



# THE LARK BUNTING

QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 61 | ISSUE 3 | JULY 2025

DFOBIRDS.ORG

## FALL PROGRAMS

In-person with Mr. eBird  
at DFO's birthday party!

PAGE 11

## DFO @ 90 HISTORY, PART 3

1980-2000: Club's golden  
era as 21<sup>st</sup> century nears

PAGES 14-20

## DFO PEOPLE

7 months gone, the bird  
art of Joe Chen is back

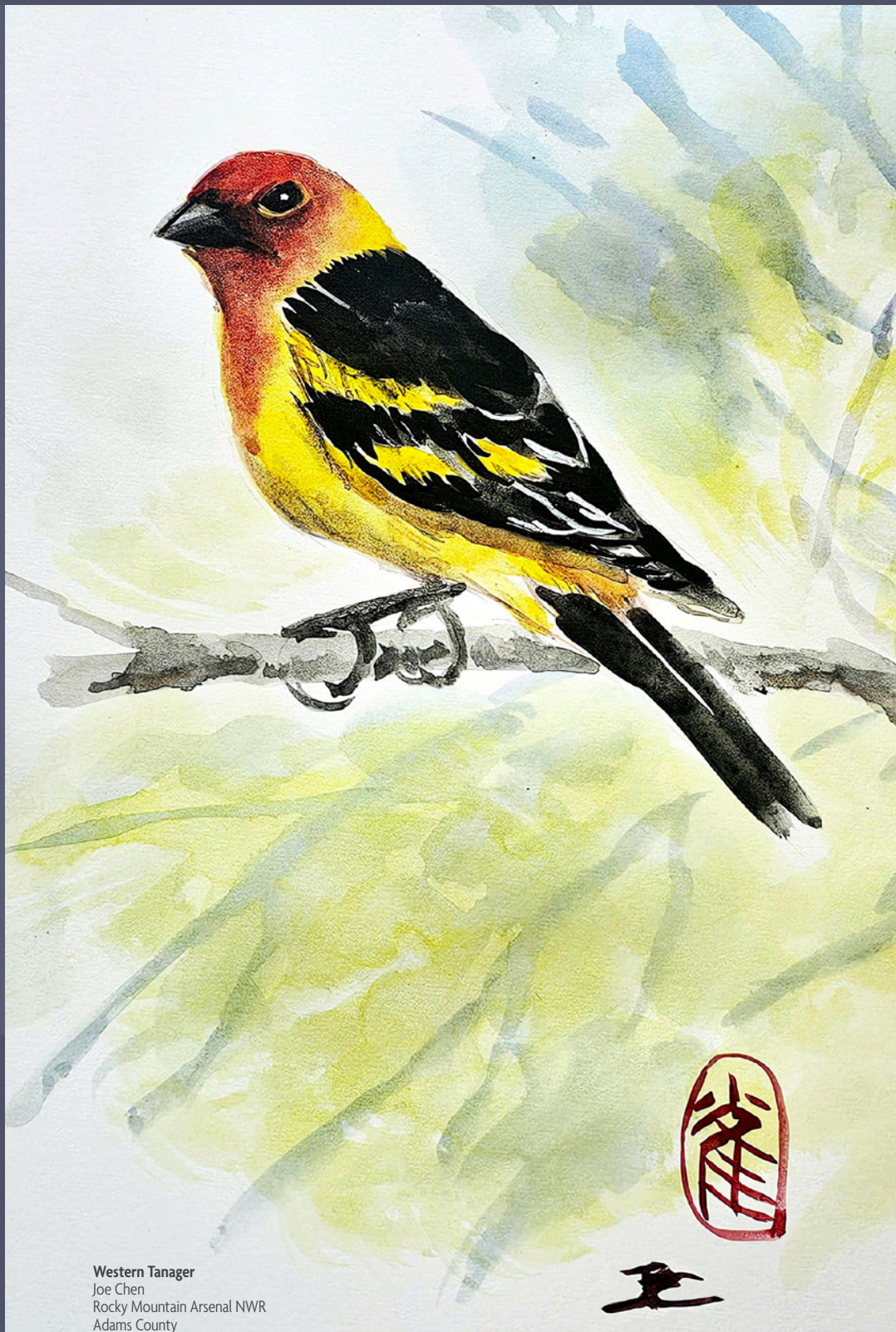
PAGES 27-29

## LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Another sky-high DFO trip  
in SE AZ's "Sky Islands"

PAGE 51-60

**dfo**  
DENVER FIELD  
ORNITHOLOGISTS  
*90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*



Western Tanager  
Joe Chen  
Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR  
Adams County



## ON THE COVER

# Western Tanager: Fiery sign of summer across Colorado

**Patrick O'Driscoll**

After months of gray, subdued winter birds and birding, those first spring-migration glimpses of color on the wing shock your system, don't they? I'm not sure there's a better spring jolt to be had than from the season's first Western Tanager male. What a creature to behold.

That flaming red head. The squint-inducing bright yellow torso. The coal-black back and tail. The dark wings slashed with two bold wing bars, yellow above and white below. It's a lit torch in a tree — and an extra *ba-dump* in your chest when you spot one.

DFO member and painter **Joe Chen** found the one on the cover of this issue of *The Lark Bunting* in late April in Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. For the moment, most Western Tanagers on Colorado's eastern Plains have come and gone — but not far. If you're in the western two-thirds of the state, they nest among you. Western Tanagers seemed to pop up everywhere last month on Western Slope

field trips at the Colorado Field Ornithologists convention in Grand Junction. A signal summer forest species of this half of the US, it occurs broadly across the region's open coniferous woodlands, especially in Douglas firs.

Western Tanager is a restless species that calls no one place home year-round. It ranges farther north than any other American tanager. After wintering in Mexico and parts of Central America, its estimated 15 million breeding birds migrate north through several states, including eastern Colorado. Some of them lay eggs and rear young as far north as Canada's Northwest Territories.

Despite the flashy plumage, Western Tanagers are not conspicuous dandies. Their low-key ways include staying largely out of sight in the shade of trees, especially evergreens. On a DFO field trip in Denver City Park in May, we got sore necks looking at a colorful male high up and inside a tall spruce. He stayed in and around that tree at least three days before moving on, presumably to pursue a mate. If so, he would stake his territory with nonstop singing along the borders. Once mated, both birds would chase off intruders, and the male would stay around at least through egg-laying.

Western Tanagers are stocky, stout-billed and methodical foragers, plucking bugs and other food as they move through the upper limbs of trees and shrubs. But they can fly swiftly. On occasion, they even sally forth and back from tree limbs, flycatcher-style, to catch prey in midair.

Scientifically, much remains unknown about the species. One of the few aspects that researchers have delved into is pigmentation — specifically, the dietary source of pigment that makes male Western Tanagers' head feathers so red.

Unlike its three closest tanager cousins (Scarlet, Summer and Hepatic) and an array of other red-colored species, the Western gets its pigmentation not from the oxo-carotenoids that account for their coloration, but from a rarer pigment called *rhodoxanthin*. It is thought to originate in insects that Western Tanagers eat (their primary diet in breeding season). The insects presumably acquire the pigment from plants.



**Joe Chen** learned Chinese ink painting in middle school but didn't take up birding until after college in his native Taiwan. A project

design engineer in the computer field, he moved to Denver in 1999, joined DFO in 2018, and retired in 2022.

**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

- 2 On the Cover**  
Western Tanager: Fiery sign of summer across Colorado
- 5 From DFO's Perch**  
Summertime: When better to enliven your birding with new info, skills, views?
- 7 DFO News Notes**
- 9 Fall Program Previews**
- 14 DFO @90, Part 3**  
1980s-2000: Golden times for DFO, confident as the 21<sup>st</sup> century beckoned
- 27 DFO People**  
Home again: the bright, charming birds of Joe Chen's brush and pen
- 31 The Lives of Birds**  
Day-sleeping masters of camouflage, nightjars are more heard than seen
- 34 Field Trips in Focus**
- 51 Last Word, Last Look**  
Third time, more charms: Late migration in drought stirs birding magic in "Sky Islands"

***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.

**VISIT THE LARK BUNTING ARCHIVES**

## PUBLICATION STAFF

### Journal Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

### Newsletter Editor

Mike Fernandez

### Photo Editor

Jim Esten

### Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

### Proofreading

Isabelle Busch

### Contributors this issue

Povy Kendal Atchison, Jason B. Bidgood, Jill Boice, John C. Breitsch, Mary Cay Burger, Charlie Chase, Joe Chen, Timothy Condon, Ryan Corda, Carly Crow, Nancy Crowley, Jared Del Rosso, Chris DeSorbo, Norm Erthal, Jim Esten, Lee Farrell, Mike Fernandez, Mary Geder, A.J. Gest, Elizabeth Goetz, Betsy Goodwin, Kathy Holland, Tina Jones, Brenda Kellner, Joey Kellner, Norm Lewis, Eileen Mennecke, Marjorie Middleton, Kathy Mihm-Dunning, Janet Peters, Dave Prentice, Linda Purcell, Courtney Rella, Denise Reznicek, Bob Righter, Ira Sanders, Dick Schlottler, Melody Serra, David Suddjian, Sue Summers, Joe Ten Brink, Sharon Tinianow, Jennifer Tonge, Robert Tonge, Bill Turner, Natalie Uschner-Arroyo, Phil Waltz

## CONTRIBUTE TO THE JOURNAL AND NEWSLETTER

Submit original journal articles, essays, photographs and story ideas to *The Lark Bunting* quarterly journal's editor at [patodrisk@gmail.com](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com). Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at [jcesten@gmail.com](mailto:jcesten@gmail.com).

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

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



© 2025 Denver Field Ornithologists. All rights reserved.



**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.

## DFO OFFICERS

### President

Sharon Tinianow

### Vice President

Charlie Chase

### Secretary

Patrick O'Driscoll

### Treasurer

Tom Econopouly

### Past President

Susan Blansett

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Susan Blansett  
Michael Fernandez  
Mary Geder  
Cyndy Johnson  
Tina Jones  
Janet Peters  
Courtney Rella  
David Suddjian  
Bill Turner  
Phil Waltz  
Gary Witt

## COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND ROLES

### Better Birding Skills

Sharon Tinianow (acting)

### Communications & Outreach

Michael Fernandez

### Conservation

Courtney Rella

### Field Trips

David Suddjian

### Finance

(vacant)

### Grants

Jill Boice

### Hawk Watch

Natalie Uschner-Arroyo (Interim)

### Membership

Cyndy Johnson

### Nominations

Mary Geder

### Programs Director

Bill Turner

### Historian

Kristine Haglund

### Volunteers Coordinator

Phil Waltz

### Web Administrator and Zoom Coordinator

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

## DFO ONLINE

### Website

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

### Facebook Group

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

### Instagram

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

## CONTACT

### Email

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

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

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

### US Mail

Attn: Tom Econopouly  
Treasurer, DFO  
PO Box 620671  
Littleton, CO 80162

## LEARN MORE

### Membership — Join or Renew

[dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership.aspx](http://dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership.aspx)

### Field Trips — Explore / Sign Up

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

### Volunteering

[dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx](http://dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx)

### Charitable Giving

[dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx](http://dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx)

### DFO Merch Store

[zazzle.com/store/official\\_dfo\\_shop](https://zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop)

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





## FROM DFO'S PERCH

# Summertime: When better to enliven *your* birding with new info, skills, views?

**Editor's note:** For years *The Lark Bunting* has published *From the President*, a regular message from DFO's top officer. Recently re-elected to a third term, DFO president **Sharon Tinianow** is taking the year to focus on other critical club tasks. With this issue, we'll fill this space with **From DFO's Perch**, a similar quarterly message. Sitting in on *The Perch* this month is longtime DFO member **Mary Geder**, who also chairs the club's Nominations Committee

### Mary Geder

Now that the pace and excitement of spring birding are subsiding, we can all settle into the less hectic tempo of summer birding. The birds we seek aren't on the move much now (but wait 'til August!). They are busy nesting, rearing and fledging their young. And that gives us the opportunity to chase them less and observe them more intensely.

In my own birding past, I've found that the usual strategy for summertime birding boils down to two things:

- Head for higher, cooler elevations, where many species have gone to breed
- Bird very early in the day, or else later, towards evening

Both are sensible guides, but unless you're retired or infinitely flexible with work, transportation options and your schedule, they won't work for everyone. I think summer is a great time to consider broadening your birding dimensions. Here are a few ideas:

- **Investigate bird behaviors.** Summer birding is a chance to delve deeper into the ways that birds behave. This is for *every* birder, not just beginners or even experts. If you "chase" reports of rare species, what better time to learn more about your target's behavior? The more you know, the better your chances of spotting the bird. And how about those many (choose your adjective) unusual, odd, weird and just plain interesting bird quirks? For instance: What's the deal with that rumba-like walk of the American Woodcock, that butt-bobbing by Spotted Sandpipers, or why all those blackbirds, magpies and jays mob and dive-bomb every passing hawk? One more: Where do birds sleep? We sometimes learn about or even check out communal roosts of crows, starlings or grackles, but what about common passerines? Where do they lay their heads, so to speak, and why there? Have you ever sought out birds that may be sleeping near you? And what about knowing which juvenile birds help their parents rear a nest full of chicks?
- **Learn more about your favorite species or bird family.** Do you really know *everything* about that spark bird or fave species? This will only be rewarding: The subject birds already interest you deeply. Knowing more about their preferred habitats, when to expect them (seasonal arrival and departure dates), their ranges and elevations, what they like to eat, how they nest and their breeding biology — all these enrich the connection to "your" bird. Loads of online sources await your search and research, from eBird and online field guides to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's encyclopedic [Birds of the World](#) species database. Spend a few air conditioned hours at this in the dog days of July and August and craft your own fresh species profiles. Amaze your birding friends with cool facts and hot factoids
- **Explore!** Whether out of habit or ease, we tend to frequent birdy places we discovered years ago, or that were mentioned by friends. They're safe and often predictable, although perhaps they'll harbor a known target bird or unexpected rarity from time to time. In between those highs, why not try someplace else truly new once a week or month? Discovering another bird spot to hang out is truly gratifying. Many people tell me they love doing this. For one

*Continued on page 6*

thing, you're finding it yourself. For another, you can share it with friends (or not!). It needn't be far away. Maybe it's an overlooked patch or part of an already known and heavily visited park. So, maybe you go early or late when there's no crowd. Searching for a new or additional favorite place is half the fun

- **Volunteer!** Helping out in groups, organizations or at places linked to your favorite pastime knows no season. As birding seasons change (like right now), it's a great time to consider volunteering. The commitment needn't be permanent or regular. You get to decide how much time you can contribute. Local and state parks, and bird-oriented clubs like DFO, CFO, and the various Audubon chapters, all can use specific, one-time help as well as longer-term commitments. Sign up for a Christmas Bird Count, or for the Denver area fall and spring counts pioneered decades ago by DFO members. (DFO vice president **Charlie Chase** coordinates those; contact him via the [DFO leadership messaging link](#)).
- **"Birding-adjacent" activities.** DFO has many very good photographers in the club ranks. How about working on a field guide to fledgling birds? I've never seen one myself. But young birds grow beyond fledglings fast and are often well-hidden during this phase. Starting a communal effort to find and photograph fledglings would be amazing — and the time to do it would be NOW



As you can see, there are many potential ways to engage, learn and add to our birding experience. And if you work on something here that isn't actual birding in the field, it'll *certainly* enhance field birding for everyone. So when it's 90 to 100 degrees or more this summer and the birds are all panting in the shade, come back to this and consider how you can reset your approach to the birds.

Happy summertime birding, everyone!

— **Mary**

---

**Mary Geder** took up birding in the 1990s and joined DFO in the early 2000s. She began work as a US Fish & Wildlife Service biologist before a 30-year career in the oil and gas field as a contracts administrator and systems analyst. Now retired, she lives in Lakewood

# DFO News Notes

**Patrick O'Driscoll**

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

## NEXT ON BIRD BOMBS:

### "SUMMER ID CHALLENGES" JULY 17

[Register now](#) for the next BIRD BOMBS mini-webinar episode, Summer ID Challenges, set for **Thursday, July 17 at 7 p.m.** via Zoom. BIRD BOMBS host and DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** will explore some of the perennial birding challenges of the summer months, including hummingbirds and more. You can also Visit the [BIRD BOMBS video library](#) on the DFO website to view any of the previous 37 episodes.



**REGISTER FOR BIRD BOMBS**

## DFO ELECTS CLUB LEADERSHIP FOR 2025-26

President **Sharon Tinianow** was re-elected in April to a third term in Denver Field Ornithologists' annual election of officers and board members. DFO voters cast ballots via email and online during a two-week period in April. The club's three other officers were interim appointees who stood for election for the first time. **Charlie Chase**, appointed by the DFO Board to the vacant vice president's post in 2024, was elected to that office for the first time. So, too, board member **Patrick O'Driscoll**, appointed secretary in February, was elected to that post. DFO member **Tom Econopouly**, also appointed in February as

interim co-treasurer, was elected to replace treasurer **Kathy Holland** on her retirement from club duties.

Voters also filled four of DFO's board seats. Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** and Nominations chair **Mary Geder**, both members of the board, were re-elected to 3-year terms. DFO past President **Susan Blansett** and field trip leader **Gary Witt** were elected to the board seats being vacated by O'Driscoll and retiring member **Tina Jones**, also for 3-year terms.

## FALL BIRD COUNT SET FOR 2<sup>ND</sup> WEEKEND IN SEPTEMBER

The annual Fall Bird Count is back for its 47<sup>th</sup> running, and DFO vice president **Charlie Chase** is overseeing it. He reports that this year's effort is set for several days around the second weekend in September. That means counts scheduled between **Friday, Sept. 12** and **Tuesday, Sept. 16**. The autumn tally and a similar count in spring were begun in the 1970s by DFO hands including **Hugh Kingery**, who continued to oversee it well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

"As part of this long-term citizen science monitoring program, we will count all the birds we can find in each of seven areas," Chase says. If you're interested in helping, email the individual count leader for any of the destinations listed below for more details, meet-up times, etc. Other questions? Send to Chase at [charlesachase3@gmail.com](mailto:charlesachase3@gmail.com).

- **Friday, Sept. 12** — Cherry Creek SP  
Contact: **Cynthia Madsen**, [cmadsen08@gmail.com](mailto:cmadsen08@gmail.com)
- **Saturday, Sept. 13** — Barr Lake SP  
**Chris Gilbert**, [chrisgee9@gmail.com](mailto:chrisgee9@gmail.com)  
**Charlie Chase**, [charlesachase3@gmail.com](mailto:charlesachase3@gmail.com)
- **Saturday, Sept. 13** — Chatfield SP  
**Joey Kellner**, [vireo1@comcast.net](mailto:vireo1@comcast.net)
- **Sunday, Sept. 14** — Castlewood Canyon SP  
**Dave Hill**, [davidhill2357@gmail.com](mailto:davidhill2357@gmail.com)
- **Sunday, Sept. 14** — Rocky Mountain Arsenal  
**Charlie Chase**, [charlesachase3@gmail.com](mailto:charlesachase3@gmail.com)
- **Monday, Sept. 15** — Bear Creek Lake Park  
**Mary Geder**, [mfg5000@live.com](mailto:mfg5000@live.com)
- **Date TBA** — Audubon Kingery Nature Center and Roxborough Road  
**Bill Schreitz**, [flannelmoth@gmail.com](mailto:flannelmoth@gmail.com)

*Continued on page 8*



**CALENDAR ALERT:  
COLO BIRDING  
CHALLENGE  
IS SEPTEMBER 6**



Colorado Field Ornithologists' 2025 fund-raising birdathon, the [Colorado Birding Challenge](#), will be one week earlier than last year's. That means more opportunities for teams to see more species in 24 hours in one or another of Colorado's 64 counties. This year's county-based challenge is **Saturday, Sept. 6**. ([Registration opens in mid-July on the CFO website](#)) Teams choose a county, give themselves a name, and collect donations from family and friends, often as pledged amounts for each species the team can checklist, to support CFO programs and conservation projects.

Twenty-six teams registered in 15 Colorado counties in 2024. The goal is to have at least one team competing in each of the state's counties. Organizers hope returning teams will choose to compete in less-birded counties to gather vital eBird data and expand the challenge's statewide footprint. Teams can enter in four categories:

- **Challenge** — Two or more birders, all out to ring up the highest number of species within their chosen county
- **Green Challenge** — Minimal carbon footprint with only non-motorized, self-propelled birding on foot, cycle, paddled boat, etc.
- **Under-25 Challenge** — Teams of young people, though adults are allowed to chaperone or drive for underage participants, and
- **BYOW, or Bird Your Own Way** — Non-competitive birding parties, solos, favorite hot spotters, even a "big sit".

In the competitive categories, team results are weighted by a "county par" calculation using eBird data so that participants in birdy and less birdy counties in the state compete on an equal footing. CFO also reports that Front Range Birding and Optics will sponsor the 2025 challenge, providing prizes to winning teams in the three competitive categories.

**REGISTER FOR THE CHALLENGE**

**CSU PROF IS AOS "MOST MERITORIOUS"  
RESEARCHER**

**Kristen Ruegg**, associate professor of biology at Colorado State University and co-founder of the [Bird Genoscape Project](#), is the 2025 recipient of the William Brewster Memorial Award of the [American Ornithological Society](#). The award honors the author of "the most meritorious body of work on birds of the Western Hemisphere" published in the past 10 years. Ruegg uses feathers and powerful chemistry to investigate birds' migratory flyways. Her project, begun in 2009 with **Tom Smith** of UCLA, aims to map migration routes of at least 100 North American species with genomic tools. Her CSU lab focuses on forces that maintain species diversity in a changing world. Her work also assesses how bird populations need to adapt to climate change. In 2020, *National Geographic* produced a highly informative, 15-minute documentary on the genoscape project, [Feathers in Flight](#). Last November, Ruegg discussed the project in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's 2024 [Paul C. Munding Distinguished Lecture](#), the lab's most prestigious annual address.

**COMBINED WORLD CHECKLIST IS OUT:  
11,131 SPECIES**

[AviList](#), the first combined directory of known bird species worldwide, was released in June. In the works since 2016, it represents a stable "consensus taxonomy" for all the birds of the world. This new downloadable species list/database blends the strengths of the three most popular previous global checklists: BirdLife Checklist, IOC World Bird List, and eBird/Clements Checklist. All three were previously updated once or twice a year; AviList will be updated annually and provide all key taxonomic and nomenclature information. In so doing, its creators bridged decades marked by confusion, different standards and conflicting decisions on some species. Updating independent and competing checklists previously amounted to much duplicated effort, and the three lists' committees were sometimes out of sync in timing and species conclusions.

AviList "version 2025" lists 11,131 species in its database, including species and subspecies that have gone extinct since about the year 1500. Users can [download the checklist spreadsheet](#) in both an "extended" version (25 column categories) and a "short" version (13 categories). The components range across taxonomy, subspecies, nomenclature, English names, linear sequence and other categories.

**AviList**  
The Global Avian Checklist

## FALL PROGRAM PREVIEWS

# Two live, in-person presentations highlight DFO's fall program lineup!

Welcome back to a new season of DFO evening programs!

This fall, for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, DFO will host two of its four autumn evening programs in person, in September and October.

Mark your calendar now and don't miss these special presentations.

The Monday, September 29 program will feature longtime DFO field trip leader **Joey Kellner** and his popular spring migration excursions to southeastern Arizona's bird-rich "Sky Islands" region.

The Monday, October 13 program will feature DFO's most famous birding alumnus, eBird director **Chris Wood** of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (who as a Denver teenager was mentored by . . . Kellner himself!). Wood will speak on the occasion of DFO's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Read on for more details about these in-person gatherings, as well as our two other fall programs, which will be Zoom webinar presentations. ►



# 10,000 Birds and (Still) Counting: One Man's Global Checklist

**Peter Kaestner** (world birder)

Monday, August 25, 2025

7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



The first person on earth to record 10,000 bird species will open DFO's fall-winter monthly program series for 2025. **Peter Kaestner**, a retired career US diplomat whose far-flung work travels helped him achieve this milestone, will recount his decades-long quest in "*10,000 Birds and (Still) Counting: One Man's Global Checklist*," scheduled for **Monday, Aug. 25** at **7 p.m. MDT** via Zoom webinar.

Kaestner reached the 10K species milestone on Feb. 9, 2024, when he spotted an [Orange-tufted Spiderhunter](#) in its native Philippines. He reached his 10,000th species only hours ahead of a rival lister. Kaestner has birded 190 countries and territories and lived in a dozen of them, from India and Afghanistan to Colombia, New Guinea and Namibia. In 2019, he became a part-time guide for Rockjumper, the birding outfitter service, which touts him as "the world's #1 birder." He also serves as a brand ambassador for the American Bird Conservancy.

In 1989, Kaestner discovered a new member of the antpitta family of small, shy, forest-dwelling ground birds of the Central and South American tropics. Avian authorities honored his finding of the [Cundinamarca Antpitta](#) by including his name in the species' Latin scientific designation, *Grallaria kaestneri*.

Kaestner earned his bachelor's degree in biology from Cornell University, where he was an ornithology teaching assistant. During his 36-year State Department career, he represented the US at conferences of CITES, the [Convention on International Trade in the Conservation of Wild Fauna and Flora](#). Upon retirement in 2016, he became a full-time birder to pursue the 10K record.





Joey Kellner and gopher  
snake friend in Arizona  
Kathy Mihm-Dunning

## Trogons, Hummers, Roadrunners: Birding SE Arizona with DFO's “Sky Islands” Guru

Joey Kellner (birder, herpetologist, field tripper)

Monday, September 29, 2025

7 p.m. MDT

[Lowry Conference Center](#)

[1061 Akron Way, Denver 80230](#)

LOOK FOR REGISTRATION DETAILS IN UPCOMING  
**DFO ON THE WING** MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

*NOTE: This program is on the **fifth Monday of the month** because the usual fourth Monday this September conflicts with the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah*

For the past three years, longtime DFO field trip leader, former club president and Ptarmigan Award recipient **Joey Kellner** has led a two-week spring field excursion to southeastern Arizona and its legendary “Sky Islands” birding habitats.

Each trip, seven lucky DFO birders (chosen by lottery) joined him for this mid-May immersion into a spring migration wonderland. Joey provided his fellow birders with numerous opportunities for “lifer” bird sightings, from Mexican Spotted Owls and Elegant Trogons to an array of hummingbirds and other rarities up from winter retreats south of the Mexico border. On the most recent trip this past May, the group checklisted 227 species!

In this live evening program Sept. 29 — DFO's first in-person monthly presentation since COVID-19 — Kellner will describe the magical destinations and scores of species encountered on his DFO expeditions into the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts.

Mark your calendar NOW for this special evening. Look for more details, including registration and venue information, in upcoming issues of the monthly *DFO On The Wing* email newsletter and other email updates.



Kellner and group seeking Common  
Ground Dove at Paton Center in Arizona  
Jennifer Tonge





Chris Wood, director of eBird  
Cornell Lab

## DFO's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party, with eBird's (and Denver's) Chris Wood

Chris Wood (DFO alumnus, director of eBird)

October 13, 2025

6:30 p.m. MDT

[Lowry Conference Center](#)

[1061 Akron Way, Denver 80230](#)

LOOK FOR FOR E-VITE INVITATION IN EMAIL AND MORE DETAILS IN UPCOMING **DFO ON THE WING** MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

*NOTE: This program is on the **second Monday of the month** instead of the usual fourth Monday to align with the speaker's schedule*

Long before he collaborated in the creation of the global database and birding cultural phenomenon that is eBird, **Chris Wood** was a self-described bird nerd growing up in the Denver suburbs. In the late 1980s, seventh-grader Wood joined Denver Field Ornithologists to go on field trips and expand his precociously prodigious grasp of the world of Colorado birds.

Today, Wood is director of eBird and a prominent member of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology team at Cornell University in New York state. He is also managing director of the lab's Center for Avian Population Studies. As the most noteworthy alumnus of DFO in the birding world today, he will speak at a special in-person monthly evening program meeting to celebrate our club's 90th anniversary.

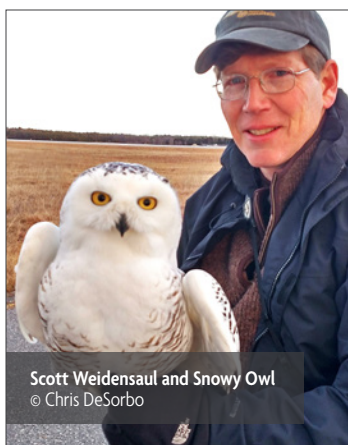
Mark your calendar NOW for the event of the season! Come celebrate DFO (birthday cake!), welcome Chris home, and mingle with friends old and new as we look forward to the last decade before DFO's centennial! Look for more details on Chris's topic and the venue for this live gathering in upcoming *DFO On the Wing* email newsletters and further email announcements as our anniversary event approaches.



Wood, right, birding with DFO members during Denver visit in February 2018  
Patrick O'Driscoll



Chris Wood on a distant bird during field trip with DFO birders in 2018  
Patrick O'Driscoll



## Caught in the SNOWstorm: Collaborative Research on Snowy Owls

**Scott Weidensaul** (author, SNOWstorm co-founder)

Monday, November 24, 2025

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

LOOK FOR REGISTRATION LINK THIS FALL IN THE  
OCTOBER ISSUE OF **THE LARK BUNTING** QUARTERLY

The winter of 2013-14 saw the largest irruption of Snowy Owls into the eastern United States in perhaps a century. That invasion also marked an unprecedented opportunity to learn more about these mysterious hunters of the Arctic. Out of that event and frantic weeks of organizing as the irruption unfolded came Project SNOWstorm, a collaborative research effort focused on this huge but underknown raptor of the North.

Author, researcher and SNOWstorm co-founder **Scott Weidensaul** (“WHY-den-sau”) will share the project’s story in “*Caught in the SNOWstorm*,” a Zoom webinar on **Monday, Nov. 24 at 7 p.m.** He will share the project’s story — how a huge, collaborative research effort focused on snowy owls came together so quickly. Funded with the help of people from around the globe, it has since grown into the largest and most comprehensive study of Snowy Owls in the world.

More than 40 scientists, bird banders and wildlife veterinarians have volunteered their time and efforts. Using sophisticated satellite transmitters, they have tracked more than 110 Snowy Owls from Alaska and the Dakotas to the Great Lakes, Northeast US and beyond. The project also consults with airports and airfields to prevent airplane-owl strikes, even relocating some birds to more secure spots.

Weidensaul presented another DFO program via Zoom three years ago, in March 2022, on global bird migration after the publication of his *New York Times* bestselling book, *A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds*. He has written nearly 30 other books on natural history, including the Pulitzer Prize finalist *Living on the Wind*. A fellow of the American Ornithological Society, he is a contributing editor for *Audubon* magazine and writes for a variety of publications, including the birding bimonthly *BWD* and the Cornell Lab’s *Living Bird* quarterly. Based in New Hampshire, Weidensaul is an active field researcher, studying Northern Saw-whet Owl migration for nearly 30 years, winter hummingbirds in the East and bird migration in Alaska.

### MONTHLY PROGRAMS

#### If you missed it: DFO’s April program

DFO keeps a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring programs. If you could not attend DFO’s 2025 evening programs before the summer break, click the “WATCH ONLINE” link below the April title to view that program recording on DFO’s YouTube channel, where you can also view the January, February and March programs. The DFO website’s “[Past Programs](#)” page also contains these and numerous other DFO programs from recent years

Monday, April 28, 2025

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

Holden Fox, William Churchill  
Anderson, Alison Hazel — and guest  
speaker Emily Braker, CU Boulder  
Museum of Natural History

**WATCH ONLINE**



### DFO ADBIRDTISEMENTS!

FREE to club members to seek, sell, swap or give away bird-related equipment, supplies, books, decorative items (art, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Include name, email and/or telephone number, and a weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (150-word limit). 1-2 photos or images per ad
- Ads do not carry over. To renew, resubmit by next deadline (Sept. 30, 2025)

Send Adbirdtisement materials and/or questions to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at [patodrisk@gmail.com](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com).



## FOR SALE: NEW Vortex Diamondback birding scope + tripod & head (\$400)

New **VORTEX Diamondback HD 20-60X85** (angled) spotting scope with **MANFROTTO** tripod and **MANFROTTO** head.

Complete setup has been taken into the field twice to compare with recently purchased (and more expensive) scope.

This scope includes original Vortex packaging plus neoprene protective covers for body, eyepiece and objective lenses, plus black canvas carrying case.

Included is very sturdy used Manfrotto 055SPROB tripod (two leg extensions) with Manfrotto 128RC head. Minimum tripod height is 3.94 inches and maximum is 70.28 inches. Tripod (5.29 pounds) can support 15.43 pounds and has quick-action leg locks. Head has 3/8-inch head-mount thread, 13.2-pound capacity, and pan/tilt locks. Head also has arm and adjustable vertical/horizontal tension knobs for fluid panning in any direction.

New scope retails for \$499.95. Prices on eBay for used tripod and head are \$100-\$150. This firm, non-negotiable offer is **\$400** for \$600-\$650 worth of quality equipment.

Contact **Gary Witt** at [lagewitt@gmail.com](mailto:lagewitt@gmail.com) or 303-905-6985.



## 1980s-2000: Golden times for DFO, confident as the 21<sup>st</sup> century beckoned

*Editor's note: This year, Denver Field Ornithologists celebrates 90 years as a birding club. To mark this milestone, The Lark Bunting quarterly is publishing DFO @ 90, a new history of our club in four parts. Parts 1 and 2 appeared in the [January](#) and [April](#) issues. Part 3 follows, and Part 4 will appear in the October issue.*

*DFO was all about sharing, sharing the bird, sharing the knowledge, sharing the fun of getting out and learning stuff.*

— **Joey Kellner** field trip leader, past president (1993-96)

### Sharon Tinianow

As monthly meetings go, the April 1985 gathering of Denver Field Ornithologists was extraordinary. Not for the program topic, or the time of year, or even the refreshments being served. Of note was the occasion itself and the who's who of Colorado birding who were in the room because of it.

That evening meeting on Tuesday, April 2, 1985, celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the club's founding. Members gathered in the Denver Museum of Natural History, the same building where, in the middle of the Great Depression, DFO was born as the Colorado Bird Club. DFO Board president **Jack Reddall** (1973-75, 1983-85) opened the anniversary evening by reading from the minutes of the first meeting in February 1935, when charter members of the new club were urged to steer clear of political wrangling and to save their pennies to purchase camping equipment for overnight birding trips.

Three charter members were present for the 1985 observance, and all were women: **Ruth Wheeler**, **Catherine Hurlbutt**, and



Embroidered patch  
for DFO's 50th  
anniversary in 1985

**Lillian Wangnild** (president 1940-42). They were joined by other longtime members and special guest **Muriel Bailey**, widow of **Alfred Bailey**, the museum's former director and long a friend of the club. Reddall's wife, **Dorothy**, presented corsages and boutonnieres to the guests.

**Elizabeth "Betsy" Webb**, the museum's curator of zoology, showed an artifact of the late director Bailey's tenure: the 1940 documentary *High Country*, which he produced. The museum's curator of ornithology, **Charles Chase** (known today as Charlie and our current DFO vice president), conducted a tour of the newly renovated Colorado Bird Hall. Longtime DFO members **Patty Echelmeyer** (president 1968-70) and **Diane Mullineaux** served refreshments while people looked through a scrapbook of DFO history prepared by **Judy Ward**. Embroidered anniversary patches featuring the DFO logo and "FOUNDED 1935" went for one dollar apiece and were oh so trendy. It was fashionable then to sew such emblems onto one's birdwatching vest or jacket.

Anniversary or not, the meeting followed the longstanding protocol of meetings past. Someone read aloud the minutes of the previous meeting. The treasurer gave a financial update. New members and guests were introduced. All present were invited to share aloud their recent notable bird sightings. Then a featured speaker (often a DFO member or local expert) presented on a topic of club interest.

*Continued on page 15*

## About DFO @ 90

This four-part history of Denver Field Ornithologists marks 2025's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of the club. The project team includes lead writer **Sharon Tinianow** (DFO president), *The Lark Bunting* editor **Patrick O'Driscoll**, and club historian **Kris Haglund**, with assistance from numerous members and supporters.

Research sources include DFO archives at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, where the club met from its founding in 1935 through 2018. Special thanks to the DMNS Archives Department, led by **Laura Uglean-Jackson**.

**Current members** with accounts, memories, photos and memorabilia from **2000 to the present are urged to share with us** for the final, fourth part of **DFO @ 90**, to be published in the **October Lark Bunting**. Contact Tinianow at [sharontinianow@gmail.com](mailto:sharontinianow@gmail.com) and O'Driscoll at [patodrisk@gmail.com](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com).

DFO @ 90 cont from page 14

### Social glue of club gatherings

In back of the meeting room, members could buy books at a DFO book table, which featured a "Birder's Guides" series by **Harold Holt** (president 1962-63) and **Jim Lane**. (Holt donated 40% of proceeds to DFO.) The monthly program meetings were always informative, but equally valuable was the person-to-person interaction, the congenial social glue holding friends old and new together around a shared passion for birds and birding.

With its golden anniversary, DFO had entered arguably its own golden age as a late-20<sup>th</sup>-century organization — confident in the abilities of its many seasoned birders and ready for the unknown possibilities ahead in the fast-approaching new century.

Field trips, always the main activity of the club, were still primarily on Saturdays and Sundays. Registration was not required but members were urged to phone the trip leader ahead of time that they'd attend. There were occasional weekday trips, but that idea didn't gain much traction. A notable exception was a new weekly meetup called Tuesday Birders, led by **Ann Bonnell** for those who were free on that weekday morning. The Tuesday Birders calendar was published in *The Lark Bunting* starting in 1988, and the group continues to this day as an independent venture under the leadership of longtime DFO members **Dave Hill** and **Cynthia Madsen**.

By the time DFO turned 50, some field trips were ranging much farther afield, often filling multiday Memorial Day and fourth of July weekends and other holidays. Wheeler led a memorable trip to Nebraska in 1984 to see the Sandhill Cranes, and **Bob Spencer** (president 1989-91) led trips to Routt and Jackson counties in 1992. Pueblo teen **Brandon Percival**, a new member in 1991, led trips in his hometown area. Charlie Chase led trips to Lamar and Westcreek. **Bob Righter** led one or two memorable out-of-state trips a year through the 1990s to a variety of destinations,



DFO field trip to Evergreen in 1986  
DFO archives-DMNS

Continued on page 16





First Ptarmigan Award winner  
Thompson Marsh on Deer  
Creek field trip in June 1986  
DFO archives-DMNS

DFO @ 90 *cont from page 15*

including Monterey, CA, southeast Arizona, the Upper Coast of Texas and the Bay of Fundy north of Maine. Husband and wife team **Dieter** and **Alicia Kamm** even led trips to Costa Rica.

DFO's expanding field trips program was led by co-chairs Wheeler and Spencer from 1980 through most of 1987. Each month they phoned field trip leaders and lined up a full month's worth of excursions. When Spencer became club vice president, which meant he would have to arrange speakers for DFO's monthly meetings, **Ruth Breckon** assumed his field trip co-chair role. The two Ruths continued to organize field trips until Wheeler stepped down in July 1992 at the age of 93. By then, the club was leading about 100 trips a year. Through the rest of the 1990s, **Mort Staatz, Jackie King, Marleen Eggerling, Pearl Jordan, Patty Echelmeyer, and Lynn Willcockson** (president 1963-66) all served terms as field trip co-chairs.



Ruth Wheeler, center in sunglasses,  
a club founder, at rest stop on  
1986 field trip to Eldora Mountain  
DFO archives-DMNS

*Continued on page 17*



## Same newsletter, changing visions

*The Lark Bunting* newsletter remained the same monthly publication it had been in previous years, with slight changes whenever a new editor took over. One major new focus was to assemble and publish a full report on the birds seen on field trips in the previous month. Trip leaders snail-mailed detailed trip reports to the editor, with date, destination, and full lists of observers and the bird species they saw. The editor then composed brief summaries of the month's trips to go with an exhaustive table that consolidated all that trip leader data. Members also were invited to submit additional reports of birds non-DFO outings. Tuesday Birders outings were included, too.

When Harold Holt became editor in 1970, he added more detail to the summaries, noting weather, total time spent, distance traveled, and number of species seen on each trip. He also added habitat particulars for each location to the table. When Jack Reddall took over as *Lark Bunting* editor in 1980, he asked for even more detail, including any observations of recognizable "forms" or subspecies. He also instructed trip leaders to list the birds they saw in American Ornithologists' Union checklist order and trip participants' names in alphabetical order.

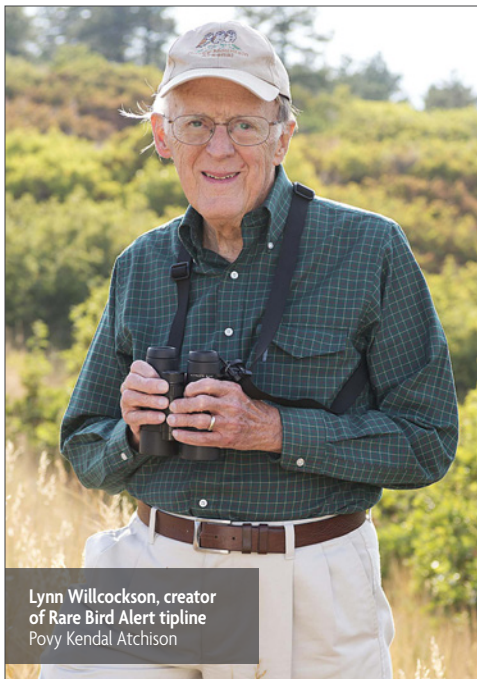
Reddall, known as a strict and serious taskmaster, became famous for challenging whatever information did not seem correct to him. Leaders who failed to get their trip reports to him by the newsletter deadline saw their trip titles listed with a blunt note, "NO REPORT SUBMITTED," Jack's un-subtle nudge to be on time.

While the format of monthly meetings, the array of field trips, and the content of the printed *Lark Bunting* remained fairly consistent, the final 20 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were a time of club transition in other ways. DFO took its role as a documenter of Colorado birds more seriously. New technologies were making club recordkeeping and communications easier. Conservation actions and education opportunities expanded. And a new cadre of volunteer leaders came forward to carry on previous DFO generations' decades of work promoting the study, appreciation and preservation of Colorado birds and their habitats.

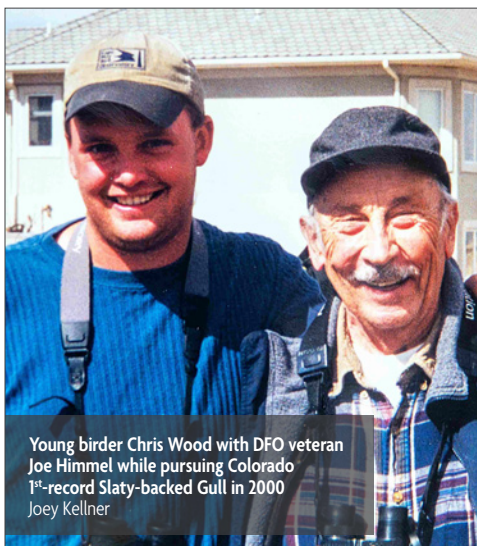
## Documenting the birds

By the early 1990s, birders, conservationists and scientists noticed that songbird populations seemed to be declining. But the Colorado Division of Wildlife only monitored game species. It was DFO's own newsletter that was publishing the only written record of non-game birds seen in Colorado for every month of the year. When the Colorado Bird Observatory (now Bird Conservancy of the Rockies) conducted a study on the state's bird populations, issues of *The Lark Bunting* dating back 25 years were the main source of this valuable data. DFO's newsletter represented one of the few long-term collections of field data, especially for western bird species.

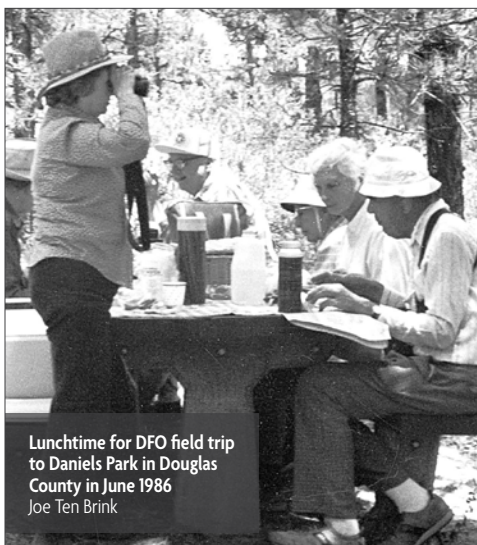
*Continued on page 18*



Lynn Willcockson, creator  
of Rare Bird Alert tipline  
Povy Kendal Atchison



Young birder Chris Wood with DFO veteran  
Joe Himmel while pursuing Colorado  
1<sup>st</sup>-record Slaty-backed Gull in 2000  
Joey Kellner



Lunchtime for DFO field trip  
to Daniels Park in Douglas  
County in June 1986  
Joe Ten Brink

*The Lark Bunting* published an update on the bird observatory's project in the September 1991 issue. Study coordinator **Mike Carter** gave a presentation at DFO's October 1991 meeting on the project's early results. DFO further supported the observatory's five-year, three-part study with a cash donation.

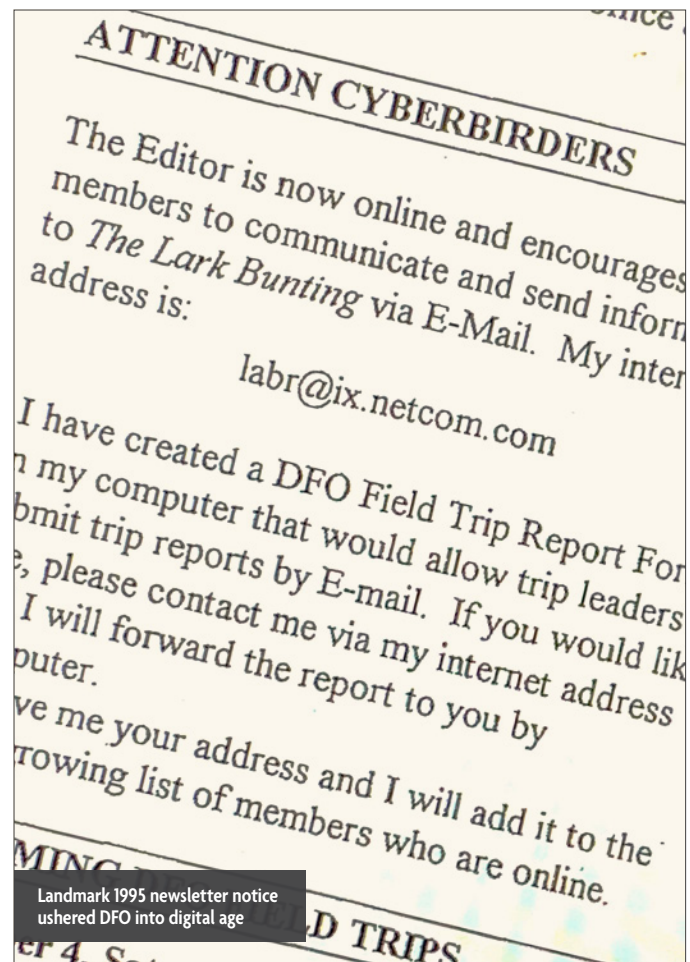
## New technology of the times

In 1982, the club's membership list, previously maintained on paper and updated annually by hand, was loaded onto a computer by member **Dave Martin**, making roster updates far easier. *The Lark Bunting*, printed for decades on an office mimeograph, transitioned to offset printing in 1994, a significant improvement in readability. The next year, newsletter editor **Lea Ann Brown** wrote a landmark notice, "Attention Cyberbirders," in the October 1995 issue. In it, she announced she now had an email address and encouraged all to communicate with her that way. Henceforth, out went the electric typewriter and in came a word processor to produce the newsletter. By 1998, DFO's rudimentary first website appeared — and with it, a fundamentally new way to notify members of club activities and to reach and recruit potential new members.

Meanwhile, DFO's Rare Bird Alert call-in service, created in 1979 by Lynn Willcockson and recorded daily in his basement, got an upgrade in 1982. A new phone line and new equipment were added to record and play back incoming rarity reports for callers seeking the latest rare-bird intel. The new system also added details of upcoming field trips and meetings to the familiar daily greeting in the voice of Lynn himself. After the greeting's conclusion, callers with new rarities to report could also leave spoken recordings for the next update.

In that first year after the upgrade, the system, called the RBA for short, took more than 3,000 calls from as far away as Maryland. The cost to maintain it was substantial, so members who donated to support it were acknowledged in *The Lark Bunting*. The service was so valuable to birders statewide that both Denver Audubon and Colorado Field Ornithologists made annual donations. In 1984, the American Birding Association added the phone number to its list of other state RBAs. DFO's was considered unique for its daily updates, vs. weekly updates elsewhere.

The popular service suffered an unsettling smear In May 1991 when someone posted a bogus rarity. As later reported in *The Lark Bunting*, a caller identifying himself as one of Colorado's most reliable observers reported that he and another prominent birder had seen a Bahama Swallow at a reservoir near Colorado Springs. The recording came in so late at night that the person monitoring the phone line did not, per usual practice, call the reporting party back to confirm. Overnight, half a dozen people from across Colorado traveled to see what turned out to be a nonexistent bird. One of those travelers collapsed in exhaustion after circling the entire reservoir in the heat. The prominent birders who'd been spoofed were getting calls from 6 a.m. on. The episode was a difficult lesson.



Continued on page 19

Thereafter, monitoring and updating the alert took a devoted committee of volunteers. Willcockson managed it for several years. After him, **Dave Martin**, **Scott Menough**, **Duane Nelson**, and **Norm Erthal** (president 1991-93) would each manage the phone line through the 1990s. Among their backups was **Dick Schottler**, whose cheery voice on the answering message greeted callers with, "Howdy birders, this is the Colorado Rare Bird Alert."

## Conservation concerns

Bird-related conservation, which had sharpened amid landmark events of the 1960s and '70s, remained on the minds of many in DFO. The federal Endangered Species Act was renewed in 1982 to wide acclaim. A couple of years later, an unexpected slump in species reported in DFO's section of the 1983 Christmas Bird Count came up at the club's February 1984 meeting. Only 93 species had been reported, the lowest count since 1979 and just the second time since 1970 when the count fell short of 100 species.

Although the field trip-focused club did not have a conservation committee, DFO members freely advocated for action in ways large and small. At the January 1980 meeting, club president **Carol Hack** (1978-80) urged members to sign a petition to end animal trapping at Cherry Creek and Chatfield reservoirs. Catherine Hurlbutt, well known locally as "Birdie" for her avian advocacy, touted her opposition to the cruel practice of using live birds, legs bound with wire, to train hunting dogs. In 1983, Ann Bonnell reported that live ammunition was being used at the dog training area at Chatfield State Park. She urged members to protest to the state Parks Board and the Wildlife Commission. The public outcry appeared to have worked. In 1984, the dog training area no longer allowed the use of live birds, and trainers could only fire .22-caliber blanks.

In 1980, **Hugh Kingery** (later club president 1987-89) urged members to attend county discussion forums about Gov. **Richard Lamm's** sweeping [Front Range Project](#), a citizen planning effort on major issues facing Colorado through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including open-space protection statewide. Also that year, **Colin Murray** circulated a petition to stop a gravel pit in Deer Creek Canyon and **Dieter Kamm** publicized ballot issues over Jefferson County Open Space. About the same time, the Denver Greenway Project — an ambitious plan to clean up and restore the South Platte River

corridor for wildlife while still allowing recreational use — recruited DFO to handle the bird portion of its baseline wildlife study.

Conservation topics in DFO program meetings through those years included "Are DFO Members Seeing Fewer Birds?" with **Mike Carter** of Colorado Bird Conservancy, "Conserving Avian Diversity" with **Fritz Knopf** of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and "Conservation Needs for Neotropical Migrant Birds" with **Dick Roth** of the USDA Forest Service.

## Learning: A core DFO mission

In any era, both teaching and learning about birds and birding have always been at the heart of the club's mission. Lessons then and now ranged from the field ornithology of birding outings to the enlightenment found in DFO's informative monthly evening programs. DFO member **Tina Jones**, who just retired from the DFO Board this anniversary year, taught classes through the years for the museum and Denver Botanic Gardens on a variety of bird-related topics, from species ID and behavior to what to plant to attract and support birds in your own backyard. She also frequently presented at DFO program meetings. *The Lark Bunting* promoted Jones's courses as well as learning opportunities about birds with other organizations entirely.

The club's long relationship with the museum included learning availabilities led by Charlie Chase, an ornithologist with expertise at making lessons in ornithology accessible to non-scientists, including so many DFO members who attended his bird ID classes.

The club's educational focus got an unexpected boost in 1994 when DFO received a gift of \$15,000 from the estate of **Mary Hope Robinson**, a member since 1958. The board set up an endowment and used the interest income to award modest grants for educational projects. After publishing guidelines for grant applications in the newsletter, DFO made the first grant in 1995 to Thornton high school student **Tim Mitzen**. The award allowed him to attend [Camp Chiricahua](#), a summer enrichment camp for young birders in southeastern Arizona's renowned "Sky Islands" region. The Robinson endowment became the start of what today is the DFO Research, Education & Conservation Fund, which since 2012 has awarded tens of thousands of dollars in grants.

*Continued on page 20*



## Diverse birding, datakeeping, and the joy of lists

The generation of birders who made this volunteer organization go in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century engaged with ornithology and birding in diverse ways. Patty Echelmeyer, though herself a “lister,” was in DFO first for the fun, the laughter, and the joy of discovery. So was Ruth Wheeler, a club founder more than 50 years earlier and a consummate nature lover who volunteered in a variety of club roles through the decades. In contrast, Jack Reddall, an absolute stickler for accurate bird ID, took the club’s responsibility for documenting bird sightings with stern seriousness. Somewhere in between was Birdie Hurlbutt, who so loved birds that she became a certified wildlife rehabilitator, filling her Denver home with those in need of special care.

Some members became truly expert field ornithologists. **Bob Andrews** (DFO president 1980-81) and **Bob Righter** (DFO treasurer 1982-86) co-wrote *Colorado Birds: A Reference to Their Distribution and Habitat*. Their 442-page opus was a worthy 1992 update to *Birds of Colorado*, the two-volume “bible” published almost three decades before by **Alfred M. Bailey** and **Robert J. Neidrach**, legendary giants of the Denver museum and friends of DFO.

Near century’s end, most DFO members were keeping life lists of the birds they loved. Some of them relished (and still do) the competitive nature of hitting birding milestones, from 300 or even 400 or more species in a single year to the elite “400 Club” of lifetime Colorado species at a time when the state’s official list of species seen had not yet reached 500. (It is 521 today.)

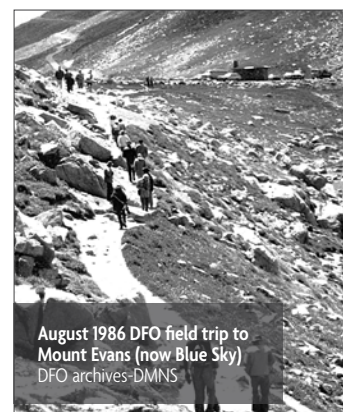
A memorable February 1994 article in *The Lark Bunting*, “DFOs HOT-SHOT BIRDERS HAD A GOOD YEAR,” captured the spirit of the chase. Writer **Gail Evans** celebrated 15 members who saw at least 300 total species in 1993, including one, Jack Reddall, who recorded the most of all in DFO (474). Six of those birders saw 300 or more species *inside* Colorado, “an awe-inspiring accomplishment in any year,” Evans wrote. They included **Joe Roller** (president 2015-17), Duane Nelson, **Joe Himmel**, Bob Spencer, 19-year-old Brandon Percival (his third straight 300-plus Colorado birds year) and **Karleen Schofield** (the most Colorado species at 342, and 454 species overall).

That same year, Kellner and 17-year-old Chris Wood set a Colorado big-day record with more than 180 species one day in June. Of special note is that Wood grew up to work at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, where he helped create and is now director of eBird, the global community-science platform and database. Barely a decade after this 1993 DFO moment, eBird’s debut in the 2000s would foster an eruption of birders old and new, tracking their yearly and life checklists online like these determined DFO forebears did with pencil and paper in the pre-computer age.

And there it was: Denver’s original bird club, nearing the doorstep of the new millennium, still bringing people together in the field and in program gatherings of shared discovery, focused on the birds we love. DFO had met the challenge of its 20<sup>th</sup>-century origins and maturation. Now it faced new tests and tasks: 25 years of astonishing change and continued growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, leading to 90 years and counting of Denver Field Ornithologists today. Join us here in October (and at DFO’s “birthday party” with eBird’s Wood on Oct. 13) as this anniversary history concludes and we look forward together to DFO’s centennial and beyond.



Always smiling Patty Echelmeyer, DFO president in 1968-70 and a longtime field trip leader  
Courtesy of Fosha family



August 1986 DFO field trip to Mount Evans (now Blue Sky)  
DFO archives-DMNS



A typical crowd today for Tuesday Birders, casual meetup group formed decades ago by DFO birders  
Jim Esten

**READ DFO @ 90 PART 1**  
ARTICLES BEGIN PAGE 14

**READ DFO @ 90 PART 2**  
ARTICLES BEGIN PAGE 18

DFO President **Sharon Tinianow** (2023-26), who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president 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

# Ruth Wheeler: Outside DFO spotlight, a “life long friend of nature and humanity”

**Sharon Tinianow**

**Ruth Wheeler**, one of the founding members of Denver Field Ornithologists, was just one of those people. You know the kind.

She toiled tirelessly for years behind the scenes (and even behind the camera) in a variety of volunteer roles for the Colorado Bird Club (and for DFO after the club's renaming in the 1960s). She did things without being asked — like keeping a scrapbook of DFO memorabilia and photos, including her own shots of birds and her fellow birders. She would later donate that incredibly valuable volume to the archives of the Denver Museum of Natural History (now Nature & Science). For us this year, it was a rich font of information about DFO's earlier days when we began the year-long “DFO @ 90” project to tell the club's history for our 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

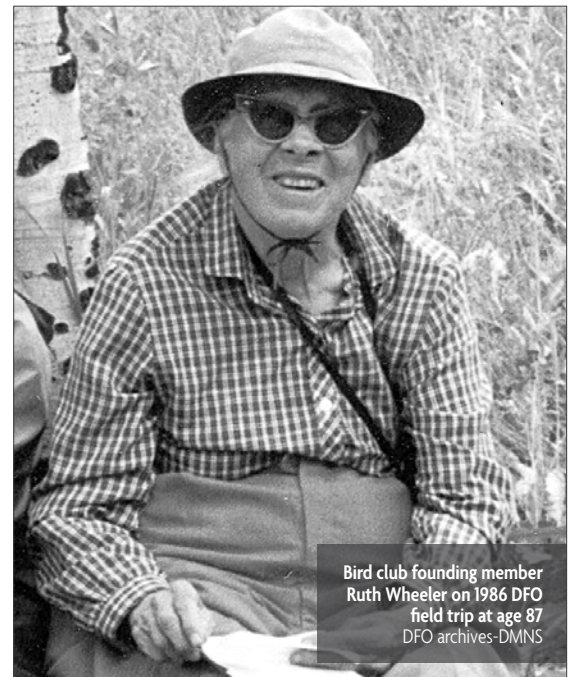
Forty years ago, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the club, Wheeler donated a complete set of DFO newsletters to those archives. Naturally, she also served on the planning committee for the 50th birthday celebration at the April 1985 monthly meeting. All this was classic Ruth Wheeler. Her selfless work helped ensure continuity so the club not only would outlive her but also thrive well into the new century.

There was much more to her than what is captured in DFO meeting minutes and old *Lark Bunting* newsletters. One of the more memorable figures in DFO's long history deserves a closer look.

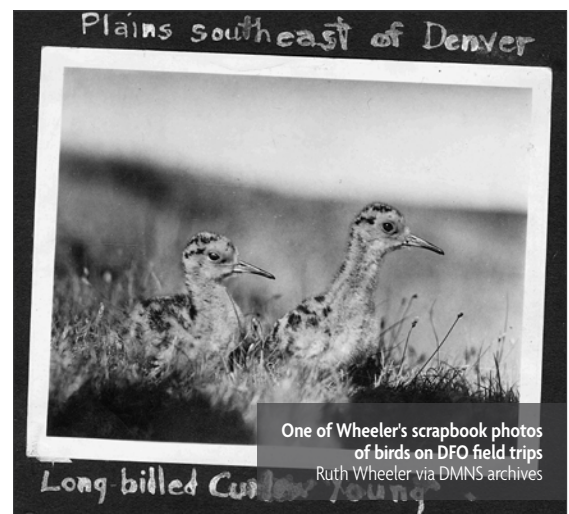
Born in New York City on Sept. 23, 1899, Wheeler was highly educated, earning a double-major bachelor's degree in botany and English from Washburn University in Topeka, KS, and a master's in zoology from the University of Kansas. Her academic ambitions were natural: Her parents met while students in college and the family lived for most of her childhood in Manhattan, KS, where her father taught at Kansas State University.

When her parents and youngest sister relocated to Denver for her father's job, Wheeler came with them and became a teacher at Denver's Skinner Junior High (now Middle) School. In an interview after her retirement, she said spending 38 years teaching science to 13-year-olds was her greatest accomplishment. Wheeler never married, and she continued to live with and care for her aging mother after her father's death.

*Continued on page 22*



Bird club founding member  
Ruth Wheeler on 1986 DFO  
field trip at age 87  
DFO archives-DMNS



One of Wheeler's scrapbook photos  
of birds on DFO field trips  
Ruth Wheeler via DMNS archives



Wheeler, at right, with co-leader  
Sadie Morrison and young people  
on 1951 Evans Ranch field trip  
DFO archives-DMNS





Wheeler, binoculars always up  
DFO archive-DMNS

DFO @ 90 PROFILE *cont from page 21*

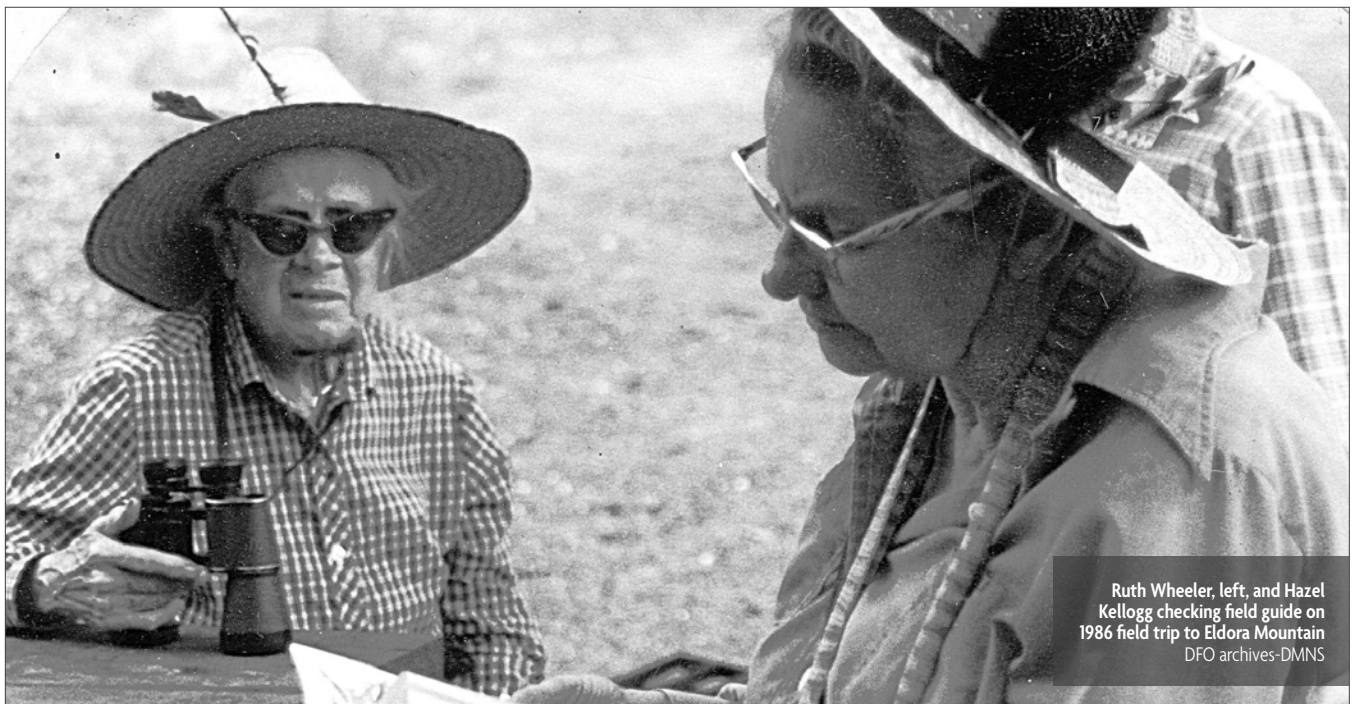
It was no ordinary household. Having inherited her father's curiosity about the natural world, Ruth kept a collection of reptiles, including garter snakes, a corn snake and a small boa. After she added snapping turtles to the collection, they overwintered in laundry tubs in the basement.

In 1932, she joined the [Colorado Mountain Club](#), where her passion for birding was sparked on the club's annual spring bird trip. Meeting in Denver City Park, about 100 people divided into smaller groups led by local bird experts, including **Robert J. Niedrach**, the Denver museum's curator of ornithology. When Wheeler learned he was teaching an evening class in ornithology at East High School, she signed up.

She was in a group of students who enjoyed Niedrach's class so much that they formed the Colorado Bird Club in 1935. She served a couple of terms as vice president, but organizing and leading field trips was her real passion. She went on to hold the position of chair or co-chair of the club's field trips committee for the next 56 years, minus a few short breaks.

Beginning in the 1950s, she and **Sadie Morrison** teamed to lead field trips every Saturday afternoon to a variety of destinations. She especially sought to have a trip to Barr Lake at least monthly, even in the winter, so the club could keep a complete four-season record of what birds were in that key area. Further, she felt it important to lead DFO trips in every ecological area in Colorado. Her personal favorite, though, was Roxborough State Park.

*Continued on page 23*



Ruth Wheeler, left, and Hazel Kellogg checking field guide on 1986 field trip to Eldora Mountain  
DFO archives-DMNS



**Charlie Chase**, DFO vice president today but a museum ornithologist back in the 1970s, recalled the first time he ran into Wheeler in the field. The day before, he had been on his first organized birdwatching trip, led by DFO's **Jack Reddall** and **Steve Larson**. Wowed as the two expert birders called out sparrow IDs from the car at 30 miles an hour, Chase decided he wanted to learn to do that, too. But when he encountered about 20 other DFO birders at Cherry Creek State Park the next day, the group had a radically different birding style.

He found the group — which included Wheeler and DFO veterans **Patty Echelmeyer** and **Bob Buttery** — wandering around, calling out birds as they saw them. Chase remembered how Wheeler, remarkably small in stature, shouted out her spottings with a piercing, nasal voice that cut through everyone else's. "Black-capped Chickadee!" she sang out. Echelmeyer, meanwhile, seemed to be laughing the whole time, and Wheeler would catch the giggles, too. "Wow, this is different," Chase thought to himself — so very fun and very different from the serious Jack Reddall way.

In December 1971, 36 years after helping start the club, Wheeler, **Catherine Hurlbutt** and **Robina Storrie** received life memberships in DFO as surviving charter members. By now 72, Ruth continued to volunteer in additional capacities, serving as corresponding secretary from 1975 to 1978.

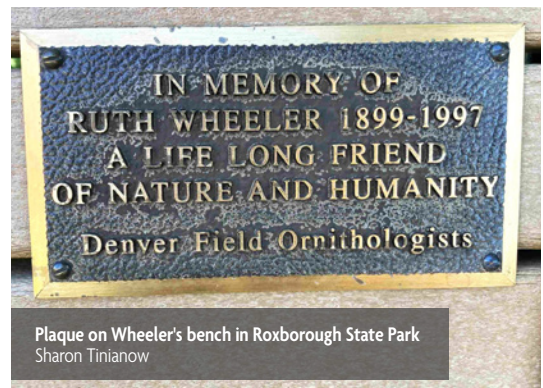
A decade later, Wheeler and prominent Denver birder **Thompson Marsh** (president 1959-60) became the first recipients of the [Ptarmigan Award](#), a new DFO honor introduced by president **Bob Spencer** to recognize volunteers who go above and beyond in service to the club.

When Wheeler's eyesight began to fail in 1992, she stepped down as field trips co-chair at age 93. She spoke enthusiastically and appreciatively of many members but downplayed her own contributions. But members Echelmeyer, **Lynn Willcockson** and **David Pantle** came back the following year with a two-page written tribute in the August 1993 issue of *The Lark Bunting* that concluded: "We want her to have our applause for her dedication to DFO, for jobs well done throughout the community, and for being a special person who has introduced nature and its wonders to young and old alike."

Four years later, on Dec 6, 1997, Ruth Wheeler died at age 98. She was buried near her parents in Crown Hill Cemetery in Wheat Ridge. Soon after, DFO arranged to place a memorial bench in her name at Roxborough State Park, just outside the visitor center. It is a lovely spot to sit and enjoy the birds and the view in Ruth's favorite DFO field trip destination. Attached to the bench, a plaque lauds her as "A LIFE LONG FRIEND OF NATURE AND HUMANITY."



DFO's commemorative bench  
in Ruth Wheeler's memory in  
Roxborough State Park  
Sharon Tinianow



Plaque on Wheeler's bench in Roxborough State Park  
Sharon Tinianow



# From 7<sup>th</sup> grade bird nerd to Mr. eBird: Chris Wood's flyway to fame began in DFO



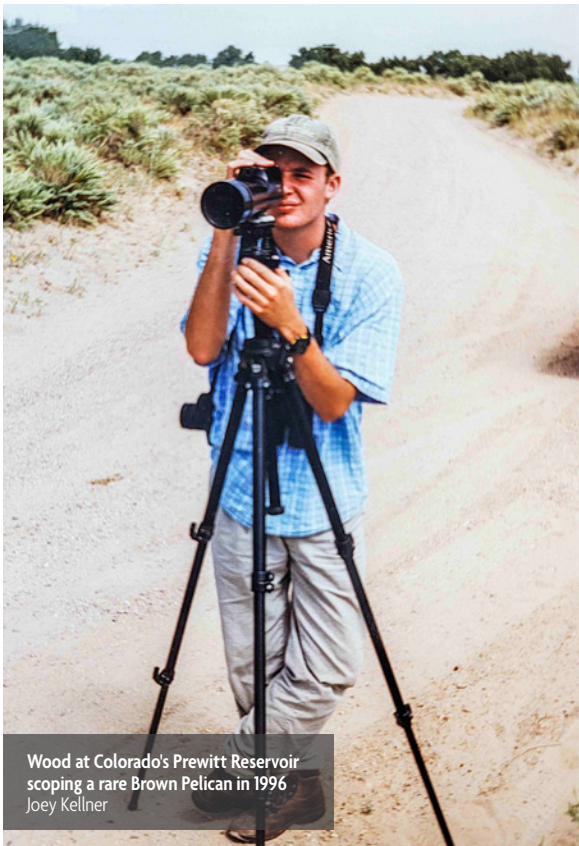
Wood, right, age 18, with mentor Joey Kellner before leaving for college in 1994  
Courtesy of Joey Kellner

## Patrick O'Driscoll

As a boy of 4 or 5, **Chris Wood** was so obsessed with dinosaurs that he searched relentlessly for fossils in the sandbox in his Morrison, CO backyard. After two years of fruitless digging, something new caught his boyhood gaze: a birdfeeder. Not long after he installed it in the yard, a stunningly colorful bird flew in. He looked it up in his first field guide: a male [Evening Grosbeak](#).

Chris, now age 7, was hooked on a new and lasting obsession. “My mom could tell when there were good birds coming to the feeder,” he later told an interviewer, “because I would take the thermometer and hold it up to a hot lightbulb to get myself a ‘fever’ so I could stay home from school and enjoy the birds.”

Teenaged Chris would pull another hooky trick a few years later when an incredibly rare bird showed up a 20-minute drive from school. By then, he had discovered Denver Field Ornithologists — and without DFO, he would never have seen that Colorado lifer.



Wood at Colorado's Prewitt Reservoir scoping a rare Brown Pelican in 1996  
Joey Kellner

Wood grew up to be an ornithologist, of course — one who helped create and now directs [eBird](#), the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's global community science database and birding cultural phenomenon. He is the club's most prominent alumnus in the birding world today. Just 49 this week, he gives DFO first credit for setting him on his successful career path.

He even draws a direct line between his boyhood DFO education — strong on data, species counts and distribution — and his work at Cornell today. “For me, it is such an incredibly important organization. eBird certainly wouldn't be the same without DFO. It was, kind of by extension, in a lot of the things that the lab does now, in eBird and Merlin.”

Chris was going on 13 in 1989 when he went on his first DFO field trip. “There was another kid at my school that was kind of into birds, and he knew about DFO,” he recalls. “We ended up going on a couple of trips.” Over the next decade, Wood literally grew up as a birder among a DFO who's who of many of Colorado's most talented avian enthusiasts: **Jack Reddall, Harold Holt, Hugh Kingery, Patty Echelmeyer, Duane Nelson, Dick Schottler, Karleen Schofield, Norm Erthal, Ira Sanders, Joe Roller, Lynn Wilcockson, Norm Lewis,**

*Continued on page 25*

**Bob Andrews, Tina Jones, Bob Spencer, Bob Richter, Warren Finch, Steve Stachowiak, Ed Holub** . . . the checklist of DFO notables goes on.

But none impressed Chris more than the first one he met at his first DFO monthly program meeting in October 1989. “**Joey Kellner** came up to me and invited me to do the Chatfield State Park count,” Wood remembers. “There were so many people in DFO that were very, very supportive, but Joey, he’s definitely my mentor. Most mentors, you learn from them things to do and you learn things not to do. But Joey didn’t have any bad habits. He is just so good. And he’s such a nice guy.” The middle-school bird nerd and one of DFO’s sharpest and most engaging field trip leaders were an instant match.

Chris had come to that first meeting for an in-depth presentation unlikely to attract a 13-year-old. “It was one of Harold Holt’s oral, annotated checklist programs of the birds of Colorado, complete with the best slide he had of each bird,” Wood recalls. “I thought it was awesome! I loved the history, the records, and all that stuff was super, super cool to me — and everybody else was falling asleep!”

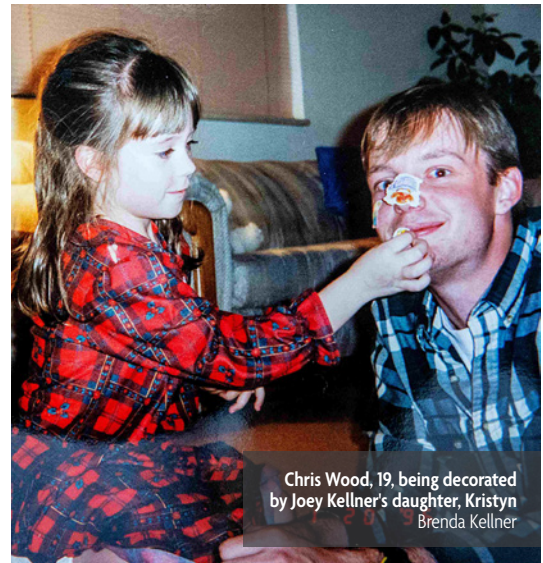
Then as now, school-aged birders were rare in DFO’s mostly grownup ranks. But Chris found a young friend just a year older in **Brandon K. Percival** of Pueblo, himself a birder since age 6, who joined DFO two years after Wood. “He was really the only other kid at the time that was into birds,” Wood says. “This was way before the internet.” Even though they lived 115 miles apart, the teens talked birds by phone, “and back then, the most expensive phone calls you could make were in-state long-distance.”

Wood and Percival were uncommonly gifted, both reaching Colorado’s elite 400-species club in their teens. Both led DFO field trips, presented at program meetings, and later collaborated on regional columns for *North American Birds*. Percival, of course, is one of Colorado’s most prominent birders today — still in Pueblo and, since at least 2015, the state’s regional editor of Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count.

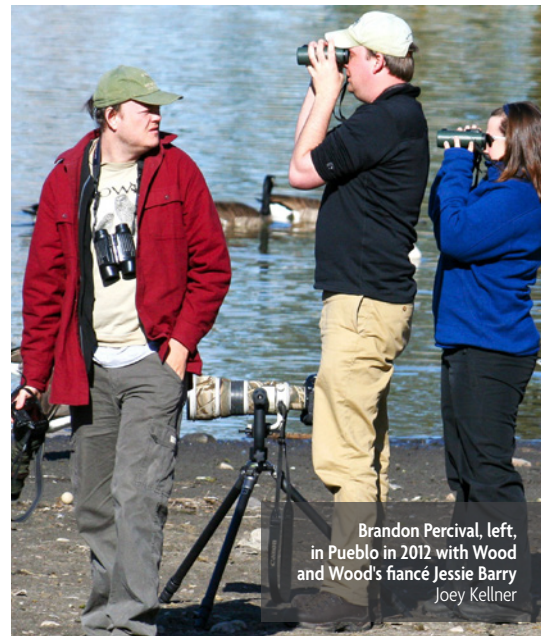
Meanwhile, in Wood’s senior year of high school, he and Kellner set a new Colorado “big day” record in 1994 (a 180-something count that Chris would return as an adult to [re-set at 229 species in 2016](#) with his Cornell Lab “Team Sapsucker” squad). In college ([Ripon College](#), environmental studies), Wood also served on the Colorado Bird Records Committee and was photo editor for *Birding* magazine.

By then, he had been primed for his Cornell future by another DFO legend, Jack Reddall, a no-nonsense stickler for birding data. “Jack was really oriented around keeping a complete list of all the birds that you’d see, with numbers. I learned that very early. It’s safe to say, I was pretty interested in numbers and status and distribution when I was still in high school.”

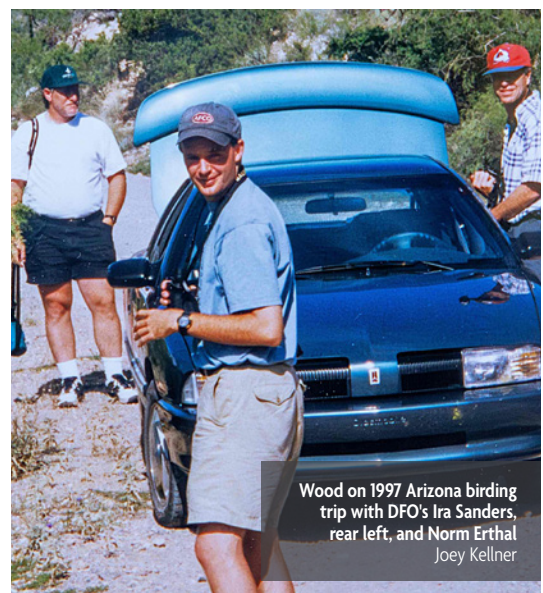
*Continued on page 26*



Chris Wood, 19, being decorated by Joey Kellner's daughter, Kristyn  
Brenda Kellner



Brandon Percival, left, in Pueblo in 2012 with Wood and Wood's fiancé Jessie Barry  
Joey Kellner



Wood on 1997 Arizona birding trip with DFO's Ira Sanders, rear left, and Norm Erthal  
Joey Kellner





Wood says Reddall's writings in *The Lark Bunting* about subspecies in the 1980s and '90s also introduced him to the notion of regional variation, a key theme later in his eBird work. "Jack had these different treatments on different subspecies, things that weren't yet in the field guides, like Mountain's and Gambel's White-crowned Sparrows, and eastern and western Red-tailed Hawks. Jack had some of the first treatments of those, certainly that I'd ever seen."

As a kid, Chris also delighted in the Colorado Rare Bird Alert, a taped telephone answering machine message that DFO sponsored and updated daily with notable bird sightings. Pre-internet, it was the only central tipoff around. "I'd call it like 15 times a day to see if anything new had shown up," Wood remembers. But he would still rely on mentor Kellner to alert him "if there was something super-rare."

That happened memorably on the morning of May 3, 1993, when DFO's Dick Schottler reported an astonishing find: a [Red-faced Warbler](#), foraging in a maple tree in the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt. Hundreds of miles from home (southern New Mexico, Arizona and Mexico), it was the species' first known occurrence in Colorado.

As birders passed the word via land line, Kellner thought immediately of Wood, a 16-year-old junior in class at the Colorado Academy. Phoning the school, Kellner asked to speak to Chris about an important matter.

"I didn't even know there was a phone in the classroom," Wood recalls with a laugh. "My European literature teacher, **Anne Strobridge**, answered the phone and said, 'Chris, it's for you.'" Puzzled but taking the receiver, he answered, "Hello?" It

was Kellner. "Joey said, 'Chris! There's a Red-faced Warbler at the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt!'"

Seizing the opportunity, cool-headed Chris put on a frown, as if hearing news of a family emergency. "Oh no! That's terrible!" he play-acted into the phone as his teacher stood by. "Let me see if I can make it there."

"I hang up the phone and I tell her, 'I'm sorry. Something's come up. I have to go.'" The trusting teacher nodded yes and sent Chris on his way. Since he had just got his driver's license, he went out to the car and took off. But hours after Schottler's sighting, could Wood find the rare bird on his own?

"Joey had told me where it was, and I sort of knew. But you couldn't call anybody or text anybody. And when I got to where I thought it was, there's nobody else there! You can imagine that if a Red-faced Warbler showed up in Denver now, there would be a hundred people!" Still, Chris persevered alone and eventually found the bird. As often happens, the rarity was gone the next day.

"That's why the Red-faced Warbler stands out," he adds. "It was the one time that I actually got a call at school and sort of sneaked out. The next day, Anne was like, 'Is everything OK?' I said, 'Yeah, OK,' and I told her the truth. I was a little nervous at first. But everybody at school knew. Birding wasn't cool, but it wasn't super-dorky, either. And by the time I was in college, every step up in birding, it got cooler and cooler."

That's Chris Wood, the original DFO cool kid, playing today in a far bigger sandbox than the one he once dug for fossils. As he notes in his Cornell Lab bio: "I've never really given up on the dinosaurs — I just focused on their closest living relatives."

# Home again: the bright, charming birds of Joe Chen's brush and pen

## Patrick O'Driscoll

Last September, followers of the [Denver Field Ornithologists Facebook Group](#) began to notice something missing from the feed of new bird photos, field trip reviews, requests for bird ID help and updates on DFO activities:

Where did **Joe Chen**'s bird paintings go?

Ever since joining DFO in 2018, Chen had been creating and posting single artworks of key or favorite birds he'd seen on each field trip. A frequent participant on DFO outings, he sometimes completed and posted the paintings the same day of the field trips.

Over the years, scores of Joe's bright ink-and-watercolor works, in the spare but expressive Chinese ink-painting style of his native Taiwan, delighted Facebook page readers. *The Lark Bunting* even profiled him and his art in the [November 2020 issue](#) and displayed his elegant rendering of a Red-headed Woodpecker from Prewitt Reservoir on the cover.

But in fall 2024, the Facebook postings suddenly ceased. Chen had taken breaks before, for trips to visit family back home. Postings of other images and photos from Taiwan on his Facebook page showed he was there again. But as his absence stretched through October, November and December, fans of his bird art felt the void. Were Joe and his paintings — unique images of birds amid the usual stream of bird photos on the Facebook group page — gone for good?

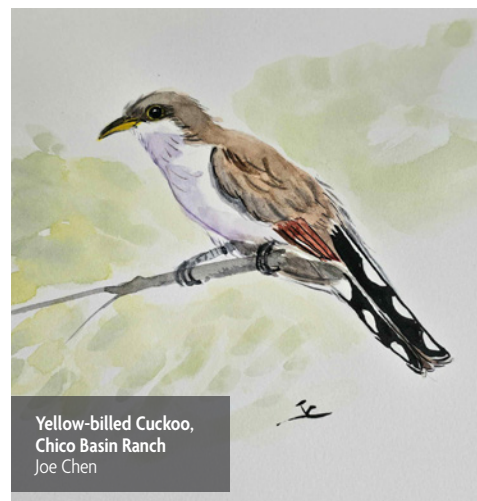
Fall and winter had reached into spring when, on April 24, a fresh painting in Joe's signature style popped up on the DFO Group's Facebook feed. It was a Blue-winged Teal, seen on a DFO field trip to Lagerman Reservoir in Boulder County the previous week. Joe Chen was back!

Joe says he actually returned to Denver on April 3, but it took a couple of weeks to get back in the groove. "I was at a disadvantage, so many field trips were already full," he explains. "I was out for seven months, so now I'm doing some catch up." The lengthy Taiwan absence was in part for his wife's extended visit to her mother, now in her 80s, a two-hour drive south of the capital, Taipei City. But Chen also wanted to take more classes in Chinese painting techniques. He birded a bit locally, but not a lot.

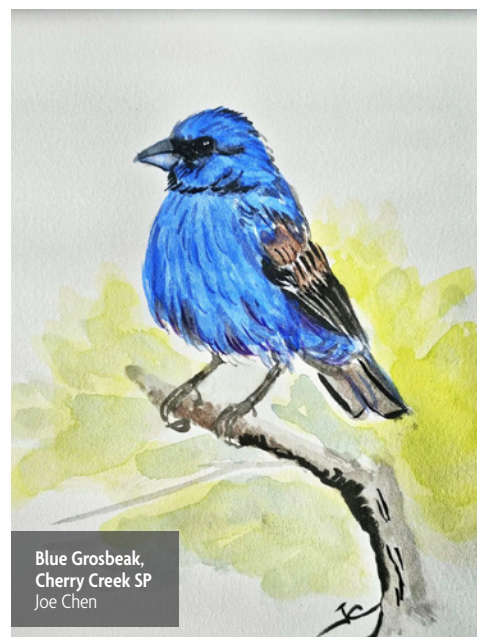
*Continued on page 28*



Joe Chen in 2022 with two earlier paintings, at First Creek in Green Valley Ranch  
Patrick O'Driscoll



Yellow-billed Cuckoo,  
Chico Basin Ranch  
Joe Chen



Blue Grosbeak,  
Cherry Creek SP  
Joe Chen



JOE CHEN *cont from page 27*

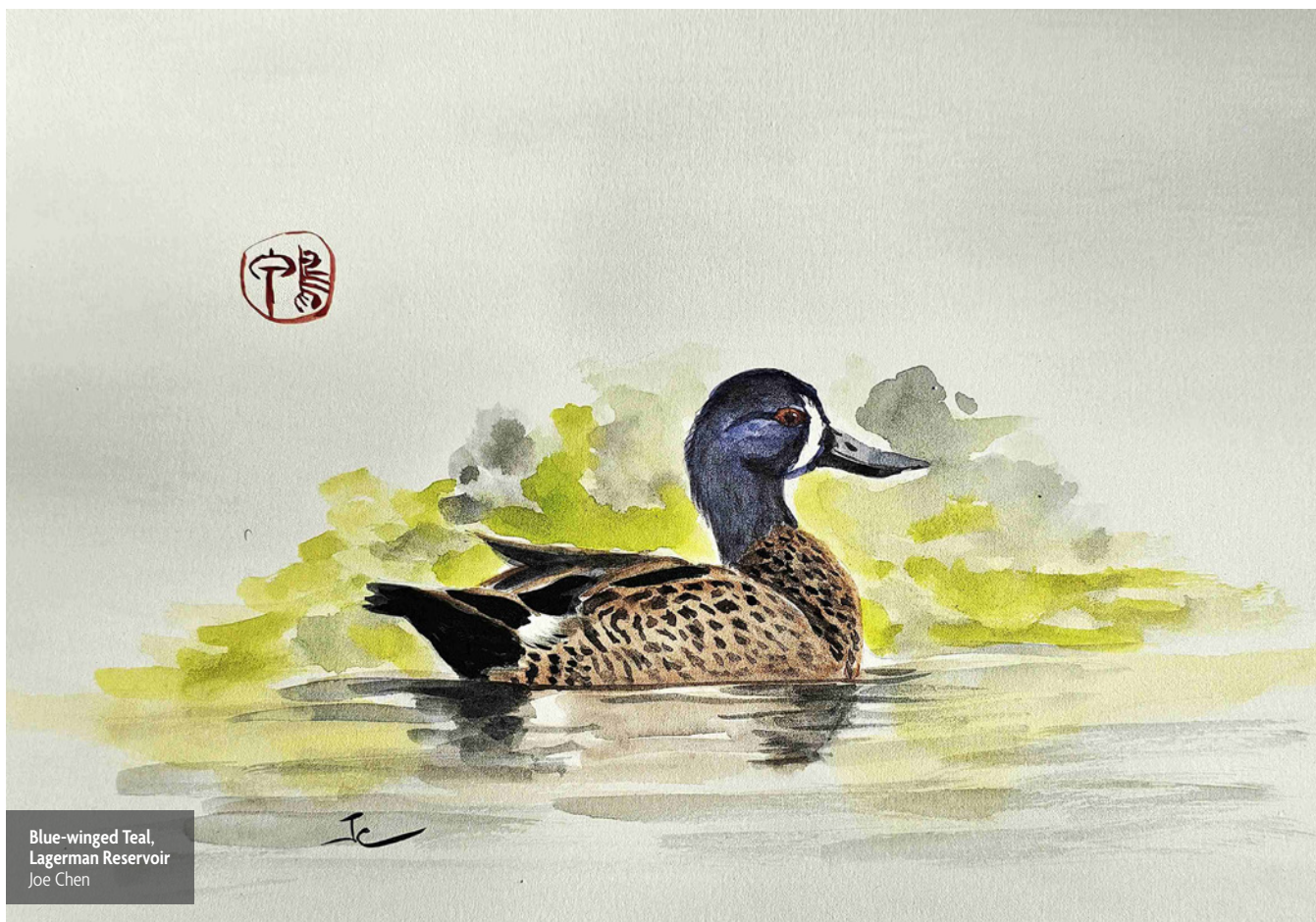


Great Crested Flycatcher,  
Tamarack Ranch SWA  
Joe Chen

Are those classes why his Blue-winged Teal seemed to have a certain new richness and detail? Perhaps. Joe focused on the more detailed “magic brush” technique — layered painting with more detailed strokes using small brushes that contain only a few hair bristles. “You use the black ink to draw the bird or flower, then you color it. The trick is on the coloring part. It’s layer by layer,” he says. “The eyes and the bill, sometimes I paint more detail.” With the teal, “I cannot just focus on the shape, features, but also the expression — more like a live animal. I tried to do that here.”

Since returning, Joe has posted more than two dozen new field trip bird images on Facebook — and one of them is also the “cover bird” of this issue of *The Lark Bunting*. “I’m still learning and practicing,” he says. (The “studio” in his Green Valley Ranch home in Denver is still simply the dining-room table.) And he’s quickly filling up his 2025 Colorado birding checklist. In April and May alone, he tallied 160 species. “Of course, I missed all the birds here,” Chen adds. “This is like seeing old friends again.” Although he first took up birding in his native land, “somehow I think I am more familiar with the birds here than in Taiwan.”

Today, Joe has a simple summer goal: “Watch more birds and paint more birds” — and his DFO Facebook followers can’t wait to see them.



Blue-winged Teal,  
Lagerman Reservoir  
Joe Chen

*Continued on page 28*





Red-eyed Vireo,  
Chico Basin Ranch  
Joe Chen



Mountain Bluebird,  
Ponderosa Preserve  
Joe Chen



Upland Sandpiper,  
Tamarack Ranch SWA  
Joe Chen



Bobolink female and male,  
eastern Boulder, June 1  
Joe Chen



# DFO helps new and young birders focus along revived Sand Creek greenway

---

## Jill Boice

Have you ever walked, bicycled or birded along Sand Creek? In my childhood many decades ago, I played in the creek, under and to the east of the Peoria Street bridge, where it emerged from the fenced-off grounds of the old Stapleton International Airport. Back then it was a muddy little creek through a trashy wasteland.

If you haven't been there recently — or if you've never visited the creek before — I urge you to do so, at once! The meager stream where I once caught tadpoles in its little ponds is now a flourishing natural area. The greenway's remarkable, 13-mile path through northeast metro Denver includes Bluff Lake Nature Center and Morrison Nature Center, but they are just a fraction of its wonders.

The creek's revival is due mostly to the efforts of [The Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership](#), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect and promote the entire natural corridor. Since its establishment in 2000, the partnership has helped raise funds for, plan and develop an array of amazing green infrastructure along the trail. The greenway's user-friendly trails, sturdy bridges, charming parks and healthy wetlands provide recreation to many neighborhoods along its course. Sand Creek's riparian habitats now attract a healthy variety of birds and other wildlife.

Now that much of the trail system is established, the partnership's emphasis is on citizen involvement through equitable access, awareness and engagement for diverse communities along the greenway. In that effort, the Sand Creek partnership successfully applied to Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Conservation & Education Grant Fund for \$990 to purchase binoculars and other items to support bird walks for greenway community members.

To enhance the effects of that grant, the DFO Board of Directors has agreed to support direct collaboration with the greenway partnership. The aim is for DFO members to help lead bird walks (many participants are young, inexperienced and could benefit from DFO expertise) and to be a continuing resource for greenway activities. The Sand Creek partnership also conducts regular cleanups along the creek, a hands-on way for DFO members to help sustain local bird habitats.

This new initiative needs DFO volunteers to help it flourish. Can you join us? To help with a cleanup day or to join a bird walk, a yoga class or educational event, visit the [greenway partnership's website](#) for specific details, dates, times and registration information. Upcoming soon are a July 16 evening bird walk co-led by DFO (5:30-7 p.m.), a July 19 "Nature Pop-up" on bugs at Bluff Lake (10 a.m.-1:30 p.m.), an Aug. 2 volunteer trash pickup and invasive weed control session (9 a.m.-noon) and an Aug. 23 "forest bathing" time in nature (9 a.m.-noon).

Do you have an idea for a program along the greenway? Contact **Jill Boice**, DFO's Grants Committee chair, at [jill@booksandcats.net](mailto:jill@booksandcats.net) or **Elena Smith**, education and program director for the greenway group at [esmith@sandcreekgreenway.org](mailto:esmith@sandcreekgreenway.org).

---

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





## THE LIVES OF BIRDS

# Day-sleeping masters of camouflage, nightjars are more heard than seen



### Jared Del Rosso

Here's one thing that every birder knows about nightjars (Family *Caprimulgidae*, "the Goatsuckers"): You're more likely to hear them than see them.

They are, after all, "secretive" birds. During the day, nightjars — our Colorado locals are Common Poorwill and Common Nighthawk — are usually inactive and hidden, concealing themselves on forest floors, tree branches, or rocky ground. With feathering that resembles pebbles, lichens, or rotting wood, nightjars match their nesting habitats just so. They may seem uncommon or rare, but they are found everywhere except Antarctica and a few island groups.

Not only have these wide-mouthed twilight fliers perfected camouflage, they have also refined its use. A [2017 study](#) found that three kinds of nightjars — Mozambique, Pennant-winged, and Fiery-necked — better matched the backgrounds they chose for roosting than any others. Whether all nightjars do this blending in is unclear. But photos of many nightjars show how well they disappear into their background.

In this regard, the photo here of two Freckled Nightjars (*Caprimulgus tristigma*) in Uganda is especially compelling. The one in front virtually vanishes into its rocky habitat. The white "flakes" of lichen or light-colored stone match perfectly the lightly speckled feathering of this bird.

Invisible by day, nightjars remain difficult to encounter at night. Some, including Common Poorwill, are most active at the end of dusk. Light is low, trails are closed, and our human imaginations — still just a little afraid of the dark and who or what lurks within it — can get the best of us.

Besides being secretive, shy and reclusive, nightjars are also more scarce than they used to be. Across most of the US and Canada, breeding populations of

*Continued on page 32*



nighthawks, Whip-poor-wills, and Chuck-will's-widows have tanked precipitously — more than 50%. Although Colorado isn't exempt from this trend, we seem to be losing poorwills and nighthawks at a slower rate. Between *Colorado Breeding Bird Atlases I and II*, observations of breeding Common Nighthawks declined by about 20%. Total Common Poorwill observations declined by about 10%.

All told, nightjars are difficult to find, nearly impossible to spot, and challenging just to add to our yearly bird lists. Often it takes a special trip to niche nightjar habitat to encounter a poorwill or nighthawk.

But there's another secret these birds keep from us: They're not nearly as reclusive as we think. When cold spring rains compel migrating birds to spend a night in backyards, alleys and streets around Denver and its suburbs, think of it as "poorwill weather." Amid or immediately after a cold, mid-to-late-May rain, go looking for poorwills — in mulch piles between trees, in rocky gardens, anywhere on the ground and seemingly out of the way where they can blend in.

This year, Denver had days of poorwill weather in late May, including a torrential rain on May 25 that brought a poorwill into my Centennial yard. I'd have missed him had I not stepped into the kitchen to make lunch just as he swooped low through the yard, within view. His white-tipped tail and warm browns were visible in flight, but once the bird entered the complex coverage of trees and shrubs at the edge of my yard, he disappeared.

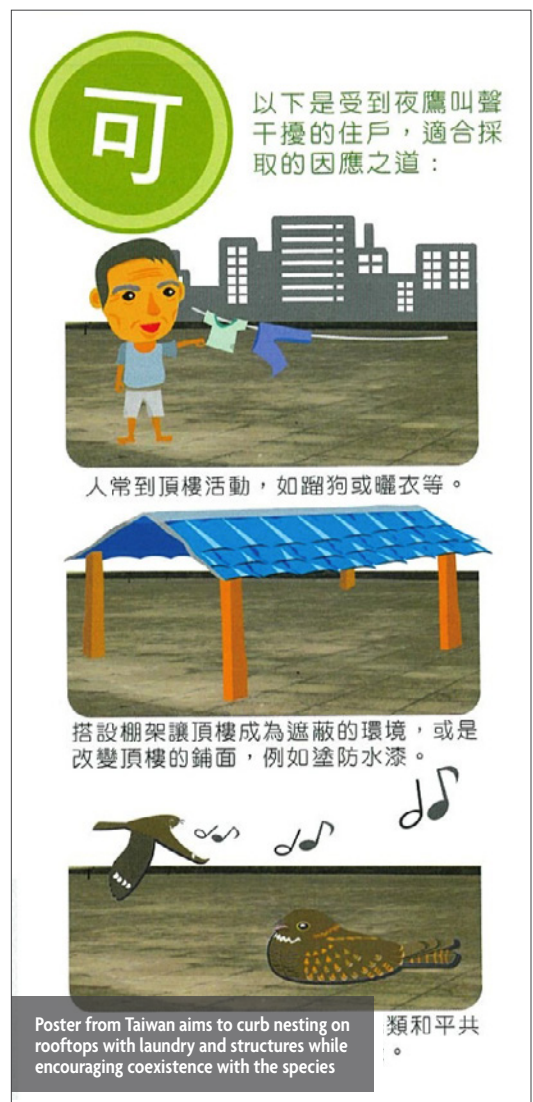
If nightjar weather is typical, where the birds land is not. Migrating poorwills even show up in downtown Denver. When I shared my report of that backyard bird to the CoBirds list-serv, DFO's own **Mike Fernandez** replied that he'd recently encountered one downtown during a "Lights Out Denver" bird window-strike survey. The poorwill in his photo was alive and fine, looking at ease on a patch of sidewalk. Somehow its feathering matched a low rock wall in the background.

During these on-the-ground stopovers, Common Poorwills generally tolerate passersby, though they'll likely flush if approached directly. But a steady, passing stream of oblivious people is nothing to a poorwill. Particularly on cold mornings, poorwills may remain hunkered down indefinitely. This allows anyone with a camera, birder or not, to snap clear and close-up photos of them in surprising locations. I've seen pictures of Common Poorwills on Facebook, Nextdoor and iNaturalist, roosting on cars, sidewalks, and the edges of garden boxes and patios.

Common Nighthawks are a bit different. Because of their high, crepuscular flights (in evening and morning twilight) over open spaces, water, and cities, people see them more often than Common Poorwills,



Common Poorwill, asleep on ground in downtown Denver near Coors Field  
Elizabeth Goetz



Continued on page 33

whose behaviors are less conspicuous. Still, it can be as hard to notice or spot a roosting nighthawk as it is a poorwill. Nighthawks sometimes rest on fence posts and branches, particularly on the Plains east of Denver. But like poorwills, nighthawks can easily blend into their surrounding habitat. Good luck spotting one perched high in a tree canopy after leaf-out! And ground-roosting nighthawks can disappear into sand and stone just as easily as a poorwill can.

Though they can be difficult to find, nighthawks do not avoid living among us. As late spring turns to summer, Common Nighthawks begin nesting, sometimes on flat, gravel-covered roofs in cities (a behavior first documented in 1869). Biologists speculate that nighthawk populations may have increased as humans used gravel to cover more roofs. Unfortunately for Common Nighthawks, gravel has fallen out of fashion as a roofing material in American cities. That change in our built environment may be a factor in the species' decline.

Common Nighthawks aren't the only such roof-nesters. In Taiwan, the [Savanna Nightjar](#) began nesting on urban roofs about two decades ago. But its nighttime vocalizations are so loud and intrusive — *Birds of the World* describes the racket as “a loud, raspy note *cheek!* or *tschreep!* repeated for long periods” — that they keep some people up too late and roust others from sleep way too early. Perhaps to forestall extreme measures to control or remove the birds, conservationists in Taiwan preach peaceful coexistence. They ask that people use their rooftops regularly to hang laundry or conduct other activities to dissuade nightjars from nesting there. Agricultural and science authorities even collaborated on posters to promote this strategy.

People in the eastern US can relate. Whip-poor-wills there are notoriously vociferous. Their scientific name says so: *Antrostomus vociferous*, Latin for “clamorous cavern-mouth.” Although **Henry David Thoreau** wished in [his own journal](#) that everyone could sleep “where you may hear the whip-poor-will in your dreams,” not everyone shared his enthusiasm. More than a century ago, the species was so common that sleepless nights were ensured around homes in the East. A [1907 article in the \*Washington Times\*](#) even told of a man so annoyed by a Whip-poor-will that he shot at it three times and missed. In a final indignity, the bird landed on his gun barrel and sang.

I can't confirm if that story is real or apocryphal, but the Whip-poor-will as a nuisance had enough cultural currency to inspire

writer **James Thurber**'s dark, Hitchcockian 1941 short story, “[The Whip-poor-will](#).” Thurber's sleepless human protagonist is driven murderously mad by days of unending Whip-poor-will song.

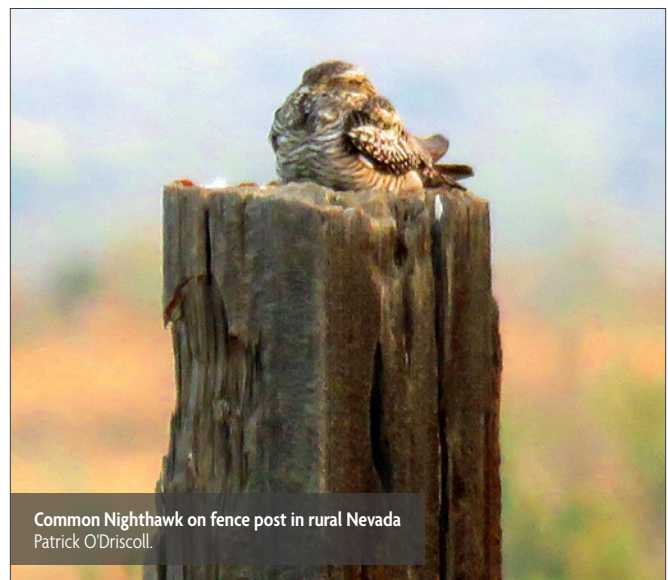
As Whip-poor-will populations have declined, the species keeps fewer people awake. But wherever the birds endure, so too does their song. Despite closed windows, I've heard an especially vocal one continue his song well past midnight under a full moon in May. And I still hear from people back East who are kept awake by Whip-poor-wills.

Whether nighthawk, poorwill or Whip-poor-will, nightjars will never be as familiar as our common backyard birds. We'll never witness their familial dramas the way we do those of robins, chickadees, and magpies.

But we shouldn't mistake our inability to spot them regularly for a species quirk. Who among us doesn't sometimes wish to be like a nightjar, spending spring and summer afternoons hidden away in difficult-to-reach places, keeping company with songbirds, oaks, and silent stones? Nightjars are neither recluses nor curmudgeons . . . or, at least, no more so than many of us birders, myself included.

---

*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](#).



Common Nighthawk on fence post in rural Nevada  
Patrick O'Driscoll





## FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

# April, May, June DFO trips *In Focus*

Field trips in the three spring-into-summer months included 81 total outings. Of those, participants on 34 trips took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 90-year-old club (plus one late trip from March). If you’re on DFO trips in July, August and September, 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 October. 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](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com). Deadline for our October 2025 fall-quarter issue is **Tuesday, Sept. 30**. Thanks!



MARCH 30

## Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams County)

### Leader

Jason B. Bidgood

### Participants

Dave Prentice, Jayne James, Matthew Fast, Lisa Seiler, Michelle Trotter, Debra Lentz, John Batt, Lynn Slaga, Scott Hammel

**Birders on March 30 field trip to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR zero in on Greater Yellowlegs and Yellow-headed Blackbirds at Lake Ladora**

(Dave Prentice)

TRIP REPORT



APRIL 7

## Southeastern Colorado (Lincoln, Elbert)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Scott Hammel, Dave Prentice, Kenneth Stuckey, Diane Roberts, Ann Christensen, Debra Strike, Melody Serra, Susan Blansett, Linda Purcell, Phil Waltz

**Birders scan the prairie for Mountain Plovers April 7 on joint DFO-Denver Audubon field trip to southeastern Colorado. Several seen from some distance included one with multi-colored ID bands on its legs. Other sightings included Burrowing Owl, Sage Thrasher and close comparison view of both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs. In Karval, a local farmer who stopped to talk was amazed that a group from Denver travel so far just to see birds**  
(Linda Purcell)

TRIP REPORT

*Continued on page 35*





APRIL 12

## Clear Spring Ranch Regional Park (El Paso)

### Leader

Megan Miller

### Participants

Diane Wilson, Andrea Duran, Lorraine Watry, Joe Chen, Dale Stevens, Mary Crimmins, Max Gowen, Joseph Gowen

**Field trippers on joint DFO-Aiken Audubon outing April 12 to Clear Spring Ranch and Fountain Creek Nature Center in El Paso County. Bird highlights included Snow Goose, Long-billed Curlew, White-faced Ibis and Eastern Phoebe**

(Joe Chen)

TRIP REPORT



APRIL 13

## Northeastern Colorado (Washington, Morgan, Weld)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Michelle Trotter, Chris Best, Jason Zolle, Ross Terhaar, Kenneth Stuckey, Robert and Jennifer Tonge, John Batt, Jenny Germano, Brady Anderson, Victoria Miles

**Birding in all directions at Lower Latham during an April 13 field trip to three northeastern Colorado counties. Despite constant windiness, the group saw their target species, Greater Prairie Chicken, on a small lek in Washington County, in addition to a lot of different birds (a seasonally late Northern Shrike among them**

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

*See "Past Trips" page*

*Continued on page 36*





APRIL 15-17

## Southeastern Colorado (Pueblo, Otero, Las Animas, Baca, Crowley, Douglas)

### Leaders

Gary Witt and David Suddjian

### Participants

Dave Prentice, Ryan Corda, Kenneth Stuckey, Winston Liu, Anne Craig, Judy McKeon

**Birders on 3-day field trip April 15-17 to southeastern Colorado trek along the chalky edge of Lake Cheraw in Otero County on successful search for Snowy Plovers. The trip recorded 101 species on 57 eBird checklists**

(Dave Prentice)

CHECKLIST

*See "Past Trips" page*



APRIL 23

## First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch (Denver)

### Leaders

Carly Crow

### Participants

Jodi Haller, Joe Chen, Diane Hutton, Colleen Nunn

**DFO field trippers zero in on a bird during April 23 outing to First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch in Denver**

(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST

*Continued on page 37*





APRIL 26

## Birds + iNaturalist, Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

### Leaders

Laura Steadman and Archer Silverman

### Participants

Andrea Duran, Colleen Nunn, Jodi Haller, Susan Shamos, Andrew Dolan, Sue Combs, Emily Braker, Joe Chen

**Birders pause to focus on a distant bird along the Lake Ladora trail during April 26 DFO trip to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. This Birds + field trip also focused on how to use iNaturalist, the app and web platform that help document the natural world (plants, animals, bugs, even birds), share community science data with biologists, and identify flora and fauna with help from AI and other users**  
(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST



APRIL 26

## Tucker Gulch, Golden (Jefferson)

### Leader

Ryan Corda

### Participants

David Suddjian, Shay Lyons, Virginia Gulakowski, Timothy Condon, Linnea Bjorkman, Paige Asmann, Jamie Pace, Victoria Miles, Catherine Millard

**Birders on trail at Tucker Gulch in Golden on April 26 afternoon field trip, new leader Ryan Corda's first. Among birds recorded were Orange-crowned and Yellow-rumped Warblers, House Wren, goldfinches and Pine Siskin, a Say's Phoebe with a nest, and more**  
(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

*Continued on page 38*





APRIL 27

## Audubon Kingery Nature Center (Jefferson)

### Leaders

Jordan Gerue and Jason Bidgood

### Participants

Jason Bidgood, Paige Asmann, Jamie Pace, Kelly Hollar, Lesly Baesens, Larry Sykes, Erin and Eric Hoffmeyer, Morgan Kahle, Bruce Raff

Field trippers pause along South Platte River during April 27 outing to the Audubon Kingery Nature Center south of Chatfield SP.

The joint field trip with Denver Audubon was the first led by newly certified DFO trip leader

**Jordan Gerue**

(Jason Bidgood)

CHECKLIST



APRIL 27

## Staunton State Park (Jefferson)

### Leaders

Timothy Condon and David Suddjian

### Participants

Lynn Slaga, Matthew Fast, Jacob Castonguay, Chip Dawes, Michelle Trotter, Kris Saucke, Sue Summers, Cynthia Breidenbach, Elizabeth Wu, Coreen Spellman

All eyes are on a distant owl during April 27 field trip to Staunton SP. Tim Condon's first time leading a DFO field trip followed the Davis Ponds loop. The group saw many birds seeking cavities in aspens to nest: Red-naped and Williamson's sapsuckers, Western Bluebirds, singing Ruby-crowned Kinglets and more

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

*Continued on page 39*





MAY 2

## Ponderosa Preserve, Aurora (Arapahoe)

### Leader

Cynthia Cestkowski

### Participants

Rosanne Juergens, Mark and Leopoldine Berkstresser, Kris Saucke, Marie Mager, Dee Sato, Catherine Millard, Joe Chen, Kevin Millard, Christine Macdonald

**Birders scan the terrain during May 2 field trip at Ponderosa Preserve, the restricted-entry City of Aurora site that protects a native stand of Ponderosa pine at the northernmost reach of the Black Forest on Colorado's eastern Plains. Periodically, DFO field trips visit this island of natural habitat in the state's third-largest city to add to its baseline of birds documented via eBird hotspot**  
(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST 1

CHECKLIST 2



MAY 2-4

## Southeastern Colorado campout trip (Bent, Crowley, Douglas, Otero, Prowers, Pueblo)

### Leader

Laura Steadman

### Participants

Melissa Mezger, Michelle Trotter, Kate and Mike Gaylord, Lara Cueni, Karen and Dan Clark, Jenny Germano, Eileen Holcomb, Christopher Curwen, Colleen Nunn, Mark Winfrey

**Participants in May 2-4 field trip to southeastern Colorado gather by the fire in Lake Hasty group campground below the dam at John Martin Reservoir after a day of birding. Although spring migration was barely underway, the group recorded 117 species, including Great Horned Owls calling from campground cottonwoods, Wild Turkey and Bobwhite wakeup calls, and hundreds of phalaropes on Hasty**  
(Eileen Mennecke)

TRIP REPORT

*Continued on page 40*





MAY 7

## Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

### Leader

Carly Crow

### Participants

Paula Rosson, Joe Chen, Susan Shetterly, Joseph Margoshes, Nathan Crow, Jayne James, Lynn Sauer, Cliff Hendrick, Colleen Nunn, Kenneth Stuckey, Kris Tita, Nadiyah Watts, Kelsey Robb, Jeff Price

**Field trippers scope and scan Lower Derby Lake during May 7 field trip to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR in search of species on spring migration through the Denver area**

(Joe Chen)

TRIP REPORT



MAY 9

## Weld County hotspots (Adams, Weld)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Gary Witt, Sandy Blair, Robert Przybylo, Andrea Duran, Joe Chen

**Birders scope from the roadside on a multi-stop field trip May 9 through the Kersey region of Weld County. Shorebirds were the outing's principal target, and conditions were especially good at Loloff Reservoir and the western pond at Road 59. Highlights included Pectoral Sandpiper (uncommon in spring), Stilt Sandpipers, and hundreds of phalaropes**

(Joe Chen)

TRIP REPORT

*Continued on page 41*





MAY 10

## Tucker Gulch (Jefferson)

### Leader

Ryan Corda

### Participants

Lynn Slaga, Eileen Warner, Kris Tita, Gary Witt, Scott and Jennifer Hatch, Nadiyah Watts

DFO birders zero in on one of several highlights during morning outing May 10 in Tucker Gulch in Golden. Although it felt a little quiet for spring migration, nice moments included a Cooper's Hawk adding to its nest, a group of newly arrived Lazuli Buntings, a pair of nesting Say's Phoebes, and a female Black-headed Grosbeak

(Ryan Corda)

TRIP REPORT



MAY 12-14

## Southeast Colorado (Baca, Bent, Crowley, Douglas, Kiowa, Otero, Prowers, Pueblo)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Melody Serra, John Batt, Walt Combs, Mary Beth Searles, Sharon Kelly, Oliver Urdiales, Christopher Curwen

Participants in DFO spring migration field trip May 12-14 to southeastern Colorado pose at the Willow Creek Nature Trail sign at Lamar Community College, one of numerous stops on the three-day outing

TRIP REPORT

*Continued on page 42*





MAY 15-26

## 2025 SE Arizona Trip (15 counties in AZ, CO, NM)

### Leader

Joey Kellner

### Participants

Denise Reznicek, Courtney Rella, Sue Summers, Betsy Goodwin, Jennifer and Robert Tonge, Bill Turner

**Trip leader Joey Kellner (left) points out a Lesser Bittern from a boardwalk in Bosque del Apache NWR in central New Mexico on May 26. It was one of the final stops on DFO's 12-day, 2,773-mile trip to southeast Arizona's "Sky Islands" and other points in neighboring states**  
(Denise Reznicek)

### TRIP REPORT

147 checklists



MAY 17-18

## Common Poorwill Evenings, Ken Caryl Ranch (Jefferson)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

(May 17) Gabby Licht, Lauren Friesen, Ryan Corda, Coreen Spellman, Elaine Friesen, Christine Macdonald; (May 18) Celia Moynihan, Sharon and Lance Tanaka, Dee Sato, Christopher and Catherine Barr

**Birders listen for some of the 11 Common Poorwills heard (three of them seen) on May 17 evening field trip in the hogbacks at Ken Caryl Ranch. Those on a second trip the next evening heard 16 poorwills. Trip leader David Suddjian has led 35 such trips at this Jefferson County location since 2018, marking "lifer" records of the species for an estimated 270 birders**

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST 1

CHECKLIST 2

*Continued on page 43*





MAY 19

## Louviers Open Space (Douglas)

### Leaders

Julia Gwinn and David Suddjian

### Participants

Bonnie Prado, Eileen Warner,  
Kathy Holland, Kris T, Michelle  
Verostko, Phil Waltz, Shay Lyons,  
Virginia Gulakowski

**DFO field trippers focus off-trail  
during May 19 outing in Louviers  
Open Space in Douglas County**

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST



MAY 19

## Denver City Park (Denver)

### Leader

Patrick O'Driscoll

### Participants

Mike and Karen Fernandez, Linda Purcell, Brian Wolfe, Natasha Albert, Ryan Corda, Steve Methven,  
Sandra Hoyle, Maggie Gibson

**Birders focus on a bright male Western Tanager in a spruce tree during May 19 field trip in  
Denver City Park. The group found 43 species across the park, including Black-crowned Night  
Herons that have returned to the nesting island in Ferril Lake for the first time since 2019**

(Patrick O'Driscoll)

CHECKLIST

*Continued on page 44*





MAY 24

## Genesee Mountain Park (Jefferson)

### Leaders

David Suddjian and Judy McKeon

### Participants

Bonnie Prado, Nadiyah Watts, Bruce Raff, Joe Chen, Kris Saucke, Lynn Slaga, Cassandra Stroud, Kelsey Robb

**Birders look high into classic Ponderosa pine forest on May 24 field trip to Genesee Mountain Park. Sightings included Olive-sided Flycatcher, a Broad-tailed Hummingbird nest, Western Tanager, Western Bluebird, Green-tailed Towhees, a pair of Townsend's Solitaires and many House Wrens. Although late in May, some species seemed to be just arriving. There were few pewees, no Empidonax, and only single Plumbeous Vireo and Black-headed Grosbeak**

(David Suddjian)

### CHECKLIST



MAY 26

## Deer Creek Canyon (Jefferson)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Cassandra Stroud, Jonathan and Angela Hebel, Coreen Spellman, Virginia Gulakowski, Ryan Corda, Nadiyah Watts

**All eyes on the skies during May 26 field trip to various hotspots in Jefferson County's Deer Creek watershed. From mist to clearing and back to clouds, field trippers enjoyed a cross-section birds from forest to wet meadow, including Wilson's Snipe, Savannah Sparrow, both bluebirds, Williamson's Sapsucker, Ovenbird, Virginia's Warbler, Plumbeous Vireo, White-throated Swift and more**

(Ryan Corda)

### CHECKLISTS

*See "Past Trips" page*

*Continued on page 45*





MAY 28

## Cherry Creek State Park (Arapahoe)

### Leader

Timothy Condon

### Participants

Joe Chen, Colleen Nunn, Kris Tita, Elizabeth Wu, Brian Wolfe, Nadiyah Watts, Virginia Gulakowski, Alison Bishop, Jordan Carpenter, Victor Doty, Jack Kurlinski

**Picturesque stormy skies frame field trippers on DFO's May 28 outing to Cherry Creek State Park**  
(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST 1

CHECKLIST 2



MAY 29

## Eastern Boulder County (Boulder)

### Leader

Peter Ruprecht

### Participants

Joe Chen, Karen Bellina, Marjorie Middleton, Susan Blansett, Dee Patterson, Christie Owens

**Peter Ruprecht leads field trippers on a birding walk May 29 in eastern Boulder County's Cherryvale and West Davidson Mesa areas. Sightings included Savannah Sparrow, Bobolink, Cedar Waxwing, orioles and American Kestrel. Also amazing wildflowers and one enormous but unidentified bird footprint**

(Marjorie Middleton)

CHECKLIST 1

CHECKLIST 2



MAY 29

## Lowell Ponds Open Space (Adams)

### Leaders

Patrick O'Driscoll and Linda Purcell

### Participants

Virginia Gulakowski, Jodi Haller, Debra Lentz, Michelle Stringer

**Binoculars are trained on a distant pair of American Avocets during DFO's May 29 field trip to Lowell Ponds Open Space, a club first to this underbirded location. Among 42 species were Great Egret, American Avocet, Wood Duck, Lazuli Bunting, Yellow Warblers and hundreds of Cliff Swallows. The day was overcast but dry between storms in an unusually rainy May**  
(Patrick O'Driscoll)

CHECKLIST

*Continued on page 46*





JUNE 1

## Pine Valley Ranch (Jefferson)

### Leader

Timothy Condon

### Participants

Matthew Fast, Paula Rosson, Brian Huculak, Jamie Pace, Paige Asmann, Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine, Michelle Verostko, Sharon Tinianow, William Knapp, Jacob Castonguay

**Birders on June 1 field trip to Pine Valley Ranch in Jefferson County, where the outing recorded 29 species, including a Chestnut-sided Warbler**

(Timothy Condon)

CHECKLIST



JUNE 6

## Birds + Museum Collection, Denver City Park (Denver)

### Leader

Ryan Corda

### Participants

Lorissa Argo Ray, Jodi Haller, Tim McAuliffe, Becky Russell, Judith Cohen, Eileen Warner, Debra Lentz

**Participants in June 6 Birds-Plus outing to Denver City Park visit the ornithology collection in the Denver Museum of Nature & Science on the park grounds. After the museum tour, the group birded the park in late afternoon for about 25 minutes before thunderstorms cut the bird walk short**

(Ryan Corda)

CHECKLIST



JUNE 9

## Birds + Trees, Mount Blue Sky & Scenic Byway (Jefferson)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Tiffany Willis, John Batt, Jason Zolle, Marjorie Middleton, Julia Gwinn, Michelle Verostko, Bonnie Prado, Melody Serra, Oliver Urdiales

**DFO field trippers focus high in a grove of aspen during June 9 Birds + Trees joint outing with Denver Audubon in the Mount Blue Sky region. The group learned to identify nine conifer species in roadside stops along Colorado 103**

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLISTS

*See "Past Trips" page*

*Continued on page 47*





JUNE 10

## Bailey Nesting Area (Summit)

### Leaders

Paul Slingsby and Chris Blakeslee

### Participants

Joe Chen, Judy Lane, Mary Fran O'Connor, Bill Schreitz, Isaac Ho

Lunch break at meadow's edge during June 10 DFO field trip to Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area in Summit County. Paul Slingsby and Chris Blakeslee have led this trip to the nesting area each summer to record species numbers. The area was established in 1971 with DFO's involvement to honor Bailey, who became director of the Colorado Museum of Natural History (now DMNS) in 1936, the year after the Colorado Bird Club (now Denver Field Ornithologists) was founded 90 years ago this year  
(Joe Chen)

TRIP REPORT



JUNE 11

## Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

### Leader

George Ho

### Participants

Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine, Nancy Crowley, Jodi Haller, Joe Chen, Alexander Dalton, Debra Lentz, Rae Jones, Virginia Gulakowski, Corrine Kuhl, Erica Sodos

Participants in June 11 DFO field trip to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR use the birdwatching blind at the Gun Club Pond to scan for waterfowl and other birds  
(George Ho)

CHECKLIST

*Continued on page 48*





JUNE 12-13

## Tamarack Ranch SWA (Washington, Logan)

### Leader

Gary Witt

### Participants

Anne Craig, Judy McKeon, Joe Chen, Kenneth Stuckey, Isaac Ho, Ann Christensen, Betty Glass

**Birders on trail in Tamarack Ranch SWA during June 12-13 overnight DFO trip to northeastern Colorado**  
(Joe Chen)

CHECKLISTS

See "Past Trips" page



JUNE 14

## Birds + Scientific Collections Tour, Boulder Creek / CU Boulder (Boulder)

### Leaders

David Suddjian and Emily Braker

### Participants

Bonnie Prado, Matthew Fast, Zak Hepler, Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine, Shai Ronen, Brian Wolfe, Nicole Callaway

**Emily Braker, Collections Manager of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History, hosts DFO Birds + outing on June 14. After birding along Boulder Creek on the CU Boulder campus, the field trippers visited the museum to see and learn about its vast collection of bird skins and numerous other specimens from nature**

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST 1

CHECKLIST 2

*Continued on page 49*





JUNE 17

## Audubon Kingery Nature Center (Jefferson)

### Leaders

Ryan Dibala and David Suddjian

### Participants

Amy Manning, Katherine Peterson, Coreen Spellman, Angela Grun, Sarah Slater, Marjorie Middleton, Gina Neptune, Kathy Drake, Jodi Haller, Natasha Albert

**Participants zero in during joint DFO/Denver Audubon field trip June 17 at Audubon Kingery Center along the South Platte River. The trip, a first as leader for Ryan Dibala, focused on birding by ear. But Ryan's good eye also found an American Redstart nest, with the male nearby**

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST



JUNE 24

## Cherry Creek State Park (Arapahoe)

### Leaders

Ethan Cleveland and Cynthia Cestkowski

### Participants

Joe Chen, Melody Serra, Sarah Franklin, Larry Wilson, Tegan Masoero-Palmer, Morgan Kahle

**Birding from the marshland edge of Cherry Creek Reservoir near Pelican Point during June 24 field trip to Cherry Creek SP**

(Joe Chen)

CHECKLIST

*Continued on page 50*





JUNE 27

## South Platte Park (Arapahoe)

### Leaders

Cynthia Breidenbach and Julia Gwinn

### Participants

Virginia Gulakowski, Robert Mitchell, Joe Chen, Alayna Nelson,  
Sara Jepsen, Suzann Edwards, Joan Hollenbach, Kris Saucke

### Binocs and scopes focus on birds along South Platte River on June 27 field trip to South Platte Park

(Joe Chen)

#### CHECKLIST

## Welcome to new DFO members

Karen Bauer, Denver; Mark Berkstresser, Aurora; Ethan  
Cleveland, Denver; Brian Cumalander and Julianna Williams,  
Littleton; Jeffrey Darkis and Carole Durst, Aurora; Barbara  
Horvath, Wheat Ridge; Jeff Reock and Jennifer Hendzlik,  
Frederick

## Thank you for your contribution

### Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Brady Anderson, Karen Bauer, Pete and Ann Christensen,  
Dee Sato, Howard Leon Smiler

### Friends of DFO

Colleen Bergquist, Jeremy Nichols,  
Howard Leon Smiler

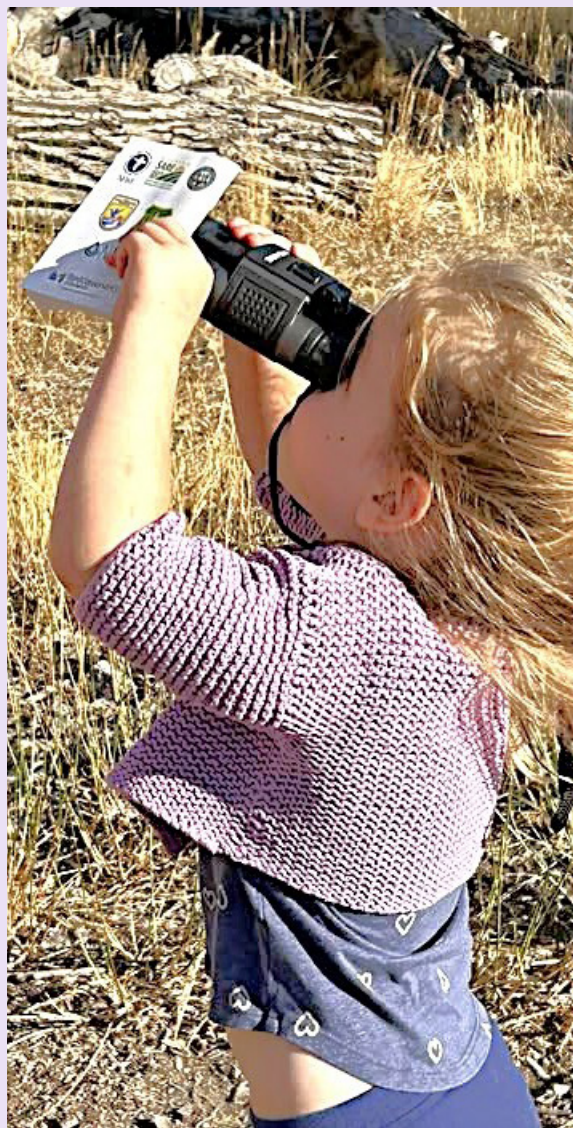
### DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Howard Leon Smiler



### DFO NEXT GEN

## Looking ahead, starting 'em young



As Denver Field Ornithologists looks ahead to future decades in this 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the club, this 4-year-old granddaughter of DFO member A.J. Gest may have her future in sight as a next-generation birder, too.

Photo: A.J. Gest



LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

# Third time, more charms: Late migration in drought stirs birding magic in “Sky Islands”

**The trip:** Southeast Arizona Sky Islands III / CO, AZ, NM

**Dates:** Thursday, May 15 – Monday, May 26

**Leader:** **Joey Kellner** + 7 participants

**Species:** 227 on 147 eBird checklists

**EBIRD TRIP REPORT**

Vermilion Flycatcher in flight  
Courtney Rella



## Joey Kellner

On Day One's long drive to Tucson from Denver, we could sense that this third consecutive DFO spring excursion to the desert Southwest would look, feel, and be different. Entering southeastern Arizona's "Sky Islands" region on Interstate 10 west, the landscape looked cooked. We were in the Chihuahuan Desert, of course, with the Sonoran just ahead. But as far as we could see, grasses and plants that should have been green in mid-May were dry, dead and often leafless.

This is how deserts deal with drought. Native plants like acacia, and even higher elevation oaks, had dropped their leaves to conserve water, a strategy quite evident to us. But by the end of our first full day of birding, we saw something else at work, too: Spring migration, always weeks earlier than we see in Colorado, was still going on!

We were finding late migrants daily in all habitats. After tallying just under 195 species in identical 12-day expeditions in 2023 and 2024, this year we recorded an amazing 227 species. Was it the drought? Late migration? Maybe both. Were migrants lingering because they needed more time to find enough food in the damaged landscape to build fat reserves to continue their long journey north?

*Continued on page 53*



Mexican Spotted Owl  
Joey Kellner



2025 Sky Islands crew, L to R, Joey Kellner, Bill Turner, Robert and Jennifer Tonge, Sue Summers, Denise Reznicek, Betsy Goodwin, Courtney Rella





Night shot of Elf Owl in cavity  
Courtney Rella



Varied Bunting  
Courtney Rella



Blue Grosbeak in unusual molt  
Joey Kellner

#### LAST WORD, LAST LOOK *cont from page 52*

We found Western Tanagers not only in the mountains where they breed but also along the lowland courses of the San Pedro and Santa Cruz rivers, and even out in the dry scrublands of the Sonoran and Chihuahuan. Warblers that should have been far north in or near their breeding grounds — Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned, Wilson's, Townsend's, Hermit, and Grace's — were still scratching around southern Arizona for more flight fuel. Black-headed Grosbeaks were still present in unheard-of numbers. (We recorded 107!) Other species unusual for mid-late May included a beautiful Red Phalarope, two Snowy Plover, Brewer's Sparrow, Least Tern, and American Golden-Plover.

And yet, even as drought gave us more birds, it took away others we had seen in the two previous May trips: Common Black Hawk, Mexican Chickadee, Mississippi Kite, and only a single Sulphurbellied Flycatcher (and not everyone got a look). In side chats with local birders in southeastern Arizona, one mentioned that Elf Owl, an iconic Sonoran species, was almost two weeks late this spring.

Physical conditions for birding were quite nice this year: mild days, sunny or high overcast, with highs in the 80s and low 90s, below-normal heat for mid-late May. If the birds and the weather treated us well, vehicular speed bumps were inevitable. Each of our cars suffered a flat tire, though the effect on our travels was minimal.

As always, luck, habitat and our collective birding knowledge helped find harder-to-get species. We could not locate a Varied Bunting that had been showing up at a water feature in the must-visit [Paton Center for Hummingbirds](#) in Patagonia, AZ. But from decades of previous experiences, I knew where else we might find one — and we found three there! Luck was also with us. On our planned arrival at the [George Walker House](#), a feeder-watch landmark in the species-rich Paradise and Portal, AZ area, a banded White-eared Hummingbird that had been seen there the previous three years arrived the day before to welcome us. Luck and some hiking also gave us unforgettable looks at a pair of Flame-colored Tanagers in Miller Canyon and an Elegant Trogon in Madera Canyon.

Geographical good fortune is what makes southeastern Arizona a mecca for so many species of birds regularly found nowhere else and seldom seen farther north. The Sky Islands are just that: isolated pockets of high ground and superior mountain habitat where the north end of Mexico's rugged Sierra Madre cordillera pokes into Arizona's corner of the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts. The cooler forested lands above the hotter sea of grass and desert shrubs below attract the birds — and thus, the birders.

*Continued on page 54*



The group of eight for my third straight May expedition included **Betsy Goodwin** and fellow DFO members **Courtney Rella**, **Denise Reznicek**, **Sue Summers**, **Bill Turner**, and **Jennifer** and **Robert Tonge**. Across 12 days, we logged 2,773 road miles, stayed in seven different accommodations (including two “in-habitat” lodges), and convened nightly over dinner to review the day’s birds with custom, tri-fold cardstock checklists I created for each trip participant for the occasion. It became both a bonding ritual and a way to sketch out backup plans for the next day to find species we had expected but missed.

Thanks to all of them for another great trip. But don’t take my word for it. Read on as several of them tell you, in their own words.

### ***First-timer in Sky Islands hopes to return***

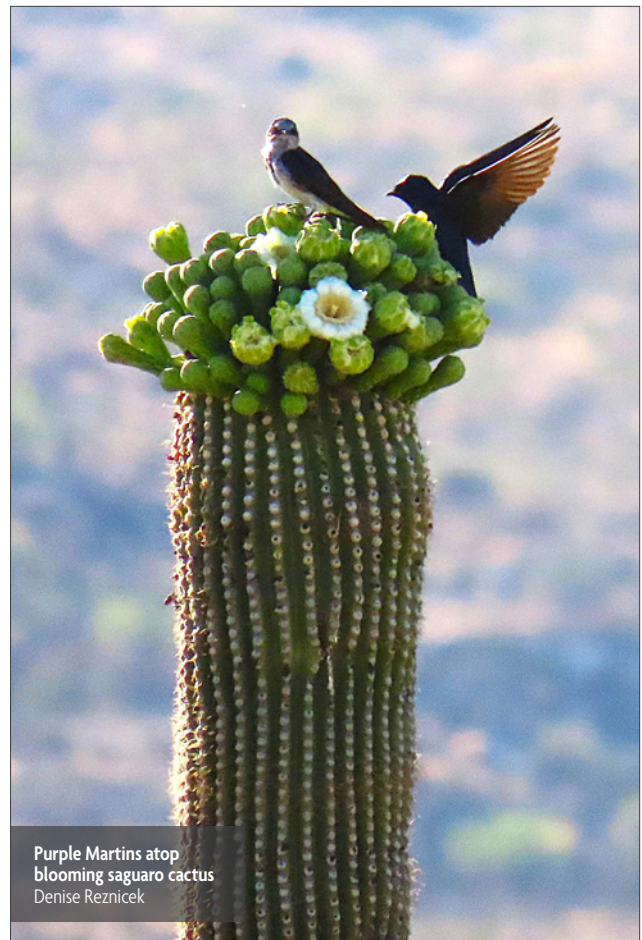
When we saw the DFO listing for **Joey Kellner**’s southeastern Arizona trip back in 2022, my sister **Jennifer** and I knew we’d want to go birding there someday. When we were ready to give it a go, great luck chose us in the drawing for spots on DFO’s 2025 excursion. Joey’s warnings about desert heat, rocky roads, and even the risk of valley fever were hardly deterrents against the chance for 40 life-bird species, 12 days of picturesque Southwest landscapes, and nighttime spotlighting for snakes, lizards and other “herps.”

Setting off for Arizona at 5 a.m. on May 15, we were soon tallying every bird as we drove (**Courtney Rella** kept a slew of incidental checklists). That early start got us down to the desert in time to reach Lake Cochise outside Willcox, AZ, an ancient playa where the birding started with a bang: shorebirds, ducks and more, including a Red Phalarope female in breeding plumage.

As we went, we kept finding birds Joey didn’t think we’d see: Black-chinned Sparrows on Mount Lemmon, Hermit Warblers all over the place, Tropical Kingbirds and Thick-billed Kingbirds together, and a White-eared Hummingbird. Listening to the locals, we suspected our luck was because widespread drought had delayed arrivals and departures of early migrants we wouldn’t normally see. Lack of water also meant fewer active reptiles on our night cruises for herps.

But throughout the trip, Joey’s accounts of the birds, plants and animals (and where to find them) were exceptional.

*Continued on page 55*



Purple Martins atop  
blooming saguaro cactus  
Denise Reznicek



Red-faced Warbler  
Denise Reznicek



Tracking a woodpecker building a nest in  
a saguaro cactus at Saguaro National Park  
Jennifer Tonge





Blue-throated Mountain-gem at feeder  
Courtney Rella



Listening and watching for warblers  
on Mount Lemmon north of Tucson  
Jennifer Tonge

#### LAST WORD, LAST LOOK *cont from page 54*

Long-lived saguaro cactuses only start to grow arms at about age 50. For a Berylline Hummingbird, go in evening to [Santa Rita Lodge](#) in Madera Canyon, AZ, but for a Blue-throated Mountain Gem, head for [Portal, AZ](#). For a Tropical Kingbird, you need an unexpected source of water, which Joey led us to on the Santa Gertrudis trail south of Tumacácori.

My favorite encounter was three owl species (Elf Owl, Western Screech-Owl, Whiskered Screech-Owl) all calling at once in the night at Santa Rita Lodge. Owls are my favorites, so of course my trip highlights were seeing Elf Owl and Mexican Spotted Owl. Learning how the Sonoran and Chihuahuan desert habitats differ, and seeing Mount Lemmon, the Chiricahuas, the Huachucas, and Madera Canyon rise out of them, I came to understand why “Sky Islands” is such an apt term. I’m already thinking of going back someday — perhaps one August after the monsoons to see other hummingbirds and migrants from Mexico.

— **Robert Tonge**, *Denver*

#### ***Day after day, vivid birding moments***

We knew the trip would be special when, arriving at Lake Cochise, our first bird was an uncommon one: Bendire’s Thrasher. The lake just off I-10 about 80 miles from Tucson served a smorgasbord of shorebirds — Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, American Golden Plover, Red Phalarope, Stilt Sandpiper . . . you get the idea. My favorite? Long-billed Curlew — that oversized, curved bill makes me smile every time.

The eastern half of Saguaro National Park at 6 in the morning is absolutely stunning. The rising sun on the scrub oak, ocotillo and saguaro cactus was heavenly. I had never seen saguaros in bloom. So delicate yet tough, their blossoms defied the desert sun, heat and dryness.

South of there, we walked the trails around [Santa Rita Lodge](#), watched the lodge bird feeders, and found the spectacular Elegant Trogon. Even farther south, our stop at Peña Blanca Lake included a picnic dinner with a lake view and an amazing acrobatic display of Lesser Nighthawks having their dinner, too.

In Patagonia, AZ, we had some of the best homemade ice cream ever, minutes away from Tucson Bird Alliance’s Paton Center for Hummingbirds. We should all be grateful for its

*Continued on page 56*



founders, whose love of nature led them to plant that yard to attract the birds, mammals, and reptiles we saw that day. Another magical highlight was an early morning walk at [San Pedro House](#) near Sierra Vista, AZ. Harsh and lifeless to the untrained eye, the environment there teemed with birds singing, defending territory and nesting.

Crossing over the Chiricahua Mountains was such an adventure. Seeing so many warblers, vireos and the trip's single Mexican Spotted Owl more than made up for flat tires along the way. On the other side, Portal, AZ was everything we were told it would be: an abundance of migrating birds, owls and an elusive Crissal Thrasher.

In the end, the trip's highlight was the guy who led us through the Sky Island landscape. Joey Kellner's abundant enthusiasm and love for southeastern Arizona and its many bird and reptile treasures made our journey something special.

— **Betsy Goodwin**, *Pueblo*

### ***A rock in the road . . . took flight?!***

There were lots of great moments and memories, and many incredible sightings. As we drove away one evening from a feeder station outside Portal, AZ, looking for that late-visiting Crissal Thrasher, there instead was a Common Poorwill, motionless in the middle of the road. Joey's quick ID and quicker thinking pulled our cars side by side in both lanes for a better glimpse. To me, it looked like a rock — and then it flew a short distance away.

What a fabulous trip! Joey's enthusiasm and wonderful knowledge of southeastern Arizona were incredible. He goes above and beyond for sure with all the amenities: Food, coolers, water, lodging reservations. So well thought out.

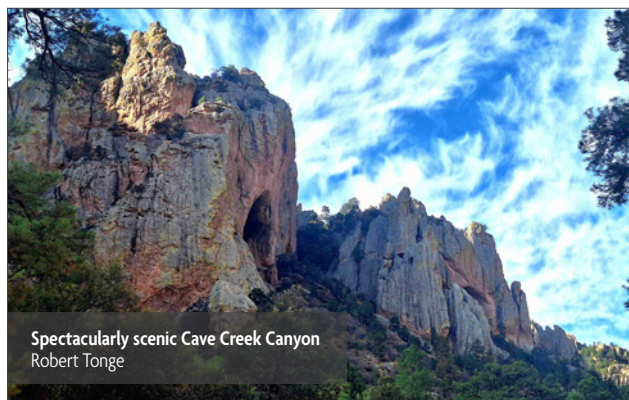
— **Denise Reznicek**, *Centennial*

### ***Dozens of lifers on a bargain excursion***

Guided birding expeditions are about half as long and twice the price of this wonderful trip! Joey's love for Arizona shone through. He may say we were lucky, but he knew the habitats and where to search for birds. I had never been to



Mexican Jay watching DFO  
birders in Madera Canyon  
Robert Tonge



Spectacularly scenic Cave Creek Canyon  
Robert Tonge



Pyrrhuloxia and Black-  
throated Sparrow at  
feeder in Portal, AZ yard  
Denise Reznicek



Gambel's Quail in  
morning light atop  
blooming saguaro  
cactus in Saguaro  
National Park  
Joey Kellner

*Continued on page 57*

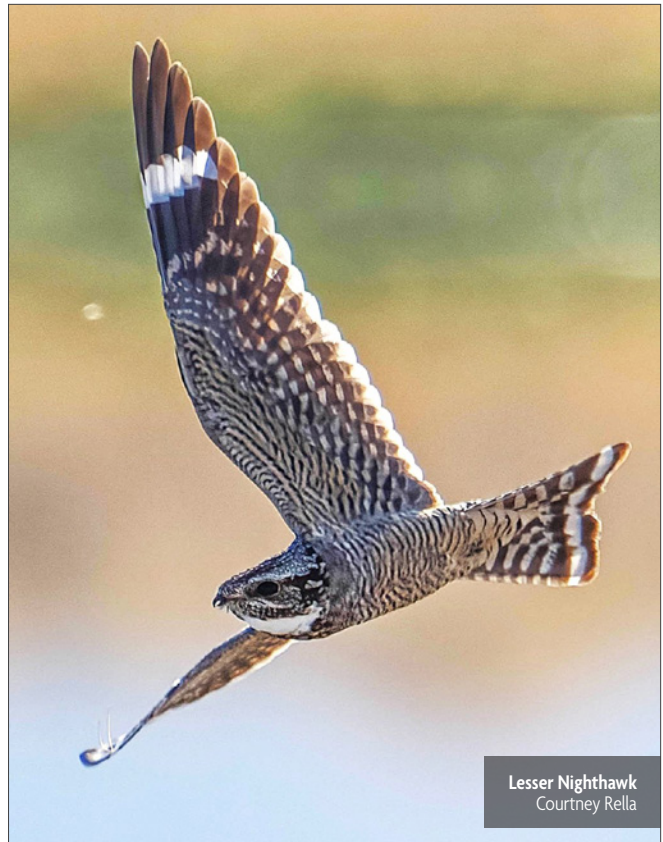


southeastern Arizona (nor birded anywhere in the state), and I had 64 lifers!

Joey was quick to get everyone on a bird as soon as he spotted or heard it. Wherever we went, he engaged other birders and helped them spot birds, too. For us, he took care of everything and made the trip super easy. All we had to do was focus on birding.

The bad drought and unusually slow spring migration were continuing and related themes. The birds' lateness in passing through allowed us to see more species than expected. But it also made some later migrants harder to find. Birds that would have been farther north and nesting were still around, and we worried if their later nesting would succeed. One breeding bird surveyor mentioned that insect and butterfly numbers were dismal, too. When we went "herping" for reptiles at night, there was little to no activity. It's kind of scary to imagine how especially vulnerable species like Mexican Chickadee (already suffering from wildfires) will fare.

*Continued on page 58*



Lesser Nighthawk  
Courtney Rella



Despite drought, Sonoran  
Desert in spring bloom  
Robert Tonge



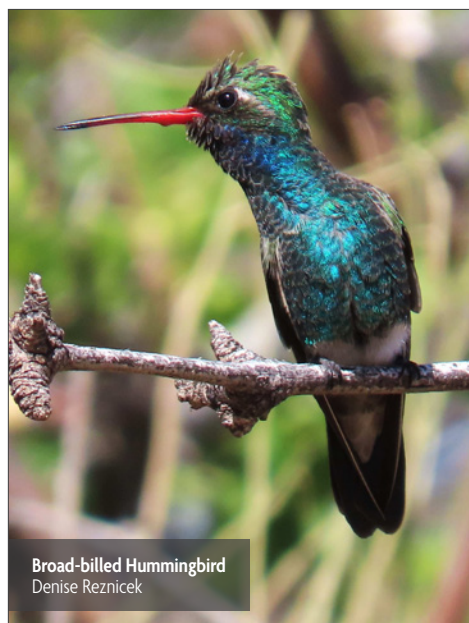
Returning home with great memories, I'll mention two. The day we birded Mount Lemmon in the high country above Tucson, we got to see so many warblers, an experience I hadn't had since living in Ohio. I loved the brilliant flits of their colors through the trees, and jumping from one bird to the next trying to identify them all.

I won't forget waiting in Madera Canyon among a flock of Mexican Jays for the Elegant Trogon to show up. The jays came amazingly close — it was like they were waiting with us! (I realize they were more likely waiting for us to drop food.) The bird feeders at Santa Rita Lodge were amazing. Several times the hummingbirds zoomed past so closely you could feel the air move.

—*Jennifer Tonge, Denver*



DFO trip team chowing down at La Unica in Willcox, AZ  
Robert Tonge



Broad-billed Hummingbird  
Denise Reznicek

*Continued on page 59*

## LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

# 227 bird species! But look what else we found . . .

### Mammals

Ringtail, White-nosed Coati, Javelina, Gray Fox, several species of bat (Pallid, Canyon, Evening, and one of the nectar-feeding species coming to a hummingbird feeder at night), many Coue's Deer, Cliff Chipmunk, Arizona Gray Squirrel, Pocket Gopher, Black-tailed Jackrabbit, Desert Cottontail, Antelope Ground Squirrel, Pronghorn, Striped Skunk and no doubt others we missed

### Lizards

Madrean Alligator Lizard, Desert Spiny Lizard, Clark's Spiny Lizard, Yarrow's Spiny Lizard, Desert Grassland Whiptail

### Snake

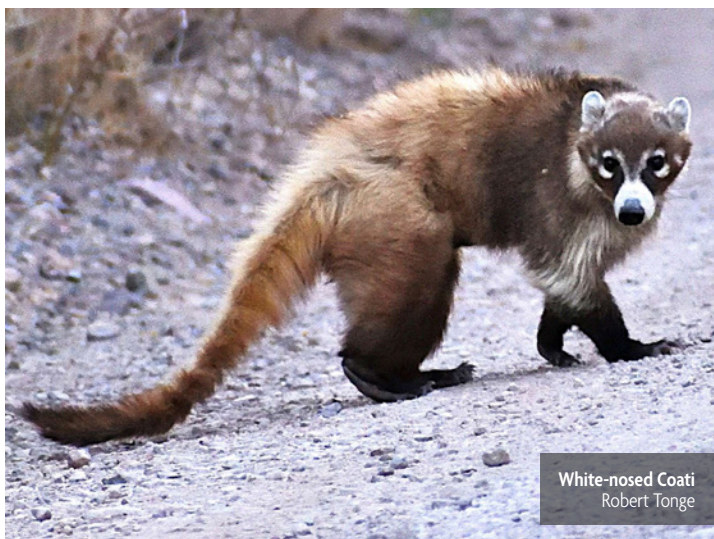
Only ONE? Was it the drought?

Our lone sighting, however, was instantly memorable:

Outside our lodge in Madera Canyon south of Tucson, some in the group found a **Sonoran Whipsnake** hiding in a bush next to the lodge's bird feeders. Then they watched as it CAUGHT and ATE a Broad-billed Hummingbird!



Sonoran Whipsnake taking down Broad-billed Hummingbird near Madera Canyon feeders  
Robert Tonge



White-nosed Coati  
Robert Tonge



## ***Awed by the birds — and the leader***

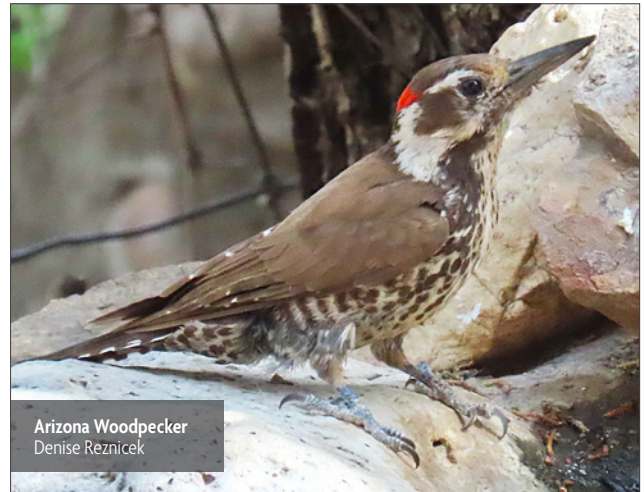
These 12 days were absolutely fantastic, an epic southeastern Arizona birding trip. Besides the high species count, we had great birding karma, seeing such specialties as Five-striped Sparrow and Varied Bunting, plus unexpecteds like Red Phalarope and Snowy Plover. After a while, we just expected to see what we were looking for — and most of the time, we did.

Seeing an Elf Owl come to a long favored nest site was pure magic. I'll never forget the trek through the woods and up a steep Pinery Canyon incline in the Chiricahuas to see the Mexican Spotted Owl. The Sky Islands already hold such mystique and allure (I've visited four springs in a row), but this time was really special. The plant and animal diversity, the sunrise sun on the cliffs in Cave Creek Canyon, so many dark-sky stars on nights far from light pollution, and knowing that a coati, javelina, or Mexican specialty bird might appear at any moment left me in awe.

Participants on Joey's previous Arizona trips had warned of very early rising and late bedtimes after owling and road cruising for "herps." But after resisting the first urge to roll over at the pre-dawn alarm, it was great to be outdoors in the morning quiet. We got more birds and avoided the worst of the heat, too. All the way along, the amenities and logistics were excellent. I had always wanted to stay at Santa Rita Lodge, and our two nights there were wonderful, from feeders teeming with birds to a roving Ringtail.

Joey Kellner is one organized and knowledgeable dude. I'm grateful to have seen him in action: enthusiastic, confident, and generous with his time and talents. I do not exaggerate to say he is a legend, and DFO is so fortunate that he shares his gifts as a birder and field trip leader with us.

— **Bill Turner**, *Centennial*





# *Until the next Lark Bunting . . .* **HAPPY MID-SUMMER AND FALL MIGRATION BIRDING!**

Photo: American Golden Plover  
chasing Killdeer at Lake Cochise, AZ  
Courtney Rella

