



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 60 | ISSUE 11 | NOVEMBER 2024

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay
John C. Breitsch
Red Rocks Park, Jefferson Co



ON THE COVER

Whose scrub-jay? Woodhouse's . . . So: Who is Woodhouse again?

Patrick O'Driscoll

I spent too much time the other day trying to answer a simple question: Why is our shy, dusty scrub-jay of the inland West called Woodhouse's?

As you may recall, the bird got this name only eight years ago. In 2016, The American Ornithological Society (AOS) split the Western Scrub-Jay into two species. The brighter blue, bold and chatty neighborhood birds of the Pacific Coast states became the California Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*). The grayer, inconspicuous outskirts-dwellers of the Great Basin, Rockies and Southwest became Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*).

That's the scrappy bird on this month's cover. Our late DFO friend and field trip leader **John Breitsch** captured this one, bill jammed with nuts, at Denver's Red Rocks Park back in January of 2014, when we still called it a Western Scrub-Jay.



DFO member, field trip leader and photographer **John C. Breitsch** died in August 2024, one month after his 60th birthday. He

bequeathed to DFO more than 10,000 bird images in his [Flickr photo gallery](#), including the one on this month's cover.

Anyway, the name changed. We birders accepted it. The split made sense. And hey, another species for the life list, right? Kind of awkward name at first, after the ease of "Western." Easy to forget that apostrophe, too (even for me, a guy with one in his last name). But OK, fine. We moved on.

In retrospect, it seems astonishing now. The bird science people put *another* 19th-century guy's name on a "new" species, barely five years before the current debate got rolling about renaming "birds-named-after-dead-white-guys." If the species split happened today, Colorado birders might be checklisting the Juniper Scrub-Jay, or maybe Inland or Southwestern or Interior. Even Western again!

But this isn't about the bird-name debate. I'm only wondering: Why "Woodhouse" and not someone or something else? Oddly, I couldn't find a thing online to explain that.

To be fair, **Samuel Washington Woodhouse** (1821-1904) was a part-time bird guy of note. As physician and naturalist on a couple of pre-Civil War expeditions around the Southwest, he made the first bird survey of Oklahoma Territory and was "the first naturalist to survey the Arizona region," too. In Texas, he even discovered and described the first Cassin's Sparrow (he named it to honor his friend **John Cassin**, curator of birds at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia).

No mention of scrub-jays, though. Woodhouse's travels probably made him scrub-jay *adjacent*. But I could find only a single, indirect reference. An **Edward Bowers** painting of Woodhouse in the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery carries this vague and unattributed description: "He discovered several hitherto unknown specimens, including a toad (*Bufo woodhousii*) and a bird (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*) that are named after him." If you say so, anonymous painting-describer. But I'm not yet convinced of the discovery part.

Does it matter? Not really. If the AOS has its way, "Woodhouse" will be gone one day, perhaps soon. Personally, I'd call the species Sagebrush or Southwestern Scrub-Jay. But names, as we can see, are sometimes fleeting. I'll celebrate the scrub-jay we have here: Woodhouse's for now, but ours forever.

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he joined DFO in 2014, became a field trip leader in 2016, and leads occasional trips in Denver City Park and other local destinations



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

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Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

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The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtiselements** 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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Next deadline: Thursday, Oct. 31, 2024





**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

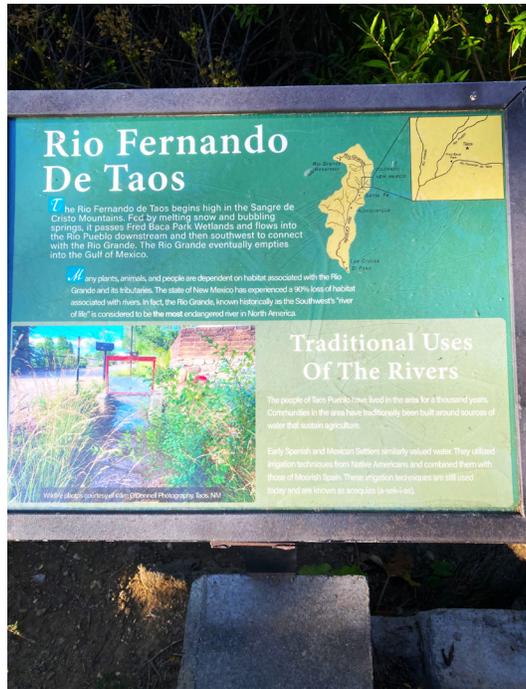
Feathered friends, never before seen, make a magic New Mexico moment

Sharon Tinianow

In mid-September I spent a long weekend in historic Taos, NM. A group of us, all women, traditionally go off to the mountains once a year for a fall weekend of relaxation and silly fun. This year, for the first time, we drove four-plus hours away from Denver to stay in a historic adobe house in northern New Mexico's famed artists' colony.

As the only birder in the group, I checked eBird for any hotspots nearby. The [Rio Fernando Wetlands](#) were just a mile from where we were staying. On a cool Saturday morning, I set off alone to see what I could see there. The walking route took me past "unimproved" land managed by the [Taos Pueblo](#). I stopped from time to time to watch American Goldfinch, Song Sparrow and Yellow-rumped Warblers foraging in the fields. Red-winged Blackbirds were forming up into flocks. A variety of other common birds interrupted my trek.

I entered Rio Fernando de Taos, which comprises about 30 wetland acres on the southwest side of town, from adjacent Fred Baca Park. A quarter-mile-long boardwalk trail took me around the wetlands' edge. I had it all to myself! Listening for more birds as I walked, I stopped now and then



Arriving at an area of open water surrounded by reedy cattails, I stopped for a bit. My eye was soon drawn to a largeish bird in the water, wrestling a dragonfly into submission. Yellow legs and a short yellow bill, buffy in color with white speckles on its back and wings. But the plumage? I consulted my Merlin phone app, which showed me pictures. And there it was: a juvenile Sora! I could not believe my luck. I had heard Sora call many times from marshes but had never actually seen one.

I was only about 15 feet away from it, and the bird seemed oblivious to me. I stayed still to enjoy the scene as long as I could, as my only camera was on my cellphone, and the only image it can take is too small to capture the moment.

A few moments later, a second bird waded out from the reeds. As I looked closer, I knew it wasn't another Sora. This was larger, with a longer, reddish-orange beak and reddish legs, too. I looked at Merlin again and noted the gray cheek and black stripes behind the legs. I couldn't believe it: a Virginia Rail! Another species I'd heard but never seen.

At this point, I wouldn't have been surprised if Big Foot tapped me on the shoulder. Seeing just one of these notoriously secretive birds in the field would've made my day. Two foraging together was a miracle! Clearly, this morning was magical, even if both species breed in New Mexico and in this particular wetland, too.

Eventually, the birds wandered back into the reeds — and I realized I'd been holding my breath the whole time. What a blessing to have seen them on such a postcard-beautiful New Mexico morning. How very fortunate for us that the Town of Taos set aside this land and protected it from development to serve as habitat for so many species of birds and wildlife.

Continued on page 6



I continued down to where the boardwalk ended at a viewing platform. Not inundated with water, the low shrubs were filled with songbirds foraging. I heard the familiar *witchity-witchity* of a Common Yellowthroat, which popped up on a nearby bush a moment later. Hummingbirds darted around, never close enough for me to identify beyond “Not a male Broad-tailed Hummingbird.” A flock of Chipping Sparrows bounced past the platform and an Eastern Kingbird made an appearance, as did many more common species.

Hunger drove me back to the house, where our designated morning-shift crew was cooking and serving brunch. Curious about my outing, my non-birding friends expressed at least polite appreciation as I told of seeing the two marsh waders. Or maybe they weren't just polite. The next morning, several of them joined me for the one-mile trek back to Rio Fernando. Although they didn't have binoculars, they were as awed as I was by the number of birds and the landscape views from the boardwalk trail.

That special experience reminded me again that we all need time in nature. When cities and towns can set aside natural areas like that one, we benefit almost as much as the wildlife that depend on the habitat afforded by that protection.

Good autumn birding, everyone!

— **Sharon**

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

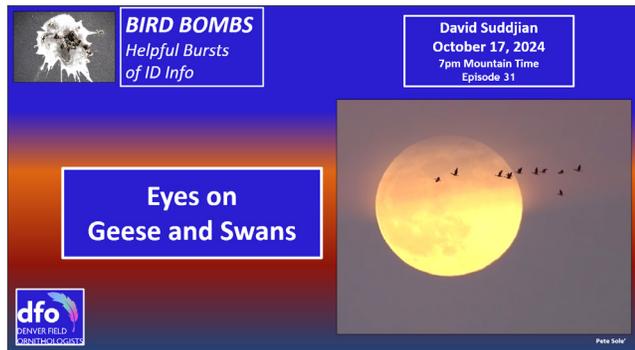
Patrick O’Driscoll

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.

**NEXT ON BIRD BOMBS:
GEESE AND SWANS ON OCT. 17**

With autumn’s arrival come the large waterfowl that spend the winter in Colorado. The timing’s perfect for DFO’s next bird ID mini-webinar, BIRD BOMBS: Eyes on Geese and Swans on **Oct. 17, 7 p.m. MDT**. Explore the identification of Colorado’s several species of geese and two kinds of swans with **David Suddjian**. Helpful past episodes for the fall birding season are available in [DFO’s BIRD BOMBS video library](#) online, including [Falling for Warblers](#), [Prairie Hawks](#), [Forest Hawks](#), [Fall Sparrows](#), [Looking at Loons](#) and [Colorado Sea Ducks](#).

REGISTER FOR BIRD BOMBS



**FIELD TRIP REMINDER:
CARPOOLS + COST SHARING**

After learning of confusion among some participants in out-of-town Denver Field Ornithologists field trips, Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** passes along this reminder about DFO’s carpool cost-sharing guidance and reasoning: “Some field trips require carpooling with volunteer drivers so that we can lessen our effect on the environment, simplify trip logistics with fewer vehicles, and improve the quality of the

trip experience. DFO recommends mileage reimbursement to volunteer carpool drivers of 50 cents a mile, divided among the number of riders. It is also optional, at the driver’s discretion, to reduce the amount each rider is asked to pay. But carpool riders should come prepared to reimburse their driver at the end of the field trip. As a further reminder, this information is always available at the top of the DFO website’s [“Upcoming Field Trips”](#) page.

**DFO VOLUNTEERS 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 several club 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 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 on the DFO website’s [special events pages](#).

**BIRD CONSERVANCY’S “NIGHT FOR BIRDS”
IS OCT. 18**

The annual “A Night for the Birds” fundraiser of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is set for Friday, Oct. 18, 6-9 p.m. in the Denver Museum of Nature + Science. This year the conservancy marks 36 years of tireless work to conserve birds and their habitats with educational programs, cutting-edge science in field and lab, land stewardship, and connection building between humans and birds. The event includes complimentary drinks and *hors d’oeuvres*, games, live and silent auctions and more. Auctioneer **Jennifer Clifford** from Beyond the Call Auctions returns again to help the conservancy meet its fundraising goal of \$150,000. Tickets are \$60 per person.

PURCHASE TICKETS

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FIELD TRIPS CHIEF TEACHING TWO MORE BIRDING CLASSES

David Suddjian, DFO Field Trip chair and creator of the popular “BIRD BOMBS” bird ID mini-webinars, is offering two more bird identification classes through Front Range Birding Company in Littleton in November and December. **“In Focus: Winter Waterfowl Warm Up”** begins with an evening class **Wednesday, Nov. 13** at the Littleton store, followed by two Saturday field trips **Nov. 23** (half day) and **Nov. 30** (full day). The following month, **“In Focus: Winter Raptor Hawk ID + More”** starts with an evening instructional **Wednesday, Dec. 4**, followed by Saturday field trips **Dec. 6** (half day) and **Dec. 13** (full day).

The November course will focus on the 31 species of Colorado ducks, geese and swans that migrate through the state or return here for winter beginning that month. The December course will explore a variety of winter-season hawks, eagles and falcons found both along roads and in protected areas. Each course costs \$160 per person, with a limit of 11 participants. For more info or to register, call Front Range Birding at 303-979-2473.

COLO PROBES CONDOR DEATH AS POACHING OFFENSE

The death of a rare California Condor in southwestern Colorado last spring is being investigated as an act of deliberate poaching, a federal offense because the species is “endangered” under the Endangered Species Act. The bird’s carcass was found in late March, a day after someone shot it the remote area west of McPhee Reservoir and northeast of tiny Lewis, CO in north-central Montezuma County.

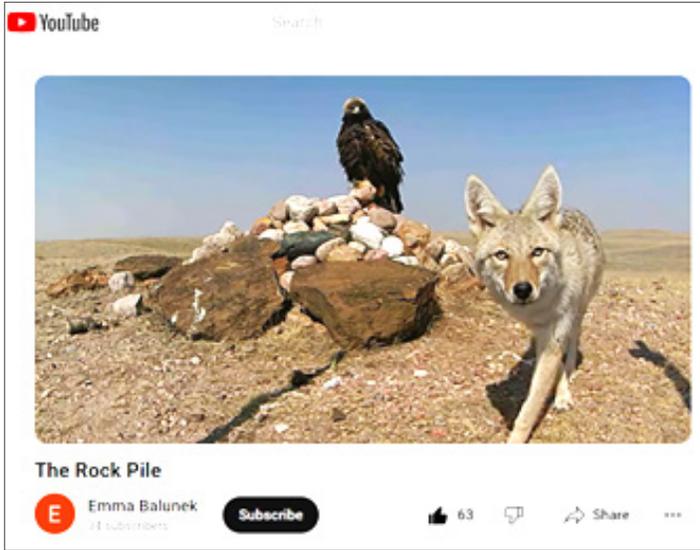
Investigators for Colorado Parks & Wildlife and US Fish & Wildlife Service are hoping the public can provide further leads in pursuing the offender. Read the full story in the Denver online e-newspaper [The Colorado Sun](#).



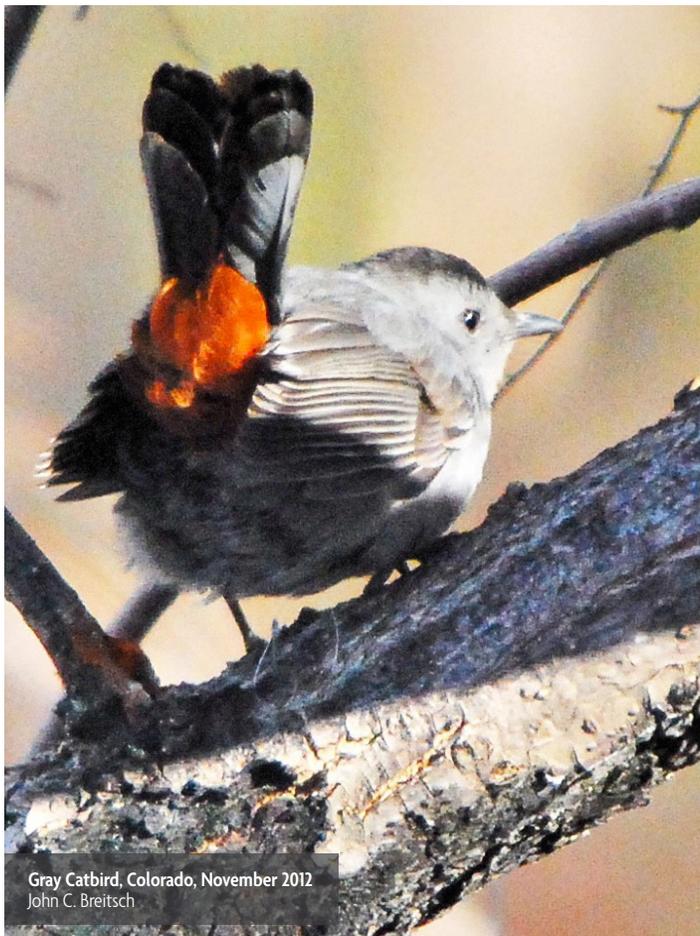
“ROCK PILE”: COLORADO PRAIRIE LIFE SPECTACLE

A University of Nebraska graduate student’s 5-year project to record wildlife visits to a simple pile of prairie rocks in northeastern Colorado is now a poetic and mesmerizing [5-minute video on YouTube](#). **Emma Balunek** has photographed the spot with remote, time-lapse and motion-detection cameras since 2019 to capture what could be lost to creeping development east of the northern Front Range. She recorded her remarkable video just inside the west edge of Pawnee National Grasslands, and in all manner of conditions: Sunrise, sunset, total darkness, wind, snow, rain and flying insects. And her footage includes a wide array of prairie creatures: badger, fox, coyote, jackrabbit, raccoon, Bald and Golden eagles, Ferruginous, Red-tailed and Rough-legged hawks, Horned Lark, Rock Wren, Sage Thrasher, mice, prairie dogs, Common Raven, shrikes, Western Meadowlark, pronghorn and more.

Continued on page 9



Balunek calls the video both “The Rock Pile” and “Prairie Crossroads” on her YouTube posting. She is also chronicling her field work for broader prairie ecosystem conservation storytelling on a [separate project website](#). Read the full story of Balunek and “The Rock Pile” on [KUNC-FM public radio’s website](#).



Welcome to new DFO members

Robert Dion Carmona and **Pamela Carmona**, Des Plaines, IL; **Joshua Koerner** and **Lillian Koerner**, Highlands Ranch; **Reagan Sanford**, Commerce City

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Tolline Gallagher; **Beth Harkins**; **Roger Koester**, in memory of **John C. Breitsch**; **Patrick O'Driscoll**, in memory of John C. Breitsch

Friends of DFO

Roger Koester (2); **Elissa McAlear**; **Mary Beth Searles** (2); **Patrick O'Driscoll**, in memory of John C. Breitsch

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Sharon Kelly; **Michael Lupini** and **Janet Peters**, in memory of **Debi Tipton**





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

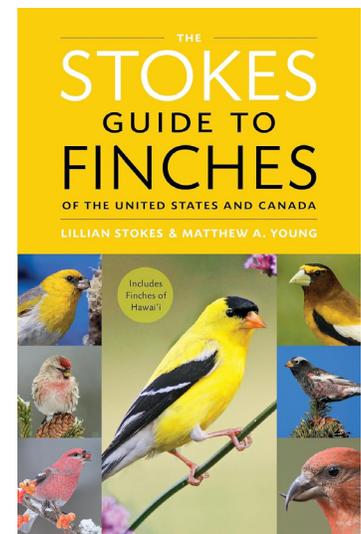
Young is co-author of that new *Stokes* guide, due out in mid-September. "There is no guide to finches for the United States, if you can believe it," he notes. He's also the audio engineer behind much of the bird call and song recordings for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Merlin Bird ID app. He has 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.



FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

American Dipper: A Magical Mountain Friend

Jessie Reese
Monday, Nov. 25, 2024
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



Jessie Reese banding birds in Colombia

With its constant diving, bobbing and rock-hopping in shallow rapids, the aptly named American Dipper is an unusual passerine. No wonder it evokes such delight when we encounter it. Coloradans are fortunate to have abundant dipper habitat along our mountain streams and urban and suburban creeks along the Front Range and west.

DFO's November evening program, "The American Dipper: A Magical Mountain Friend" (**Monday, Nov. 25, 7 p.m. MST via Zoom**), will explore dipper ecology and the adaptations that make the unique lifestyle of this chunky little bird possible. Guest speaker **Jessie Reese**, a senior avian ecologist with the [Bird Conservancy of the Rockies](#), will also examine dippers' distribution on the Front Range, including migration and movements from high country and foothills down to urban areas in winter. The timing of Reese's presentation couldn't be better for us: Stand by for dippers soon!

Reese has studied birds and their habitats for the past 15 years in numerous far-flung places, from the swamps of Virginia and meadows of Yosemite Valley to Pacific islands and Amazon jungles. She earned her master's in science from Virginia Commonwealth University, traveling from there to Panama and Colombia to study migratory connectivity (how closely birds follow direct trajectories to common migration destinations) in Prothonotary Warblers.

In grad school, Reese developed a passion for ecological restoration, which led to a job with the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources helping landowners manage their forests to benefit Appalachian species like Cerulean and Golden-winged warbler. After moving to Colorado in 2019, she joined the conservancy's Stewardship program, running a team of biologists working to help landowners manage shortgrass prairie for grassland birds.

Returning to her scientific roots, Reese now manages the conservancy's program of multi-species avian point counts (single-observer, sight-and-sound bird counts at fixed locations for specified periods) in Wyoming and the southern Great Plains. When not tramping around in the field counting birds, she co-leads the redevelopment of the conservancy's Rocky Mountain Avian Data Center, a web portal with access to population trends and other data for more than 300 bird species.



American Dipper
Frank D. Lospalluto/
Creative Commons

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's September program

The DFO website contains a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring lecture programs on Zoom. If you could not “attend” our most recent program live, click the link below to view the recording.



SEPTEMBER 23

The State of Birding, Version 2024.9 Ted Floyd

Colorado birding free thinker, guidebook author and avian journalist **Ted Floyd** begins this Zoom update on the state of birding with a just-now twist. On the screen is his same-day photo of a friend stalking an “everywhere right now” fall-migrant Wilson’s Warbler in [Greenlee Wildlife Preserve](#), Floyd’s home patch in Lafayette. From that thin first thread, Floyd (longtime editor of *Birding* magazine) weaves an hour-long, free-range conversation across numerous current bird topics:

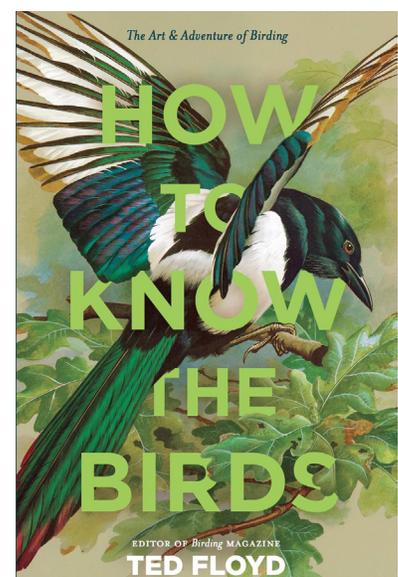
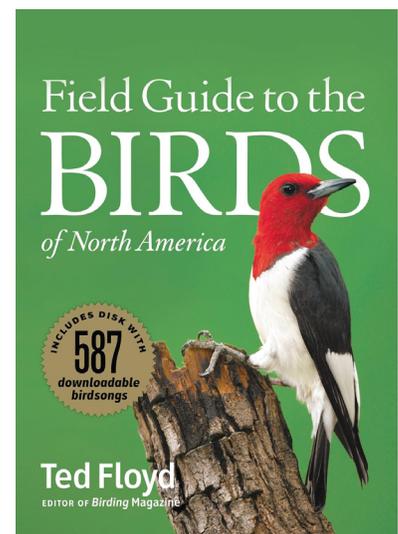
The species-renaming debate (including that warbler’s namesake, “father of American ornithology” **Alexander Wilson**). Spectrograms of birdsong and cricket chirps. Bird checklists handwritten and apped on handheld devices. The northward march of Black-chinned Hummingbirds. Forty-year flashbacks (Ted’s “plain as day” teen memory of a Wilson’s Warbler in Pennsylvania). And finally, the Shakespearean question: To Merlin or NOT to Merlin? THAT is the question — and Ted has answers, from “Trust, but verify” to “It can only get better.”

Listen closely. Although Ted Floyd’s a nonstop talker, every bit of this program is entertaining — and enlightening.

WATCH ONLINE



Thanks to DFO historian **Kris Haglund** for editing and posting videos of other past programs, which can be viewed on the DFO website’s [Past Programs](#) page.





Feeding a patient
at Greenwood Rehab
Jill Boice



Western Grebe under care
Greenwood Wildlife

DFO GRANT FUND

Year-end giving? Grants fund helps science, research, education — even wildlife rehab

Jill Boice

As you renew your Denver Field Ornithologists membership this fall — or join for the first time, or return to the club after some time away — please consider a donation to [DFO's Research, Conservation & Education Fund](#).

Each year, DFO makes grants to projects in three general categories: Bird-related research, education about birds, and conservation of birds and their habitat. That last category can even include on-the-ground work in avian rehab, as you'll learn farther down in this article.

Donating is easy to do online while renewing or starting your membership, and year's end is an ideal time to make a tax-deductible gift. If you specify your contribution for the grants fund, that's where the money will go. (DFO has two other funds, for the Hawk Watch community science project, and the Friends of DFO Fund for general club expense needs.)

Recent grants have ranged from about \$800 to \$2,000 and have helped college ornithology student research, local birding habitat development and review, and community development of birding resources. The fund's 2024 recipients included projects for new interpretive nature signs on Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County, additional elementary school visits with live raptors by Nature's Educators, and continuing Front Ranch research projects on chickadees, House Wrens and Loggerhead Shrikes. (You can read about [past grants fund awards since 1995](#) on the DFO website.)

Another of this year's recipients is the [Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center](#) in Boulder County, which received \$2,000 for specialized medical products and food for small birds. In August, DFO President **Sharon Tinianow** and Grants Committee chair **Jill Boice** toured the busy center near Longmont. Greenwood's high level of compassion and commitment to the rehab and release of orphaned, sick and injured wildlife was abundantly evident.

Although several wildlife rehab facilities in Colorado work with injured raptors and larger mammals, few care for smaller birds. Sixty percent of Greenwood's patients are songbirds. During their tour, Sharon and Jill saw Evening Grosbeaks in an outdoor aviary, gaining strength for their upcoming release, and a pair of Blue Jays in the treatment room. Black-billed Magpies, Northern

Continued on page 14

Flickers, Mallards, American Robins and even a European Starling were in various stages of treatment. (The patients weren't all birds; raccoons and some very adorable young marmots were also in care, the latter having somehow come down from the mountains via car.)

Established in 1982 as an outgrowth of the local Humane Society, Greenwood became a separate nonprofit in 1993. Today, its 13 wildlife rehabilitators handle about 4,000 animals a year, aided by as many as 500 volunteers annually. Besides grant aid this year from DFO, the center holds fundraisers, runs a consignment thrift and art gallery in Boulder, and provides educational opportunities, internships and training on wildlife interaction. The [center website](#) also has advice about what to do if you find an injured bird or other animal.

DFO's grant support is distributed through a yearly funding cycle. Applications for 2025 grants are due on **Feb. 1, 2025**. Preference is given first to projects in the great Denver metro area, then the rest of Colorado's Front Range and beyond. Applications and guidelines are on the [DFO website](#).

After the deadline, the DFO Research, Education & Conservation Fund Committee will review applications and determine award amounts. The current committee includes chair Boice and members **Pat Cullen, Ginni Dickinson, David Hill, Mary Fran O'Connor** and **Elaine Wagner**. If you have any questions about the grants program, you can contact Boice at jill@booksandcats.net.

Jill Boice, a DFO member since 2001, chairs the club's Grants Committee and leads occasional slow field trips. She is also a volunteer raptor monitor at Cherry Creek State Park

DFO NEWS

Autumn membership in DFO is FLOCKING AWESOME!

Sharon Tinianow

What makes belonging to Denver Field Ornithologists so awesome? Your modest annual membership dues enable our 89-year-old birding club to:

- Offer hundreds of FREE field trips year-round to Front Range destinations and beyond
- Present expert speakers at monthly programs at NO CHARGE eight times a year
- Continue to provide BIRD BOMBS, the popular short-burst webinars of bird ID information with **David Suddjian** via Zoom for FREE
- Maintain a website that makes registering for all of this easy, while also providing tons of useful information for Colorado birders, including recordings of past monthly programs and BIRD BOMBS
- Publish *The Lark Bunting* (quarterly beginning in 2025) and a new monthly e-newsletter to keep you up-to-date on what is happening at DFO

If that's not enough awesome for you, DFO is dedicated to keeping field trips and programs open to all, members or not. We want everyone to try out our awesome, then join the flock and discover the benefits of birding with Colorado's oldest bird-related organization.

Do your part for DFO by becoming a member, or renewing your membership. Members receive access to features in the Members Only section of the website, which include a member directory where you can decide how much of your personal information to share, and club business documents including DFO Board minutes and financial statements.

Joining in autumn also is awesome. When you sign up now (**after Oct. 1**), your membership includes bonus months for the rest of 2024 and runs through next year to Dec. 31, 2025. You can choose from an Individual Adult membership for \$30 or a Family membership (including all members of the same household) for \$45. Students under age 23 can join for just \$15.

Join our awesome flock today on the [DFO website](#), won't you? And if you're already a DFO member, keep the support coming. Renew NOW for uninterrupted benefits and access. Current memberships expire on **Dec. 31, 2024**. Thanks for joining, renewing and keeping DFO's flocking awesomeness going!



DFO VOLUNTEERISM

A new treasurer in 2025? DFO's looking for one, and more — come help us!

Patrick O'Driscoll

It takes the work of many volunteers to make our club go. Several immediate volunteer needs are listed below — but we have also begun searching for someone to help in a key DFO role beginning next year.

DFO Treasurer **Kathy Holland** will finish her service in spring 2025. Do you have general bookkeeping skills and a knack for tracking income and expenditures? If so, a small nonprofit organization called Denver Field Ornithologists can use your help. Here are the basic particulars.

The treasurer does not need to be a professional accountant, but DFO seeks someone organized, analytical and with some knowledge of budgeting. Familiarity and experience with QuickBooks accounting software will be helpful, too. Transition will require some time for one-on-one sessions with Kathy, so we seek candidates now or as soon as possible. If this interests you, or if you'd like more information, please contact DFO Nominations chair **Mary Geder** at mfg5000@live.com or 303-981-8823.

Now, for our continuing need for DFO volunteers. We thank those of you who have stepped forward to ask: How can I help? We have several specific answers below, but DFO is also open to volunteer service in whatever way you think you can help. Whether it's a few hours a month or lending a hand now and then, your time and energy are priceless.

Here are several priority needs and the ways you can most help. Look them over and contact DFO Volunteer Coordinator **Phil Waltz** at 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?

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

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

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 newsletter

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTER (COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH COMMITTEE)

As lead volunteer for just-in-time postings to DFO's Facebook, Instagram and other social media, 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

MILESTONES

Bluff Lake @ 30: from airport crash zone to bird-rich nature preserve

Jason B. Bidgood

Bluff Lake Nature Center in northeast Denver recently announced its 30-year anniversary. Wow! Even as an early resident of the Central Park neighborhood that now surrounds it, I wasn't aware that this bird-friendly preserve existed until a few years after I moved there in 2004.

Even then, it was hard to imagine a nature center in what was essentially a construction zone. Bluff Lake was a wide and undeveloped spot along Sand Creek, itself an unloved trickle through a largely industrial corridor. For half a century, the lake lay unknown and unused inside Stapleton International Airport. Then the airfield closed in 1994 with the opening of Denver International Airport. Soon, plans to transform the old airport into a flourishing neighborhood with parks and businesses allowed Bluff Lake to fulfill its potential as the nature center it is today.

Bluff Lake's origins date back more than a century. It was built in the late 1800s as a large irrigation pond for surrounding farmland. When the growing city sought to expand nearby Denver Municipal Airport in the 1940s, the city aviation department acquired the lake as part of the expansion. And there it sat, fenced off in the "crash zone" at the end of one of Stapleton's runways.

The 123-acre site we know today as [Bluff Lake Nature Center](#) was negotiated as part of a legal settlement in 1994. The Sierra Club had sued Denver's Department of Aviation for environmental damage to Sand Creek caused by discharges of toxic aircraft-deicing fluids from inadequate retention ponds. Under the settlement, the city agreed to preserve the Bluff Lake area and pay \$3 million to enhance wildlife habitat, restore the banks of Sand Creek, and build an interpretive trail system with open-air shelters.

By 2000, basic infrastructure was in place, and on the surface, little has changed since. In 2008, the city transferred ownership of the property to the nonprofit Bluff Lake Nature Center. Today, from sunrise to sunset every day of the year, it's a hub of nature programs, after-school activities, summer camps, first-Saturday bird walks and self-guided enjoyment of nature. Denver Field Ornithologists has joined in the appreciation of Bluff Lake, having led almost 30 field trips there over the past decade (and possibly more before that).

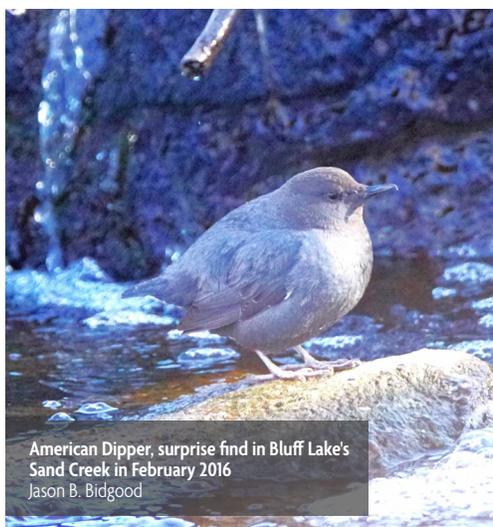
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Golden-crowned Sparrow at Bluff Lake
Jason B. Bidgood



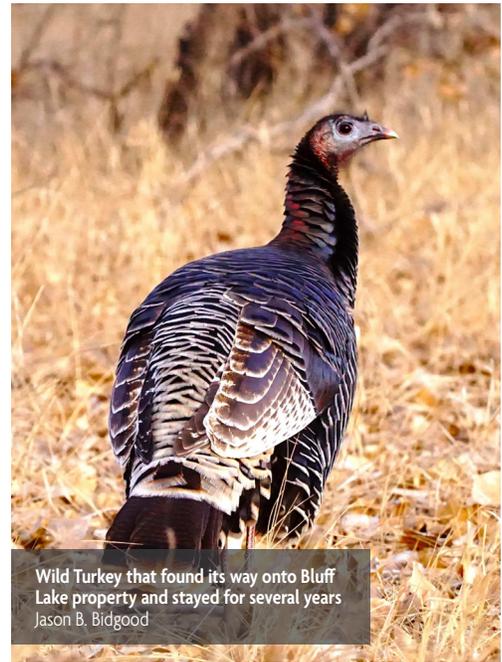
Participants on a Bluff Lake bird walk scan from the boardwalk
Jason B. Bidgood



American Dipper, surprise find in Bluff Lake's Sand Creek in February 2016
Jason B. Bidgood

Current visitors may be unaware that before 2017, it was typical for Bluff Lake to dry up in the summer. Its sole sources of water are precipitation and storm runoff from the nearby neighborhood. But the lake's dam, more than a century old, could no longer contain the waters. After several years of planning and fundraising, the dam was rebuilt in 2016. Anecdotally, the leaky dam made Bluff Lake a better birding hotspot for shorebirds because there was commonly more shoreline mud than water. The birding tradeoff is that now in late summer, you're more likely to see Mallards, Blue-winged Teal, Pied-billed Grebes and American Coots on the lake (with their young) as well as Black-crowned Night Herons along the water's edge.

That year was also about the time I started birding and visiting Bluff Lake more frequently — and I've seen some of my most memorable life birds there since. On a walk one unusually warm February afternoon in 2016, I was surprised to find an American Dipper in Sand Creek. Four years later, two months into the COVID-19 shutdown, I chased an American Bittern one evening just before dark in April 2020.



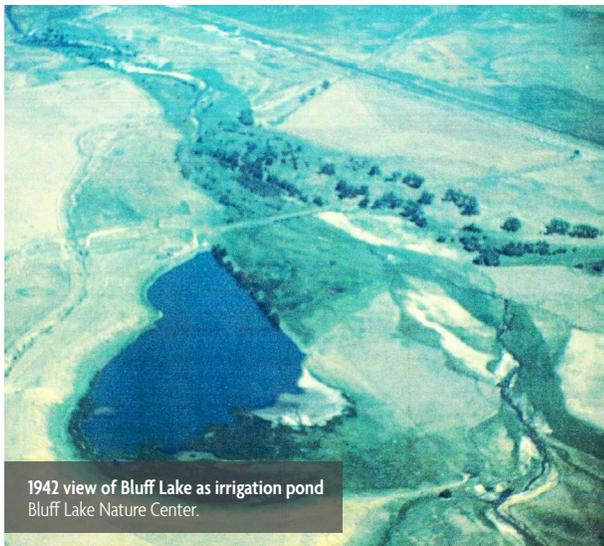
Wild Turkey that found its way onto Bluff Lake property and stayed for several years
Jason B. Bidgood

Chases for other rarities likely introduced many Denver birders to Bluff Lake. Did you see the Wild Turkey that showed up in July 2017 and stayed around for several years? Perhaps the Green Heron in summer 2018, or the Magnolia Warbler in May 2020? And then there are the Golden-crowned Sparrows that have been found (usually in the same spot) for each of the past three winters.

Regardless of how they come to know Bluff Lake, birders keep coming back. The center has become Denver County's top eBird hotspot in the number of both checklists and bird species recorded in the past few years. It is now approaching 6,000 checklists, almost twice as many as the city's second most popular hotspot, Denver City Park.

And if you still haven't been birding at Bluff Lake, what are you waiting for? It's easy to find, easy to get around, and a great place to spend a morning or afternoon. Come join me!

Jason B. Bidgood, a DFO member since 2016, is an environmental engineer / project manager for a federal contractor. He has led DFO field trips and Bluff Lake Nature Center bird walks as a volunteer since 2022. When not birding, he can often be found at his local climbing gym or out for a run



1942 view of Bluff Lake as irrigation pond
Bluff Lake Nature Center.



1953 view of Stapleton Airport with Bluff Lake crash zone at far right
Bluff Lake Nature Center.



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

September DFO trips *In Focus*

Early fall migration DFO field trips in September 2024 included 14 outings where participants took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 89-year-old club. If you’re on DFO trips in October, please take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best for the issue of *The Lark Bunting* due out in November.

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. Deadline is last day of the month — **Thursday, Oct. 31** for the next issue. And don’t forget: photos of field trip *people* for this feature, please. Thanks!

SEPTEMBER 1

Northeastern Colorado (Washington, Logan, Morgan, Weld counties)

Leader

Joey Kellner

Participants

Winston Liu, Steve Hebert, Norman Erthal, Dave Prentice, Christopher Curwen, Robert and Jennifer Tonge, Joe Chen, Liza and Ajit Antony, Laura Hollenbaugh, Mark Amershek, Courtney Rella, Andrea Duran, Patricia Cullen, Thomas Forre, Archer Silverman, Tim Smart, Lillian Koerner

Joey Kellner (left-center, at scope) at Prewitt State Wildlife Area on Sept. 1 with some of the 19 birders he led on his annual fall migration field trip to northeastern Colorado
(Mark Amershek)



SEPTEMBER 2

Louviers + Dupont Open Space (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Kris Saucke, Julia Gwinn, Lynn Sauer, Ann Christensen, Mary Ramsey, Cindy Bouldin

Group shot of DFO field trippers on very birdy visit Sept. 2 to Douglas County village of Louviers and DuPont Open Space
(David Suddjian)

Continued on page 19

SEPTEMBER 3

Ponderosa Preserve, Aurora (Adams)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Cynthia Cestkowski, Amy Manning, Catherine Millard,
Kevin Millard, Christina Jeske, Brady Anderson,
Cindy Bouldin, Phil Waltz, Kris Tita

Birders on DFO's 10th species-survey field trip Sept. 3
inside Aurora's restricted-access Ponderosa Preserve
Cynthia Cestkowski



SEPTEMBER 5

Chatfield SP (Douglas, Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Ryan Corda, Alice Tariot, Sarah Feigelson, Nadiyah
Watts, Chip Dawes, Nathan Crow, Kathy Johnson

Crossing the grasslands in Chatfield State Park on Sept. 5
field trip that found two Long-tailed Jaegers
(Nadiyah Watts)



SEPTEMBER 8

Louviers + DuPont Open Space (Douglas)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Kathy Kunce, Susan Shetterly, Ryan Corda, Scott Hammel,
Debby Miller, Mindy and David Densmore

Birders on outskirts of village of Louviers in
Douglas County on Sept. 8 field trip
(Mindy Densmore)

Continued on page 20



SEPTEMBER 13

Aurora Reservoir (Arapahoe)

Leader

Carly Crow

Participants

Ryan Corda, John Batt, Andrea Duran, Cynthia Cestkowski, Nathan Crow, Catherine Millard, Christopher Curwen, Debby Miller

DFO birders scan Aurora Reservoir during field trip on Sept. 13
(Debby Miller)

SEPTEMBER 15

First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch (Jefferson)

Leaders

Patrick O'Driscoll and Felice Lyons

Participants

John Batt, Meg Reck, Julia Auckland, Rosanne Juergens, Steve Methven, Sandra Hoyle, Michael Fernandez, Jackie Nelsen, Mary Onstot, Mary Keithler, Lynn Slaga, Susan Blansett

Birders on memorial DFO trip Sept. 15 to the late John Breitsch's patch at First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch
(Patrick O'Driscoll)



SEPTEMBER 16

Chico Basin Ranch (El Paso, Pueblo)

Leader

Jessica Miller

Participants

Bonnie Prado, Holly Winters Deppe, Ryan Corda, Steve Hebert, John Batt, John Rising, Jon Deppe, Kathy Barnum, Dale Stevens, Melissa Wetzig, Linda Cunico

Field trippers scan Headquarters Pond at Chico Basin Ranch on Sept. 16 DFO outing during the ranch's short fall birding season
(Steve Hebert)

Continued on page 21



SEPTEMBER 18
**Audubon Kingery Nature Center,
Chatfield SP**
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Coreen Spellman, Ryan Corda, Nancy Donovan,
Dave Prentice, Becky Russell, Gigi Zarzuela

All eyes up into the trees for pewees on DFO field trip Sept. 18
to Kingery Audubon Nature Center at Chatfield State Park
(Gigi Zarzuela)

SEPTEMBER 22
Denver City Park
(Denver)

Leaders
Patrick O'Driscoll and Archer Silverman

Participants
Lisa Seiler, Lorraine Dixon-Jones, Steve Methven,
Sandra Hoyle, Julia Auckland, Heidi Letko

First-day-of-fall birders focus skyward during
Denver City Park field trip Sept. 22
(Patrick O'Driscoll)



SEPTEMBER 22
**Birds + Nature Journaling,
Barr Lake SP**
(Adams)

Leader
Carly Crow

Participants
Jennifer Tonge, Matthew Hazelgren, Paula Rosson

Participants in Birds + Nature Journaling field trip Sept. 22
at Barr Lake State Park pose with their handiwork
(Carly Crow)



Continued on page 22

SEPTEMBER 23

**Birds + History, Louviers
+ DuPont Open Space
(Douglas)**

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Debby Miller, Virginia Gulakowski, Phil Waltz, Sarah Feigelson,
Jeanne Dillon, John Batt, Bonnie Prado, Cynthia Cestkowski

Birds + History field trippers Sept. 23 in village of Louviers community center for Historic Douglas County Inc. presentation on the 116-year-old former company town for a DuPont dynamite plant
(Debby Miller)



SEPTEMBER 26

**Birds + Bird Photography,
Chatfield SP
(Jefferson, Douglas)**

Leaders
David Suddjian and Dave Prentice

Participants
Steve Hebert, Kris Saucke, Jim and Linda Mann,
Matthew Hazelgren, Kathy Kunce, Lynn Sauer,
Annette Aguero, Ginger Okada, Dick Prickett

Early morning scan for Sabine's Gulls on Sept. 26
Birds + Bird Photography field trip to Chatfield State Park
(Dave Prentice)

SEPTEMBER 29

**Cherry Creek SP
(Arapahoe)**

Leaders
David Tønnessen and David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Virginia Gulakowski, Nadiyah Watts,
Taylor Xavier, Lisa Seiler, Kathy Johnson, Andrea Duran

Pausing on the path during Sept. 29 outing to Cherry Creek State Park,
David Tønnessen's first as a field trip leader
(David Suddjian)





DFO OUTREACH

Flying the DFO flag at Barr Lake's annual birding festival

Isabelle Busch

Early birds landed in force at Barr Lake State Park the morning of Sept. 14 for the park's annual Fall Birding Festival. Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, whose headquarters is inside the park, led the migration-focused gathering outside the Barr Lake Nature Center with guided bird walks, tours of the conservancy's banding station, and nature journaling sessions.

Hundreds of park visitors, many brand new to birding, flocked to an inviting outdoor alley of canopy-shaded booths featuring live birds from Nature's Educators and bird-oriented displays, among them Colorado Parks & Wildlife, Wild Birds Unlimited, Denver Audubon, the Leave No Trace outdoor ethics movement, and, of course, Denver Field Ornithologists.

DFO's information table, staffed by Communications & Outreach chair **Mike Fernandez** and newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll**, featured club information: handouts and links, Q-and-A for potential new members, promotion of DFO's free field trips, and a highly popular book giveaway. From the dozens of guidebooks, reference works, and other bird-related volumes, I chose a lovely Sibley guide. The books were among hundreds bequeathed to the club this summer by DFO trip leader and gifted birder **John Breitsch**, who died in August.

Nature's Educators, which presents live raptors up close for audiences at schools and events like the festival, arrived with three avian ambassadors. "It is really exciting for us to be here with people who are already super motivated," said program specialist **Rebeca Reyes**, who handled **Zelda** the Prairie Falcon.

Festivalgoers also saw live birds being tagged at the conservancy's banding station, where DFO vice president **Charlie Chase**, himself an ornithologist, assisted with the operation. Eastern Colorado lies within the Central Flyway, an aerial highway for birds heading north in spring and south in fall. Local habitats like Barr Lake are important stopovers where migrants build fat reserves necessary to fly hundreds and even thousands of miles. Although modern migration is often tracked with GPS, the classic technique of banding birds remains important.



Continued on page 24



Bird bander Meredith McBurney with Wilson's Warbler
Isabelle Busch



Zelda the Prairie Falcon at Nature's Educators booth
Isabelle Busch

BIRD FESTIVAL *cont from page 23*

“We’re monitoring migratory songbirds so that we can conserve them,” said **Meredith McBurney**, a 20-year veteran bander for the conservancy. Asked what’s the most important part of her work, she replied, “Turning people onto birds. We’re the gateway drug for birding.”

Her banding demonstration definitely charmed **Joel Cross**, age 11, who held a newly-banded songbird in his cupped palms for a brief moment before it fluttered away. His reaction? “Wow, this is amazing!” A fifth grader from North Star Elementary School in Thornton, Cross was fascinated by how birds migrating through the park stop to just “fatten themselves up and then go.”

Although the festival celebrates fall bird migration, spring may be a bigger season in Colorado. That’s the case for raptors traveling north along the Front Range. Expert-led teams of DFO volunteers track and count birds of prey daily for 10 weeks on Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County. This annual Hawk Watch citizen science project lasts from March 1 to mid-May.

“What makes our Hawk Watch unique is not the sheer number of birds, but the variety of species,” said Fernandez, himself a Hawk Watch volunteer who chatted with festival visitors about DFO’s effort. He noted that spotters at Dinosaur Ridge record more than 20 species of hawks, eagles, falcons, and vultures.

One more lesson at this year’s festival was how eating enough to fuel long seasonal flights is vital to all migrating bird species. Natural habitats teem with insects, seeds, fruit and rodents, but what about urban and suburban areas? **Cacie Nickalaus**, a bird-friendly-gardening volunteer for the conservancy, said we can create food banks for birds that pass through our own yards.

“Native plants support insect communities better than ornamental plants do because they have co-evolved to exist together,” she explained. “If we get enough people planting these pockets of habitat, it’ll create really great corridors for birds to exist in year-round as well as for migratory stopovers.”

As the morning-long birding festival reached its height, visitors looked up to admire, within a few minutes of each other, a Bald Eagle and a flock of American White Pelicans passing overhead. The shouts of excitement and delight were welcome signs of another year’s success for the festival.

Isabelle Busch is an avid birder and nature journalist who moved from Washington this summer to Colorado, where she discovered DFO. Her graduate research at Colorado State University focuses on international bird conservation

DFO NEWS

DFO outreach at Arsenal festival, too



DFO promoted bird appreciation and conservation on Sept. 28 with a booth at Refuge Day, the annual festival of one of metro Denver's most popular birding destinations, [Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge](#). Club president **Sharon Tinianow**, Communications & Outreach chair **Mike Fernandez**, and newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** answered questions about field trips, taught children how to use binoculars, handed out club brochures and bird fact sheets, and gave away bird-related books and candy.

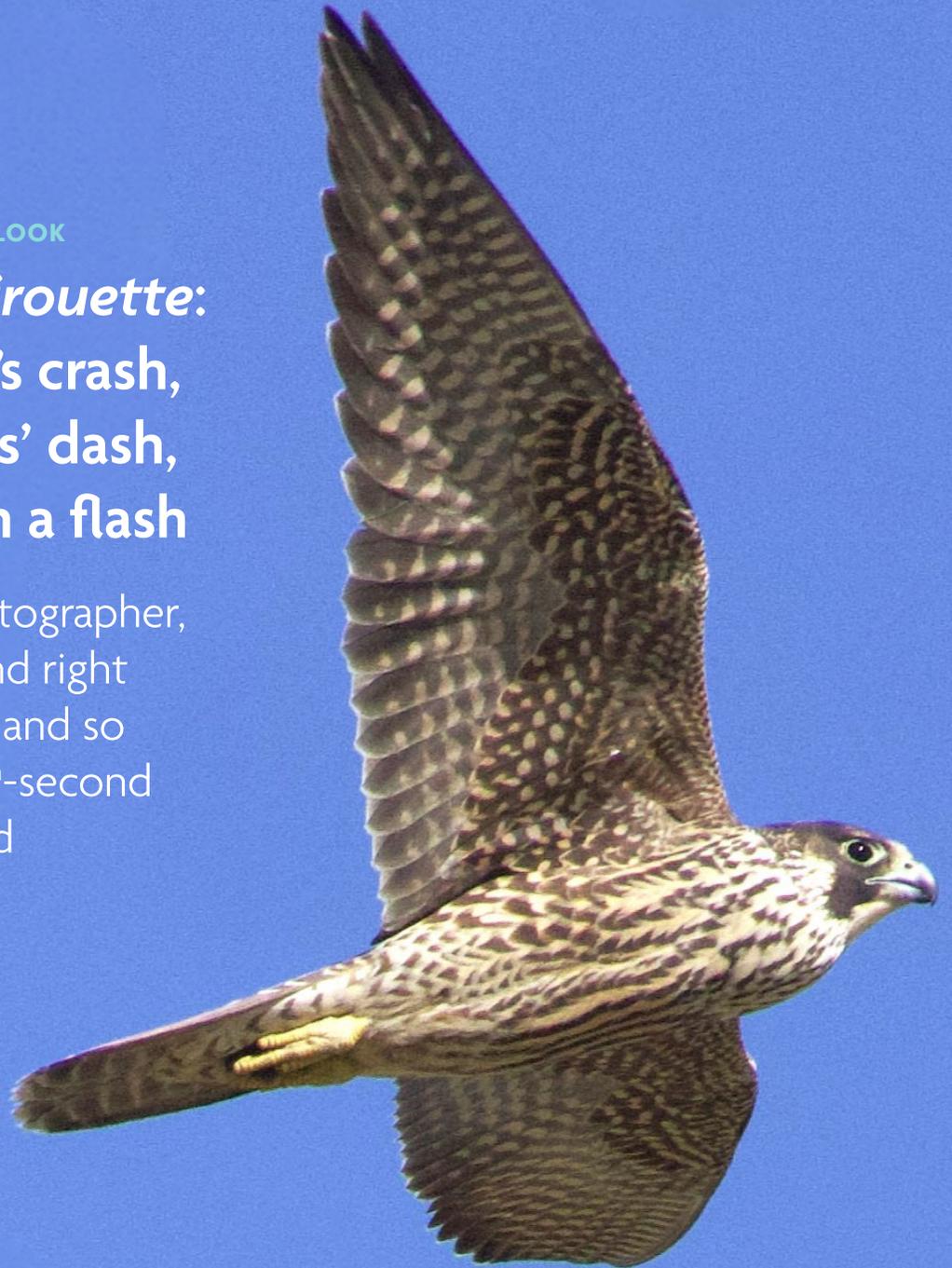
Photo by Patrick O'Driscoll

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Prewitt *pirouette*: Peregrine's crash, shorebirds' dash, all gone in a flash

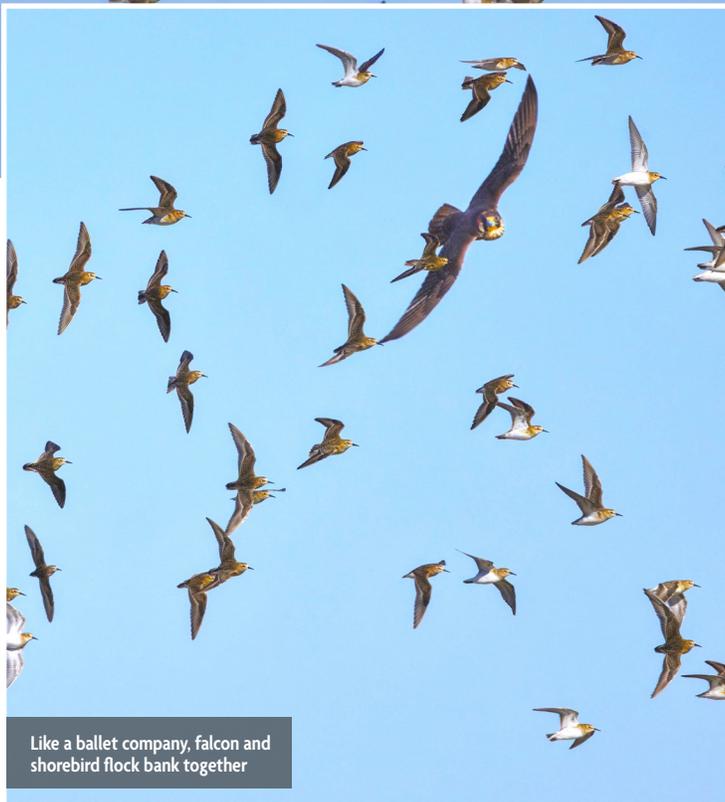
For DFO photographer,
right place and right
time help — and so
does 1/3200th-second
shutter speed

Photos by David Prentice





The sandpiper squadron takes flight, with falcon in pursuit



Like a ballet company, falcon and shorebird flock bank together



Aerial battle, or aeroballet?

Dave Prentice

We were checking out shorebirds at Prewitt when everything flushed . . . and instantly it became apparent why.

It was around 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 21, the last day of official summer. This was my fourth visit to [Prewitt Reservoir State Wildlife Area](#) in September. It's an amazing spot because of all the migrating shorebirds and land birds in fall — although there are also dove and duck hunters around, and those “friends” were sharing the same end of the reservoir. So that made it more challenging.

Winston Liu from Lafayette was with me. He's a very good birder and a photographer as well. We had decided to cross the inlet canal at the far south end of the reservoir and explore the small bay on the east side of the inlet. This required bringing our rubber boots along to get across, but it was definitely worth it.

There were at least 17 species of shorebirds being seen. We were specifically looking for the Marbled Godwit, Short-billed Dowitcher and American Golden Plover. At this point, we had found the godwit.

Continued on page 28

LAST WORD *cont from page 27*

Winston and I were shooting photos of hundreds of shorebirds when they suddenly flushed. As if out of nowhere, a Peregrine Falcon flew in. It looked like every bird in the bay had flushed — hundreds of all different species. We estimated 200 Baird's Sandpipers alone.

I was shooting with a Canon R5, RF 100-500mm lens with 1.4 extender to 700mm. I quickly bumped the shutter speed up to 1/3200th-second as the Peregrine circled around a little before diving into the flying Baird's flock.

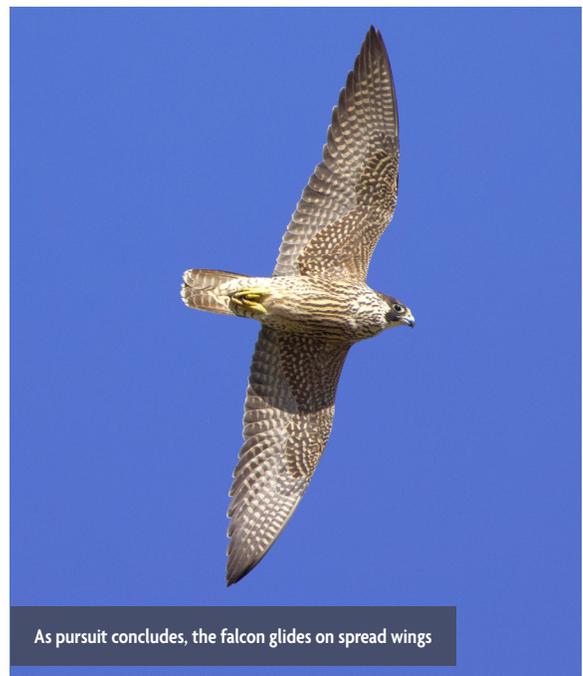
We didn't see it snatch any birds, and going through the photos later, it looked like the falcon had a full crop already. But it was so exciting to experience and to get these photos. The whole episode lasted only 30 seconds.

At first I was disappointed that the camera focused on the sandpipers and not the falcon. But I think it actually worked out better in telling the story — that the Peregrine is chasing from behind. My photos look like it was just the Baird's flock flying together, but I didn't look at every one, and I don't know "shorbs" that well.

I do know that I took 250 photos in 30 seconds. So many to choose from! (Here is our [eBird checklist](#).)



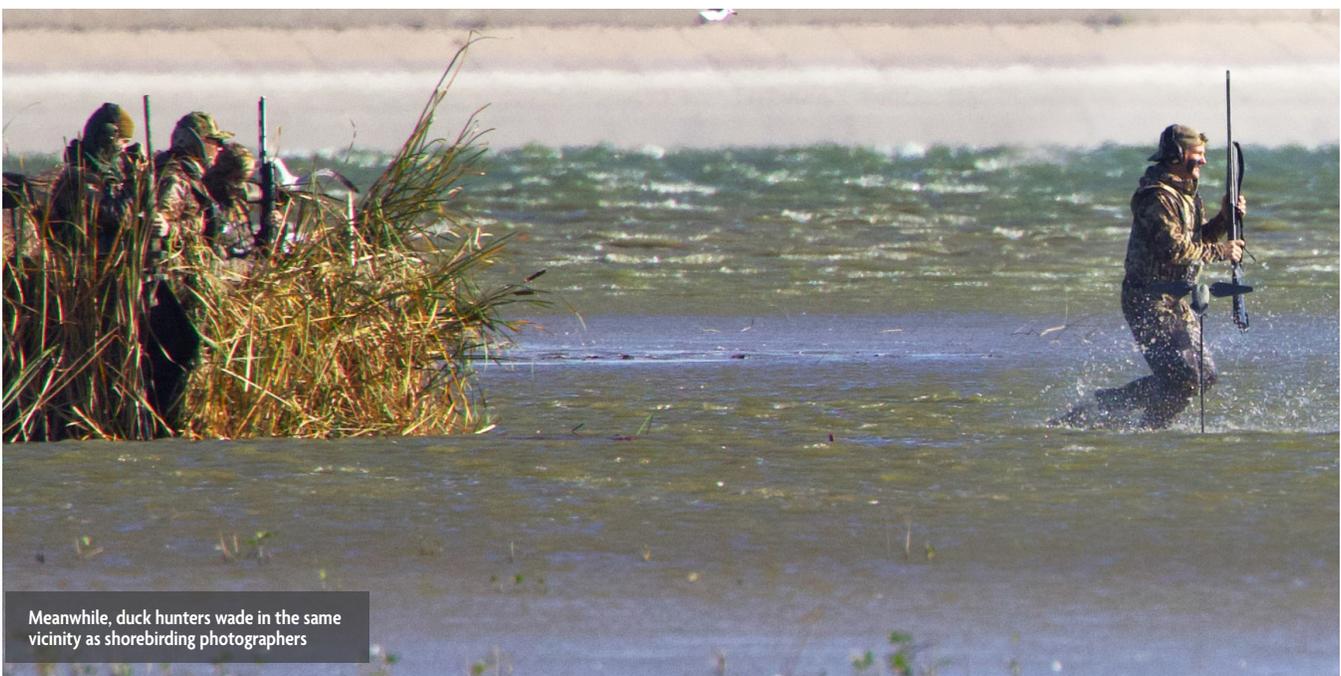
Peregrine's dive-bomb ballet is ending



As pursuit concludes, the falcon glides on spread wings



A DFO member since 2018, **Dave Prentice** has been a birder / photographer for the past 10 years. A Colorado native, he lives in Denver and is retired from the industrial design field



Meanwhile, duck hunters waded in the same vicinity as shorebirding photographers



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

Peregrine Falcon flies off after aerial ballet
Sept. 21 with shorebirds over Prewitt Reservoir