THE LARK BUNTING

QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 61 | ISSUE 2 | APRIL 2025

DFOBIRDS.ORG

dfo DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS 90th Anniversary

Bushtit
Dave Prentice
Overland Park, Denver

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

ON THE COVER

Bushtit: Short-named, tiny-bodied builder of big, extended-family nests

Patrick O'Driscoll

Look closely: This month's cover bird, a female Bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*), is nothing but business at this all-business time of the year. Cover photographer **Dave Prentice** found her on March 20 in Denver's Overland Park, along the South Platte River about four miles upstream from downtown. She (and no doubt her mate, somewhere nearby) were gathering the makings of their nest.

Prentice watched the yellow-eyed female (male eyes are black) "for a couple of minutes as she pulled spiderwebs from an old spider nest." You can see some of the web matter there, feathery white in her dark, stubby bill. Spiderwebs are primo building material for the Bushtit's nest, a pendulous, oblong construction cartoonishly large for such tiny, long-tailed birds (smaller than a kinglet).

Cornell's *Birds of the World* tells us why. The Bushtit is one of the first species discovered to have "helpers at the nest" — non-breeding adults generally, but sometimes older juveniles. They help with household tasks, from incubating eggs (which average six in a Bushtit clutch) to gathering nest insulation materials and brooding the hatchlings and nestlings. These "cooperative breeders" also provide another warm body or two in the nest, a Bushtit family dynamic for coping with cold.

That nest itself is a wonderous construction. Bushtit nests are so well insulated that during the two-week egg incubation period, the parents typically spend only 40% of their time on the eggs, giving them more time to forage outside.

Bushtit dwellings are also marvels of camouflage. Those I've managed to find (pure luck) in Denver City Park over the years were hidden in plain sight, tucked high in outer branches of spruce or pine. Picture a longish gourd, covered with plant material from surrounding trees, interwoven with spiderwebs. To me they look like cylindrical globs of dryer lint. In his 2019 book *How to Know the Birds*, Colorado bird expert **Ted Floyd** recalled someone else's description: "a basketball player's dirty tube sock hanging from a tree."

Once the young fledge, everyone abandons the nest, but not the communal sharing of warmth. On a spring cold-snap morning several years ago, I found a Bushtit family in City Park's "Pinetum" conifer grove. As the parents flew back and forth bringing food to their brood, the six fledglings huddled in a tight, shoulder-to-shoulder line on an interior juniper branch. Cutest survival strategy ever.

Gray and drab at a glance, Bushtits are mesmerizing to watch. Roaming in flocks (before and after having two broods a season), they flashmob through the trees, gleaning tiny insects and spiders nonstop. Hard to photograph but delightful to watch.

And to think: Bushtits were rather rare hereabouts until a decade or so ago. "Part of the reason is likely the warming and drying of climate," Floyd wrote in a 2020 American Birding Association blog. He suggests they're among several Southwest species "spreading steadily northward in the past couple of decades."

To which I can only add: Lucky us!

***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,*

IN THIS ISSUE

The Lark Bunting, formerly the monthly newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists, is the club's quarterly journal and is published online in January, April, July and October.

DFO On the Wing, the club's digital newsletter, is emailed monthly to all members.

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Submit time-sensitive, month-to-month news items, tips, announcements, photos and other materials to the monthly newsletter's editor at comm@dfobirds.org.

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

DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS 90th Anniversary

DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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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To reach DFO officers, board directors, committee chairs, and other position holders directly, please contact them individually via the **DFO Leadership Page.**

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Wild Bird 9-1-1: After two unsettling incidents, I'm preparing now for a smoother next time

Sharon Tinianow

I was birding in Denver's Washington Park one morning at the end of January when I spotted a raptor — on the ground. About 10 people were gathering around it, but giving it room, maybe 10 feet or so away. As I got closer, I could see it was a Red-tailed Hawk. Perhaps the binoculars around my neck gave me extra birder credibility, because when I arrived, the bystanders asked me what kind of bird it was — and was it OK?

The hawk looked fine to me, but hawks normally don't linger on the ground in an urban park where lots of people and dogs walk by. I knew not get too close. A puncture wound from one of those talons would *not* be fun. I opened my phone and called two DFO raptor experts whose numbers are in my contacts.

First to answer was **Janet Peters**, our club's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch champion. She quickly walked me through a visual assessment: No drooping wings? Clear eyes? She suggested I try to flush the bird off the ground and out of harm's way simply by walking slowly toward it.

The hawk's plumage indicated it was an immature bird. Perhaps it just lacked good judgment in a situation like this? As I slowly approached, I heard back from **Courtney Rella**, DFO's Conservation Committee chair. She also volunteers with the Rocky Mountain Raptor Program in Fort Collins, which rehabs, researches and teaches about birds of prey. She suggested I call Rocky Mountain Wildlife Alliance in Sedalia for advice. I did, and I left them a message.

About then, a Denver Parks & Recreation ranger showed up. After he phoned Denver Animal Protection (also known as Animal Control), he told everyone at the scene that there was no need to be concerned. He said Animal Protection advised that if the bird was not "actively dying," just let nature take its course. At that point, the hawk ruffled its feathers a few times and flew up onto a low branch in a nearby tree, and the bystanders dispersed. That didn't mean the hawk was OK, but at least it was out of immediate danger from people or dogs. (Unfortunately, that's one of the challenges if a bird has avian influenza. Even symptomatic birds may suddenly appear normal if they take flight.)

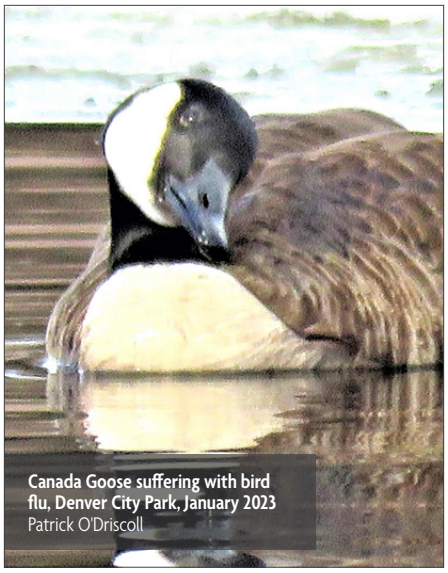
Later that same week, one of my neighbors called to say a Canada Goose was in the yard of the neighbor between our two houses, and it did not look good. "Could you take a look?" she asked, knowing of my birding obsession. (Not that I'd ever claimed to be a wildlife vet.) But the yard with the goose was the domain of two large dogs, and the homeowners were out of town. She was afraid that if the pet sitter came by to let the dogs out, the unfortunate goose would become prey.

I took a look and agreed. The goose — actually a Cackling Goose — seemed unable to stand and had trouble holding its head up. I was able to approach from behind, pick up the bird and carry it outside the fenced yard to my side so the dogs couldn't get at it.

And then it dawned on me: Avian flu! I quickly went inside, washed my hands thoroughly and called Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. I had visited there not long ago with **Jill Boice**, DFO's Grants Committee chair, and I remembered that they work with a lot of bird species besides other wildlife. This time I reached a real person, who suggested I phone Denver's Animal Control. She also gave me advice how to get past Animal Control's automated phone system to speak directly to someone or to at least leave a message in the right place.

Continued on page 6

Red-tailed Hawk
John Breitsch



Canada Goose suffering with bird flu, Denver City Park, January 2023
Patrick O'Driscoll

I looked out my window from time to time to check on the goose. It was just where I'd left it, still unable to walk or fly. I think Animal Control came by when I wasn't looking, because the next time I did, the poor bird was gone. I assume the goose had to be euthanized if it didn't die first.

Two experiences in the same week made me realize I'm really not very prepared for dealing with a wildlife emergency. Something tells me I'm not the only one. After doing some internet research, here are a few organizations whose numbers and websites you might want to keep close by (or in your cellphone contact list) in case you come across a sick or injured bird.

Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation and Rocky Mountain Wildlife Alliance (clickable links above) offer good advice about what to do and not to do in a wildlife emergency. Check out these resources, including nonprofit organizations and programs that rely on public donations to function:

- Rocky Mountain Raptor Program in Fort Collins deals specifically with sick or injured birds of prey. It serves the area from Longmont north into several parts of Wyoming, and it has a 24-hour rehab hotline
- Rocky Mountain Wildlife Alliance in Sedalia accepts raptors, small mammals, and songbirds, and is reachable by phone, text and social media
- Birds of Prey Foundation in Broomfield also helps with raptors. It serves Broomfield, Boulder and Adams counties and adjacent areas
- If none of those is close to you, Animal Help Now has a website and a mobile app that provide lists of local/regional agencies and organizations when you report your location and the bird or other animal you've encountered
- Colorado Parks & Wildlife has a wildlife diseases page with specific avian influenza updates, safety tips, and a link to your closest CPW office to report wildlife sick or dead from possible bird flu. It will respond in person if three or more dead waterfowl are reported from a location within a two-week period
- Colorado Department of Agriculture's avian influenza webpage includes epidemic updates and wild bird-specific advice as well as human health precautions to take around sick or dead birds. Since avian flu has been observed in mammals, people are advised not to touch sick or dead birds without proper protection and to keep pets away from them or their droppings

On that sobering but important note, good birding everyone! It's good to be vigilant when enjoying the birds around us as spring migration progresses.

Heading into my third year as your president with DFO's election in April, this will my last *From the President* column. In our club's 90th anniversary year, I am focusing on finishing our new four-part DFO history here in *The Lark Bunting* (Part 2 is in this issue). Longtime member **Mary Geder**, a DFO Board member and chair of our Nominations Committee, will take over writing this quarterly column until a new president takes office this time next year. Look for Mary's byline in this spot in the July issue.

— Sharon

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*DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is former editor of* The Lark Bunting *(2017-20). She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.*

2025 ELECTION

April? Time to vote for DFO officers, board

Mary Geder

Denver Field Ornithologists will hold the club's annual election in April for officers and board directors. As in previous recent years, balloting will be via electronic mail.

Ballots with the names of eight candidates are scheduled to go out via email to all club members by **Monday, April 14**. Online voting begins upon receipt, with ballot selections due back no later than **Saturday, April 26**. Election results will be announced two nights later, at the start of DFO's monthly evening program on **Monday, April 28 via Zoom**.

Although single candidates are standing for election to each of the officer and director positions, any DFO member can self-nominate or write in other DFO members as candidates. The four officers (president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer) serve single 1-year terms and can run for re-election year to year. This year, two current officers, President **Sharon Tinianow** and interim Vice President **Charlie Chase**, seek election. Board member **Patrick O'Driscoll**, appointed interim secretary by the board in February, seeks election to that post. DFO member **Tom Econopouly**, appointed interim co-treasurer by the board in February, seeks election with the retirement of treasurer **Kathy Holland**.

Two of four DFO director candidates are running for re-election: Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** and Nominations chair **Mary Geder**. DFO past President **Susan Blansett** and club member and field trip leader **Gary Witt** seek the board seats being vacated by O'Driscoll and retiring member **Tina Jones**. Board directors serve 3-year terms and can run for re-election term to term.

Brief biographies of the candidates follow. "Please do take the time to learn about the candidates and vote," Geder says. "It will only take a moment." She also asks members to consider club leadership and other volunteer opportunities at DFO: "Your age and birding experience are not as important as your enthusiasm and new ideas."

To explore volunteering for DFO and serving in club leadership, go to the DFO Leadership page. For answers to your questions or to comment, contact Geder at mfg5000@live.com.

The 2025 candidates include:

PRESIDENT

Sharon Tinianow

Sharon was elected DFO president in 2023 and 2024 and seeks re-election to a third term. She previously was vice president (2021-2023), editor of *The Lark Bunting* newsletter (2017-20), and a member of the Conservation Committee. She is retired from the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History and lives in Denver.

VICE-PRESIDENT

Charlie Chase

While curator of birds at Denver Museum of Natural History in the early 1980s, Charlie led field trips and taught classes for DFO and Colorado Field Ornithologists. He also chaired the state bird records committee. After 20 years in Florida and other parts of the world, he returned to teach ecological and environmental design at he University of Colorado and work on Rocky Mountain Arsenal bird studies and ecological restoration. Now retired, he volunteers in Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' bird banding, Colorado bird surveys and monitoring work at the Arsenal, and he coordinates seasonal bird counts begun by DFO more than 40 years ago.

SECRETARY

Patrick O'Driscoll

A retired newspaper journalist, Pat took up birding in his 50s and joined DFO in 2014. He became a field trip leader in 2016 and was elected three times to the DFO Board (2018-2024). He became editor of *The Lark Bunting* newsletter in late 2019 and converted it to a quarterly journal in 2025. In 2023, he received one of DFO's first two Peregrine Awards, for *Lark Bunting* innovations.

TREASURER

Tom Econopouly

Tom recently joined DFO and is a retired federal employee, most recently as a hydrologist with the US Fish & Wildlife Service, where he worked on the Platte River Recovery and Implementation Program. He has worked in recent weeks with

Continued on page 8

2025 ELECTION *cont from page 7*

Holland to become familiar with DFO's books and financial practices.

BOARD DIRECTOR

Susan Blansett
Susan was DFO president (2021-23) and is the most recent past president. She has served as a board member, chair of the Nominations Committee and interim Conservation chair. She is also a trip leader. Susan spent 30 years in economic development and recently retired from the Colorado Workforce Development Council.

Mary Geder
Mary joined DFO in the early 2000s and is a field trip leader. She has also served as treasurer, field trip scheduler and Nominations Committee chair. A retired data system analyst in the oil and gas industry, Mary also worked previously as a biologist for the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

David Suddjian
David joined DFO in 2014 and became a field trip leader in 2016. In 2018 he organized and led the club's Colorado Big Year, which recorded 361 species on 230 trips, both club highs. DFO Field Trips chair since 2021, David has served on the DFO Board ever since. He has certified 40 new trip leaders and coordinates 200-300 outings a year. He has begun field trip collaborations with Aiken Audubon (Colorado Springs) and Denver Audubon. He created and presents *BIRD BOMBS*, DFO's popular bird ID series on Zoom. In 2023, he received one of DFO's first two Peregrine Awards, for field trip program innovation.

Gary Witt
A 31-year career hydrogeologist for Wright Water Engineers in Denver, Gary retired in 2021 after stints as a project manager and vice president. Soon after, Suddjian recruited him to be a DFO field trip leader. He has since led 24 DFO trips and three outings at last year's Colorado Field Ornithologists Convention in Lamar, and he'll lead two at this year's convention in Grand Junction. Gary is a member of the 400-species club in Colorado (420) and his life bird species list is nearing 1,300.

Welcome to new DFO members

Cathy and Christopher Barr, Littleton; Sally Berga and Lynn Jankovsky, Greenwood Village; Jesse and Nicole Bopp, Lakewood; Shmuel and Amy Korengut, Golden; Robert Mitchell, Arvada; Polly Reetz, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund
Sally Berga and Lynn Jankovsky, Karel Buckley, Jasmine Dey, Brian Johnson, Tina Jones, Roger Koester, Pam Lauman, Philip McNichols, Polly Reetz, Melissa Schlothan, Lori Sharp, Sara Slater, Holly Sollod and John Chanin, Robyn and Jeremy Winick

Friends of DFO
Sally Berga and Lynn Jankovsky, Tina Jones, Felice Lyons *in memory of John C. Breitsch*, Kevin Millard, Melissa Schlothan, Robyn and Jeremy Winick

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch
Jane Haddock, Tina Jones, Megan Miller, Linda Olson and Michael Serruto, Melissa Schlothan, Cheryl Wilcox, Larry Wilson, Rob and Michele Worrall

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DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS
90th Anniversary

Wood Ducks, Barr Lake, 2013
John Breitsch

DFO NEWS

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: CONE FORESTS "HABITAT BLAST" ON APRIL 10

Register now for the next *BIRD BOMBS* webinar, "Habitat Blast: Cone Forests," scheduled for Thursday, April 10, at 7 p.m. MDT. Creator-presenter **David Suddjian** describes it as "first in a small series of episodes focused on the birds of particular Colorado habitats." The sessions will still explore bird identification, but also bird communities typical of the subject habitat, and they will highlight "important resources and features for birds in each." If you missed the most recent episode, "ID Masters, Spring Edition," the Zoom video is now available with the rest of the *BIRD BOMBS* episodes on DFO's YouTube Channel and on the DFO webpage.

REGISTER FOR BIRD BOMBS

SPRING BIRDING @ CHICO BASIN STARTS APRIL 29

Birding at Chico Basin Ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties opens **Tuesday, April 29** and runs for six weeks through **Monday, June 2**. This marks the second year of severely restricted public access to the 86,000-acre ranch, a prized birding destination owned by the Colorado State Land Board, which in 2024 unilaterally dictated narrow new seasons and visitor restrictions for spring and fall birding. (The ranch is leased for cattle ranching by a family-owned livestock operator.)

Registration is the same as last year at the website of **Aiken Audubon Society**, the Pikes Peak region chapter of National Audubon. Cost is $15 per person, with registration up to a week in advance. Access is still limited to only 20 birders a day, and mornings only (7 a.m. to 1 p.m.). Groups of 10-12 birders can register ahead of time by emailing Aiken at chicoregistration@aikenaudubon.com with the number in the party and name/email of the group leader, who will receive instructions back for the group. Additional group members (beyond 12) can sign up individually one week ahead of the group trip date.

Also like last year, visitation is limited to just three locations: the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies banding station, the ranch Headquarters Pond, and Rose Pond. **Linda Hodges** of Aiken Audubon, which holds a birding lease at Chico Basin only to facilitate registration, reminds visitors that "any abuse of the above requirements could cause us to lose the lease." Questions? Contact Aiken at chicoregistration@aikenaudubon.com or email Hodges directly at conservation@aikenaudubon.com.

REGISTER TO BIRD AT CHICO BASIN

COLORADO'S XMAS BIRD COUNT TOTALS IN FOR 2024

Participants in 53 official National Audubon Christmas Bird Counts across Colorado in December 2024 and early January 2025 recorded 204 bird species and 790,435 total birds, according to **Brandon Percival**, regional editor for the Colorado count. In reporting the results, he noted that "the most interesting bird" of the count was a Red-breasted X Red-naped Sapsucker hybrid found in Cortez. "I don't think that hybrid combo has been found on a Colorado CBC before." In reporting the results, Percival said a full summary of the Colorado CBC season was in the works. To check for it, look for "The 125th Christmas Bird Count in Colorado" in Percival's article page on the Audubon website.

Continued on page 10

NEWS NOTES *cont from page 9*

BLUFF LAKE NATURE CENTER

Wildlife Refuge ~ Outdoor Classroom

BLUFF LAKE CONSTRUCTION: NO ONSITE PARKING, STAIRS

On St. Patrick's Day, construction crews dug in at Bluff Lake Nature Center to begin an $8.5 million "Campus Improvements Project." The popular birding destination, along Sand Creek in the Central Park neighborhood where Denver's Stapleton International Airport once stood, will still be accessible, but with major temporary changes. Access is only on foot or bicycle through two new pedestrian entrances from Havana Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. From now through the expected completion late this fall, anyone driving to Bluff Lake must find street parking in the neighborhoods south and west, across the street from the nature center.

"There will be no onsite parking during construction as the entire parking lot area and the ramp/stairs down into the site will be closed" and off limits, the center announced in its March 2025 email update to friends of Bluff Lake. "We encourage anyone who is able to roll or stroll to the site." It called construction "an exciting, and, yes, potentially challenging time for Bluff Lake, including its team and visitors."

The new entrances includes a permanent pedestrian access point above Bluff Lake's far northwest end, where the crosswalk at Florence Way crosses Havana Street. That area will also serve as the center's temporary headquarters during construction. The second new "Southwest" pedestrian entrance is temporary. It crosses Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard where the street begins to bend from west to north, about 1,500 feet west of the now-closed main entrance to Bluff Lake. Further details, including a map of the changes, are on the Bluff Lake website's "Construction Site Access" page.

2025'S GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT: 8,127 SPECIES

The Great Backyard Bird Count, a partnership among the Cornel Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon, and Birds Canada, set a new high mark in species recorded during its Feb. 14-17 run. Worldwide, 8,127 bird species were checklisted by hundreds of thousands of birders during the four-day observance. That count (which is still being updated) totals 207 more species that during the 2024 count.

The backyard count was launched by Cornell and Audubon in 1998 as the first online community science project to collect data on wild birds and display results in near real time. Birds Canada's participation in 2009 increased the turnout, and the project became global in 2013 when the data was first entered into the eBird database, which itself is the world's largest biodiversity-related community science effort.

Not surprisingly, US birders filed the most Backyard Bird Count checklists on eBird, with more than 200,000 lists recording 670 species. Submissions via Merlin soared to more than 435,000, up 100% from 2024. India and Canada were a distant second and third among the 217 countries or eBird subregions where birders participated. Go to the count's 2025 final results webpage for full details. For even more updated figures and drill-down details, visit the backyard count's eBird page.

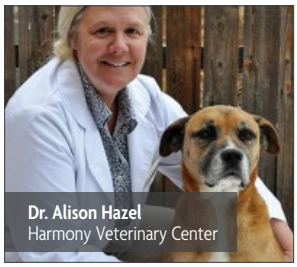
AUDUBON'S STATE OF BIRDS 2025: SHARP DECLINE

The 2025 US State of the Birds report, produced by National Audubon and a coalition of conservation and science groups, shows continued widespread declines in American bird populations across all habitats, both mainland and marine. It notes that 229 species require "urgent conservation action." To no surprise, the worst losses were listed among grassland birds, whose numbers have plummeted by 43% since 1970. Forest birds also were hard hit. Waterfowl, which had seen improvement, now show steep declines since 2022. The report follows five years after the blockbuster 2019 report in the journal *Science* — known colloquially as the "Nearly 3 Billion Birds Gone" study — that documented the many North American birds lost over the half-century.

DOWNLOAD FULL REPORT (PDF)


Holden Fox
CSU


William Churchill Anderson
CU Boulder


Dr. Alison Hazel
Harmony Veterinary Center


Emily Braker
CU Museum of Naural History

SPRING PROGRAM PREVIEW

Research, Education & Conservation in Action: 2024 DFO Grantees Report

Holden Fox, William Churchill Anderson, Alison Hazel
Monday, April 28, 2025
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

The last installment in the 2025 winter-spring series of DFO monthly Zoom programs is "Research, Education & Conservation in Action," a kind of show-and-tell session with recipients of last year's grants from the Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Education and Conservation Fund.

Three of the six 2024 grantees will present updates on their research and conservation work. All winners of these annual grants agree to report back to the DFO membership in one of three ways: An article in *The Lark Bunting*, a DFO field trip planned around the theme and field location of the research, or an oral presentation at the April membership meeting.

In addition, this final evening program before DFO's summer break will include a bonus presentation by **Emily Braker**, vertebrate zoology collections manager at the University of Colorado Boulder Museum of Natural History. Her PowerPoint talk will feature images from the school's extensive ornithology collection.

Two of the grantee presenters for the April 28 meeting are conducting research on common bird species in Colorado. **Holden Fox**, now a doctoral student at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, will discuss his grant-winning project, "Conservation Genomics of Loggerhead Shrike." In applying for his $1,850 grant, Fox noted "persistent and widespread declines" among grassland birds. He proposed to conduct "a comprehensive genetic analysis" of migratory patterns for the Loggerhead, "a grassland species of conservation concern." He intended to create a map of "range-wide genetic variation" for use in targeted management and conservation strategies for the species.

Another doctoral student, **William Churchill Anderson** in the University of Colorado Boulder's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, will report on his work with House Wrens, titled, "Continued Exploration of a Novel Avian Hybrid Zone." Anderson and his colleagues had previously learned that the two subspecies of House Wren found in the US — thought to be more widely separated in the East and West — are in fact occurring together here in Colorado. This means the hybrid zone where the two subspecies meet is significantly farther west than previously thought. Anderson's $2,000 grant research in 2024 continued his work to more precisely map the transition zone between subspecies along the Front Range of the Rockies.

The third grant recipient to report is Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Longmont. On behalf of Greenwood, veterinarian **Dr. Alison Hazel**, a center volunteer and former avian clinic supervisor, will discuss "Wildlife Rehabilitation: the Big Picture." Greenwood Wildlife received $2,000 to purchase specialized food and medical supplies "vital for the healthy development of young wildlife and the recovery of adults from injuries and illness." Orphaned young require "species-specific formulas from specialty retailers," the center said in its grant application. "Recuperating adults often require specialized foods such as live fish, crickets, waxworms, and fruit flies" not readily available from general public supply sources.

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's January, February and March programs

DFO keeps a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring programs. If you could not attend our first three programs of 2025 live via Zoom, click the "WATCH ONLINE" link below each title to view the program recording on DFO's YouTube channel — or go to the DFO website's "Past Programs" page to view.

JANUARY 27

No Boundaries for Wildlife: Saving Tropical Birds in Colorado

Nic Korte
Wildlife conservationist, author
(*Ten Jungle Days*)

WATCH ONLINE

FEBRUARY 24

Colorado: We Need to Talk About Ravens

Nathan Pieplow
Birdsong expert, author
(*Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds*)

WATCH ONLINE

MARCH 24

Mountain Plover Ecology and Conservation in North America

Angela Dwyer
Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, program manager, northern Great Plains

WATCH ONLINE

DFO HAWK WATCH

Dinosaur Ridge raptor count underway in busy spring for Hawk Watch events

Patrick O'Driscoll

Hawk Watch counters and volunteers are about midway through DFO's annual spring-migration count of birds of prey atop Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County. As of April 3, 621 hawks, eagles, falcons and other raptors had been tallied this season by the Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch teams of ridgetop counters and volunteers.

The daily raptor count, which began March 1 and runs through May 10, followed an orientation session in late winter for new volunteers. This year's count also comes after an overwinter presentation about the Dinosaur Ridge operation to a Colorado Field Ornithologists audience via Zoom, and the start of a joint DFO-Nature's Educators program to familiarize Jefferson County schoolchildren with birds of prey. And coming up April 12 is Hawk Watch's annual Raptorthon fundraiser.

Lead counter **Emma Riley**, back for her fourth season on Dinosaur Ridge, said the first raptor tallied on a quiet (three birds) opening day March 1 was an uncommon one: Rough-legged Hawk, "a very exciting start to the count and the first Rough-legged recorded on the ridge in the past two years."

The counting site west of Denver sits atop an iconic segment of the Dakota Hogback geological formation, along the Front Range of the Rockies between Golden and Morrison. "Migration is picking up every day," said Riley, "and we look forward to the return of a few species we have yet to see: Osprey, Swainson's Hawk, and Broad-Winged Hawk." Overall, she added, "we expect to see about 2,000 more raptors between now and May 10."

The count on March 20 was the best day thus far, with 68 migrant raptors of seven different species. The day's "showstopper" was a noon-hour flyby of 41 Red-tailed Hawks, most of them in a low flight line directly over the ridge. Four days later, a whopping 59 Red-tails passed over the ridge March 24, 56 of them during a two-hour period. "The last time we saw a Red-tailed Hawk flight like this was in 2019!" the Hawk Watch team reported on its Facebook page.

One day after that, the March 25 count registered a one-day high for the year of 71 raptors, including an "amazing" surge of 32 American Kestrels after only two had been recorded previously.

Birds weren't the only surge that day: With balmy weather, 33 human visitors climbed to the ridge on March 25, "with many people curious about the count," the team reported.

Continued on page 13

HAWK WATCH *cont from page 12*

Raptorthon fundraiser April 12

Coming up soon is Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch's annual "Raptorthon" fundraiser, set this year for **Saturday, April 12** (rain date April 13). DFO's team, The Mile High Raptors, seeks to earn pledge donations by recording as many bird species as possible (both raptors and other birds) in a 24-hour period. The eight-member team on the ridge will be assisted by volunteer birders counting species down below within an 8-mile radius birding circle centered on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO's is one of five Raptorthon teams that represent hawk-watching stations across the country. All are affiliated with the Hawk Migration Association, with which they work in tandem to collect and distribute essential migration data from seasonal raptor counts.

Please consider donating to help keep Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch running each year. To participate in the birding circle, see the circle map on the Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch website. Participants are encouraged to file eBird checklists from their birding counts within the circle on April 12, and then share the checklists using the "share" feature on eBird with the DFO hawk watchers' eBird account, "dinoridgehawkwatch." **Donations can be made through May 31**.

DONATE TO THE MILE HIGH RAPTORS

Hawk Watch training / orientation

The prelude to the 2025 Hawk Watch season included a well-attended online training Feb. 19 and in-person orientation Feb. 22 on Dinosaur Ridge. Volunteer education coordinator and former DFO president **Dave Hill** led the "basic training" via Zoom for 67 prospective observers. A veteran hawk watcher, Hill went through basic details about how to become Dinosaur Ridge observers as well as the fundamentals of in-flight raptor identification. Interest in the hawk count was so strong, with 40 new and returning volunteers, that they were split into two ridgetop orientation sessions led by Hill and lead counter Riley.

Continued on page 14

Lead counter Emma Riley, center, scans sky during Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch orientation
Natalie Uschner-Arroyo

Hawk Watch-Nature's Educators joint program at Westlake Elementary in Lakewood
Audrey Anderson

HAWK WATCH *cont from page 13*

Trainer Dave Hill leads orientation for volunteer hawk watchers on Dinosaur Ridge
Natalie Uschner-Arroyo

JeffCo schools raptor program

Thanks to a grant from the Jefferson County Open Space Foundation, DFO's Hawk Watch team will familiarize more than 1,000 students in three JeffCo schools with birds of prey this spring in collaboration with Nature's Educators, the traveling Colorado wildlife education program that exhibits live raptors and other wildlife.

"Our goal is to introduce students to what raptors are and their importance," said **Natalie Uschner-Arroyo**, DFO Hawk Watch chair and program manager. "We want to teach them a little about migration, let them recognize that they can see these majestic birds in their own area, and even visit a close-by site where biologists monitor these raptors in migration" — Dinosaur Ridge.

Janet Peters, Hawk Watch youth education coordinator, organized the first presentation March 3 at Westgate Elementary in Lakewood. Hawk Watch counter **Audrey Anderson** gave a short presentation about the Dinosaur Ridge count, after which Nature's Educators brought out live hawks and other birds of prey. Bear Creek K-8 and Welchester Elementary, both in Lakewood, will have their raptor sessions in May (Bear Creek on May 15 and Welchester on May 16). The team also distributes handouts created by the Hawk Watch Committee that complement the school program. They include activity worksheets and trading card-sized guides with raptor fun facts and directions on how to visit the Dinosaur Ridge site.

Outreach: CFO, Evergreen Audubon, social media, new logo

In late January, Riley gave an hour-long presentation in Colorado Field Ornithologists' Dead of Winter Knowledge Quest speaker series. Her engaging and informative talk on Jan. 30 via Zoom covered the history of raptor conservation, species specifics and population trends, the history of hawk migration watches, and highlights of the past three seasons of DFO's hawk counts at Dinosaur Ridge.

WATCH RILEY'S PRESENTATION

Also scheduled in early April for Evergreen Audubon's monthly in-person chapter meeting was counter Anderson's talk, "Hawk Migration Along the Rocky Mountain Flyway: The Importance of Community Science Projects."

In addition, Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch has set up new social media pages. Visit them on Facebook and Instagram.

The raptor-counting program also has a new-look website and a nifty new logo. The online site includes various links to the main DFO webpages. The colorful logo, designed by Hawk Watch volunteer coordinator **Pam Moore**, features a Red-tailed Hawk against a stylized backdrop of forest, mountain and sky.

DINOSAUR RIDGE
HAWK WATCH

RESEARCH, EDUCATION, CONSERVATION

Species science, bird nutrition, youth binocs: 2025 DFO grants invest with record funding

Jill Boice

Thanks to the generosity of our members, applicants for grants from Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Education & Conservation Fund are receiving a combined $11,327 in financial aid in 2025, a new record.

This year's nine winning bird-related projects — from equipping a school bird club with binoculars and improving nutrition for rehabilitation of injured wildlife to species-specific scientific research and birdlife awareness along a creekside Denver trail — also represent the most applicants to receive grants in a single year.

DFO has awarded grants periodically since 1994, when **Mary Hope Robinson** donated $15,000 to establish the DFO Educational Endowment Fund. In 2012, the grants program name was changed to the DFO Research, Education, and Conservation Fund, and we have funded projects grants annually ever since.

This year the club received 12 very interesting applications. The DFO Grants Committee evaluated them based on how well they matched our goal to "encourage the study, appreciation and preservation both of birds and their habitats." The DFO Board of Directors approved the 2025 awards at its February meeting. In addition to funding student research, grants also represent new opportunities for DFO outreach and partnerships with other non-profit organizations and programs.

The grantees are expected to report back to DFO next year on their projects' status. These can take the form of an oral presentation at the club's annual general meeting in April, a written article in DFO's quarterly journal, *The Lark Bunting*, or a field trip-style outing (where practical) to a location of a project's field research work.

Here are summaries of the winning projects and grant amounts:

Young birder on Sand Creek Greenway

Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership, Denver

Community Bird Awareness Programs ($990)

The Sand Creek Regional Greenway is a 13-mile public trail and natural area in the stream corridor across northeast metro Denver. The nonprofit Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership was established to protect, maintain and enhance the greenway. Members organize community cleanups, wellness programs and community science experiences. The partnership's grant application sought money to further develop bird awareness programs along the greenway. It also plans to use some of the funds to buy binoculars and field guides, and pay for transportation and translators as needed.

(** In a new DFO effort, the club has agreed to provide DFO volunteers to the greenway group to help with community programs, including bird and naturalist walks and cleanup days. Interested DFO members can visit the Greenway Partnership's website or email DFO Grants chair Jill Boice at jill@booksandcats.net.)

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Christina Barros with a Red-winged Blackbird

Cristina Barros, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley

Song Function of Female Birds Using Red-Winged Blackbirds as a Model ($1,560)

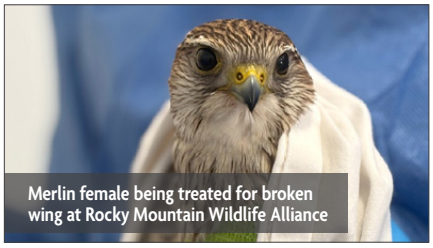
A doctoral candidate in biology, **Cristina Barros** is studying the role of female birdsong, a behavior present in about two-thirds of songbird species. She believes this characteristic has been overlooked in bird studies and counts. Her research studies five functions of female birdsong. She will use nest monitoring techniques to correlate song use to reproductive success. During field work this summer, she will perform research demonstrations for visiting youth groups. Barros also intends to publish her work in both English and Spanish.


Sara Padula with Mountain Chickadee

Sara Padula, University of Colorado Boulder

Genetic Adaptations for Spatial Cognition in Chickadees Using Elevation Contrasts ($2,000)

Tiny but tough, chickadees survive cold winters by storing food and using their impressive memory to find it later. But how do their brains adapt to that challenge? Researcher **Sara Padula**, a third-year doctoral student in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, is investigating the genetic basis of spatial memory in Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees, two species that live at different elevations in the Front Range landscape where UC Boulder's Taylor Lab has conducted its long-running Boulder Chickadee Study. By comparing the genetic variation of birds from high and low elevations, Padula's study aims to uncover genetic adaptations that allow the birds to evolve such impressive memories and, thus, survive harsh winters. Understanding these genetic traits could also provide insights into how animals adapt to climate change and extreme environments.


Merlin female being treated for broken wing at Rocky Mountain Wildlife Alliance

Rocky Mountain Wildlife Alliance, Sedalia

Safeguarding Raptors Through Reliable Nutrition ($500)

Rocky Mountain Wildlife Alliance in Sedalia operates a variety of programs to foster the relationship between people and nature. Its key program is a wildlife hospital and rehabilitation center, where DFO's grant will go toward the purchase of quality food for raptors.


Nate Carley beside a chickadee nestbox

Nate Carley, University of Colorado Boulder

Does Ambient Temperature Influence Incubation Behavior In Front Range Chickadees? ($1,281)

Incubation is critical to the successful hatching of all birds, yet its intricacies are difficult to observe in the field, especially among cavity nesters. **Nate Carley**, an undergraduate student in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, will use remote-sensing "iButtons" to collect ambient and incubation temperatures of Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees. Understanding how temperatures affect the species will provide data which may guide how to support species in rapidly changing climates.

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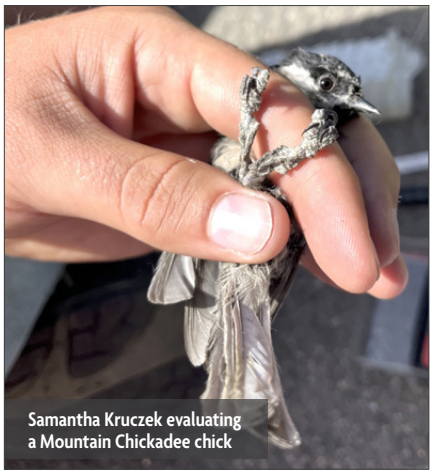
DFO GRANTS *cont from page 16*

Denver South HS Bird Club students ID'ing ducks at Washington Park

Denver South High School Bird Club

Binoculars For Club Outings ($1,436)

DFO field trip leader **Nate Bond**, a chemistry teacher at Denver South High School, applied for a grant to equip the school's birding club with binoculars. Vortex Optics, the American maker of quality optics for wildlife watching and hunting, has agreed to provide some of the binoculars at modest cost and donate others.



Samantha Kruczek evaluating a Mountain Chickadee chick

Samantha Kruczek, University of Colorado Boulder

Characterization and Spatial Analysis of Avian Pox Virus in two Chickadee Species across an Elevational Gradient in the Colorado Front Range ($1,900)

With a lifelong interest in nature, undergraduate student **Sam Kruczek** grew up learning to catch and identify dragonflies and salamanders at summer nature camps. Since starting college, her interest has turned to studying the threats that animals face. This project focuses on the avian pox virus in Black-capped and Mountain chickadees. How does it affect the birds' health? What strain is infecting them? How do infection patterns vary across elevation? Understanding the answers could inform conservation efforts for Colorado's two chickadee species. Kruczek plans further exploration of wildlife health and conservation in her academic and professional careers.

Nicolas Frasson with Lincoln's Sparrow

Nicholas Frasson, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Does Migratory Distance Affect Reproductive Success Of A Passerine Bird? ($1,160)

Nico Frasson, a fourth-year French doctoral student in Evolution, Ecology and Organismal Biology, focuses on physiological tradeoffs between long-distance migration and reproductive strategies. His subjects are a population of Lincoln's Sparrows that breeds at Molas Pass, CO, elevation approximately 11,000 feet. Camping there for six weeks each summer, Frasson and undergraduate students band and measure the birds and sample and record their songs. They also search for the sparrows' nests to measure the nestlings. Also of interest is where his summer sparrows spend winter and how that migration distance (an important energy cost) may affect reproductive success.

Pied-billed Grebe in treatment at Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center

Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Longmont

Species-specific Food and Medical Supplies ($500)

Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center near Longmont is a wildlife treatment and rehabilitation facility for both mammals and birds. The grant funds will assist in the purchase of species-specific foods and medical supplies for the center's wild patients.

***Jill Boice**, who joined DFO in 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*

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DFO @ 90 HISTORY, PART 2

"Bill Bailey" and the raven keeper: Eminent scientists took young birding club under their wing

Editor's note: This month, Denver Field Ornithologists celebrates 90 years as a birding club. To mark this milestone, DFO is researching and drafting ***DFO @ 90****, a fresh history of our club in four parts. Beginning in January with Part 1, four chronological chapters are appearing quarterly through 2025 in* The Lark Bunting. *Part 2 follows. Parts 3 and 4 will appear in the journal's July and October issues.*

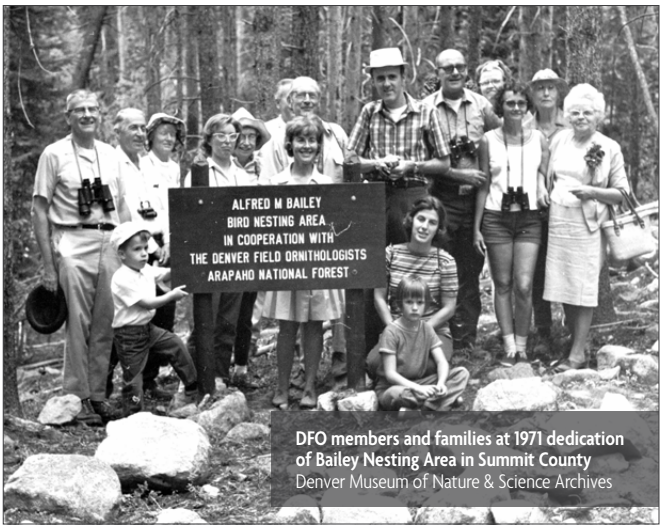
Sharon Tinianow

Half a century ago, cheerful chitchat and a smattering of applause broke the Saturday stillness in a wild, remote corner of Arapaho National Forest outside Silverthorne, CO. It was July 17, 1971, and a small group of Denver birders and their families had journeyed 70 miles west into Summit County. The last two miles led up a winding dirt track to the Rock Creek Trailhead, elevation 9,500 feet.

Amidst pine and spruce woods, the group from Denver Field Ornithologists gathered around a new, double-posted wooden sign to dedicate the Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area. **Alfred M. Bailey** himself, an internationally known ornithologist, was present that day. He had recently retired as director of the Denver Museum of Natural History (now Denver Museum of Nature & Science). The decision to name the area after him acknowledged not only Bailey's extensive ornithology work there, but also his years of support for DFO from its Depression-era beginnings as the Colorado Bird Club.

Our club worked for years with the US Forest Service to set aside this 5,000-acre tract below the southern spine of the Gore Range as a special management area. No timber cutting, heavy grazing or development of new mining claims would be allowed there again. Tucked between the Gore Range Trail and Eagles Nest Primitive Area (now Eagles Nest Wilderness), the Bailey area protects vital and diverse habitat — stands of spruce, aspen and lodgepole pine, and extensive willow thickets, bogs and grass meadows along North Rock Creek. As its name indicates, it was and is an avian maternity ward for dozens of nesting species, from Red-naped Sapsucker, Steller's Jay and Mountain Chickadee to Western Flycatcher, Violet-Green Swallow and Lincoln's Sparrow.

Bailey even took some of the species photographs there for Birds of Colorado, the landmark historical reference work he co-wrote with his museum colleague and fellow ornithologist **Robert J. Niedrach**. The birding club, credited on the official Forest Service sign for its role in preserving the area, conducted overnight field trips there for a number of years. Every summer, DFO still returns to lead a field trip survey of the nesting area's abundant birdlife (more than 100 eBird species recorded).



DFO members and families at 1971 dedication of Bailey Nesting Area in Summit County
Denver Museum of Nature & Science Archives

Good friends, good humor

Bailey and Niedrach, colleagues and co-authors of Colorado's bird bible, became great personal friends as well. Both were devoted to field work and to public education. Each traveled extensively to document birds in locations across the globe. Besides *Birds of Colorado* (1965), they wrote several other publications together. Beyond their serious pursuit of ornithology, they shared a sense of humor and joyful camaraderie. Bailey good-naturedly accepted being called "**Bill**," after the popular, turn-of-the-century music hall anthem "(Won't You Come Home) Bill Bailey." Niedrach, who had a habit of adopting wild animals, was nevermore without his pet raven, **Dick**.

Continued on page 19

About *DFO @ 90*

DFO @ 90 is a four-part historical narrative to mark this year's 90th birthday of Denver Field Ornithologists,. The project team includes club president **Sharon Tinianow**, *The Lark Bunting* journal editor **Patrick O'Driscoll**, and club historian **Kris Haglund**, with assistance from other members and supporters.

Sources for our research include materials in the club archives at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. The Colorado Bird Club (renamed DFO in 1964) held its meetings there for the first 29 years of the club's existence, when DMNS was the Colorado Museum of Natural History. As DFO, the club continued to meet in the museum through 2018.

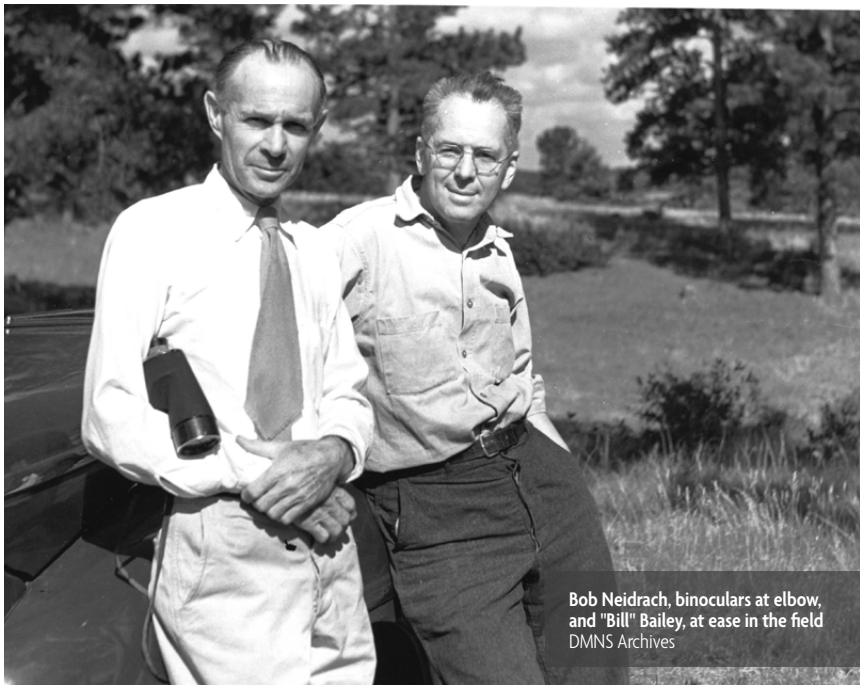
Thanks to the DMNS Archives Department, led by **Laura Uglean-Jackson**, for its generous time, expert curation of DFO's records and invaluable assistance in our research.

The DFO archive also contains scrapbooks, photos and memorabilia kept through the years by history-minded charter members of the club, including co-founder **Margaret Pritchett** and **Ruth Wheeler**. The team also relied on a previous DFO history written in 2002-03 by club historian, former president and Ptarmigan awardee **Warren I. Finch** (1924-2014).

Tinianow is chief writer of *DFO @ 90*. O'Driscoll edits, revises and augments with additional team research. Thanks also to club members who responded to our request for their own DFO-related memories and accounts.

The *DFO @ 90* team appeals again for more member accounts, documents and photos. Please share your memories and mementos to make this history as complete and accurate as possible. Contact Tinianow at sharontinianow@gmail.com and O'Driscoll at patodrisk@gmail.com.

DFO @ 90 *cont from page 18*



Bob Neidrach, binoculars at elbow, and "Bill" Bailey, at ease in the field
DMNS Archives

Individually and together, Bailey and Niedrach left an indelible imprint on our birding club. As a teacher, Niedrach inspired DFO's founders to organize the Colorado Bird Club in 1935, and he helped guide their new venture through the Great Depression and World War II. Both men were frequent presenters at the club's monthly program meetings, and Bailey continued to present occasionally through the 1960s. The club honored both with lifetime DFO memberships.

As the Colorado Bird Club passed its 20th anniversary in the 1950s, its relationship with the museum deepened. The growing institution in Denver City Park was host to club meetings eight months of the year. The president of the board presided over the business part of the meeting, including reading aloud the minutes of the previous meeting. The vice president, responsible for planning each month's program, introduced the featured speaker. Attendance ranged as high as 65 members and guests, and sometimes dipped to as few as 16 on bad-weather nights.

As museum director, Bailey formally invited the club in 1959 to make the museum its official address and use the museum's phone number in contact listings. Bailey also advised the board of directors on various administrative issues. The bird club's close bond with both Bailey and Niedrach secured meeting space for the club there for several decades.

Close relations continued under **Donald Thatcher**, the museum's curator emeritus, who volunteered on club committees and served on the board of directors. He would serve later as DFO president himself (1970-71). Club members were regular volunteers at the museum, helping Thatcher renovate the museum's Bird Room in 1979. That year, former DFO president **Patty Echelmeyer** (1968-70) served as the museum's volunteer coordinator. Bird club members groomed and dusted bird specimens, even repainting the feet of some and replacing glass eyeballs in others.

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DFO @ 90 *cont from page 19*

Birding on the rise

In the years after the Colorado Bird Club was born, similar clubs began to form in cities across the country. Chapters of the National Audubon Society, which began in New York City, were fledging in more and more states. But birding really took off as a leisure activity in the 1950s and 1960s. Prosperity surged in the '50s for many Americans (particularly white ones). With the end of wartime gas rationing and rubber shortages, car ownership was within reach, and people had more non-work free time. The comfort and safety of the nation's roadways grew dramatically just as more local, state, and federal parks and recreational sites were being created.

The freedom to travel easily to natural areas where birdlife flourished coincided with better gear as well. Before the war, a good pair of binoculars (usually European-made) was too expensive for most. The only affordable alternative was a low-magnification pair of opera glasses — better than nothing but of little use in identifying species beyond the backyard. Post-war, the market was flooded with military surplus binoculars that put quality optics in the hands of far more outdoor enthusiasts, from hunters and hikers to the swelling ranks of "birdwatchers." (They would come to be known as "birders" only after a 1969 glossary in *Birding* magazine defined that word for people who "seriously" pursue "the hobby of birding.")

In the decade after the war, new illustrated field guides filled the market, too. The iconic and portable Peterson Guides pioneered by American naturalist **Roger Tory Peterson** in 1934 (the year before our club was formed) were still popular. But guides proliferated further with multiple options according to geography, bird types and species families, even some organized by bird size and plumage color. "Field guides make the natural world knowable," naturalist-author **Scott Weidensaul** later wrote. "They are the first entry point for most people into the diversity of life on the planet." In his book *Of A Feather: A Brief History of American Birding*, Weidensaul notes that being able to attach a name to something is the first step toward appreciation.

Club birders on July 1951 field trip to Evans Ranch west of Evergreen
DMNS Archives

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DFO @ 90 *cont from page 20*

As the ranks of birders grew in the '60s and '70s, so did the Colorado Bird Club, now called DFO. Membership rose from 100 in 1959 to 245 in 1978. The original club's "year book" annuals and monthly postcard notices for meetings and field trips were replaced in 1953 by a monthly newsletter. Typewritten, mimeographed and mailed to all members, *Colorado Bird Notes* included field trip reports listing species and bird numbers seen, club member news, a calendar of meetings and field trips, and advice for birders. (There were no photos, of course.) The very first issue delivered this advice:

> *Keep a bird list for each trip. Get into the habit of checking off every bird you see. Still better, keep count of the numbers seen and the number of times a species is seen, together with the locality, habitat, weather and total time you spent looking. Every birder should have a LIFE list, a YEAR'S list and a TRIP list. At the end of the year, we'll publish the number of species everyone gets on his year's list.*

(That last commitment, it should be noted, was not kept!)

More field trips . . . and a new club name

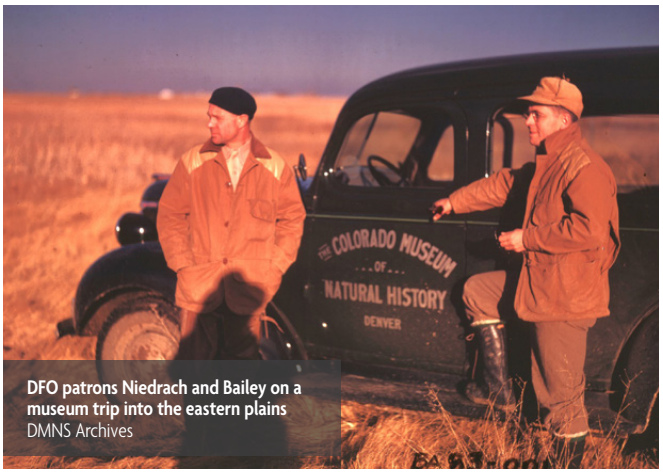
Field trips were conducted in every month of the year. Red Rocks Park, Genesee Mountain Park and Barr Lake were favorite destinations, with at least one trip and sometimes more a month. As the years passed, the number of destinations expanded to include Pawnee National Grasslands, Rocky Mountain National Park, the San Luis Valley and Pueblo, among others, in addition to closer-in destinations like Bear Creek, Castlewood Canyon and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal. Field trips were almost always on Saturday and Sunday with the occasional overnight or weekday trip. A cadre of field trip leaders tended to lead one trip a month to a site they knew well. A meetup location was designated so that carpools could form, and members were urged to reimburse the driver for gas money.

An important milestone in DFO's history coincided with events that led to the club's name change. In response to growing demand in Colorado beyond Denver, a committee led by **Lois Webster** planned the first statewide convention of Colorado birding enthusiasts. More than 100 people attended, and collectively they recorded 128 species of birds in two days of group outings. The Denver convention's success led to the formation in 1965 of our first statewide bird organization, Colorado Field Ornithologists. To avoid the confusion of two birding organizations with "Colorado" in the name, our Colorado Bird Club changed its name in 1964 to Denver Field Ornithologists.

The change of name also reflected a philosophical realignment of focus. Calling ourselves "field ornithologists" suggested a more systematic and scientific approach to studying (and enjoying) birds in the wild. The previous "bird club" harkened back to a more old-fashioned era, when women of means formed associations to accomplish good works.

By the 1960s, more and more birders were keeping life lists of species they'd seen. Local, state and national parks even began printing bird lists to hand out to visitors. National Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, founded at the turn of the 20th century, was a well-established tradition that DFO members had participated in since the club's founding. Other counts were springing up, too, including annual DFO-organized spring and fall counts in several Denver area locations beginning in 1979. Since then, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology launched the Great Backyard Bird Count in 1998, one of the largest global community science efforts of its kind.

The Denver-area spring and fall counts were created through DFO by a group of birders that included today's dean of Colorado birding, **Hugh Kingery**. He had joined the Colorado Bird Club as a young man in 1953, was involved in the transition that created CFO, and later served as DFO president (1987-89). After the spring and fall counts got going, Kingery coordinated them for decades into the 2020s (though they were canceled in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic).



DFO patrons Niedrach and Bailey on a museum trip into the eastern plains
DMNS Archives

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DFO @ 90 *cont from page 17*

Bird Notes: How newsletter changed names

From time to time, the editor of *Colorado Bird Notes* begged readers for interesting articles to publish (an editor plea that continues to this day) and for trip leaders to submit their checklists in time for publication. One member who consistently answered that call was **Howard Rollin**, a self-taught northeastern Colorado artist and diligent observer of birdlife in his area. Rollin lived in the town where he grew up, Weldona, near Fort Morgan. Beginning in 1953, he submitted "Weldona Notes" ("Bird Notes from Weldona" in some issues). He detailed when birds arrived in spring, how they fared through breeding season, and observations of migration and winter residents. Known locally as "the cowboy artist," Rollin had earlier displayed some of his paintings at a monthly meeting in 1940. After that, he gave the club one of his bird paintings as a gift each year through the 1950s. The bird club even exhibited Rollin's bird works.

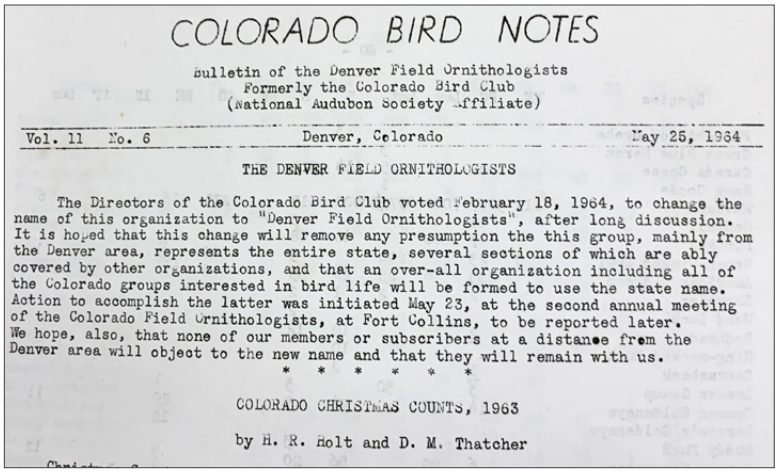
Despite consistent contributions by authors like Rollin and others, it was challenging to produce even six issues of *Colorado Bird Notes* each year. In 1965, the bird club board voted to change the newsletter's format and name. The result was a mouthful. *THE MONTHLY REPORT OF FIELD OBSERVATIONS of the Denver Field Ornithologists* abandoned feature-type articles and focused on getting meeting notices and field trip details to members in a more timely way. After the notices came lists of previous trips and special bird counts with detailed information about the species seen. The new, shorter newsletter really did go out each month through the 1970s. (Past issues of this and other club publications are viewable on the DFO website.)

That unwieldy name, however, became an issue for some club leaders, so DFO held a contest to choose a new one. Initially, when the majority of those who responded wanted to keep the name the same, the new-name idea was dropped. But in November 1971, newsletter editor **Harold Holt** announced at a board meeting that he would resign unless the newsletter was renamed *The Lark Bunting*, for Colorado's state bird. The board swiftly complied with his demand. The new name, with a black-and-white sketch of a male Lark Bunting perched on a Plains yucca plant, appeared on the December 1971 issue. The name and an image of the bird (in color since 2011) have remained on the cover ever since.

Embroidered DFO patch from 197[illegible]

Painting of Lark Buntings by mid-20th century DFO member Howard Rollin
DMNS Archives

Continued on page 23



COLORADO BIRD NOTES

Bulletin of the Denver Field Ornithologists
Formerly the Colorado Bird Club
(National Audubon Society Affiliate)

Vol. 11 No. 6 Denver, Colorado May 25, 1964

THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

The Directors of the Colorado Bird Club voted February 18, 1964, to change the name of this organization to "Denver Field Ornithologists", after long discussion. It is hoped that this change will remove any presumption the this group, mainly from the Denver area, represents the entire state, several sections of which are ably covered by other organizations, and that an over-all organization including all of the Colorado groups interested in bird life will be formed to use the state name. Action to accomplish the latter was initiated May 23, at the second annual meeting of the Colorado Field Ornithologists, at Fort Collins, to be reported later. We hope, also, that none of our members or subscribers at a distance from the Denver area will object to the new name and that they will remain with us.

* * * * * *

COLORADO CHRISTMAS COUNTS, 1963

by H. R. Holt and D. M. Thatcher

Images top to bottom:

Club bulletin news in 1964 of name change to DFO
DMNS Archives

Colorado Bird Club members scanning Barr Lake from dam on 1953 field trip
Margaret Pritchett

L to R, members Margaret Miller, Mary Crow Kirsher and Margaret Pritchett on a field trip to Daniels Park
DMNS Archives

DFO @ 90 *cont from page 22*

Harold Holt was that influential for good reason. For several years in a row, he presented a DFO program featuring his field photographs of birds. In the decades before modern cameras and filmless digital imagery, photography was an expensive hobby that demanded great skill, particularly where birds were the subject. Holt served as club president and held other leadership positions over the years. He also organized Colorado's original Rare Bird Alert with **Mildred Snyder** in 1970. Volunteers signed up to be on a pyramid-like "telephone tree" to spread the word quickly and widely with multiplying calls to other birders when a rare bird was reported. The alert continued to operate well into the 21st century, and in recognition for this and his other contributions to the club, Holt was awarded a life membership in 1972.

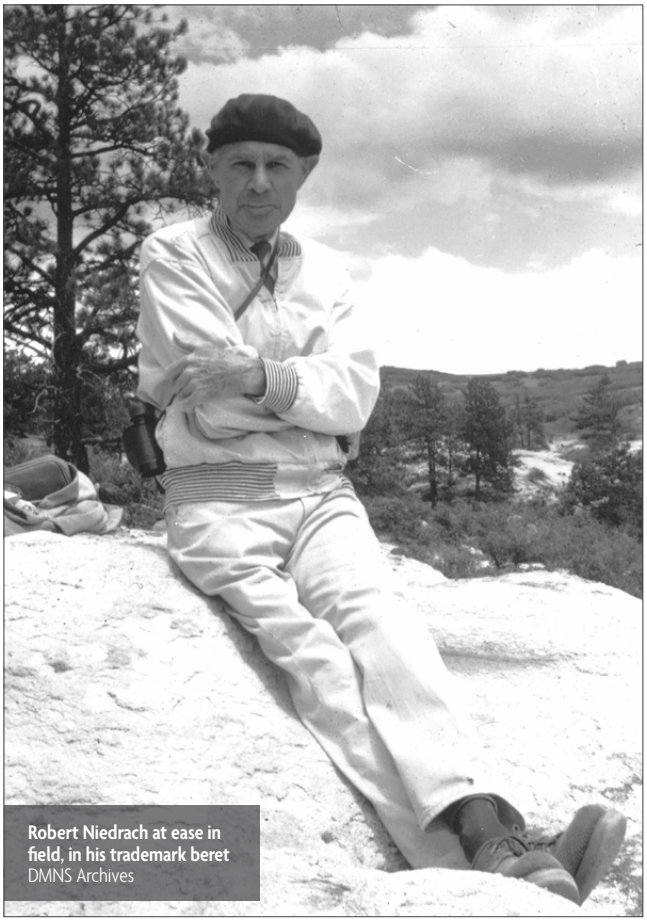
DFO matures, conservation comes of age

The mid-century era in which young DFO was maturing also included growing national and global environmental movements. The DFO meeting minutes through those decades include increased mention of programs on conservation topics (national and local) and letter-writing campaigns for legislative action to protect birds, especially raptors.

Imagine it: As late as 1953, a cash bounty existed on Bald Eagles in Alaska, where salmon fishermen erroneously believed the birds threatened their catch. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 sounded the alarm on harmful pesticides threatening bird populations. In 1966, the Endangered Species Preservation Act was passed, and a year later, the Bald Eagle was placed on the endangered list.

The table was set. The first Earth Day was observed in April 1970. Just three months later, the Environmental Protection Agency was signed into law. On the heels of all this, in 1972 the new EPA banned the pesticide DDT, whose secondary effects imperiled eagles and other birds.

Continued on page 24



Robert Niedrach at ease in field, in his trademark beret
DMNS Archives

DFO @ 90 *cont from page 23*

Throughout those times of seismic environmental change, the club regularly discussed and debated how to respond to conservation challenges on behalf of birds. The birding club was living up to its founders' original statement of purpose: to promote interest in "the study and preservation of birds and their habitat," and to support "local and national movements for birds' protection."

Bird club at a crossroads

In the midst of heightened concern about the environment and what that meant for birds, DFO wrestled with what might be considered its most important decision — whether or not to become a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

Technically, the Colorado Bird Club *did* "affiliate" with National Audubon in 1958, but that wasn't the same as being a chapter. The club merely paid $15 a year for an affiliation status that carried the prestige of Audubon and its conservation programs, along with a copy of Audubon's magazine.

Ten years later, the idea of a closer affiliation with National Audubon was broached. On May 16, 1968, Audubon's **William Goodall** and Prof. **Gus Swanson**, head of Colorado State University's Department of Fishery and Wildlife Biology, attended a special meeting of DFO members to discuss what it would mean to be a chapter of Audubon. They enumerated the advantages of becoming an official part of a well-known conservation group that welcomed nonprofessionals, including Audubon's focus on the education of young people and adults alike.

The requirements for becoming a chapter were outlined. The name of the club would have to change to include "Audubon." Dues would rise to $10 a year, $4 of which would be returned to the local club. Finally, Audubon recommended that a formal vote of DFO members should happen at a later date and that at least 80% of members should favor becoming an Audubon chapter before going forward.

The DFO Board formed a committee, which Lois Webster agreed to chair, that would discuss the relevant issues and recommend to the membership whether to join National Audubon. Hugh Kingery agreed to work with Webster on a presentation for the Sept. 24 general membership meeting.

DFO members gathered that night in the Bird Room at the museum, and newly elected president **Patty Echelmeyer** presided. The committee resolution proposed that DFO disband to form a new Denver chapter of National Audubon. A long discussion among the membership followed.

A defining debate: the soul of DFO

Advocating for a "yes" vote, Webster said being an Audubon chapter would give the club more publicity and greater prestige, leading to growth. "We need more conservation work and more action," she said. Kingery also supported the motion but clarified it. DFO would disband only IF a charter was granted for a new Audubon chapter. The committee felt that if both DFO and an Audubon chapter existed, they would be two weak organizations.

Continued on page 25

DFO @ 90 *cont from page 24*

DFO member **Dick Lindstrom** advocated for a no vote. He believed the club would become more a historical society than a birding club. Other members feared that field trips, which DFO led every Saturday and Sunday throughout the year, might not continue at that level. The dues increase may also have concerned others. DFO annual individual dues were only $3 at the time.

Former DFO president **Thompson Marsh**, a University of Denver law professor, avid birder and club member since 1954, was concerned that club finances could not support the Audubon chapter responsibilities under discussion: organizing junior clubs, hosting screenings of National Audubon films, and addressing environmental legislation. "Shall we begin with a new organization overloaded?" he asked. Thompson felt strongly that no ornithological club had done as much for birds as DFO had. He urged club members to "not risk destruction of an already effective organization."

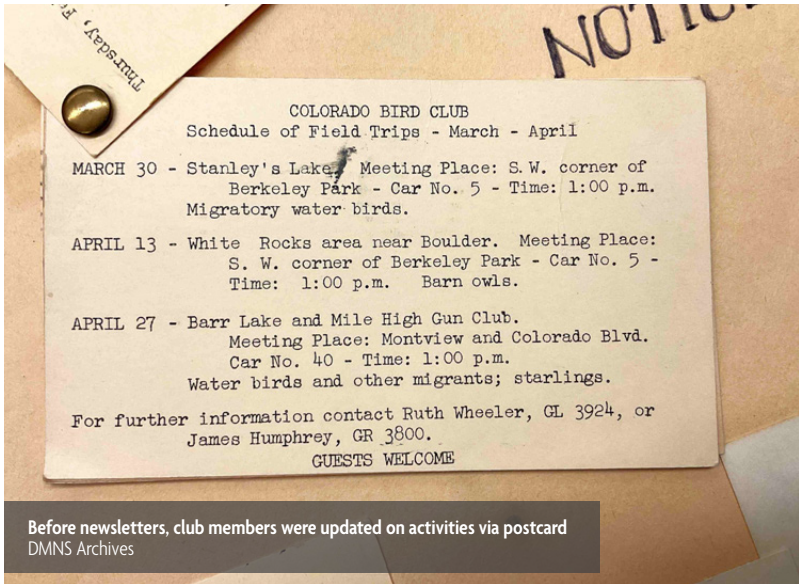
DFO's membership at the time was 168 people. Sixty-one of them were present at the meeting. Under the club's bylaws, motions required a two-thirds vote to pass. If the "nays" prevailed, an Audubon chapter could still be formed, but DFO would continue as an independent birding club.

When the votes were tallied, 17 members voted yes and 44 voted no. The motion failed. Immediately, those who still wanted to form an Audubon chapter adjourned to an adjoining room to do just that — even skipping one of Harold Holt's much-anticipated presentations of his bird photographs.

Looking back — and going forward as friends

Nearly half a century later, Kingery reflected on that decisive meeting during a 2014 oral history interview at the museum. He recalled that members in 1968 didn't want to convert DFO into an Audubon chapter because they feared it would dilute the club's field trip schedule, a club endeavor as highly valued then as it is now. Kingery noted that DFO's primary focus was birdwatching, while Audubon's broader approach included environmental activism and education.

In an interesting postscript, a brief note in the minutes of the DFO Board meeting a month later, in October 1968, states that Bailey was against DFO's "losing its identity." The remark suggests that Bailey and Niedrach may have advocated behind the scenes against joining National Audubon. Marsh's emphatic statement the night of the membership meeting may also have helped sway the vote. Marsh questioned the Webster committee's assertion that there wasn't room for two bird clubs in Denver. He reminded members of the unique nature of their cherished organization.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NOTIC

COLORADO BIRD CLUB
Schedule of Field Trips - March - April

MARCH 30 - Stanley's Lake. Meeting Place: S.W. corner of Berkeley Park - Car No. 5 - Time: 1:00 p.m. Migratory water birds.

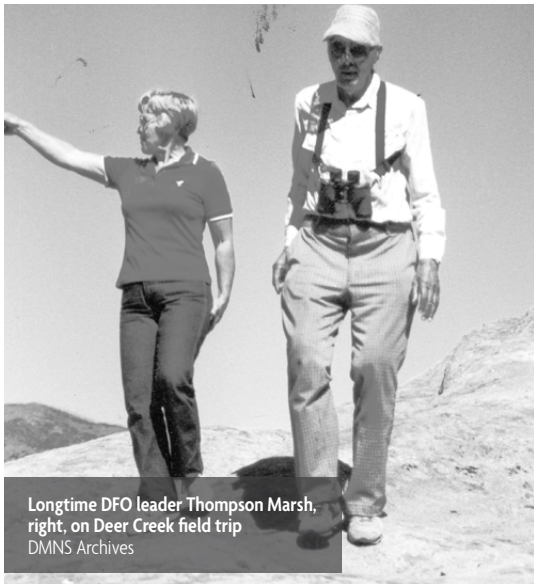
APRIL 13 - White Rocks area near Boulder. Meeting Place: S. W. corner of Berkeley Park - Car No. 5 - Time: 1:00 p.m. Barn owls.

APRIL 27 - Barr Lake and Mile High Gun Club. Meeting Place: Montview and Colorado Blvd. Car No. 40 - Time: 1:00 p.m. Water birds and other migrants; starlings.

For further information contact Ruth Wheeler, GL 3924, or James Humphrey, GR 3800.

GUESTS WELCOME

Before newsletters, club members were updated on activities via postcard
DMNS Archives


Longtime DFO leader Thompson Marsh, right, on Deer Creek field trip
DMNS Archives

Continued on page 26

DFO @ 90 *cont from page 25*

Kingery remembers Marsh as an imposing man and an interesting guy known for his singular devotion to birding. Marsh walked to work at the DU law school with binoculars around his neck, birding as he went. He had a long life list and would travel "at the drop of a phone call" to see a new rare bird, sometimes taking a call while teaching, then heading for the airport immediately after class.

Although Hugh and Thompson took different sides in the Audubon debate, the Kingerys and Marshes were friends outside of DFO, and their friendship endured. Such collegiality appears to have reflected the organization as a whole. "Cooperation with Audubon Chapter was urged," the recording secretary noted in the minutes of the October 1968 DFO Board meeting. In August 1970, the clubs organized a joint DFO-Denver Audubon field trip to Staunton Ranch.

Collegiality, in fact, is one of the core values that define DFO to this day. Like Bailey and Niedrach, like Marsh and Kingery, like bird club founders Pritchett and Huron, and like so many others, we are "always headed afield" (a favorite Bailey phrase) to observe birds and record what we see. We return with a greater appreciation for birdlife, the natural environment and each other.

We'll tell more stories of the people who made DFO a truly special organization when we publish Part 3 of *DFO @ 90* in July. Until then, good spring and early summer birding!

READ *DFO @ 90*, PART 1
The Lark Bunting, January 2025, page 14

DFO @ 90 HISTORY, PART 2

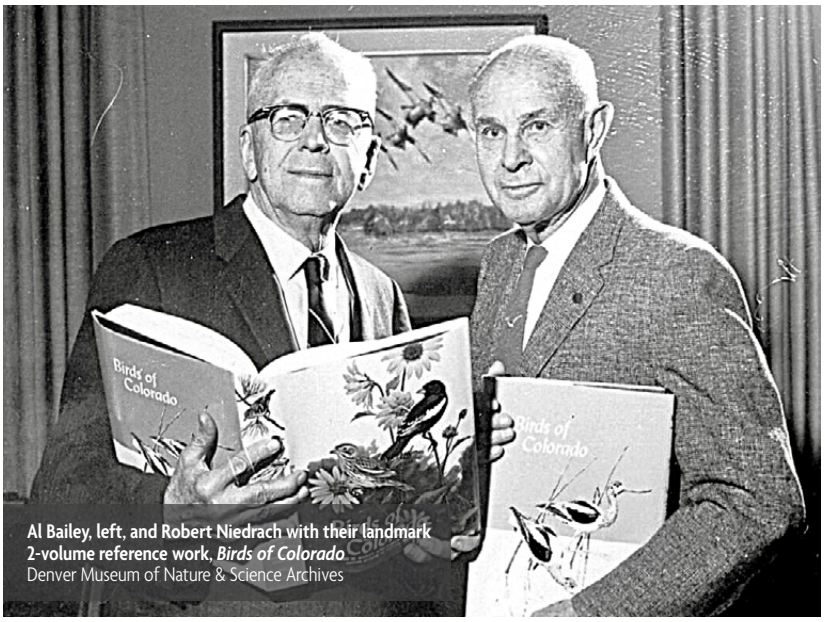
Bailey & Niedrach: Partners, friends, and advocates for bird science — and birders

Sharon Tinianow

From its 1935 beginnings as the Colorado Bird Club, the 20th-century history of Denver Field Ornithologists is intertwined with the city's hub of natural science inquiry and exhibition — first as the Colorado Museum of Natural History, later the Denver Museum of Natural History and today, the Denver Museum of Nature & Science.

At the same time, the museum's two most dynamic personalities and advocates for bird science — **Alfred Bailey** and **Robert Niedrach** — were inextricably linked to DFO and its membership. As we mark the club's 90th anniversary this year, *The Lark Bunting* pauses in retelling DFO's history to chronicle the lives of Bailey and Niedrach, life members together forever in the life of our club.

Alfred Marshall Bailey was born in 1894 in Iowa City, IA, and graduated in 1916 from the University of Iowa, where he learned museum exhibition techniques from **Homer R. Dill**, master bird taxidermist and zoologist. In an itinerant early career, Bailey was curator of birds for the Louisiana State Museum and surveyed southwestern Alaska for the Bureau of Biological Survey (now US Fish & Wildlife Service).



Al Bailey, left, and Robert Niedrach with their landmark 2-volume reference work, *Birds of Colorado*
Denver Museum of Nature & Science Archives

Continued on page 27

Niedrach preparing a Wild Turkey for museum exhibit
DMNS Archives

BAILEY & NIEDRACH *cont from page 26*

In the 1920s, he was a curator briefly at the Colorado Museum of Natural History (now Denver Museum of Nature & Science) before transferring to the Field Museum in Chicago. By 1927 he was director of the Chicago Academy of Sciences. Within a decade, he would return to Colorado to become museum director in 1936, the year after the Colorado Bird Club was founded in the museum.

Bailey would spend the rest of his distinguished career there alongside **Robert James Niedrach**, the ornithology instructor so instrumental in the bird club's formation. Born in 1889 in Union Hill, NJ, Niedrach grew up exploring meadows along the Hackensack River and the Palisades, across the Hudson River from Manhattan. He, too, learned taxidermy (a necessary museum skill in exhibiting birds and other wildlife) and eventually met **Frederick C. Lincoln**, who became the Denver museum's curator of birds. Niedrach followed Lincoln to Denver in 1912 to be his assistant. After serving in the Army during World War I, he returned to Denver. More than a decade later, he became curator of birds just before Bailey arrived as museum director.

During his first stint at the Denver museum, Bailey and his wife **Muriel** fell in love with Colorado. "One of the delights of a naturalist living in Denver," Bailey wrote in his autobiography, "has been the varied type of country available within a day's run from prairie of the Upper Sonoran Zone, at an altitude of 3,000 feet upward to mountain summits of the Alpine Zone over 14,000 feet in height."

Although they had moved to Chicago, the Bailey family came back to Denver whenever possible to renew acquaintances with friends and staff. Bailey himself also did some field work in the mountains and on the plains. During Bailey's 1920s forays from Denver into the field, it was Niedrach who went with him. Bailey's delight in the natural environment, coupled with a lower cost of living in Denver and a much shorter commute to work, made returning to Denver to be the museum's second director an easy decision. And now, he lived in Park Hill, only a 10-minute walk from the office.

Bailey was known for his ability to maintain and advance the scientific standards of a museum while extending its usefulness to its members. His accomplishments as an author and filmmaker contributed to the study and appreciation of birds and birdlife. His personal charm and integrity endeared him to the museum staff. Devoted to his work, he was an excellent manager — efficient, prudent and possessed of good business sense.

Niedrach's strengths were field and exhibit work. He supervised the installation of more than 50 of the museum's ageless habitat dioramas, still on display in today's museum. Bailey and many others on staff particularly valued Niedrach's observational, interpretive, and photographic skills. He was an outstanding all-around naturalist, fully committed to the museum's educational role in the community. Niedrach's work with the bird club reflected that commitment.

Bailey valued him greatly. "I was fortunate to have Robert J. Niedrach as an associate, and he literally covered the many habitats of the state, probably obtaining a better first-hand knowledge of the plants and animals of the various life zones than any other

Continued on page 28

naturalist," Bailey wrote. The two were frequently in the field together, mostly to make films of birds for museum programs and lectures, and photographs for their magnum opus together — *Birds of Colorado* (1965), a two-volume, 885-page essential reference work for the state's birdlife. Although he was director, Bailey was able to "go afield" frequently because the museum board's president had an office there and could "keep an eye on things" for him.

Those excursions were no walk in the park. They lugged cameras (including a German-made Exakta, state-of-the-art for its time), extra lights, tripods, ladders and materials to build bird blinds with them to every part of Colorado. Their work required infinite patience and no small amount of risk. Perhaps the epitome of this was their effort to photograph and film Golden Eagles. Bailey called the species the finest bird of prey in North America.

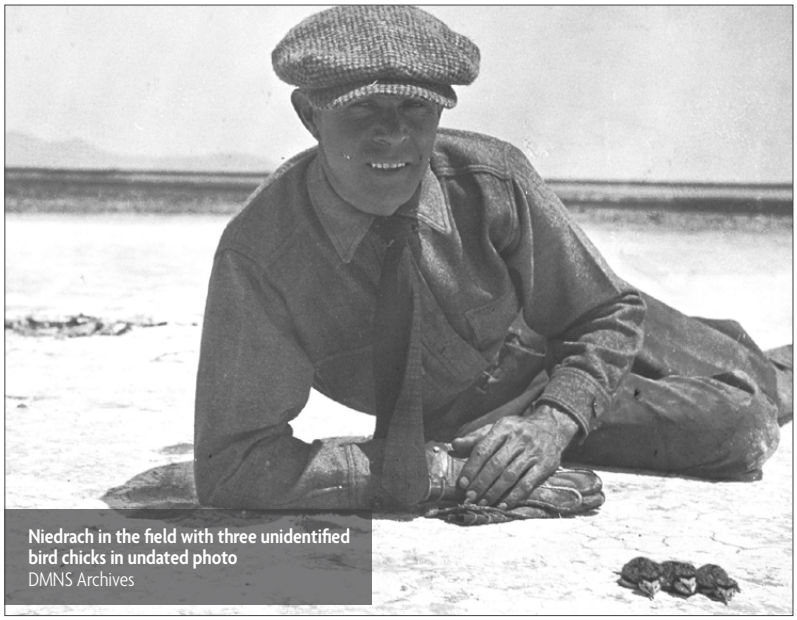
Working in Daniels Park, west of present-day Castle Pines in Douglas County, Niedrach and Bailey set up a blind as close as they could to an active nest. This often meant perching the blind in a tree or on a cliff and sitting patiently on a precarious, uncomfortable seat until the birds were at ease. But the camouflage could not prevent the camera's whirring and glints of light off its lens from spooking the adult eagles. To succeed, they had to climb to their blind before dawn and prepare to sit patiently for hours until the birds were comfortable enough to show up and be photographed.

At another Golden Eagle observation site in Weld County, Bailey and Niedrach thought they'd found a perfect location, with a nesting pair not easily startled. They soon learned, however, that they couldn't get close enough for good photos because a number of "pugnacious" rattlesnakes were in the way. Only later did they learn what the locals called this location: Rattlesnake Hill.

On a fossil hunting trip near the Kansas line, Niedrach found a young raven. Thinking he was

Continued on page 29

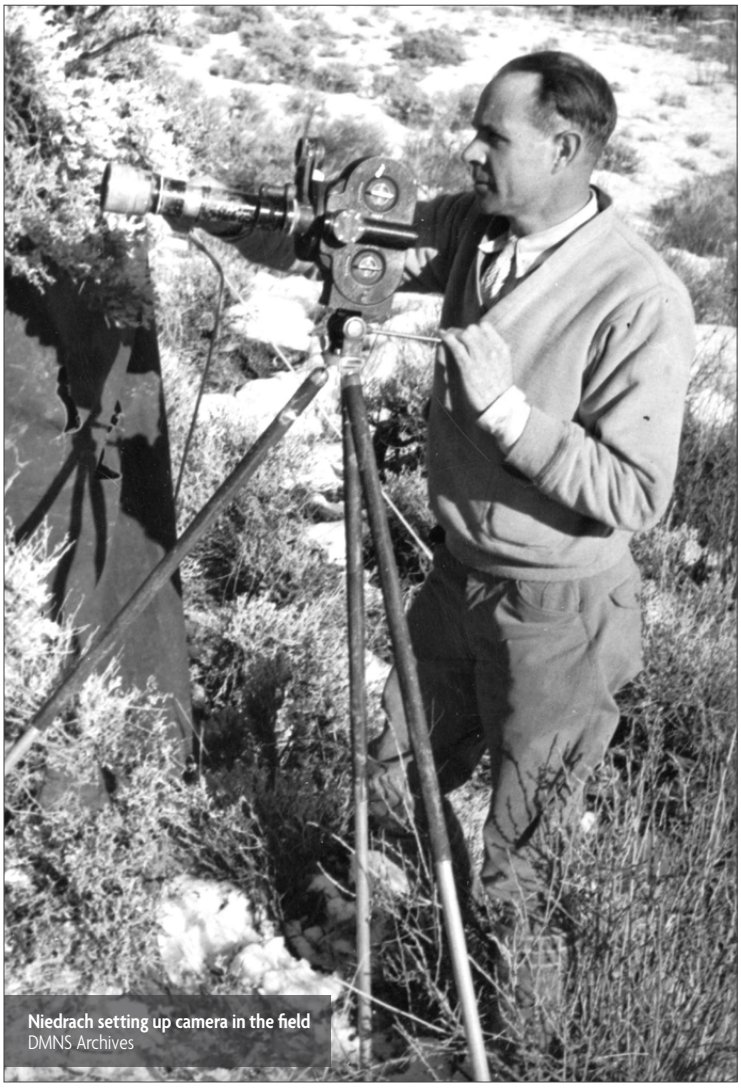
Bailey photographing Golden Eagle chicks at nest outside Denver
DMNS Archives



Niedrach in the field with three unidentified bird chicks in undated photo
DMNS Archives

Neidrach with Golden Eagle nestling in undated photo
DMNS Archives

Niedrach with pet raven, Dick
DMNS Archives



Niedrach setting up camera in the field
DMNS Archives

BAILEY & NIEDRACH *cont from page 28*

a White-necked Raven (what today's Chihuahuan Raven was once called) and thought to be extinct in Colorado, Niedrach brought the bird home to raise. He named the bird **Dick** and gave him free rein of the house. Dick bonded with Niedrach, coming when he whistled (and only for Niedrach) and greeting him with joyful noise when he returned home from the museum each day.

Dick seemed to think his job was to help fight the dandelion invasion in Niedrach's yard by pulling the weeds out by the root. One problem: Dick could not tell a dandelion from a dahlia. Noting the Corvid family's high intelligence, Niedrach once told an interviewer from *The Denver Post* that perhaps Dick's difficulty was that both plant names start with the letter D.

Dick was not his only adoptee. In February 1938, Niedrach and Bailey were in the field at Barr Lake, apparently collecting museum specimens. When Niedrach shot a Black-tailed Jackrabbit that turned out to be pregnant, he performed a caesarean and out slipped one young. Niedrach took the bunny home and named him **Ed**, feeding it milk from a medicine dropper. Ed grew quickly and soon was hopping circles around the kitchen. [The long-eared bunny even came to his wife, Alice, when she clapped her hands.] At two months of age, Ed was liberated back to the wild.

Both critter stories were written up in the local papers. It didn't seem to bother Niedrach that the press was more interested in his wild adoptees than in the honorary doctorate the University of Colorado awarded him. Bailey was of similar good humor. He good-naturedly accepted when people (including museum contacts abroad in formal correspondence) nicknamed him "**Bill**" after the popular, turn-of-the-century music hall anthem "(Won't You Come Home) Bill Bailey."

"Bill" Bailey's distinguished career included a doctorate in science from Norwich University and a doctorate in public service from the University of Denver, as well as the Malcolm Glenn Wyer Award for distinguished service in adult education from the Adult Education Council of Metropolitan Denver.

Continued on page 30

BAILEY & NIEDRACH *cont from page 29*

Bailey and Niedrach's families more than tolerated the colleague-scientists' attraction to "being afield," to use Bailey's phrase. His daughter, **Patricia Bailey Witherspoon**, went along on their field excursions and operated the cameras. Bailey's grandson, **Jack Murphy**, frequently accompanied, too. Sometimes the two families would go to a favorite spot to picnic and enjoy the view from the cliffs of Daniels Park — the same Douglas County ridge where the two men had once crept close to Golden Eagles from behind a blind. In his journal, Bailey recorded his awe at the view "across the great valley, the sunset glowing on Mount Evans [now Mt. Blue Sky] and the mountains to the north. One could grow poetic about the finest panorama this side of paradise — the purples and fast-changing colors."

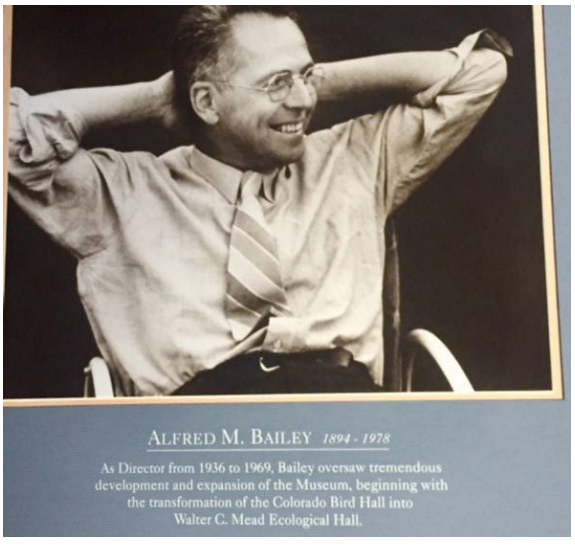
Three years after DFO and the US Forest Service dedicated the Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area in the Summit County wilderness north of Silverthorne, mortality overtook his longtime friend and colleague. Robert J. Niedrach, also retired but still involved as curator emeritus at the museum, died there in 1974. A fatal heart attack struck as Niedrach was backing his car out of the museum parking lot.

Four years later, in March 1978, Barr Lake State Park officially opened, and the Robert J. Niedrach Boardwalk Trail was dedicated in his memory. It is an appropriately birdy spot. Later that year, Alfred W. Bailey died, too, from a heart condition. He is buried in Denver's Fairmount Cemetery.

Four decades after the club was founded, the passings of Bailey and Niedrach ended an eventful era for DFO. But more new members were already assuming leadership roles for the next era, and for the new century beyond. As we honor their invaluable contributions to DFO this anniversary year, we recognize that the lives of the people in it then and now make Denver Field Ornithologists the earnest and enduring organization it is today.

Top right:
Mexico's Sierra Madre Sparrow named *Xenospiza baileyi* in Bailey's honor
Wikipedia Commons

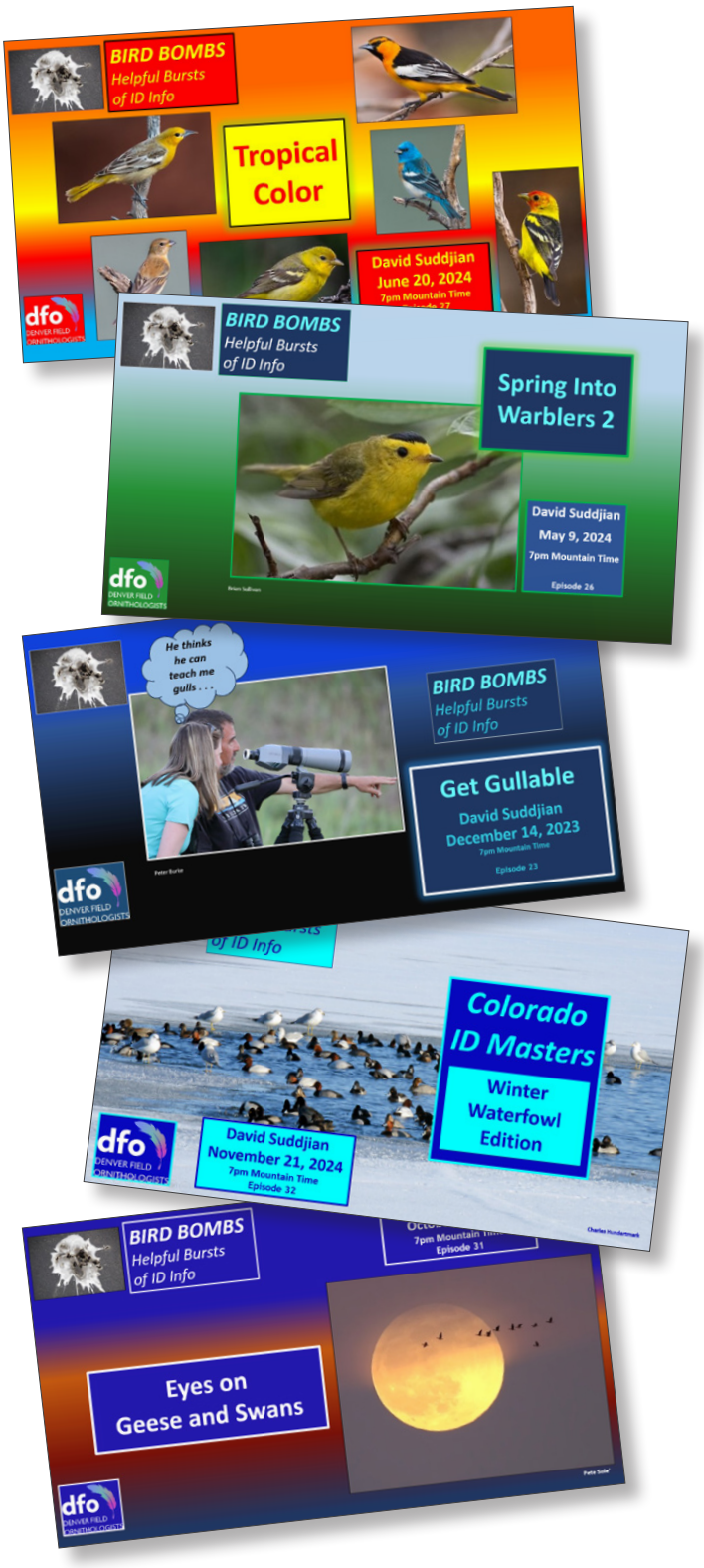
Left:
Bailey with daughter Patricia at dedication of Bailey Bird Nesting Area in 1971
DMNS ArchivesMargaret Pritchett



Bottom right:
Bailey at ease, from undated museum tribute after his death
DMNS Archives

DFO PROGRAMS

BIRD BOMBS awayyy! Dropping DFO avian ID tips For 3 years and counting



Patrick O'Driscoll

Three years ago this April, the first "***BIRD BOMB***" landed on a largely unsuspecting audience. Creator **David Suddjian**, expert birder and chair of the DFO Field Trips Committee, announced that this short Zoom webinar would deliver "helpful bursts of ID info" on spring migrant warblers about to arrive in Colorado.

The cheeky and irreverent logo that accompanied his "Spring into Warblers" session triggered chuckles. Its abstract windshield *SPLOTCH!* of white-black guano from an unseen bird flying overhead was a . . . **bird** . . . **bomb**. Get it?!

Thirty-six episodes later, everyone gets it. Suddjian's revolving series of intensive but easy-going tutorials on field ID markers (species size, shape, behavior, plumage, color, habitat), with photo quizzes and other savvy tips, has drawn an enthusiastic following, from birding beginners to experts. Those who can't catch an initial webinar live (often on the second Thursday of the month) can view the Zoom video days later. The three dozen Bird Bombs episodes so far reside in viewable archives on both the DFO website and DFO's YouTube channel.

"Outside of DFO field trips, the *Bird Bombs* series is the most helpful resource I've come across for understanding bird ID, behaviors, and distribution," says **Ryan Corda**, new to birding in 2024 and a "frequent flier" since then on DFO outings. "Even beyond traditional field guides and eBird's various resources, I find myself coming back to *Bird Bombs* episodes over and over again."

Julia Gwinn, an Audubon master birder, revisits episodes to prepare for field outings: "Their concise and targeted focus on specific birds or topics makes them incredibly valuable. Having access to an entire library is a fantastic resource for gearing up for spring migration or field trips."

Continued on page 32

BIRD BOMBS *cont from page 31*

Janet Peters, youth education coordinator for DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch, says the content and presentation rival paid-tuition programs online: "I still can't believe these are free."

The series' popularity "has exceeded my expectations," Suddjian says. He plans to continue producing new *Bird Bombs* at least through 2025 and perhaps beyond. This year's wrinkle will be several episodes focused on the varied territories and landscapes inhabited by Colorado's bird communities. "I am calling them 'Habitat Blasts.' "

Suddjian came up with *Bird Bombs* to augment "Developing Birders," a field-trip theme he coined after becoming Field Trips chair in 2021: "The idea was for short videos to capture the sort of information I was sharing on my field trips." Learning the technical tricks of video production, however, 'was not so practical for me," he adds. But when DFO turned to Zoom for programs and meetings in the physical isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the platform's automatic recordings were the perfect answer. Thus, "they're not one-off presentations for whoever registered to watch them live."

California Gull
John Breitsch

New episodes coincide whenever possible with seasonal bursts of birding activity: spring and fall migration, nesting and fledging of young, summer sparrows and flycatchers, winter waterfowl, shorebird comings and goings, and so forth. He also labels the webinars for maximum attraction. Colorful posters promote each episode. Wordplay in episode titles, whether clever turns or puns, adds to the charm, from "Better Duck!" and "I'm Molting!" to "4 & 20 Blackbirds" and a perennial favorite, "I Wish They All Could Be California Gulls."

"After *Bird Bombs* I cannot look at a gull without thinking 'Beach Boys!' and whether the gull is 'laid back,' " says DFO member **Chris Curwen**, recalling a tip about different gull postures. "They inject a clever dose of enthusiasm and pointers to help me grasp those fleeting clues that make bird identification rewarding."

"So much information about the topic is available in one place," adds member **Dana Hiatt**. "I have a book about gulls that I love and a couple of field guides with gull information. But if I watch — and watch again on tape — a *Bird Bombs* about gulls, I get a really good review of all of the hints and tips for ID."

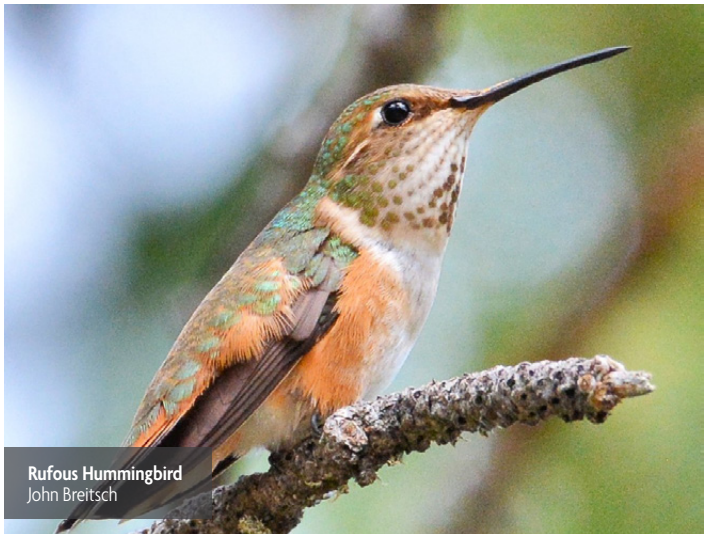
Suddjian says he is "humbled, happily, by how helpful the series has been for so many birders." He credits the nearly 100 photographers who have provided the "interesting and informative" photos that enhance his bird ID lessons. In alphabetical order, he shouts-out "key contributor" photographers: **Anne Craig**, **Ted Floyd**, **George Ho**, **Charles Hundertmark**, **Ron LeValley**, **Jim Merritt**, **Steven Mlodinow**, **Tresa Moulton**, **Dale Pate**, **Rob Raker**, **JoAnn Potter Riggle**, **Diane Roberts**, **Pete Sole**, and **Brian Sullivan**. He also praises collaborator and DFO trip leader **Laura Steadman** for her "hot seat" episode review and quiz segments and handling viewer Q&As, and he thanks members **Gigi Zarzuela** and **Nate Bond** for similar help.

Corda appreciates how Suddjian often uses photos that show how we actually see birds in the field — obscured and half-hidden behind tree leaves, not the polished images and ideal views found in field guides. "The quizzes are real practice," adds *Bird Bombs* fan **Debra Strike**. "The programs are making me a better birder."

"Keep on *Bird Bombing*," says Curwen, "you guys make birding fun."

THE LIVES OF BIRDS

Hummingbirds love our flowers — and we love what they do for our gardens



Rufous Hummingbird
John Breitsch

Anna's Hummingbird
John Breitsch

Jared Del Rosso

Birds are underappreciated landscapers. Corvids cultivate oak forests by caching acorns that sometimes take root. By eating and then excreting, winter flocks of starlings, robins, and waxwings scarify enormous quantities of seeds — juniper, chokecherry, currant, and invasive buckthorn, especially. If you've found a shrub growing where you wouldn't expect — along a fence line, beneath your favorite backyard tree, even in the crook of that tree — chances are good that a songbird's fertile dropping put it there.

Hummingbirds (family *Trochilidae*) don't do any of this, but their effect on our landscapes is equally profound. As we wait for the first trills of male Broad-tailed Hummingbirds to signal spring, it's a good time to take stock of the role these tiny, vividly hued birds play in our lives.

One contribution is obvious: Hummers pollinate flowers. They prefer their blossoms red and tubular. Using long bills and tongues, hummingbirds collect nectar at the bottom of those tubes. The flowers, in turn, dust the birds' faces with pollen. When they hum along to the next bloom, they bring that pollen with them.

Here in Colorado, our most common hummingbird, the Broad-tailed, favors several wildflowers that are relatively common in the wild and increasingly common in urban and suburban gardens: Western Red Columbine (*Aquilegia elegantula*), Scarlet Gilia (*Ipomopsis aggregata*), penstemons, paintbrushes (*Castilleja* spp.), and Kingcup Cactus (*Echinocereus triglochidiatus*). I've also observed Broad-tails visiting wild-growing Golden Currants (*Ribes aureum*) in early spring in metro Denver and Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) at Roxborough State Park in mid-summer. Black-chinned Hummingbird, our other common species, browses similar selections of plants.

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HUMMINGBIRDS *cont from page 33*

Broad-tailed Hummingbird at Sunset Crater Penstemon
Jared Del Rosso

Visiting flowers is quintessential hummingbird behavior. No matter that they are also voracious hunters — catching tiny flying insects almost as effectively as swifts or nightjars (both close relatives of hummingbirds). Besides the garish coloring of the males, I suspect what endears hummingbirds to us is that they visit equally garish flowers. The colors are almost too much: Emerald, ruby and flaming-orange birds meet scarlet blooms. I've spent summer hours at the edge of my garden, hoping for one clear photograph that does justice to the intensity of hummingbird meeting penstemon.

Hummers alter landscapes in another way: They use us. Of all the bird families, humans admire them perhaps the most. We can't move Heaven, but we'll literally move Earth to attract them into our yards.

In my garden, my preferences track with those of hummingbirds. A single Firecracker Penstemon (*Penstemon eatonii*) that I planted years ago is now a patch that a male Broad-tailed greedily defends in May. Remarkably, this particular plant blooms with the final May snowstorm of the year. When It bounces back, hummingbirds are all too happy to visit.

Inspired by this bird-blossom interplay, I've grown a three-season garden buffet for hummingbirds. In early spring, Golden Currants, Firecracker Penstemon, and Dusky Penstemon (*P. whippleanus*) bloom in early

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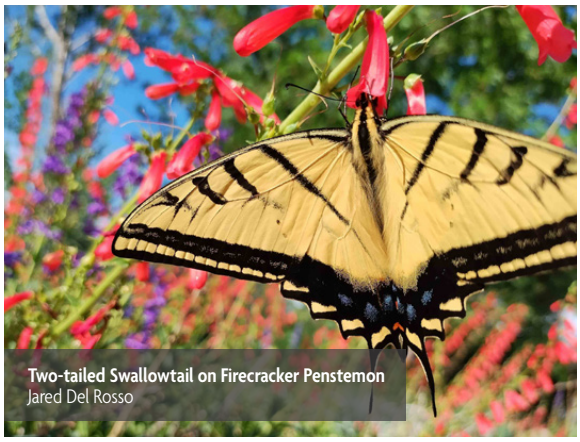
About "hummingbird-friendly" gardening

Take care with plants and seeds labeled "hummingbird-friendly," as many are introduced species. I especially hesitate to recommend BBB Seed's "Wildflowers to Attract Hummingbirds" mix, though I like many of BBB's individual seed packs. That particular mix contains Rocket Larkspur, which is quite weedy, and all parts of the plant are highly toxic. Of the other retailers I listed in this essay, only Prairie Moon exclusively sells plants and seeds native to the US. However, all have extensive selections of native and near native plants. For more information, see the guides provided by Wild Ones Front Range or Rocky Mountain Audubon.



Two-tailed Swallowtail on Firecracker Penstemon
Jared Del Rosso

Rocky Mountain Bee Plant
John Breitsch

Black-chinned Hummingbird
John Breitsch

HUMMINGBIRDS *cont from page 34*

spring. Through early and mid-summer, the smorgasbord of native and near-native wildflowers varies wildly. Neighborhood Broad-tails feast on Beardlip Penstemon (*P. barbatus*), Sunset Crater Penstemon (*P. clutei*), Nodding Onion (*Allium cernuum*), Showy Milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*), Rocky Mountain Bee Plant (*Cleomella serrulate*), California Fuchsia (Epilobium canum), Scarlet Gilia, "Red Birds in a Tree" (*Scrophularia macrantha*), and Desert Willow (*Chilopsis linearis*).

When summer gives way to autumn, the mint family takes over: Autumn Sage (*Salvia greggii*), Sunset Hyssop (*Agastache ruperistis*), and Mosquito Plant (*Agastache cana*). Don't let that last name mislead you. It's so named for its alleged ability to repel mosquitoes. I find it happier in my suburban yard south of Denver than Sunset Hyssop, a plant more commonly sold at nurseries.

"Hummingbird-friendly" plants are big business for wildflower nurseries. Major retailers of regional natives and/or xeric plants grow heaps of them. The Plant Select nonprofit collaboration classifies more than two dozen of its selections as hummingbird-friendly. Prairie Moon Nursery lists 56 plants and seeds packs for hummingbirds. High Country Gardens offers an astonishing 186. Most seed providers curate mixes said to attract hummingbirds. Locally, Botanical Interests of Broomfield has its "Hummingbird Haven" mix, as does BBB Seed of Boulder.

We haven't just remade the landscape in service of hummingbirds. We've also redecorated it. Feeders are outdoor *décor du jour*. There are two primary ways to fashion hummingbird feeders: as saucers, with the sugar-water in a flat dish within perching and feeding reach, and as inverted-bottle feeders, with a container of sugar-water above the feeding area. But discerning birdwatchers can choose from all sorts of designs fashioned from clear glass, ornate blown glass, orbs, wine bottles, antique red bottles, and red plastic. There are feeder rings and even hummingbird feeder masks you can wear for the ultimate close-up view. The choices seem almost as numerous as the hummingbird species themselves. (There are 363 kinds of hummingbird, one of the bird world's most diverse families.)

The history of hummingbird feeders dates to the late 1920s and early 1930s. But even before that, people fed the birds simply by pouring sugar-water into a dish. The first may have been someone's last-ditch effort to nurse a bird accidentally trapped indoors and exhausted trying to escape. An 1885 article in the ornithological journal *The Auk* recounted how a clever woman in Wisconsin nourished a Ruby-throated Hummingbird for almost two months. First she tried pouring sugar-water mixtures into the flowers of a gladiolus. Then she hung

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HUMMINGBIRDS *cont from page 35*

a vial of the nectar amid petunia blooms. Others who fed indoor hummingbirds were more daring. In the 1907 edition of his field guide, *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America*, ornithologist **Frank Chapman** wrote: "The Hummingbird is curiously fearless. Sometimes one will probe a flower in the hand and when they fly into houses, as they pretty often do, they manifest but the smallest degree of suspicion and will feed at once upon sugar held between the lips."

Broad-tailed Hummingbird visiting Sunset Hyssop
Jared Del Rosso

There are other, more profound relationships between hummingbirds and us. Most obvious, perhaps, is that we use some of the same plants for food. For the birds, it's the nectar. For us, it's the fruit that their pollination produces. Hummers are especially important pollinators of currants and blueberries, both valuable to humans. They also have mythic and literal associations with tobacco plants, especially in indigenous peoples' beliefs in the Americas.

And then there's this: By using our landscapes to attract hummingbirds, we're actually altering their behavior and ranges. A 2019 study documented the expansion of the range of Anna's Hummingbird from the Baja Peninsula north into colder locations with higher densities of people's homes. Using Project FeederWatch data, the study's authors also found the species was more likely to visit feeders in there than in its historical range. The appearance of Anna's farther north may have led to changes in *human* behavior, too. More people in the bird's new northerly range were putting up feeders to attract the species, which was not the case in its historical range.

At first glance, this all seems good news. In a time of declining bird populations, isn't a greater range for Anna's Hummingbird a welcome development? The authors aren't sure. They write that "long-term ecological consequences of the . . . range expansion remain uncertain." Of note is that Anna's Hummingbirds are moving into the historical range of Black-chinned and Rufous hummingbirds. As anyone who's watched hummers knows, species competition is fierce for territories and food. How the arrival of Anna's will affect Black-chinned and Rufous populations is yet to be seen.

Here in Colorado, we've also witnessed changes in hummingbird distributions. The range of Black-chinned Hummingbirds has crept east and northeast over the past 40 years. The cause is not yet clear. Territorial competition in their historical range, climate warming, warmed micro-climates (e.g., the urban heat island), altered landscapes, and feeders all may be leading Black-chinned hummingbirds east.

Whatever the reasons, this much is certain: It's a hummingbird's world, and we're just living in it.

The Lives of Birds *is a recurring feature by DFO member and birder* ***Jared Del Rosso****, a wildflower gardener and sociologist with a special interest in urban and suburban nature. He's also writing a book about Whip-poor-wills in American culture. Read more at his blog The Lonesome Whip-poor-will.*

FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

January, February, March DFO trips *In Focus*

Field trips in the three winter months included 47 total outings. Of those, participants on 22 trips took pictures of "birders birding" as photographic history for our 90-year-old club. If you're on DFO trips in April, May and June, take a few shots of your fellow birders birding and send us the best for the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, coming out in early July. Send .JPG or .PNG photo files of birders in the field, with date/location of trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline for our July 2025 summer-quarter issue is **Monday, June 30**. Thanks!

JANUARY 1

Pueblo Birding

(Pueblo County)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Scott Hammel, Ajit and Liza Antony, Sarah Feigelson, Melissa Wetzig, John Batt, Dana Hiatt, Kenneth Stuckey, Timothy Condon, Kris Saucke, Ann Christensen, Betsy Goodwin, Jonathan and Angela Hebel

Crowd of 16 New Year's Day birders scopes Pueblo Reservoir on DFO trip to various locations in and around the city
(Ryan Corda)

JANUARY 3

New Year's Birding Blitz

(Jefferson, Denver)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
John Batt, Eileen Warner, Michelle Verostko, Virginia Gulakowski, Robin Trevillian, Catherine Millard, Amy Manning, Melody Serra

Field trippers pose on Jan. 3 "New Year's Birding Blitz" in Jefferson County, where leader David Suddjian (3rd from right) notched his 10,000th eBird checklist

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JANUARY 8

El Paso County Hotspots

(El Paso)

Leader
Kip Miller

Participants
Anne Craig, Kenneth Stuckey, Dana Hiatt, Andrea Duran, David Suddjian, Melody Serra

DFO paparazzi mob star Golden-crowned Sparrow at Garden of the Gods during Jan. 8 field trip to El Paso County hotspots
(Kip Miller)

JANUARY 11

South Platte Park — South End

(Arapahoe)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Coreen Spellman, Lynn Slaga, Kris Saucke, Shai Ronen, Jeanne Marie Dillon, Sandy Mathias, Nathan Crow, Shay Lyons

DFO field trippers pose on Jan. 11 in American Dipper location beneath C-470 bridge across South Platte River and South Platte Park
(David Suddjian)

Continued on page 39

JANUARY 15

Littleton
(Jefferson, Denver)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Melody Serra, Victoria Miles,
Coreen Spellman Bailey, Linda Purcell

Walking the Governor's Plaza community parkway on Jan. 15 field trip to local spots in western Littleton with a stop later at Marston Reservoir in Denver for waterbirds
(Melody Serra)

JANUARY 17

Aurora Reservoir
(Arapahoe)

Leader
Cynthia Cestkowski

Participants
Bonnie Prado, Catherine Millard, Kris Tita,
Sue Summers, Amy Manning, Theresa Braymer,
Stephen Sears, Ethan Cleveland, Christine Macdonald

Jan. 17 field trippers bundled up at Aurora Reservoir the day the big Arctic blast approached Colorado. The reservoir was 80% iced but had ducks, gulls, hawks, 7 Bald Eagles and 2 Northern Harriers until a cold wind brought in thousands of geese
(Cynthia Cestkowski)

JANUARY 25

Bluff Lake Nature Center
(Denver)

Leader
George Ho

Participants
Sharon Kelly, Christopher Keefe, Liz Cox,
Ryan Corda, Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine,
Zach Turner, John Rainwater, Nathan Woodward

Jan. 25 field trip participants pose at Denver's Bluff Lake Nature Center after a 24-species outing in snow and 17-degree temperatures
(George Ho)

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JANUARY 26

Waterton Canyon
(Jefferson)

Leader
Wes Donnell

Participants
Sarah Feigelson, Timothy Condon, Diane Sanelli, Tim Redmond, Michelle Trotter, Andrea Duran, Sharon Tinianow, Caroline Armstrong

Field trippers pose along snow-packed trail up Waterton Canyon on Jan. 26 outing. Unusual sightings included a Red-breasted Merganser, Rock Wrens, and more than 30 Spotted Towhees
(Sharon Tinianow)

FEBRUARY 9

Super Duck Sunday III, South Platte Park
(Denver County)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Gigi Zarzuela, Amy Manning, Jordan Nicholls, Sarah Feigelson, Paula Rosson, Timothy Condon, Glenn Jacoby, Brian Huculak, Virginia Gulakowski, Ryan Corda

Trip leader David Suddjian briefs participants on DFO's annual Super Duck Sunday outing Feb. 9 at locations around South Platte Park. Super Duck Sunday III birders scored points for two duck "teams" whenever spotting "Divers" and "Dabblers." The score was close at halftime but diving ducks won out, 92-57, boosted by added points for species diversity and more courtship "field goals" and copulation "touchdowns"
(Gigi Zarzuela)

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FEBRUARY 9

Boulder County Raptor Tour
(Boulder)

Leaders
Donna Stumpp

Participants
Andrew Wertheimer, Becky Russell, Susan Blansett, Matthew Fast, Deb Piranian, John Batt, John Rainwater

Participants in Feb. 16 raptor tour of north Boulder County had a very productive outing on a chilly (5 degrees to start) but sunny day: 6 Golden Eagles, 12 Bald Eagles, 15 Red-tailed Hawks, 8 Ferruginous Hawks and 3 American Kestrels
(Donna Stumpp)

FEBRUARY 16

Birds Plus + Nature Journaling, Audubon Kingery Center
(Douglas-Jefferson)

Leaders
Carly Crow

Participants
Jason Bidgood, Diane Sanelli, Valerie Martino, Jodi Haller, Claire Frazier, Megan Miller, Paula Rosson

Array of amazing sketchwork by the seven participants Feb. 16 in another of Carly Crow's popular Birds Plus + Nature Journaling field trips, this time a snowy trek through the Audubon Kingery Nature Center south of Chatfield SP (and indoor sketching session in the center HQ)
(Carly Crow)

FEBRUARY 23

Ken Caryl Valley
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Gabby Licht, Melody Serra, Laura Sheets, Scott Hammel, John Batt

Shadowy field trippers watch and listen for Northern Saw-whet Owls on a pre-dawn field trip Feb. 23 in Jefferson County's Ken Caryl Valley
(Melody Serra)

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FEBRUARY 23

Barr Lake State Park
(Adams)

Leader
Jason Bidgood

Participants
Timothy Condon, Sarah Feigelson, Michelle Verostko, Jeanne Marie Dillon, Amy Manning, Lynn Slaga, Becky Russell, Annette Megneyse

Birders on DFO field trip to Barr Lake SP on Feb. 23 seeking out a Barn Owl
(Jason B. Bidgood)

MARCH 2

Prospect Park / Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
(Jefferson)

Leaders
Gigi Zarzuela

Participants
Jason Bidgood, Julia Aukland, Kris Saucke, Lynn Slaga, Ruolan Wu, Ryan Corda, Ginny Gulakowski, Theresa Braymer, Patricia Kuzma Sell, Carol Cook

Birders on trip leader Gigi Zarzuela's last regular monthly trip to Wheat Ridge Greenbelt (she moved to Seattle in March) focus together on something good. The four-hour tour checklisted 38 species
(Gigi Zarzuela)

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MARCH 9

South Platte Park, south end

(Arapahoe, Douglas)

Leader
Gigi Zarzuela and David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Gabby Licht, Beth Partin, Becky Russell, Alice Tariot, John Batt, Victoria Miles, Cassandra Stroud, Lynn Slaga, Coreen Spellman, Morgan Kahle

Field trippers scoping in South Platte Park during March 9 field trip, the last led by DFO leader Gigi Zarzuela before her move to Seattle. Zarzuela with trip coleader (and DFO Field Trips chair) David Suddjian. It was Gigi's 30th and final time leading or co-leading a DFO trip
(David Suddjian)

MARCH 15

Chatfield State Park

(Douglas, Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Coreen Spellman, Christopher Keefe Christine Macdonald, Cassandra Stroud, Shay Lyons, Sofia Prado-Irwin, Debra Strike, Jodi Haller, Ryan Corda, Michelle Stringer

Participants on March 15 DFO trip to Chatfield State Park pause to pose along trail near Plum Creek. Highlights: returning swallows (Tree and Cliff), Mountain Bluebird, Horned Larks, Bald Eagles, and a low flyover by a Sandhill Crane
(David Suddjian)

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MARCH 15

Walden Ponds / Sawhill Ponds
(Boulder)

Leader
Laura Steadman and Donna Stumpp

Participants
Melody Serra, Christie Owens, Lynn Slaga, Jim Petri, Karen Hawley, David Shafer, Melissa Mezger

Participants on March 15 trip to Walden Ponds Wildlife Habitat and Sawhill Ponds stroll along boardwalk. Outing began with a coffeeshop tutorial on using eBird bar charts for better trip planning. Highlights included a Common Raven flying by with nesting material
(Melody Serra)

MARCH 21

Bear Creek Greenbelt, Lakewood
(Jefferson)

Leader
Anne Craig

Participants
David Suddjian, Sofia Prado-Irwin, Jenny Germano, Virginia Gulakowski, Donny Dixon, Tanya Gelster, Shumel and Amy Korengut, Hanna Supanich-Winter

Birders focus raptly on Great Horned Owls and week-old owlets on a short March 21 evening field trip to the Bear Creek Greenbelt in Lakewood. Two different nests also attracted interest from passersby on the trail, with whom the DFO shared scope views
(David Suddjian)

MARCH 21

Aurora Reservoir
(Arapahoe)

Leader
Cynthia Cestkowski

Participants
Sharon Tinianow, Catherine and Kevin Millard, Jodi Haller, John Tentler, David Suddjian, Christopher Keefe, Ryan Corda, Robin Trevillian

Pausing for an impromptu group shot during March 21 field trip to Aurora Reservoir. Besides a photogenic Common Goldeneye X Bufflehead hybrid, the birders saw Cinnamon and Blue-winged teal and mating pairs of Bufflehead and American Kestrels
(Cynthia Cestkowski)

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MARCH 23

Cherry Creek State Park
(Arapahoe)

Leaders
David Suddjian

Participants
Lynn Slaga, Victoria Miles, Ryan Corda, Leanne McDorman, Melody Serra, Kathy Johnson, Scott Hammel, Kathleen Bahr, Virginia Gulakowski

Field trippers march to Pelican Point on March 23 field trip to Chatfield State Park
(Melody Serra)

MARCH 29

Prospect Park / Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
(Jefferson)

Leaders
Cassandra Stroud and David Suddjian

Participants
Patricia Kuzma Sell, Cheryl Ames, Kris Tita, Dave Prentice, Alice Tariot, Andrea Duran, Kelsey Robb, Lynn Slaga

Birders on the March 29 outing to Prospect Park and Wheat Ridge Greenbelt took advantage of a 3-hour window of sunshine between bursts of rain. Cedar Waxwings, a shy Marsh Wren, a Horned Grebe, and Bushtits gathering nesting material were highlights of Cassandra Stroud's first outing as a DFO field trip leader
(Dave Prentice)

MARCH 30

South Valley Park, Littleton
(Jefferson)

Leaders
David Suddjian

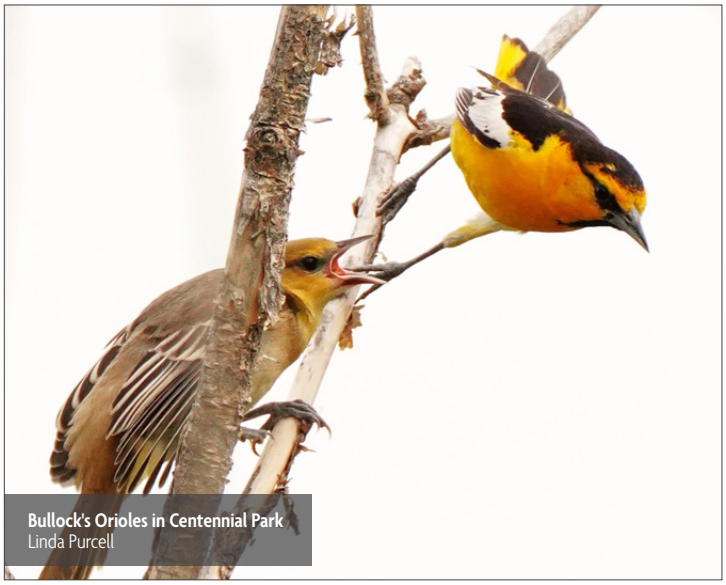
Participants
Sarah Feigelson, Timothy Condon, Eileen Warner, Zak Hepler, Kathy Holland, Coreen Spellman Bailey, Ryan Corda, Jodi Haller, Michelle Verostko

Birders pose March 30 in South Valley Park on special field trip co-sponsored by DFO and Denver Audubon, a new partnership the clubs have begun with more trips scheduled. On a cool, cloudy morning, participants saw six species of raptors and gobs of Mountain and Western bluebirds
(Kathy Holland)

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK: URBAN BIRDING

Gritty gems: birding between the rocks and hard places of industrial Denver

Western Meadowlark perched on razorwire on border of Centennial Park in Englewood
Melody Serra



Bullock's Orioles in Centennial Park
Linda Purcell

DFO field trip birders walk razor-wired fence line in Centennial Park
Melody Serra

Linda Purcell

The first time I went birding at Centennial Park, I was struck by how un-parklike it is. Wedged along the industrial south border of Denver between Federal Boulevard and the South Platte River, it's a gritty, razor-wired, urban backyard. Somehow, more than 200 species of birds know all about it — but many metro Denver birders don't.

Recently renovated by the City of Englewood, it does have "people park" features: picnic pavilions, playground, ballfields, restrooms, paved footpaths. But for birders, it has something else — ruggedly unattractive yet bird-friendly habitat. Scattered trees ring the unremarkable lake. Vegetation is generally overgrown. Low hillsides are weathered. An oxbow amputated from the river pokes in from the east.

Centennial Park is an uncut birding gem in an aggregate neighborhood of mechanical, contracting, storage, waste, recycling and other heavy commerce. But over time and more than 100 visits, it has wormed its way into my heart. Built atop a reclaimed landfill beneath high-voltage transmission lines, it is surprisingly peaceful, with few people and lots of birds (118 species on my eBird list). It's my kind of birding: You dig for everyday treasures where you wouldn't expect to find them — until you do.

Although my "patch" is not exactly invisible, it's not well-known, either. As an eBird hotspot, it's easy to find and navigate. But Centennial Park requires exploration to understand why 203 species have been found there. The South Platte, the park lake and that oxbow pond in between creates a mosaic of habitats and conditions favorable for birds year-round: food, water, shelter, and nesting opportunities.

Somewhere around my 50th checklist there, curiosity got me wondering: This can't be the only scruffy bird magnet in metro Denver. What other under-birded urban spots deserve a boost onto DFO's roster of marquee field trips? An explorer by nature, I decided to go looking for overlooked locations, some known, others not. As a group, the places I found tend toward sketchy and ungroomed — and they are all the more inviting because of it.

After all, we live in a rather densely developed, sprawling cityscape. But beyond our own backyards and favorite birding destinations farther afield, what do we miss that's right around us? When I looked more closely, I noticed pockets of hidden habitat that birds see and use. I found places new to me without much effort.

Consider — or perhaps reconsider — these more than half a dozen spots and hotspots. There are contamination-adjacent havens like Denver's Heron Pond Natural Area and the York Street-to-I-270 stretch of the South Platte River beside Commerce City's smelly Suncor petroplex. Some, like Adams County's little-visited Lowell Ponds Open Space, are within an easy walk of better-known hotspots. In this case, the better-known is Arvada's Clear Creek Valley Park, itself a Jekyll-and-Hyde combination of tidy city park and unkempt waste ponds just off I-76. Still others, you may already know and perhaps have even birded.

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These pockets epitomize "industrial birding" to me: rough-edged destinations that offer field experiences different from but no less satisfying than popular and classic out-of-town haunts along the Front Range. At each, I was able to record a decent checklist of species in two hours or less at a typical birding pace.

I defined my survey by poring over printed maps and satellite views of the metro area. From the start, I eliminated places with or near these characteristics:

- Large "greenbelt" housing developments
- Big-box industrial and warehouse sites with scattered tree islands and acres of pavement
- Highly groomed areas, including heavy-traffic parks and tightly trimmed gardens
- Limited or no open water year-round

What drew me were places with these attributes:

- Resistant to development, undesirable for construction
- Not zoned for planned development, e.g., natural pockets, ignored or overlooked, in the middle of urbanscapes
- Year-round water, but sketchy — ditches, gullies, puddles and pits, wetland sumps, backwater stretches of urban creeks
- Diverse, overgrown vegetation — riparian, conifer, scrub and brush, berry bushes, leaf piles, sprouting trees, patches of grass and weeds
- Big enough (15-40 acres of connected, diverse habitat) for at least two hours of varied birding
- Room to park, and a circular route of path-trail-road (bushwhacking optional)
- Urban "gray areas" — backyards to industry, near or even bounded by better-known hotspots

Here's what I settled upon (after Centennial), starting with locations generally near the South Platte River corridor and working outward from there.

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Pelican taking flight in industrial part of Denver
Patrick O'Driscoll

The author scouting industrial stretch of Clear Creek in Lowell Ponds Open Space
Patrick O'Driscoll

South Platte River – York St to I-270 (Adams County)

Not 10 minutes' drive from downtown Denver, this under-visited eBird hotspot is in the shadow of the metro area's largest industrial complex, the Suncor Energy USA refinery. Think of this area as 58th to I-270, along York Street. Like the most urbanized stretches of the river, it lacks the charm and excitement of busier downstream hotspots farther north in Adams (and upstream points far south in Arapahoe, Douglas and Jefferson). But it offers interesting sightings and loads of riverside potential on a two-hour excursion.

Moving north/downstream but before the South Platte's confluence with Sand Creek and I-270, the warm waterfall gushing out of metro Denver's main wastewater treatment plant attracts bountiful waterfowl. It's also one of the best spots in greater Denver to see Black-crowned Night Herons in winter (16 on a recent DFO field trip!). Where Sand Creek enters farther downstream, it creates a nice sandbar, too. South of 64th Avenue, heavy old cottonwoods lean out over the east bank, a seasonal spot for Wood Ducks. In early spring last year, I watched Bushtits build a nest at the riverbank.

The mostly paved, out-and-back trail attracts many bicyclists but few pedestrians. Raptors are present year-round. One thrilling episode: A Red-tailed Hawk with a squirming snake in its mouth flew just over my head to its nest on idle construction equipment nearby. I park at a large dirt area at 64th or somewhere along York Street.

eBird data

101 species on 87 checklists (since 1989). I am surprised the area has had virtually no observations between June and August since the year 2008, though species before and after are varied and numerous. It's highly likely that this stretch of path and river supports more unreported species

Takeaway

Ignore the industrial setting and enjoy the birds in one of the least birded stretches of the South Platte in all of metro Denver

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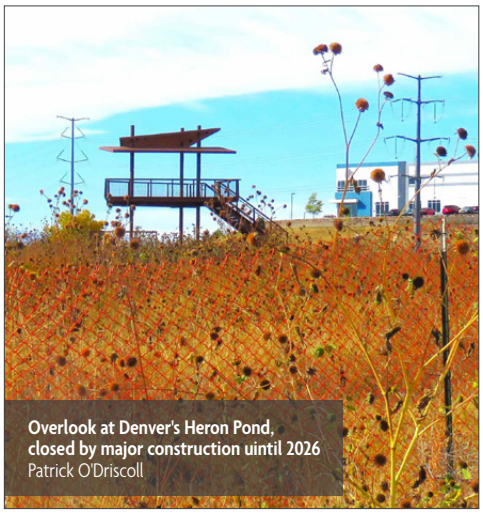
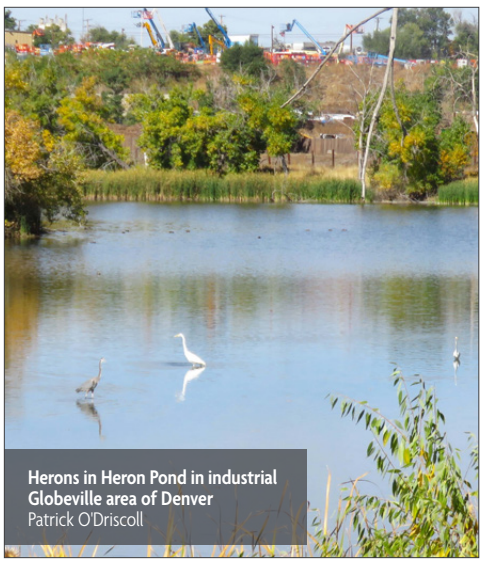
Dry, razor-wired hillside on north side of Centenial Park, Englewood
Linda Purcell

Construction zone at Heron Pond Natural Area in Denver
Patrick O'Driscoll



Overlook at Denver's Heron Pond, closed by major construction uintil 2026
Patrick O'Driscoll



Herons in Heron Pond in industrial Globeville area of Denver
Patrick O'Driscoll

64th Avenue & South Platte (Adams)

An adjacent, overlapping hotspot, 64th & South Platte, has similar data with even fewer checklists, fewer birds reported, and minimal summer observations. Like York-to-I-270, this area is heavily overgrown with vegetation along the opposite bank of the river. Where present, the bike/pedestrian path on the west side provides good visibility downstream.

This is a shorter stop. In about 45 minutes, I bird south/upstream from 64th to 58th avenues and check out the tangle of vegetation and low water under the 58th Avenue bridge. Parking isn't allowed at the Metro Water Recovery entrance, but south end parking is a dirt patch at 58th and York that accommodates a couple of cars. I also park along York St. between 58th and 64th, walking along the road and bushwacking. This sounds more complicated than it is, although an initial drive-by is essential. Consider going to this scruffy area on a weekend for less noise and traffic.

eBird data

66 species on 59 checklists (since 1994). Remarkably, only one eBirder has visited this hotspot more than twice (he went three times), and only seven others have visited twice. By contrast, the adjacent hotspot downstream (South Platte River – Sand Creek mouth) has recorded almost twice as many species on six times as many checklists

Takeaway

Definitely under-birded, but full of possibility. Roadside parking can be dodgy, as can the neighborhood, so do a drive-by before you commit to birding this heavily industrial stretch of the South Platte

Heron Pond Natural Area (Denver)

I had intended to start the list with this truly hidden gem. But since last spring (May 2024), Heron Pond Natural Area (also called Heron Pond Open Space) has been locked behind tall construction fencing. Major park transformation work from the pond south to the South Platte will continue at least into 2026.

The pond itself will survive Denver Parks & Recreation's major facelift to much of the 80-acre former brownfields site. In the meantime, a few determined birders continue to visit around the edges, aiming binoculars and cameras through the chain link barrier. Construction or not, the birds are still there. They love it (almost 200 eBird species).

This patch of iffy water, scraggly woods and weedy fields just blocks north of downtown is a gritty part of the city's industrial history. Across the river from the National Western Stock Show grounds and historic Riverside Cemetery, it is surrounded by recycling, junk, metals and truck yards. For a century the

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pond lay within view of the Globe Plant, Asarco Inc.'s defunct heavy-metals smelter and Superfund cleanup site in working-class Globeville, where Interstates 25 and 70 meet.

A playground and other park amenities are due next year. Already built but not yet open are a new wetland, paved walks, landscaped areas and parking lots. An observation tower in the northwest corner provides a sweeping view of the pond, "Heller Open Space" acreage and retooled Carpio-Sanguinette Park, a 13-acre, riverside "pocket" on the ruins of an old sewage plant.

All this signals a decidedly "neighborhood park" emphasis when it reopens. But the pond itself will remain a bird sanctuary, perhaps defiantly so. Shallow and lined with cattails, cottonwoods and brush, it is still the main attraction for waterfowl and waders, including four kinds of herons and egrets.

Part of Heron Pond's appeal to me is how isolated it is from other bodies of water on the map. Scruffy but pleasant, it has that off-the-radar feel — relatively quiet beyond the local truck traffic. In spring and fall, warblers and other migrants join the waterbirds and year-round species.

eBird data
194 species on 1,198 checklists (since 1973). Although visited by 314 eBirders, one-quarter of those list-visits are by just 10 top birders. The 10th highest birder has 86 species

Takeaway
Not undiscovered, but certainly under-birded. Once Heron Pond Natural Area reopens in 2026, it will be worthy of repeated visits. For now, check it out through the fence

From those pockets along the South Platte, I followed the map west along a thin blue line that defies the urban grids crisscrossing it. Clear Creek begins at the Continental Divide near Loveland Pass and descends, wild and unobstructed, to the Front Range plains. Its sinuous path winds through Golden, Lakewood and Wheat Ridge, then roughly along Interstate 76 until it joins the South Platte in southeast Thornton.

Studying that map and scouting by car, I explored the largely ignored stream and undeveloped floodplain between Federal and Sheridan boulevards, with combinations of creek and lakes, open space, and wildlife areas. Within that patchwork of white, green and blue on the terrain map, I focused on these creekside locations.

Clear Creek Valley Park (Arvada)

Visible below from westbound traffic on Interstate 76, this 80-acre expanse between Tennyson Street and Lowell Boulevard north of the freeway is a hidden jewel in plain sight. It's an unexpected mix of public park amenities on the north side (grass fields, pickleball courts, playground, urban gardens, trails, fishing pond) and a rough-edged tract of open space on the south. Amazingly, Clear Creek Valley Park has recorded nearly 200 eBird species.

The first time I visited this Hyland Hills Park and Recreation District site, I was immediately drawn (and still am) to that unkempt swath of what the district calls "wildlife viewing ponds." To the non-birder, the three ponds are unwelcoming as they push up against the uncut-scrub slope of I-76, something of a habitat buffer. The ponds attract wading birds from egrets and herons to avocets and even, eight years ago, a White Ibis. Ephemeral Islands and peninsulas in these shallows provide nesting habitat for shorebirds, including American Avocet. The park's fishing pond (formerly a gravel pit) also draws waders (Great Egret, Western Cattle-Egret). The birding's even good in winter: In early February, with very little open water and the temperature near freezing, I still managed to see 18 species.

eBird data
197 species recorded on 1,056 checklists (since 2001) by 313 eBirders. Breaking this down, the top checklist leader (193 lists) has recorded 191 species

Takeaway
Reachable off the interstate, with plentiful parking and easy access to the pond habitats south of the developed park

Lowell Ponds Open Space (Adams)

I suspect this eBird hotspot hasn't gained traction beyond a very local and fortunate few because it used to be one of Colorado's State Wildlife Areas, which were once managed solely for wildlife and "wildlife recreation" (hunting and fishing). At some point Adams County assumed management of what

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is now Lowell Ponds Open Space (though its old SWA name lingers on some obsolete maps and non-updated internet pages).

Although barely a 5-minute walk south from Clear Creek Valley Park, the open space feels somewhere else entirely. Interstate 76 is a raised and noisy buffer between the two. The ponds' strip of trees, water and grass lies low in the Clear Creek floodplain, tucked south of the freeway between Lowell Boulevard and Tennyson Street, four blocks from the Denver city limits.

It takes a couple of visits to figure out how best to experience Lowell Ponds. There's parking on both sides of Lowell, but entry is southwest of the boulevard bridge over the creek. The bike path there, along the south bank, is an obvious out-and-back route. But I find it birdier and more interesting to cross the bridge (safe pedestrian walkway), then dip down another path between the north bank of the creek and the main ponds for a loop walk. From the bridge, the breadth of the creek's still-intact floodplain is a thrilling remnant of natural history to this urban birder.

Down on the ground, the views and access to the creek are better, too. There are even a couple of well-worn viewing platforms with picnic tables. Visible through the creekside cottonwoods are reminders that it's still an industrial setting: graffitied walls on nondescript commercial buildings, a construction truck yard, concrete rubble rapids in the creek, and electrical transmission towers overhead.

Once Tennyson comes into view on the west side, loop back around the open ponds. As you explore the thickets and gulleys for birds, follow the trail (with its curious remnants of long-ago pavement and sidewalk) below I-76 and back to the bridge crossing.

eBird data

188 recorded species, 2,255 checklists (since 1972) by 285 eBirders. This is where the stats reveal Lowell Ponds' diamond-in-the-rough story. More than 75% of those checklists belong to just three regular birders. and the top species leader has recorded 169 of those species

Takeaway

So many lists and species by so few birders! Lowell Ponds is a wide open birding book for the rest of us, smack in the middle of town

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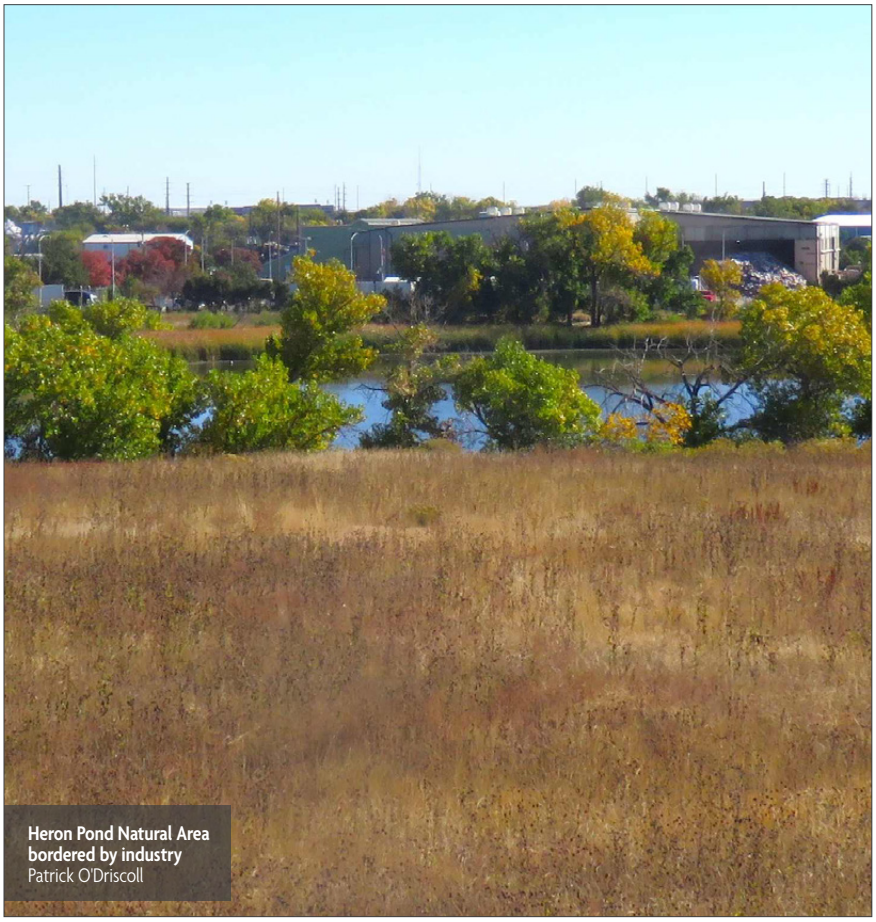
Great Egret at Clear Creek Valley Park, Arvada
Linda Purcell

Wetland ponds at Clear Creek Valley Park in winter
Linda Purcell

American Pipit in Creekside Park, Wheat Ridge
Linda Purcell

American Kestrel in Lowell Ponds Open Space, Adams County
Patrick O'Driscoll



Heron Pond Natural Area bordered by industry
Patrick O'Driscoll

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK *cont from page 52*

Creekside Park (Wheat Ridge)

Still basking in the glow of a Lowell Ponds walk and with 30 minutes to spare, why not explore one more target site on Clear Creek? I headed just a couple of miles west on I-76 to Creekside Park in Wheat Ridge (North Marshall Street and West 49th Avenue). On the eBird map, it looks like a dead zone: a non-hotspot wedged in a triangle between I-70 and I-76, surrounded by industry (several HVAC companies, self-storage complex, concrete contractors, cannabis outlet, and a sprawling demolition-excavation-materials recycling yard across the creek).

But this modest patch of baseball diamonds and grass is for the birds because . . . well, it is *creekside*. A jogger who stopped to chat on the path along the stream raved about the birds on that stretch of Clear Creek. It turns out Wheat Ridge is making efforts to re-establish native vegetation in the area to support bird habitat. Learning that was a nice surprise — and then I spotted an American Pipit! I'll definitely be going back for more surprises at this under-the-radar spot.

Inspiration Point Park (Denver)

If you visit Creekside Park, it's only a 5-minute drive or a 20-minute walk east to this unusual hotspot on a wooded hillside barely inside the Denver City limits. Inspiration Point Park is a narrow, 5-blocks-long strip with perhaps the only grove of Ponderosa pines for miles around. Those trees, and remnant patches of foothills shrub habitat on the edges of this neighborhood greenspace, are the chief attractions for

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the birds. Although the park lacks its own water source, Clear Creek itself is just a short flight downhill for thirsty birds.

Aptly named, this 25-acre park tapers west along its narrow hilltop (elevation: 5,415 feet) to a singular point for postcard sunset views of the Rockies — and a bird's eye view of the spaghetti tangle of lanes and ramps where I-76 and I-70 meet/split far below. Inspiration Point's island-in-the-sky location makes for excellent flyover birding, from waterfowl flocks to raptors. There are hummingbirds, too.

eBird data
114 species on 267 checklists (since 2014) by 64 eBirders. Although I have not visited this park yet, my editor vouches for its surprising diversity: migrant warblers in fall (Townsend's, Wilson's), foothills shrub species (scrub-jays, towhees, thrashers), conifer songbirds (nuthatches, Bushtits, creepers, Mountain Chickadees) and more

Takeaway
Exceptional range of species for such a small, isolated and under-birded patch of unexpected habitat. Why should just 64 other eBirders have all the fun?

Those are my suggestions for new or overlooked industrial birding hotspots to try in 2025. (Keep an eye out for future DFO field trips to some of these, too!) How about your favorite urbanized birdspots? Let's share.

In closing, I'll touch on a couple of places that were once as scruffy and overlooked in their time as these ones are now.

Nearly 40 years ago, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal chemical weapons plant was a Superfund cleanup site. A decade and a half later, it opened to the public in 2004 as Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. Since then, eBirders have filed more than 24,000 checklists from 14 different Arsenal hotspots, making it one of the top destinations in Colorado.

For 60 years, Bluff Lake was an end-of-runway, crash-safety buffer zone at Denver's Stapleton airport until Denver International opened in 1995. The more than 6,300 eBird checklists filed since then at Bluff Lake Nature Center make it the most visited eBird destination within the Denver city limits.

If the popularity of such hotspots is any indication, other industrial and commercial places and previously ignored or overlooked urban patches can also rise to increased (or renewed) acclaim. Here's to future birding enjoyment and appreciation in every corner of metro Denver, especially in industrialized places where birds manage to survive — and even thrive.

A DFO member since 2021, ***Linda Purcell*** *has been observing birds and taking photographs all her life. A southwestern Colorado native, she has lived in Denver since 1989. She retired in 2020.*

Sources and Resources

General

- Denver Field Ornithologists
- Bodies of Water (Wikipedia)
- Colorado Birding Trail

Heron Pond

- Globeville's Heron Pond is Getting a Facelift (Colorado Community Media)
- Heron Pond/Carpio-Sanguinette Parks (The Greenway Foundation)

Clear Creek

- Evolution of the Landscape along the Clear Creek Corridor, Colorado—Urbanization, Aggregate Mining, and Reclamation (USGS)
- Clear Creek Colorado (Wikipedia)

Checklists and data

- ebird (Cornell lab)

Rocky Mountain Arsenal

- Superfund Site: Rocky Mountain Arsenal (EPA)
- Rocky Mountain Arsenal (CDPHE)

Bluff Lake

- Bluff Lake @ 30: from airport crash zone to bird-rich nature preserve (*The Lark Bunting* November 2024, page 16)

BACKstory: Who's the predator?

I took this photo March 22 at Cherry Creek State Park's Prairie Loop. **Winston Liu** and I were looking for a better view of the Glaucous-winged Gull that had been reported at Pelican Point when we noticed the Ring-billed Gull commotion.

We thought one of them had caught a crayfish and the rest were chasing after it. Not until later, looking at the photos on my computer at home, did I see the momentary reversal of predator-prey roles.

The crayfish was not locked in the gull's bill. Rather, it dangled from the bird's breast, holding on for its shellfish life with a pincer-full of feathers.

— Dave Prentice

Ring-billed Gulls with crayfish, Cherry Creek SP, March 22, 2025
Dave Prentice