly: “I think that anything that gets people out in the field or learning about birds aligns with our mission.”

We also learned there are many ways people engage with DFO. But regardless of personal preferences, members see value in variety. “DFO is a big community with a wide range of interests, capabilities, knowledge, available time, etc. . . . So all those activities are important,” one respondent wrote.

The last, open-ended question drew a variety of answers, too. Ideas for field trips and appreciation for everything DFO does were the most frequent replies. A few expressed the wish that DFO have more in-person meetings again. The most frequent complaints? Field trips filling up too quickly, and — frustration with the software program we used to conduct this survey. (We hear you, and we’re working to make it better and easier next time.)

The C&O Committee shared survey responses with the DFO Board and all the club’s committee chairs. They will keep your opinions, ideas and priorities in mind as they make decisions for our club in how we handle field trips, club finances, volunteer recruitment, the Hawk Watch project, and yes, communications.

Thanks to all of you who participated. Your willingness to tell us what’s on your mind is just another way that DFO is a special organization. You show that we all care about how our club works and succeeds, because DFO’s success enhances our enjoyment of the birds that have brought us all together.

Good birding!

— **Sharon**

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*DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of The Lark Bunting. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder’s Museum of Natural History.*

# 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).

## NEXT ON BIRD BOMBS SEPT. 12: "ASS" WHAT?

You're reading this right: ASSFEET! The grebe family's scientific name *Podicipedidae* combines the Latin words *podicis* ("rear end" or "anus") and *pes* ("foot") to describe the physical placement of grebes' legs toward the rear of their bodies. Learn more about this and other Colorado grebe identification tips in BIRD BOMBS: Assfeet, DFO's next bird ID mini-webinar on **Sept. 12, 7 p.m. MDT**. If you missed the last one, Colorado Bird Taxonomy Made Simple, the video is now available with 28 other episodes in Denver Field Ornithologists' online BIRD BOMBS video library.

REGISTER FOR BIRD BOMBS



## DFO VOLUNTEER TRIBUTE IS OCT. 19 AT ARSENAL

This year's Denver Field Ornithologists' Volunteer Appreciation Day celebration is set again for the visitor center at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. This gathering on **Saturday, Oct. 19 from 10 a.m. to noon MDT** will feature coffee-break snacks and beverages, presentation of the club's highest awards for volunteerism, and a live-animal program with "Colorado Native" species by Nature's Educators, Colorado's own wildlife education outreach organization.

In the 89 years since our organization was founded in 1935 as the Colorado Bird Club, DFO has functioned solely because of the contributions of time and energy from dedicated volunteers. This second annual event is in tribute to DFO field trip leaders, Hawk Watch volunteers, behind-the-scenes tech helpers, program managers, board and committee members and the club's officers. To attend, volunteers must register themselves and up to one guest.

REGISTER FOR VOLUNTEER TRIBUTE

## FALL BIRDING FEST AT BARR LAKE SP SEPT. 14

With autumn migration underway, it's time again for the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' annual Fall Birding Festival at Barr Lake SP. This year's event is **Saturday, Sept. 14, 7 a.m. – 1 p.m. MDT**. The morning begins with guided bird tours and a visit to the Conservancy's bird banding station. There will be kid-friendly crafts and activities for youngsters, and educational booths on an array of themes — live birds on the glove, bird dress-up, bird-friendly actions humans can take, and more, including DFO's own information table (and free book giveaway).

BIRDING FEST SCHEDULE AND INFORMATION



## CHICO BASIN RANCH NOW OPEN FOR FALL MIGRATION

The first season of fall migration access under Chico Basin Ranch's shortened birding schedule began on **Monday, Sept. 2** and will continue through **Sunday, Oct. 6**. Except for a similar 6-week period in spring, the bird-rich prairie location

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in El Paso and Pueblo counties is closed to birders the rest of the year. Birding each day is mornings only (7 a.m.-1 p.m.), and access is limited to three eBird hotspot locations on the ranch. Birders must register and pay the \$15 fee in advance online at the website of [Aiken Audubon](https://aikenaudubon.com), the Pike's Peak regional chapter of National Audubon. Aiken now oversees and manages the birding program, and proceeds go to maintain birding access to the ranch. Visitation is limited to just 20 birders a day, and birders can register up to 7 days in advance of their requested date. Those seeking group reservations should first email [chicoregistration@aikenaudubon.com](mailto:chicoregistration@aikenaudubon.com).

Besides individual birding visits, DFO has scheduled two group field trips to Chico Basin this season: **Monday, Sept. 16** and **Monday, Sept. 23**. Registration for both trips on the [DFO field trips page](#) is filled with long waiting lists, a testament to Chico Basin's popularity.

#### CHICO BASIN RULES, REGISTRATION, AND DETAILS

### NATURE PLAY™ ZONE OPENING IN DENVER CITY PARK

After almost two years of fenced-off construction, a new children's "Nature Play" feature in Denver City Park opens **Sept. 10** with a public celebration at the Denver Museum of Nature + Science (3–9 p.m. MDT, free museum admission). The 4-acre zone that extends below the southwest corner of the museum is a combination of nature-themed playground and natural riparian zone, with a regularly flowing stream for the first time in decades. The museum and Denver Parks & Recreation created Nature Play around what's left of the park's 71-year-old DeBoer Box Canyon and stream corridor, originally a feature of Denver's first botanic garden.

Over the years, the strip also became a patch of unexpectedly attractive habitat for birds — especially during spring and fall migration — even though water rarely flowed except after storms. The restored riparian area, which will recirculate stormwater in a cycling loop, has been replanted with native grasses, wildflowers, shrubs and trees and is crisscrossed with footbridges. The area also has playground features from swings, slides, and carved benches and sculptures of birds and wildlife to rock formations, a climbable log "beaver dam" and a 20-foot-tall Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep play structure.

As heaviest construction activity subsided this summer, more birds have been using the habitat within the still-fenced area. Once the fences come down, the zone's attractiveness to kids may be a test of whether park birdlife (more than 200 species recorded) can coexist with the highest volume of human use in the DeBoer corridor's history.



### REFUGE DAY @ ROCKY MTN ARSENAL IS SEPT. 28

The Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, one of metro Denver's most popular birding destinations, hosts its annual [Refuge Day](#) open house on **Saturday, Sept. 28**. Activities scheduled between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. MDT include Nature's Educators live animal shows, face painting, arts & crafts, "Try-It Archery" (noon–2 p.m.) at the refuge's archery range, and the opportunity to meet endangered Black-footed Ferrets and urban farm animals. All the activities are free and scheduled at the refuge visitor center (except archery). In addition, various "activity tables" will include a DFO booth staffed by club volunteers who will offer training in optimal use of binoculars. Visitors can bring their own binocs and DFO will provide loaners for the training as well.

*Continued on page 9*



## “FALL INTO BIRDING” FOR BEGINNERS STARTS SEPT. 21

After a successful spring offering, [Front Range Birding Company](#) in Littleton is staging a “Fall into Birding” beginners’ course this autumn, again with DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** as instructor and trip leader. The four-class, five-field-trip course begins **Saturday, Sept. 21** with a “getting-to-know-you” morning field trip. Sessions will then alternate between Wednesday night in-class sessions (6:30–8 p.m.) every other week (Sept. 25, Oct. 9, Oct. 23 and Nov. 6) and four more Saturday morning half-day field outings (Sept. 28, Oct. 19, Oct. 26, Nov. 9). Classes will take place at the Front Range Birding Co. store in Littleton at 10146 W. San Juan Way, #110. Field trip times and locations will be announced.

The course, which costs \$215 per person (payable upon registration), will cover birding basics, how to find and identify local and migratory birds, different bird habitats, best local birding spots, and how to use birding tools including eBird, Merlin ID, and more. Registration is limited to 15 participants. To reserve a spot, call or stop by Front Range Birding Company in Littleton or call 303-979-2473.

## CFO’S BIRDING CHALLENGE IS SEPT. 14

Colorado Field Ornithologists’ fourth Colorado Birding Challenge — in which teams and individuals try to find as many bird species as possible in 24 hours in the Colorado county of their choice — is set for **Saturday, Sept. 14**. This year is the first time the challenge will be in autumn. If you’re not already on a team, it’s too late for organizers to place you with one, but you can set one up with as few as two members on CFO’s webpage for the challenge,

As in previous years, funds raised support CFO programs and a noteworthy science or conservation project in the state. This year’s beneficiary is southern Colorado’s Conejos River Restoration Project, which works to restore habitat along the largest tributary to the Rio Grande in the state.

Teams compete in four categories: The Challenge, and The Green Challenge (both have registration fees), and The Under-25 Challenge and Bird Your Own Way categories, which are free. After registration, teams receive a confirmation email with a link to set up their teams’ COBC pages. That’s where teams list name, team members, which county they’ll bird in, and their species goal and fundraising target. Each team page also includes a donation link so supporters can contribute directly to the team’s fundraising goal.

### CFO CHALLENGE INFO AND TEAM REGISTRATION







Ted Floyd  
© Abby Santurbane Photography

## FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

# The State of Birding, Volume 2024.9

Ted Floyd  
Monday, Sept. 23, 2024  
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

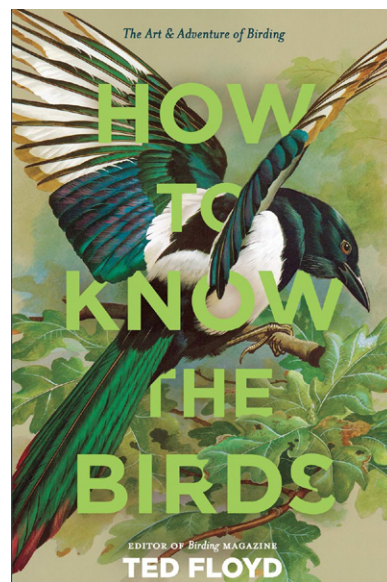
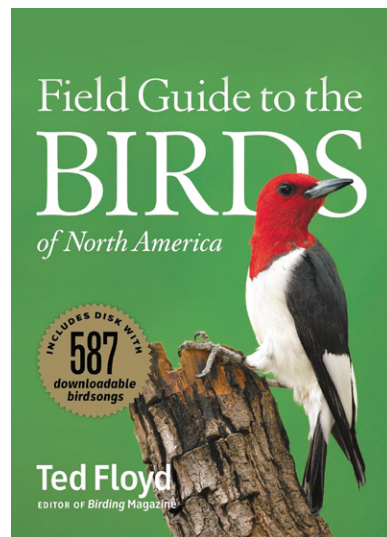
The world of birding is changing fast. eBird and the Merlin Bird ID app continue to alter the way we bird. Cornell Lab's [Macaulay Library](#) delivers terabytes of amazing bird media to the whole world. Top-line optics maker Swarovski has even launched a "smart" binocular that actually works. Meanwhile, the [American Ornithological Society](#) has begun the process of renaming some of the most familiar birds in Colorado and beyond, with plenty of controversy swirling around it. (AOS's "Summit for the Birds" annual meeting this fall, in Estes Park, will feature a public forum on that topic.)

What to make of it all? Our "man on the inside" — distinguished Colorado guidebook author, avian journalist and birding free thinker **Ted Floyd** — will discuss the latest in new knowledge, new tech, new names, and, ultimately, new ways of engaging and appreciating the bird world . . . at least as of September 2024. Hence, the title of his DFO evening program, "*The State of Birding, Volume 2024.9*," on **Monday, Sept. 23 at 7 p.m. MDT** via Zoom. And yes: Ted says you can expect it to all change again pretty soon thereafter.

Floyd, who last spoke to DFO almost exactly two years to the day before this presentation, is longtime editor of *Birding* magazine, flagship publication of the [American Birding Association](#). Engaging and energetic, he has written five bird books — including the *Smithsonian Field Guide to the Birds of North America* (HarperCollins, 2008) and *How to Know the Birds* (National Geographic, 2019) — and he has three more on the way. He has also written more than 200 popular articles, technical papers, and book chapters on birds and nature. He is a frequent speaker at bird festivals, club meetings, and ornithological conferences.

Floyd is especially interested in analyzing bird vocalizations, applying new media and emerging technologies toward the appreciation of nature, and interpreting birds and nature for children and beginners. He regularly leads popular field trips in and around Boulder County, where he and his family live in Lafayette.

Ted has served on the boards of Western Field Ornithologists and Colorado Field Ornithologists. He holds a Ph.D. in ecology from Penn State University and has taught biology, math, and statistics to everyone from second graders to advanced graduate students. He is a recent recipient (2022) of the ABA's Claudia Wilds Award for Distinguished Service, and he is a frequent guest on the American Birding podcast. He is a prolific content generator for ABA's online platforms and is especially proud of his involvement in the association's Young Birder programs.







Matthew Young with Redpolls  
Melissa Groo

## FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

# Crossbills, the Finch Research Network, and the new *Stokes Guide to Finches*

Matthew A. Young  
Monday, Oct. 28, 2024  
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

What makes a finch a finch? A heavy, conical bill meant for cracking open seeds, right? Not so fast, says **Matthew A. Young**, one of the nation's foremost researchers into the finch branches of the avian family tree. It's more complicated than that. Remember Darwin's finches in the Galapagos Islands? Turns out they're actually tanagers.

Bill size and shape are "no longer the case with taxonomy," says Young, president and founder of the [Finch Research Network](#) and an expert in the many calls of the Red Crossbill, another finch family member. Young will discuss all this and more in DFO's October evening program, "Crossbills, the Finch Research Network, and the new *Stokes Guide to Finches*," scheduled for **Oct. 28 at 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom** webinar

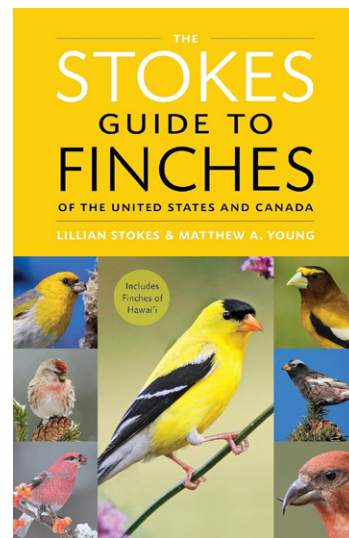
Young is co-author of that new *Stokes* guide, due out in mid-September. "There is no guide to finches for the United States, if you can believe it," he notes. He's also the audio engineer behind much of the bird call and song recordings for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Merlin Bird ID app. He has worked for Cornell on and off for 15 years of an eclectic career that also includes extensive (and current) employment as a social worker with special-needs adolescents and young adults.

He also works with the Rosy Finch Working Group, which he says "is looking into how climate change may play a big role in the future of rosy finches." And he is co-leader of the International Evening Grosbeak Working Group, which is "trying to figure out what led to a 92% decline" in the species in the past 50 years.

Atop all that, Young also studies bogs, fens and orchids. (He founded and is president of the Native Orchid Conservation Network.)

Young has observed and enjoyed nature since early childhood. He first marveled at finches after moving to Yellowstone NP for a summer host job at a park hotel. As he stood at the iconic Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River, "a flock of birds flew in above me and started feeding. It was Red Crossbills. It was the spark — not a spark bird, but a moment in life that shifted my whole being."

He earned his bachelor's degree in water resources and master's in ornithology at two branches of SUNY, the State University of New York. He currently teaches an introductory birding class at Cornell. He was also an adjunct professor in environmental studies at SUNY-Cortland, and he has served as board chair of The Wetland Trust. Young was a regional editor for 10 years with *The Kingbird*, quarterly journal of the New York Ornithological Society.





John Breitsch in the field in 2018



John, rear center, with good DFO friends in 2021 at his First Creek @ GVR patch Patrick O'Driscoll



On his 60th birthday July 10, John with his family, from left, sisters Liz and Barbara, and niece Emma Patrick O'Driscoll

## IN MEMORIAM

# John Breitsch (1964 – 2024): dedicated birder, inventive trip leader, compassionate to all

### Patrick O'Driscoll

Gifted birder and DFO field trip leader **John Breitsch**, a stalwart and gentle-hearted friend to people and birds alike, has left us far too soon. Six months after he was diagnosed with abdominal cancer, John died on Aug. 12, just a month after his 60th birthday. Gaunt and weak but uncomplaining, he spent his final months where the passionate birder in him least wanted to be: in a hospital bed in his northeast Denver living room, under home hospice care.

Still proud, however, that he had survived to his milestone birthday July 10, John chose to celebrate his favorite holiday for the rest of the month. Thanks to his caregiving sister **Barbara Breitsch Moore**, his “Christmas in July” included decorations, a tree, presents, and visits from more family, a best Army buddy and a childhood best friend, all of whom still called him by his boyhood name, “Johnny.”

On July 30, Johnny posted his last Facebook update to friends: *I will make it to August! Yay. September is a bit of a pipe dream. Keep smiling and having fun.*

With his own enigmatic smile and a stoical view of life, John Breitsch called himself “an urban hermit.” For decades from his 20s on, he was comfortable in the solitude of the night shift, working jobs while the rest of us slept. But in his last two decades, he overcame his private and introverted nature to let the caring camaraderie of birding embrace him. He embraced back. As a member and trip leader in Denver Field Ornithologists, John won innumerable friends and admirers with meticulous trip preparation, self-effacing humor, and quiet generosity with his expertise in the field.

“The trip was never about him, it was about helping everybody else,” said **Beth Payne** of Colorado Springs, who became a close friend over the past decade. “New birder or not, if a special or interesting species was spotted, John made sure you got to see the bird.”

His signature move was to arrive at field trip locations an hour or more ahead of everyone else to scout, whether he was leading the trip or not. Because he worked overnights, John’s pre-dawn birding ritual came easily. But he welcomed company, said fellow trip leader and friend

*Continued on page 13*





**Anne Craig** of Lakewood: “Twice I had the pleasure of walking beside John before dawn. He was at ease in the cool darkness, senses keen and a smile at the ready as he discerned each new bird of the day.”

John’s passing leaves holes in DFO hearts and indelible marks in the Colorado birding community. Five years ago, He revived our club’s bygone practice of multiday, out-of-state birding trips, leading a celebrated six-day ramble through southwestern New Mexico. The spirit of that August 2019 trip burns brightly today in ambitious group excursions by other DFO leaders, from **Joey Kellner’s** two recent expeditions to Arizona’s “Sky Islands” to **David Suddjian’s** 1,300-mile journey last spring to the last four Colorado counties unvisited by Denver Field Ornithologists trips.

John created that New Mexico trip as an alternative to the kind he could never afford: exotic tours for deep-pocketed birders with top guides and luxe amenities. “When I was a new birder, I would have killed to have experienced birders take me down there like this and only have to pay for car, room and board,” he explained. Many on the trip still say it was their best DFO outing ever. (“An absolutely amazing trip, and John Breitsch did such an amazing job!” wrote **John Malenich** of Boulder.) His after-trip report was amazing, too. You can read it at [dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/TripReports/9664.pdf](https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/TripReports/9664.pdf).

Another Breitsch innovation was pre-trip information sheets for participants. These PDF guides noted likely species and included maps, trip details, historical notes and fun facts. His printed guide for the epic New Mexico trip was TWENTY-EIGHT pages — with about 28 times the information. No detail was too small, from sunrise/sunset charts to recipes for cooking souvenir New Mexico chilies when they got home. He even packed Windex and paper towels to keep everyone’s windows clear on long dirt-road drives.

Closer to home, John deliberately chose lesser-known destinations for his trips. He liked to promote overlooked birding gems like Star K Ranch, Idalia Park (aka Parkfield Lake Park at the Montbello Rec Center), Pine Valley Ranch Park, Heron Pond Natural Area, White Ranch Park and Parker Regional Park, to name just a few.



That enigmatic smile of John Breitsch, 2017

*Continued on page 14*



Most of all, John popularized bird-rich First Creek, until recent years a rarely visited riparian corridor through his Green Valley Ranch neighborhood. It would blossom into three fruitful eBird hotspots: the tiny but mighty Green Valley Ranch migrant trap he discovered a mile from his house; the reliable-year-round First Creek @ DEN Open Space off Peña Boulevard at 56th Avenue, and the First Creek Trail west of there into a previously closed part of Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

John birded along parts of First Creek more than a decade before the first eBird hotspot pinned it to the map. “That was where my passion for finding birds in little nowhere places started — a place to look and grow,” he explained weeks before his death. “Such under-birded spots became part of my birding philosophy.” His aim was to record quickly at least 100 species at each place to attract more birders. At the three First Creek locations, he saw far more species than any other birder, and he visited each hundreds of times more than the next closest birder.

Born and raised in Chappaqua, NY, John Carl Breitsch was the youngest of the three children of accountant **John W. Breitsch** and homemaker **Eleanor Breitsch**. Growing up introverted and afraid of heights, young John faced his fears head-on. In high school, he threw himself into rock climbing in southeastern New York’s Shawangunk Mountains (aka “The Gunks”), a mecca for serious rock-jocks. After graduation, John enlisted in the Army and threw himself out of airplanes as a paratrooper in the elite 82nd Airborne Division.

“I had never been on a plane in my life,” he recalled last spring, “and now I want to *jump out of planes*? I thought, ‘Conquer your fears,’ because I’m afraid of heights, dude! I’m so freakin’ introverted that I’ll just do what scares the s--- out of me. That was my philosophy at 18.” After the Army, he attended State University of New York-Binghamton for two years before working a decade in historic resort hotels in Pennsylvania’s scenic Pocono Mountains (night auditor was his first after-hours gig). From there John came to Colorado.

After climbing rocks and bailing out of planes, taking up birding would seem the opposite of frightening. But practicing and mastering birding skills among total strangers were challenges. John met them with the same care and precision that his risky earlier pursuits demanded. “The thing about being introverted and going on or leading a field trip is, you

have the birds to fall back on,” John said. “It’s all about the birds.”

Though he grew up in the scenic Hudson River Valley, John didn’t start birding until after arriving in Colorado in the late 1990s. First to catch his eye were American White Pelicans, cruising in an Arvada golf course pond. “My first thought was, ‘What the hell is a pelican, and what’s it doing here?’ ” he recalled. More “spark” birds at nearby Standley Lake included coots, cormorants and one jaw-dropping-beautiful Blue Grosbeak. “Oh my God,” he remembered thinking, “*this bird exists in nature?*”



Paratrooper John, age 18, in training for Army’s 82nd Airborne Division

After outings with the Boulder Bird Club and exploring on his own, John joined DFO more than a decade ago. He became a field trip leader in 2017, leading 44 outings in seven years, the last on Sept. 10, 2023 at Rocky Mountain Arsenal. Working the night shift was an occupational hazard for a trip leader (his last job was as a certified nuclear pharmaceuticals tech for Cardinal Health). Daytime birding opportunities came in odd and unpredictable spurts.

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Life wasn't entirely birds. John loved rock music on the edges, especially XTC, Shriekback, The The, Queen and other post-punk, alt-pop bands of the '70s and '80s. He even mixed birds and music in one-of-a-kind hats and tees, one of which read, "The best Bohemians are Waxwings and Rhapsody." He was a fan of **Agatha Christie** mysteries, with an entire bookcase filled with her complete works. Some years ago, John also pursued "a craft session of my life" — plastic-canvas needlepoint, a yarn embroidery method for making two- and three-dimensional art, rugs, vases, figures, dioramas and other works.

Sometime after that last DFO field trip in September 2023, stomach and back pain began to nag. It was not until a doctor's diagnosis early last February that John learned of the cause: an inoperable gastrointestinal stromal tumor the size of a football. It had already invaded his liver and spine, and its pressure against his stomach left him unable to eat. By late spring, John had lost 50 pounds and was too weak to walk more than a few steps at a time.

Never one to complain, he had only told or hinted to a handful of friends. But after an ER visit in May that led to several days in the hospital, John shared details with a wider circle. "Hi folks," he wrote to friends May 26 on Facebook. "I've had some people wondering about my situation." He explained it in frank terms, with typically dry humor and zero self-pity. He now had IV fluids, blood transfusions, an intestinal feeding tube and "other odds and ends to get me jump started. Hopefully I will get nutrients this way much easier."

"In the meantime," he added, "you won't see me leading any birding trips. Be well out there and have some fun. I'm doing great other than the health, so no worrying necessary. Love to all, John."

A month later, after several falls one night, John returned to the ER, and then the ICU. The feeding tube and oral chemo hadn't worked, and he'd now lost 60 pounds. A week later, he went home to hospice care. His sister Barbara arrived from Connecticut to oversee his needs tirelessly for the final six weeks. The night he died, she posted on John's Facebook page that she envied his "ability to truly exist in each present moment, and he liked himself and his own company. So, while the process was very difficult, as you can imagine, he handled it with acceptance and strength."

In July, John donated birding equipment and several boxes of books on birds and birding to DFO, along with open access to his personal Flickr photo gallery online. It contains more than 10,000 images, most of them never seen beyond eBird checklists and some Facebook posts. Ironically, he had deliberately avoided bird photography until about 5 years after he started birding: "I wanted to learn how to really see a bird first. When you look at it through the camera lens, you see a bird differently. My motto is, 'I'm a birder, not a photographer.'" For not-a-photographer, John's bird images are amazing. See for yourself at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/breitschbirding/>.

John also left a collection of more than 25 "DFO Fact Sheets" he wrote and designed to be printed as handout profiles of Colorado bird species. (He left unfinished templates for about 20 more.) He conceived them several years ago with then-DFO President **Chuck Hundertmark** as they talked about how to connect the club with new audiences at festivals, public events and other gatherings.

John is survived by his mother, siblings and a niece, all of Connecticut and New York state: mother **Eleanor Breitsch**; sisters **Elizabeth Breitsch** and **Barbara Breitsch Moore**, and Barbara's daughter, **Emma Gianoplus**. In lieu of flowers, the family asks John's friends to consider memorial donations to Denver Field Ornithologists.

Birding friends in Colorado will scatter John's ashes in the coming weeks and months at some of the birding spots he loved the most.



## IN MEMORIAM

# Memories of our friend John

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*Editor's note: After the untimely death on Aug. 12 of widely admired Colorado birder and DFO member **John Breitsch**, The Lark Bunting gathered comments and memories from friends, acquaintances and others who knew or had birded with him.*

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I first birded with John as a DFO leader in August 2021 at White Ranch, where he was subbing for **Chris Gilbert**. John's "preflight" email to the group was typical of his unassuming and gentle nature: *We may not go as fast or as far, but it is a beautiful area and there should still be some young birds around to confuse us.*

— **Anne Craig**, Lakewood

What a great, big-hearted, and patient guy. I would love to see this eBird hotspot [**First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch**] named after him -- he's the one who made it famous. <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L5723111>

— **Mark Obmascik**, Denver, via Facebook

I got to know John on the first of my five Christmas Bird Counts at First Creek @ DEN Open Space on New Year's Day 2019. We kept up a good friendship with conversations and other bird outings. In an email exchange in 2020, he wrote kiddingly that he wanted to go to Africa "for the weekend" to see the [Ring of Fire eclipse](#). I replied, "Why is it called that? I want to see that!" Four years later, visiting John in home hospice, I told him I was able to photograph the annular solar eclipse last October. He really perked up at that, still fascinated. Knowing I was also a moon chaser, he pointed to two beautiful, long-exposure landscapes on his living room wall — taken only with the light of a full moon. I told him I will try that sometime, another of the ways I'll remember John.

— **Rosanne Juergens**, Littleton

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Birding at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, September 2019  
Rosanne Juergens



2018 selfie that John labeled "Human" on Facebook



I met John in 2015 on a field trip at Chico Basin Ranch. We became Facebook friends, and after I traveled to Arizona to go birding, I posted about the trip. Right away, John contacted me eagerly: “*You went to Tucson? What did you see? Where did you go?*” On maybe our third time birding together, we went to Barr Lake. Heading for the boardwalk, we passed an American Coot lying dead on the trail. John stopped and stood there a moment. When he looked up, tears were rolling down his face. That told me everything I needed to know — his compassion for nature and everything in it. We became very close friends.

— **Beth Payne**, *Colorado Springs*

What a wonderful friend! John had a child-like sense of awe, love, and enthusiasm for birds, animals, and all of nature. Every field trip was an adventure. Within 30 minutes of meeting him on our first DFO trip together, he felt like my younger brother. John was generous and irrepressible — his comments made everyone laugh. I’ll miss his texts, checking to see what birds I’d seen and asking about my family. I will *really* miss John’s bright, beautiful spirit.

— **Sharon Kermiet**, *Denver*

This warms my heart. I am John’s ex-wife, and we got into birding together about 20 years ago. It happened by chance when I saw several huge white birds in the pond by John’s apartment in Arvada. We didn’t know what they were (American White Pelicans, we later learned), but the birding kind of skyrocketed from there. Despite our divorce, John was still gentle and kind, and truly a joy. I’m so happy he had so many friends in his birding community and that he was loved by so many people.

— **Pamela Crystal**, *Aurora*

So sad. I only met him once, when I rode my bike all the way over there from Littleton to meet John [*at First Creek @ GVR*] to get the Yellow-crowned Night Heron in 2021 for my **Joe Roller** Memorial Green Big Year. We had an awesome morning birding around there.

— **Scott Somershoe**, *Littleton, via Facebook*



At Lake Ladora at the Arsenal, one of John's last times out birding, March 2024  
Patrick O'Driscoll



Birding hats and binoculars at home  
Patrick O'Driscoll

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Oh my goodness. This hits hard. I had no idea . . . Not John! He was a kindred spirit, a wingman on every birding trip.

— **Chris Rurik**, Lakebay, WA, via Facebook

Rest in peace, friend and birding buddy. I vividly remember first meeting John in 2012 on the trail along the South Platte River a little north of 88th. We were on the quest to see a rare Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*). We were successful . . . and had a great time getting to know each other . . . When I saw a Little Blue Heron again last January at South Padre Island in Texas, I thought of that time 12 years ago when our friendship was made.

— **Mark Amershek**, Denver, via Facebook

John was very generous. Several times during the annual Christmas Bird Counts in northeast Denver, he invited all the birders to bring their lunch and eat together in his house. John was so well-prepared and diligent for the trips he led. He would come to the birding place early after working all night and check out all the birds before the rest of us arrived. Finally, John was the creator and first leader of the First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch birding hotspot. I follow his checklist there because it helps to find many life birds for me.

— **Joe Chen**, Denver

I would be at First Creek at what I thought was early, 6 a.m., and John would already be coming around the corner, camera in hand: “Oh, Karen, you just missed a Nashville Warbler, a Hermit Thrush,” et cetera. Damn, it’s just not right that the best die young. The week John passed, I went back on my birthday to walk First Creek. I almost expected to see him coming down the path with his big camera, just off the night shift. First Creek was dull that day — just Common Grackles, Eurasian Collared Doves, Rock Pigeons — as if the beauty, bird sounds and life had left with John.

— **Karen Drozda**, Denver

John was an integral part of my life for the last several years and I consider myself blessed to have been his friend. He was loved unconditionally and will be missed more than mere words can express.

— **Felice Lyons**, Denver

John’s enthusiasm, birding skills, and friendliness will be greatly missed.

— **Chuck Hundertmark**, Lafayette, via Facebook

In the field, John had an unusually sharp ear and eye, often the fastest to ID a distant bird. He downplayed his gift, crediting instead the extra distance and magnification of his bulky, 12x50-power Swarovski binoculars. “They are scope-esque,” he said dryly. But John never mentioned what strength, practice and skill it took to swing those heavy binocs up in a flash, then quickly relocate a target bird within a field of vision far narrower than ours. That was just superhuman.

— **Patrick O’Driscoll**, Denver







## DFO GRANTS

# DFO grantee report: Nature's Educators raptor road show in JeffCo schools

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Recipients of grants from DFO's Research, Education & Conservation Fund are asked to report to club members on their work with a program talk, a field trip, or an article in The Lark Bunting. Devin Jaffe, founder and executive director of Florence, CO-based [Nature's Educators](#), chose the third option. This article is about the group's 2024-funded grant project, "Presentations in Jefferson County Schools."*

## Devin Jaffe

Thanks to an incredibly helpful \$986 grant from Denver Field Ornithologists, Nature's Educators presented three 1-hour raptor programs at schools in Jefferson County this past spring. The highlight of these programs, as always, was the displaying of live hawks, eagles and other birds of prey up close for rooms full of elementary school children.

One thousand students and teacher attendees at three JeffCo schools — Webb Elementary in Arvada on March 29, Mount Carbon Elementary in Littleton on April 8 and Swanson Elementary in Arvada on May 15 — also learned about raptor identification, the birds' diets and habitats, conservation efforts, personal histories and more.

We hope that after participating in these interactive programs, students will want to help observe raptors in their areas and take an active role in conservation. Our presenters teach "easy" conservation efforts for students to take. They include keeping household cats indoors and never throwing unfinished food out car windows, as discarded items can attract wild birds and other animals into road traffic, a too-common danger to wildlife.

Our conservation messages make a greater impression when audiences get to meet wild species live, not just via photos or video. Our "ambassador" birds come from among more than 40 hawks, eagles, falcons, owls and other species that Nature's Educators and our partners shelter. Webb Elementary's 350 students got to meet our Harris's Hawk, Turkey Vulture, Barn Owl, and Peregrine Falcon. Mount Carbon Elementary's 150 students were introduced to our Bald Eagle, Turkey Vulture, Ferruginous Hawk, and Peregrine Falcon. At Swanson Elementary, 650 students met our Golden Eagle, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, and American Kestrel.

Nature's Educators' hard-working ambassadors (human and avian) have touched many lives thanks to this DFO grant, along with the excellent information cards from DFO's Hawk Watch program (based atop Jefferson County's Dinosaur Ridge) that we handed out to the students.

*Founded in 2008 in Cañon City, CO, Nature's Educators is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit wildlife program that travels Colorado and surrounding states giving informational presentations on wildlife and wild places. It also offers virtual programming, bird "flight shows," and continuing education. It can be reached at [info@natureseducators.org](mailto:info@natureseducators.org) and 719-455-HAWK (4295).*



# NATURE'S EDUCATORS



## BIRDING

# 45<sup>th</sup> Denver Fall Bird Count set for Sept 13-16

The Denver Fall Bird Count, a seasonal tradition begun and kept alive for 45 years by prominent and longtime Colorado birder

**Hugh Kingery**, is set for a four-day weekend in September.

The count has returned each spring and fall to eight prominent birding locations across metro Denver, including four local state parks (Barr Lake, Castlewood Canyon, Cherry Creek and Chatfield), Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, the Audubon Nature Center near Chatfield, the lower Bear Creek area. This year, Bear Creek Lake Park in Lakewood also is included.

Kingery “is taking a well-deserved break from coordinating these counts,” said **Charlie Chase**, the new coordinator beginning this fall. Coincidentally, Chase also was recently named interim vice president for DFO.

Birders interested in participating can contact Chase with any questions at [charlesachase3@gmail.com](mailto:charlesachase3@gmail.com). To sign up for the counts, contact the leader for each outing. Here are the dates, locations, count leaders and contact information for each:

### FRIDAY, SEPT. 13

- Cherry Creek SP, **Cynthia Madsen**, [cmadsen08@gmail.com](mailto:cmadsen08@gmail.com)
- Audubon Nature Center / Roxborough Road, **Bill Schreitz**, [flannelmouth@gmail.com](mailto:flannelmouth@gmail.com)
- Barr Lake periphery (outside park), **Gregg Goodrich**, [gregggododrich@gmail.com](mailto:gregggododrich@gmail.com)

### SATURDAY, SEPT. 14

- Chatfield SP, **Joey Kellner**, [vireol@comcast.net](mailto:vireol@comcast.net)
- Lower Bear Creek area, **Rick Cresswell**, [rickcresswell@yahoo.com](mailto:rickcresswell@yahoo.com)

### SUNDAY, SEPT. 15

- Castlewood Canyon SP, **Dave Hill**, [davidhill2357@gmail.com](mailto:davidhill2357@gmail.com)
- Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, **Charlie Chase**, [charlesachase3@gmail.com](mailto:charlesachase3@gmail.com)

### MONDAY, SEPT. 16

- Barr Lake SP, **Chris Gilbert** and **Charlie Chase**, [charlesachase3@gmail.com](mailto:charlesachase3@gmail.com)
- Bear Creek Lake Park, **Mary Geder**, [mfg5000@live.com](mailto:mfg5000@live.com)

The fall count and its spring counterpart were begun in 1979 through DFO by a group of birders including Kingery. “Various people coordinated it early on and after a while Hugh became the coordinator,” Chase said. After dwindling participation and difficulties setting up registration on the DFO website, the club decided to suspend coordinating the count after 2022. Stats for the first 42 counts through 2021 (COVID-19 forced cancellation of the 2020 count) are still accessible on the DFO website at <https://dfobirds.org/Birds/SpringFall/SpringFallSpecies.aspx>. Click “Spring/Fall Count Summary” and then either the “spring” or “fall” button to view count statistics back to 1979.





FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

## August DFO trips *In Focus*

Late summer DFO field trips in August 2024 included 15 outings where participants took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 89-year-old club. (This month we’re also including a 16th photo, from a late July trip.)

If you’re on DFO trips in September, please take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best for the issue of *The Lark Bunting* due out in October. Action shots of birders are preferred, but posed group pictures are acceptable, too. Send .JPG or .PNG photo files, with date/location of trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at [patodrisk@gmail.com](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com). Deadline is last day of the month — **Monday, Sept. 30** for the next issue. And don’t forget: photos of field trip *people* for this feature, please. Thanks!

JULY 25-26

### Birds Plus + Herps, SE Colorado

(Cheyenne, Lincoln, Otero, Kiowa, Bent,  
Las Animas, Crowley counties)

#### Leader

Joey Kellner

#### Participants

Christopher Curwen, Jenyva Fox, Steve Herbert,  
Christie Owens, Courtney Rella, and  
Jennifer and Robert Tonge

Trip leader Joey Kellner leads stargazing session with laser pointer  
during Birds Plus + Herps field trip July 25-26 to SE Colorado  
(Steve Herbert)



AUGUST 6

### Beaver Ranch Park

(Jefferson)

#### Leader

David Suddjian

#### Participants

Coreen Spellman, Phil Lyon, Joey Caskey,  
Oliver Urdiales, Phil Waltz, Kathy Kunce

Photographers focus on Red-naped Sapsucker  
(2nd tree back) during Aug. 6 trip to Beaver Ranch Park  
(David Suddjian)

*Continued on page 22*



AUGUST 10

## Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Ryan Corda, Lynn Slaga, Brady Anderson, Mary Ramsey,  
Linda Purcell, Gigi Zarzuela, Bonnie Prado, Matthew  
Fast, Eileen Warner, Cindi Inklebarger

Birders examining a beetle on the ground  
during Rocky Mountain Arsenal field trip Aug. 10  
(Cindi Inklebarger)



AUGUST 11

## Birds Plus + Geology, National Center for Atmospheric Research Trail (Boulder)

### Leaders

Jason Bidgood and Dave Sutherland

### Participants

Courtney Rella, Christie Owens, Shay Lyons,  
Christopher Curwen, Lori Potter, Mark Bennett,  
Lorraine Dixon-Jones, Jim Petri, Jeanne Dillon,  
Becky Russell, Nicole Callaway, Kris Tita

Field naturalist Dave Sutherland explains sandstone makeup  
of Boulder's Flatirons during Birds Plus + Geology field trip  
Aug. 11 at NCAR in Boulder  
(Courtney Rella)

*Continued on page 23*



AUGUST 13  
**East Boulder Trail**  
(Boulder)

**Leader**  
Chuck Hundertmark

**Participants**  
Christie Owens, Marjorie Middleton,  
Sharon Tinianow, Joe Chen, Todd Maston

Birders scope from a viewpoint on Aug. 13  
East Boulder Trail field trip led by Chuck Hundertmark  
(Joe Chen)



AUGUST 15  
**Birds Plus + Recycled Art**  
(Douglas, Teller)

**Leader**  
Diane Roberts

**Participants**  
Debby Miller, Julia Gwinn, Cindi Inklebarger,  
Steve Whitman, Laura Hollenbaugh, Joe Chen  
  
TIF\_Birders visiting Rita the Rock Planter sculpture on  
Birds Plus + Recycled Art field trip Aug. 15 to Teller County  
(Joe Chen)



AUGUST 16  
**Birds Plus + Natural History,**  
**CU Boulder, Boulder Creek**  
(Boulder)

**Leader**  
David Suddjian and Emily Braker

**Participants**  
Leanne McDorman, Judy McKeon, Debby Miller,  
Debbie Fox, Joe Chen, Emily Scheler, Cindi Inklebarger

Emily Braker shows array of specimens at CU Boulder  
vertebrate lab, a stop during Birds Plus+ Natural History  
field trip Aug. 16 in Boulder  
(Joe Chen)



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AUGUST 21  
**Staunton SP**  
(Jefferson)

**Leader**  
Norm Lewis

**Participants**  
Eileen Warner, Lynn Slaga, Andrea Duran,  
Sharon Tinianow, Joe Chen, Chip Dawes,  
Chris Thompson, Cindi Inklebarger

On the trail during DFO field trip Aug. 21  
in Staunton SP, one of the “best bird hikes” in trip  
leader Norm Lewis’s book on Front Range birding  
(Joe Chen)

AUGUST 23  
**Birds Plus + Birdscaping, Littleton**  
(Jefferson)

**Leaders**  
Courtney Rella and Tina Jones

**Participants**  
Kris Saucke, Stephen Smith, Kathryn Smith, Debby  
Miller, Lorraine Dixon-Jones, Jana Everett, Virginia  
Gulakowski, Susan Ringoen

DFO birder-gardener Tina Jones discussing  
native plants in her bird-friendly Littleton garden  
during Birds Plus+ field trip Aug. 23  
(Courtney Rella)

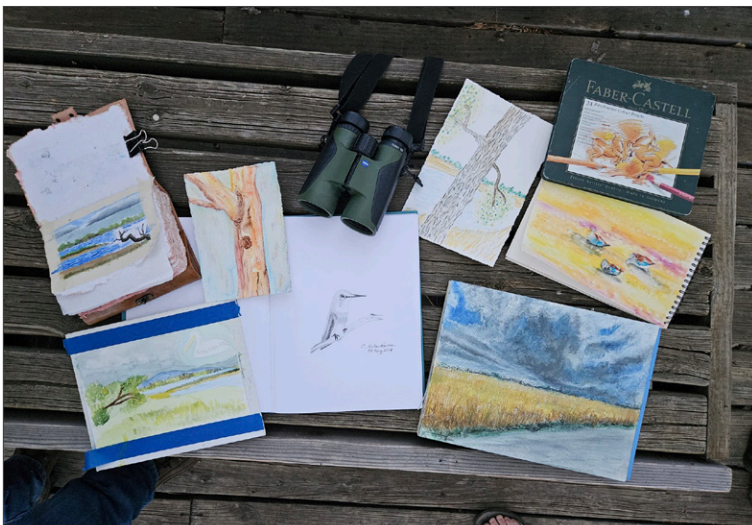


AUGUST 25  
**Birds Plus + Nature Journaling,**  
**Barr Lake SP**  
(Jefferson)

**Leader**  
Carly Crow

**Participants**  
Dee Patterson, Susan Shetterly,  
Cindi Inklebarger, Catherine Millard

Field trippers’ creations from a Birds Plus + Nature  
Journaling trip Aug. 25 at Barr Lake SP  
(Carly Crow)



*Continued on page 25*



AUGUST 25  
**Ken Caryl Valley**  
(Jefferson)

**Leader**  
David Suddjian

**Participants**  
Robin Trevillian, Ryan Corda, Kevin and  
Catherine Millard, Cassandra Stroud

Golden Eagles above Ken Caryl Valley capture  
DFO field trippers' attention on Aug. 25 outing  
(David Suddjian)



AUGUST 26  
**Northeastern Colorado**  
(Washington, Morgan, Logan)

**Leader**  
David Suddjian

**Participants**  
Diane Roberts, Ryan Corda, Joey Caskey,  
Oliver Urdiales, Kenneth Stuckey

Scanning for birds from the sandy shore of  
Prewitt Reservoir SWA on Aug. 26 field trip  
(David Suddjian)

AUGUST 29  
**Birds Plus + Bird Photography,**  
**Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR**  
(Adams)

**Leader**  
David Suddjian and Dave Prentice

**Participants**  
Catherine Millard, Coreen Spellman, Melody Serra,  
Cindi Inklebarger, Martha Strickland, Bonnie Prado,  
Nadiyah Watts, Virginia Gulakowski, Kathy Johnson

Bird photographer Dave Prentice, center, co-leading Birds Plus +  
Bird Photography field trip Aug. 29 at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR  
(David Suddjian)



*Continued on page 26*



AUGUST 30

## Birds Plus + Beavers, Coal Creek (Jefferson)

### Leader

Courtney Rella and Sheridan Samano

### Participants

Sharon Tinianow, Marjorie Middleton, Shai Ronen,  
Patricia Kuzma Sell, Lorraine Dixon-Jones, Joe Chen,  
John Williams, Janet Johnston, Melody Serra, Yvonne Parrott,  
Anne Craig, Steve Hebert, Hanna Supanich-Winte

Eco-tour guide Sheridan Samano describes beaver activity along  
Coal Creek during Birds Plus + Beavers field trip on Aug. 30  
(Courtney Rella)



AUGUST 31

## Wheat Ridge Greenbelt (Jefferson)

### Leader

Gigi Zarzuela

### Participants

Patricia Kuzma Sell, Henrika McCoy,  
Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine, Ellen Bracchi Arvada,  
Eileen Warner, Cat Phanthamany, Marie Mager,  
Joe Chen, Lynn Slaga

Field trippers crowd Bass Lake boardwalk Aug. 31 on  
DFO's monthly outing in Wheat Ridge Greenbelt  
(Nadiyah Watts)



AUGUST 31

## Common Poorwill Evening, Ken Caryl Valley (Jefferson)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Cassandra Stroud, Tim Redmond, Diane Sanelli,  
Marjorie Middleton, Sheila Liley, Tolline Gallagher,  
Susan Blansett

Quiet sunset in Ken Caryl Valley on Aug. 31 evening  
field trip to see and hear Common Poorwills  
(Susan Blansett)





# Tech comms? Social media? Newsletter aide? Trip leader? Come help DFO

Volunteers make DFO run. And who are they? People like YOU.

Denver Field Ornithologists functions thanks to people who have stepped forward to ask: How can I help? We've got a few answers below, but DFO is open to volunteer service in whatever way you think you can help.

As an all-volunteer organization, DFO exists only because people like you offer your knowledge, experience and enthusiasm. Whether it's a few hours a month or lending a hand now and then, your time and energy are priceless assets.

Here are some priority needs and the ways you can most help. Look them over and contact DFO Volunteer Coordinator **Phil Waltz** at [philipwaltzDFO@gmail.com](mailto:philipwaltzDFO@gmail.com) for more details. And if you're got a talent or skill that you think DFO can use, let Phil know that, too, won't you?

## TECHNICAL COMMUNICATIONS ADVISER

DFO needs a member with “techie” background, and knowledge and interest in online streaming and event recording (audio-video), to help present programs and conduct meetings and webinars

## SOCIAL MEDIA POSTER (COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH COMMITTEE)

As lead volunteer for just-in-time postings to DFO's Facebook, Instagram and other social media platforms, your role could be intermittent, on an as-needed basis. We also seek expertise in helping DFO develop a strategic plan for our social media communications

## ASSISTANT PROGRAMS MANAGER

Working with DFO Programs Manager **Bill Turner**, this volunteer helps develop and arrange DFO's monthly evening programs in spring and fall, and helps write and post notices, articles and links to promote these Zoom-based presentations on our social media and in our newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*

## FIELD TRIP LEADER

Field trips are DFO's signature club activity, and the Field Trips Committee is always looking to add more trip leaders to the team. Experienced birders who are familiar with DFO field trips and have experience or ability to lead people in small group activities are a plus, but anyone interested can ask for more details

## NEWSLETTER AND MONTHLY DIGEST ASSISTANT

You'll help compile and write short items and “blurbs” about DFO events, programs, club news and people for *The Lark Bunting*, our periodic newsletter and the *DFO Monthly Digest* email update. Basic writing ability is a plus, but your interest and ideas about what to write and show are a double-plus

# Bird books on eBay: Your purchase helps DFO

Got books? Birds and birding books? DFO still has some of the volumes that longtime DFO member **Barry Knapp** gave us last spring to sell for the club cause.

Covers, descriptions and prices for the 20 remaining rare and hard-to-find titles are still up on eBay and available to browse and buy at the sales site.

They include beautifully illustrated coffee-table books (*Birds of America*, *Birds of Britain*, *Song and Garden Birds*), books on bird families (seabirds, finches, shorebirds), regional guides (western US, Mexico, Florida, Hawaii, Tikal, Britain and Europe), even field guides to mushrooms and a vintage LIFE Magazine Books title, *The Wonders of Life on Earth*.

With the holidays and gift-giving season coming sooner than you think, perhaps there's something there to add to your gift list. Give it a look, and thanks for shopping. All proceeds go to continuing DFO programs and services for YOU.

BROWSE BIRDING BOOKS ON EBAY



Samuel Shaw



LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

# Field tripping: An overnight “birping” quest in SE Colorado for fliers and . . . creepers!


**THE TRIP:** Southeastern Colorado Birds Plus + Herptiles (“herps”)

**DATES:** Sunday–Monday July 25–26, 2024

**LEADER:** **Joey Kellner** + 7 participants

**SPECIES:** 83 bird species on [17 eBird checklists](#) + 16 herp species

*Continued on page 30*



Crowding around to see Tiger Salamanders  
at bottom of abandoned homestead well  
in Otero County  
Steve Herbert





Courtney holding Plains  
Black-headed Snake  
Joey Kellner

## Joey Kellner

On a morning in late July, two carloads of DFO birders headed east of metro Denver for a two-day birding excursion with a twist. Like always, we would scan the skies, fences, trees and brush for our friends with wings. But we also would search the ground and grasses for wingless friends with scales and warts. In the end, we saw plenty of birds (87 species!) — and found (and even handled) more than a dozen kinds of herps, too!

Herps? Yes, HERPS. (*Not* herpes!) From [herpetology](#), the branch of zoology that covers reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders). Related but different, both families consist of cold-blooded, four-legged vertebrates. When commonly studied together, they go by a common name — *herptile*, or *herp* for short.

I went over all of this as we stood together on July 25 on a remote dirt road east of Limon on the Colorado Plains. The seven of us from the northern Front Range had just met up with our eighth member from farther south. (Besides me, the crew included **Christopher Curwen**, **Jenyva Fox**, **Steve Herbert**, **Christie Owens**, **Courtney Rella**, and **Jennifer** and **Robert Tonge**.) With roadside introductions, we talked about the birds in the area and our “road cruising” adventure ahead later, after dark. For two days together, we would be both birders and herpers — BIRPERS!



Uncommon night sighting  
of a Texas Horned Lizard  
Jenyva Fox

*Continued on page 31*



Back in our vehicles, we continued south, stopping now and then along the dusty backroads. Soon, Jenyva found our first herp: a female [Ornate Box Turtle](#). A short time later, a [Plains Hognose Snake](#) slithered into view. On our stops, we talked about the environment around us and how these animals eat and live.

After changing a flat tire (my trips always seem to have one unscripted road challenge or another), we pushed down to Long Lake in Kiowa County for waterfowl and shorebirds. While there we also flushed a very nice Peregrine Falcon. High water and no shoreline meant almost no waterbirds at our next stop, Blue Reservoir in Bent and Kiowa counties (also known as Adobe Creek Reservoir SWA). So we headed on to Cheraw Lake in Otero County.

By then the temperature had reached the mid-90s. But plenty of summer resident species were still present at Cheraw, including Black-necked Stilt, Snowy Plover (with young) and Eared Grebe, to name three. Even in midsummer, migrant shorebirds were already starting to move south in good numbers, including sandpipers (Baird's, Western, Least, Stilt), Wilson's Phalaropes and both kinds of Yellowlegs.

*Continued on page 32*



Plains Hognose Snake  
Steve Herbert

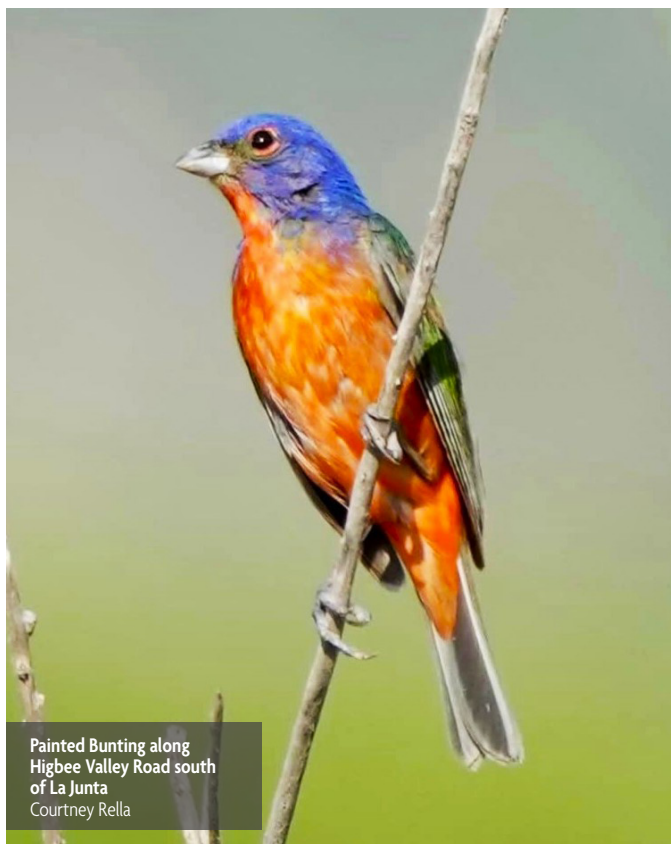


Ornate Box Turtle found  
along SE Colorado road  
Jenyva Fox



Ash-throated Flycatcher  
along Otero Co Road 804  
Robert Tonge





Painted Bunting along  
Higbee Valley Road south  
of La Junta  
Courtney Rella



Clark's Grebe and young at  
Lake Henry in Crowley Co  
Courtney Rella

#### LAST WORD *cont from page 31*

By midafternoon, as the thermometer flirted with 100 degrees, we checked in at our motel in La Junta and all retired for cooling *siestas*. Reconvening at 4:30 p.m. for an early dinner at the famous Lucy's Tacos, we compared similarities and differences among birders and herpers, went over herp ID by both sight and sound, and previewed the evening ahead.

With some of us in yellow reflective vests for group visibility and safety, we spent the remaining daylight and then hours of darkness until 1 a.m. on a slow backroads cruise for herps. Whenever we spotted one the road, we pulled over, hazard lights flashing, and got out carefully to examine, photograph and identify each herp. My own Colorado Parks & Wildlife permit allowed me to handle herps briefly in the wild for ID and education purposes.

After each flashlight huddle, we released the herp off the road in the direction it was going when we found it. And what an array we found: eight kinds of snake and four kinds of lizard, plus toads and two Barred Tiger Salamanders. A nocturnal bonus was enjoying all the stars and the Milky Way as we went.

After a 1:15 a.m. nightcap and discussion of Day 2's plans, we managed about 4 hours of sleep before circling up outside the motel at 6:30 a.m. July 26. Back on birding track, we headed south of La Junta along bird-rich [Higbee Valley Road](#) to see Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Canyon Towhee, Rock Wren, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak and — bonus! — a pair of Painted Buntings. Next stop after that was Pickett Wire Canyon. Although we missed a previously reported Gray Vireo there, we did get to see Texas Horned Lizard (“horny toad”) and a pair of Eastern Collared Lizards.

With the morning heat already near 90 degrees, we stopped for a late brunch-to-go, retraced our route north to Lake Cheraw, and from there went to Lake Henry in Crowley County. After great looks at two Clark's Grebes with young riding on their backs, it was time to escape the heat and head homeward.

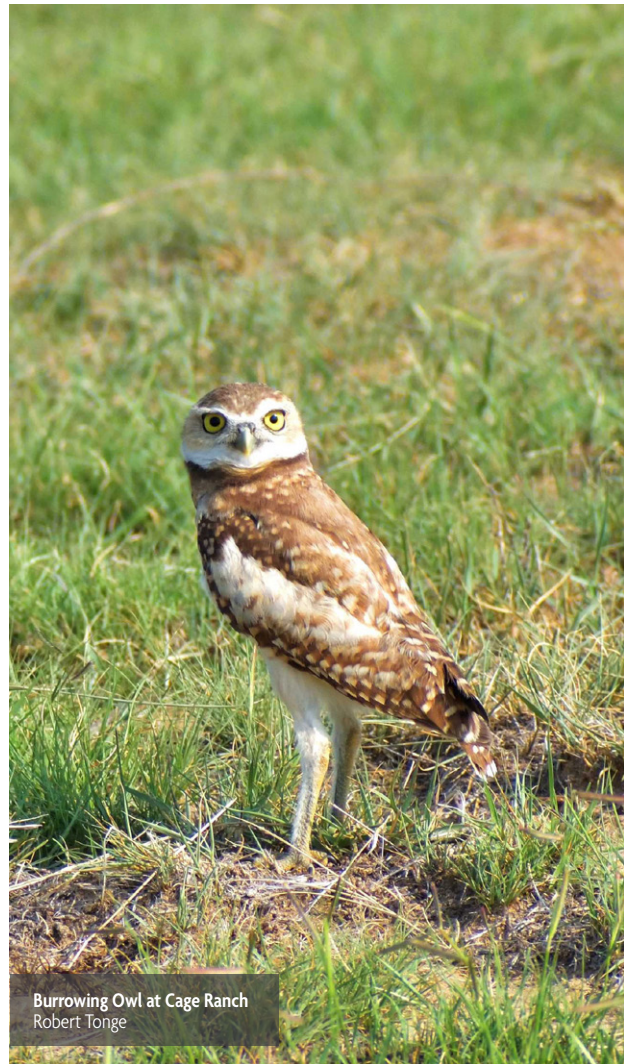
Our new squad of birpers learned a lot and said they had a good time. I could tell because not one of them fell asleep during our late-night road cruising. Too many cool herps to see, and no one wanted to miss a thing.

*Continued on page 33*





Cassin's Kingbird  
Courtney Rella



Burrowing Owl at Cage Ranch  
Robert Tonge



Eastern Collared Lizards  
in Picketwire Canyon  
Jenyva Fox



P.S.: The things we did *not* miss seeing include:

- **Birds** — All of them (some with photos) are on the eBird trip report at <https://ebird.org/tripreport/262996>
- **Herptiles** — Barred Tiger Salamander (2), Green Toad, Woodhouse's Toad (2), Ornate Box Turtle, Eastern Collared Lizard (2), Texas Horned Lizard (2), Prairie (Six-lined) Racerunner, Prairie Lizard, Kansas Glossy Snake, Plains Hognose Snake, Chihuahuan Night Snake, Great Plains Ratsnake (unfortunately DOR, "dead on road"), Bullsnae (several), Plains Black-headed Snake, Lined Snake (3, one with eggs/young), and Prairie Rattlesnake (2)
- **Other critters** — A bull elk, a species of shrew, Kangaroo Rats, smaller "mice," American Badger, Coyote, Mule Deer, Swift Fox, dung beetles (rolling a ball of cow dung), Steel-blue Cricket-hunter, Western Spotted Orbweaver (many) and the occasional human

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**Joey Kellner**, a 39-year member of DFO, is a field trip leader, compiler of the annual Denver Christmas Bird Count, a club past president (1994-96), and the 2012 recipient of the Ptarmigan Award, DFO's highest honor.



Lined Snake underside showing half-moon spots  
Joey Kellner



Texas Horned Lizard  
Courtney Rella



Birding and herping in SE Colorado  
Steve Herbert



Trip leader Joey Kellner with a daylight look at a Texas Horned Lizard  
Steve Herbert



*Until the next  
Lark Bunting . . .  
HAPPY FALL  
BIRDING!*



Common Nighthawk roosting in  
morning on fence post in SE Colorado  
Jenyva Fox