



THE LARK BUNTING

QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 62 | ISSUE 1 | WINTER 2026

DFOBIRDS.ORG

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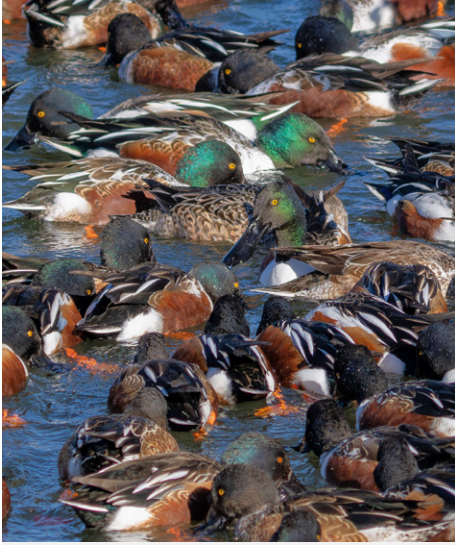
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Northern Shovelers
Rob Raker
Kountze Lake
Belmar Park, Lakewood



ON THE COVER

Northern Shovelers: Whatever you call what they do, that feeder-go-round is amazing

Patrick O'Driscoll

So, you're visiting a typical Colorado lake or pond in winter, and out on the open water is a familiar, even beloved sight to us birders: a floating mosh pit of whirling, circling ducks. A white-green-black-rust-brown-orange mess of shoulders, heads, bodies, feet and, here and there, yellow eyes.

Northern Shovelers (*Spatula clypeata*) of course. Duh! So, what do you call what they're doing? Yes, it's a form of dabbling (vs. diving). That's Ducks 101. And you well know how the shoveler's almost comically huge *schnozzola* of a duckbill is uniquely equipped to strain plankton, bugs and other delectable invertebrates like a sieve out of those waters churned and stirred up by the birds' communal roiling.

But what do *YOU* call it? Shoveling? (Too obvious?) Pinwheeling? Sure, it's a feeding circle. And BTW, you've long since noticed that shovelers will do this solo or in pairs, too — indeed, in almost any number into the dozens, scores, even hundreds.



Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former environmental scientist, adventurer and

filmmaker on many expeditions around the world. Now retired, he enjoys birding and photography and still goes rock-climbing and skiing

But what word popped out the first time you saw this phenomenon? Swirl? Raft? Vortex! Spin cycle? Shoveler-go-round? Here's one I hadn't heard until I saw it on Google just now: *Carousel feeding*. Well, heck yeah! Shovelers aren't *using* a lazy Susan — they *ARE* the lazy Susan!

The first time I saw a circle of shovelers feeding, my first thought was: Scrum. Must be a ball in there somewhere. Look at any rugby match on TV or online. See what I mean? (Go ahead, mate, I'll wait.) Whatever you call what shovelers do, it's yet another of those behaviors — endearing, puzzling, jaw-dropping — we encounter daily when pursuing this birding passion of ours.

I'm not sure where I'm going with this — except maybe that, whatever the field guides and scientific papers say (and on shovelers, they say plenty), we can still call it like we see it. For us humans, anthropomorphizing birds' unusual looks and behaviors is a rather common frame of reference. Sometimes it's enough simply to accept and say, as my non-birder significant other and I do when witnessing something in the wildlife world that amazes and delights us at the same time: "*Eff-ing NATURE!*"

For the record, the kinetic image of dozens of moshing, scrumming shovelers on the cover of this winter's issue of *The Lark Bunting* was taken by longtime DFO member **Rob Raker** one morning last December at Kountze Lake in Lakewood's Belmar Park. I don't think he titled the photo, but I'll call it, "Breakfast of Champions."

Fun fact: You know what duck hunters call shovelers? Spoonies! Also, Bootlips! The spoon part is understandable: It's right there in the Latin of their scientific name, *spatula clypeata*. Literally, "spoon" and "shield-like," for how broad and flat that spatula of a bill is. (Hunters, BTW, "harvest" roughly half a million shovelers a year, yet the world's population is deemed stable at up to 6 million, half of them in the US.)

I'll leave it to Colorado's own deep-thinking populist birdman, **Ted Floyd**, to scratch one more itch about Northern Shovelers' feeding habits. In his [How to Know the Birds](#) column on the website of the American Birding Association (where he's editor of *Birding* magazine), Floyd asks (and offers a theory or two) why some feeding shovelers spin clockwise while others go counterclockwise, with his own video clips of both. In the end, we're still guessing, but I'm at peace with my own answer: *Eff-ing NATURE!*

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



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The Lark Bunting, formerly the monthly newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists, is the club's quarterly journal and is published in winter (January), spring (April), summer (July) and fall (October).

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

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The Lark Bunting welcomes story ideas and original articles, essays and photos from DFO members. Submit yours to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at 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.

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

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS

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**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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[DFO Leadership Page](#).



FROM DFO'S PERCH

In new year, Colorado's bird festival season is just around the bend

Mary Geder

Whether it feels like it or not, winter is here, and so is winter birding. Without question, December was a strange weather month, with record high temperatures, mostly open water, and very little snow on the ground along the Front Range or the Plains.

Accessible food sources are still available here for birds that normally would be far south—so they're lingering, in no great need to move on. When more seasonal weather finally arrives, could we see large, late movements of stragglers?

Don't wait. Be ready to tog up with your fleece and get out there. You could have your own personal "count day" in January or February if and when the cold and snow really snap and the birds take the hint. Who knows? The way the climate's changing, maybe it'll become a mid-winter tradition.

But first: New Year's is a great time to lay out your long-term birding plans for 2026. What are yours? New places to try? Old places to rediscover? A roster of target birds you want on your life list? A special trip somewhere?

All this makes me think about bird festivals. They're popular, they're multiplying, and they're all over the country, in every season. Don't take my word for it. Check out the [festival and event listings](#) in the Cornell Lab's *All About Birds* online guide to birds and birding.

Bird festivals come in many flavors and sizes, but they all share a fundamental characteristic: Enthusiastic people wanting to see and learn about birds. Festival planners and

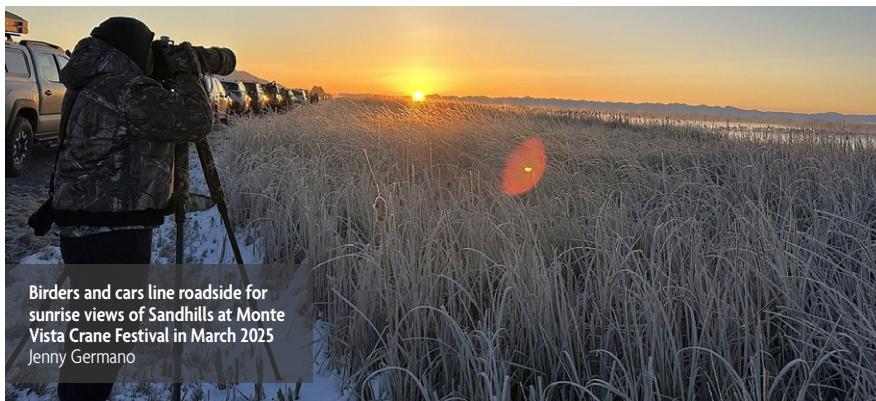
organizers feed that desire with guest experts, top birders, knowledgeable guides and outings. Host towns and local organizations provide support with venues, transportation, food and lodging.

Some focus on specific bird species or populations. Think of Colorado's own Karval Mountain Plover Festival, a small but welcoming celebration of a favorite eastern Plains bird in the tiniest of festival towns (population 190 or so). Or the [Grays Harbor Shorebird Festival](#) in Washington state, with hundreds of thousands of plovers, sandpipers, dowitchers and turnstones (and in its 30th year this May). And of course, there are Colorado's two crane migration fests, in spring at Monte Vista and fall around Steamboat Springs. The namesake star birds are the attraction, but you are sure to see other interesting species as well.

Other festivals emphasize great regional locations with many species and environments. One prime example is the [Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival](#), which is centered in Harlingen, TX but reaches up and downvalley across varied and bird-rich interior and coastal habitats.

Never been to a birding festival? I'm keen on them. So much to do and see! They all have guided birding trips and opportunities. Larger festivals also hold seminars on birds and birding topics, workshops for bird photography, sessions on nature journaling and other niches, even dinners with keynote speakers. They also host vendors for all things birding, from optics, cameras and travel to books, clothing and bird-themed products of every kind.

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Birders and cars line roadside for sunrise views of Sandhills at Monte Vista Crane Festival in March 2025
Jenny Germano



Friends Kelsey Robb, left, and first-time birder Karin Kaspar enjoying Monte Vista Crane Festival last year
Kelsey Robb

It is true that with eBird and other resources, you can visit such places and find the star birds on your own. But for maximum productivity and just plain fun, festival birding is hard to beat. Why attend? I've got five reasons right off the top:

- **You'll be BIRDING!** It's a new locale, with new birds (lifers!) and old favorites. You'll visit, bird and learn with experts about fresh places that you can return to on your own again later to bird at your own pace
- **Behind-the-ropes ACCESS!** In some cases, festival outings will take you to private lands and preserves not open to the general public. Such special places often have target birds that are harder to find elsewhere
- **Make new birding FRIENDS!** You'll be surrounded by new faces with the same common interest. Often, conversations with new acquaintances on the bus or over lunch or dinner stir new ideas for birding and meeting up
- **Bird with EXPERTS!** Festival trip leaders and guides are experts in the particular areas and habitats in which you're birding. Festivals often recruit nationally known guides, too
- **Local CULTURE!** Not only will you see and learn about the birds — you'll also be exposed to the host communities: Local birders, birding property owners, festival volunteers, local food, history, customs and culture

As for costs and expenses, there's wide variation. Some festivals cover everything in a single registration fee. Larger festivals may charge for registration plus per-trip fees (between \$30 and \$100 depending on travel time, distance, entry fees at some destinations). A range of all-day and half-day outings is typical over a three- to four-day festival. And there are those workshops, seminars, banquets and other activities. No wonder advance planning is key, especially in getting the outings you want. Check each festival website for the date when field trips are first posted.

Here are some of Colorado's festivals for 2026. Given our status as a spring migration corridor, that season is prime festival time: One each month from February to April, then two in May.

FEBRUARY 5-8

[High Plains Snow Goose Festival, Lamar](#)

MARCH 6-8

[Monte Vista Crane Festival, Monte Vista](#)

APRIL 24

[Karval Mountain Plover Festival, Karval](#)

MAY 6-10

[Ute Mountain Mesa Verde Birding Festival, Cortez](#)

MAY 14-17

[Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival, Colorado Springs](#)

SEPTEMBER 3-6

[Yampa Valley Crane Festival, Steamboat-Hayden-Craig](#)

Check them out . . . and Happy New Year, happy new birds and, maybe, a happy new trip to a bird festival.

— *Mary*

Mary Geder, filling in this season in the "From the President" slot, has held several volunteer posts since joining DFO in the early 2000s. She worked as a US Fish & Wildlife Service biologist before a 30-year career in the oil and gas field. 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 news, tales from the trail, personal birding adventures (and life birds!), milestones, etc. Email items, photos and any questions to patodrisk@gmail.com

FORGOT TO RENEW WITH OR DONATE TO DFO?

It happens to the best of us. In the year’s-end whirl of holidays, tax prep, new year planning and various *et ceteras*, you might forget a couple of this’s or that’s. If that included renewing your DFO membership, fear not! Dec. 31 was the calendar deadline to re-up for 2026, but there’s still time to fix your lapse. [Renew for yourself today](#) — and you can even give a DFO membership as a belated holiday or New Year’s gift to someone else in your flock of friends and relations.

You already know this, but it bears repeating: Belonging to Denver Field Ornithologists is still a solid 4 B’s — **Best Bargain** in the **Birding Business!** More free field trips (hundreds a year) than any bird club on the planet. Stimulating programs and workshops online and gatherings in person. An entertaining quarterly web journal and an informative monthly e-newsletter. And the companionship of hundreds of like-minded people who love birds and birding as much as you do. Annual dues are modest by any measure, and have been for years: Individual Adult – \$30; Family – \$45; Student (age 22 and under) – \$15. And so easy: Go to the [Join or Renew page](#) of the DFO website.

While you’re renewing, how about starting 2026 with a fresh donation to the cause? Whatever the time of year, contributions to DFO’s three funds help do the work of the club. Choose from the Research, Education & Conservation Grant, Friends of DFO and Hawk Watch funds — or make it a trifecta and give to all three! Also super easy: Scroll to the bottom of the Join or Renew page and donate right there. Either way, thanks for being a member of the DFO flock.

DONATE TO DFO NOW!



DFO HITS “COLORADO GIVES” DONATION TARGET



Contributions to Denver Field Ornithologists through the 2025 [Colorado Gives](#) statewide charitable giving campaign in December are projected to reach \$10,000. The most recent total was \$9,652, about \$450 less than the 2024 tally. But an expected corporate match

of \$500 will push DFO over \$10K in the club’s second year as a Colorado Gives participant. The average donation from the 59 individuals who made contributions was a hair under \$100 each (\$99.46). More than 42% of the donors were repeat donors from 2024. The generosity of contributors to DFO’s Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch fund enabled the club to collect a \$3,000 matching gift from a generous private family foundation. That amount was a dollar-to-dollar match of contributions to Hawk Watch, the annual spring count of migrant birds of prey atop the sandstone ridge in the foothills west of Denver.

Thanks to all who contributed, and here’s to even better support for DFO in Colorado Gives 2026!

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DFO'S 1ST VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR CLOCKS OUT

With thanks and a tinge of regret, DFO bids a reluctant farewell in the new year to Volunteer Coordinator **Phil Waltz**, who joined the DFO Board early in 2024 and was the first person to hold this vital post. With extensive experience managing volunteers in other arenas, Phil helped DFO recruit and organize help, get a handle on our volunteer needs, track the club's considerable volume of volunteer hours with monthly recordkeeping online, and host appreciation day events to acknowledge and reward those who give their free time to help make DFO go.

"With my wife's imminent retirement, I realized we're going to be traveling more than we had imagined, at least several months a year," Waltz told the board this past fall. "I feel bad having to step aside," but being gone months at a time is "too much of a disconnect to properly manage the volunteer responsibilities."

He added: "I really enjoyed working with all of you. Keep up the great work, and happy birding." We wish Phil and **Kathy** the best in their busy, travel-filled retirement — and in the same breath, we invite any and all DFO members to join in the enduring work of our 90-year-old organization. Whether serving on committees that conduct club business, helping with events during the year, or even picking up where our just-departed volunteer coordinator left off, DFO always needs more hands, heads and hearts. Visit the [Volunteer Page](#) on the DFO website to see what's needed, or to tell us what else you'd like to offer.



Volunteer coordinator Phil Waltz, right, with DFO president Sharon Tinianow and Jim Esten

HAWK WATCH 2026 TRAININGS COMING IN FEBRUARY

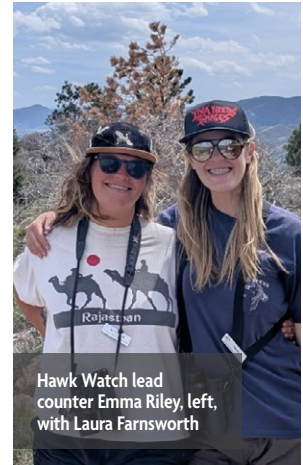
In less than two months' time, DFO's [Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch](#) season begins. The March 1 start of the spring count of migrating birds of prey will be preceded by important training. First up is a **Feb. 22** in-person

stewardship orientation with Jefferson County Parks & Open Space in Golden — park regulations, how to interact with visitors, and the like. The 9-11 a.m. session is at JeffCo Open Space headquarters, 700 Jefferson County Parkway, Suite 100 in Golden. (Enter through main entrance on east side, by flagpole.) Returning volunteers are welcome and encouraged to attend.

Three days later, Wednesday **Feb. 25**, a Hawk Watch skills training for in-flight raptor identification is planned via Zoom webinar, 7-8 p.m. (Registration will be available on the [Hawk Watch website](#) after **Jan. 15**.) On Saturday, **Feb. 28**, morning and afternoon Hawk Watch orientation sessions will be held onsite at the counting station atop the ridge. The first is 10 a.m.-noon, and the second 1-3 p.m.

Last year's lead counter, **Emma Riley**, will return for her second year in that key post. It's also the fifth season at Dinosaur Ridge for Riley, a raptor biologist from Fort Collins. Assisting her will be new counter **Soren Zappia**. A University of Wisconsin chemistry/ biochemistry graduate and a birder since childhood, he first hawkwatched last fall at Minnesota's Hawk Ridge. He previously worked in environmental education and songbird banding. Returning for a second season as a part-time observer is **Laura Farnsworth**, a University of Colorado Denver grad student studying population ecology of waterfowl wintering in urban areas. She has taught numerous field ornithology courses and worked as a field technician for various Colorado Wildlife projects.

To volunteer for the spring count, go to the [Volunteer page](#) on the Hawk Watch website.



Hawk Watch lead counter Emma Riley, left, with Laura Farnsworth

Welcome to new DFO members

Mars Atchison, Denver; Kathy Ballinger and Brian Stutheit; Westminster; Barbara Banks and Edward Imatani, Golden; Cathy and Christopher Barr, Littleton; Amy Bennett and Eric Rau, Denver; Mark Berkstresser, Aurora; Michelle DiGiacomo, Denver; Phil Gerkin, Aurora; Ray Gradale, Denver; Juliana Hebel, Lakewood; Cindy and Gene Hill, Thornton; Michael Millner, Denver; William and Karen Musser, Evergreen; Polly Reetz, Denver; Charlie and Mary Saunders, Lakewood; Susan Simpson, Lakewood, and Katherine Snyder, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Mark Amershek, Yvonne Berg, Mary Beverly, Jill Boice, Renee and Dan Brachear, Jodi Chambers and Sally Palmer, John Chanin and Holly Sollod, Susan Clasen, Dan and Carol Cook, Kevin Corwin, Jacqueline Crivello, Doris Cruze, Linda Cummings and Dale Stevens, Jean and Charlie Curlee, Jeanne Marie Dillon, David Driscoll, Ed Furlong, Laurie Gibb, Gregg Goodrich and Ann Troth, Suzanne Grady, Anne Gurley, Stephen Hendrix, David Hennes, Roy Hohn, Jerry Jargon, Judy Lane, Jean McClenathen, Joyce Michael, Victoria Miles, Barbara Retzlaff, Niña Routh, Mary and Charlie Saunders, Steven G. Schwartz and Alice Tariot, Lynn Slaga, Denise and Danny Smith, Bob Spencer and Sondra Bland, Sharon Tinianow, Elaine Wagner, Laura and Wayne Wathen, Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele, Scott Yarberry, Mary Zick

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DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Kathy Barnum, Yvonne Berg, Mary Beverly, Jason Bidgood, Jill Boice, Dan and Carol Cook, Kevin Corwin, Linda Cummings and Dale Stevens, Mary and Chip Dawes, Patricia Diluzio, Stephen Hendrix, David Hennes, Roy Hohn, Chuck Hundertmark and Marjorie Jannotta, Mary Keithler, Lori Morton, Malcolm "Mac" Parks, Janet Peters and Michael Lupini, Bob Righter, Janet Shin, Susan Simpson, Denise and Danny Smith, Bob Spencer and Sondra Bland, Eileen Warner, Laura and Wayne Wathen, Larry Wilson, and Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele



WINTER PROGRAM PREVIEW

Birding former British Honduras? You'd Better BELIZE it

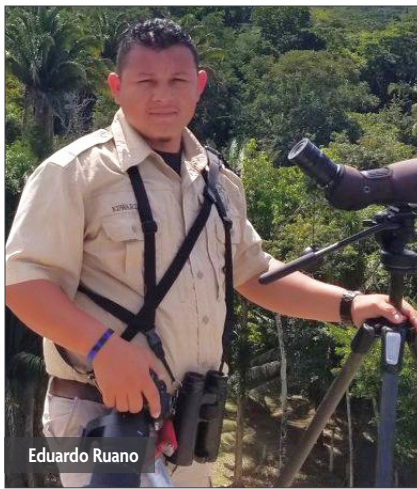
Eduardo Ruano and Ruben Arevalo,

Belizean bird guides

Monday, January 26, 2026

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



Eduardo Ruano



Ruben Arevalo



Jabiru

Formerly British Honduras until gaining independence from Great Britain in 1981, Belize is known to travelers as an English-speaking vacation mecca (also Spanish and Creole) of beaches, snorkeling and diving, rainforest adventuring and ancient Mayan ruins on the Caribbean side of Central America.

It is also dream habitat for birds. Although Belize is Central America's second-smallest country (roughly the size of Massachusetts), half of its land is covered with rainforests. More than a third of the land is under environmental protection, and it is the region's least-populated country. No wonder it is home to more than 600 species of birds, from multiple kinds of trogons, motmots and puffbirds to the Yellow-headed Parrot and the Jabiru stork, tallest bird in the Western Hemisphere. The species also include large numbers of North American warblers and flycatchers that overwinter in Belize.

Meet the birds of Belize and more through the eyes and photographs of Belizean bird guides **Eduardo Ruano** and **Ruben Arevalo** in DFO's first evening program of 2026. "**Birding former British Honduras? You'd better BELIZE It!**" is set for **Monday, January 26 at 7 p.m. MST via Zoom.**

Ruano and Arevalo are longtime guides at Lamanai Outpost Lodge, one of several well-known destinations on the Belize birding tour circuit. Their home base has checklisted more than 400 bird species, and the lodge is a four-time winner of the H. Lee Jones Belize Bird-a-thon, an annual 24-hour competition named for the ornithologist-author of the *Birds of Belize* guidebook. It is also headquarters of a long-term University of Florida study of Morelet's crocodile.

Presentation topics range from the land and tree birds of Belize's inland rainforests and pine savannas to shorebirds and waders of the Caribbean coastal region, where the Belize Barrier Reef of corals, mollusks and fish is part of the 700-mile Great Mayan Reef, second longest in the world. Nighttime boat safaris may reveal Yucatan nightjars and poorwills, and tropical forest walks cross paths with Great Curassows, Ocellated Turkeys, Red-lored Parrot and Collared Aracari, a kind of toucan.



WINTER PROGRAM PREVIEW

The Wonders & Glories of Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, the Greatest Place on Earth

Ted Floyd, Colorado birder-writer-educator,
editor of *Birding Magazine*
Monday, February 23, 2026
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

We haven't been keeping score, but by *The Lark Bunting's* very unofficial count, Colorado birding writer-editor, educator and free thinker **Ted Floyd** has been a DFO program speaker approximately twelvety-six-birdzillion times, give or take a few. Denver Field Ornithologists keeps bringing Ted back because he *always* has fresh and provocative things to say about birds and humans, and the collective birding pastime-obsession-addiction that brings the two communities together.

If you're a regular reader of the [CoBirds email birding list-serv](#), you've also seen Floyd's occasional postings about epic birding daytrips (and nocturnal bird listening), full of granular details not only about birds but also other flora and fauna (humans included) along the way. And whenever Ted's subject is a visit to [Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge](#) — usually with a band of smart, eager young birders — it's best to drop whatever you're doing and read along.

So mark your calendar now for **Monday, Feb. 23, 2026** and Floyd's next DFO evening presentation, "**The Wonders & Glories of Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, the Greatest Place on Earth.**" Whatever Ted decides to show and tell about that improbably rich haven for birds, bison and other critters on the edge of urban Denver, his Zoom webinar at 7 p.m. MST will be worth every minute.

As the Lafayette-based co-editor of the American Birding Association's *Birding Magazine*, Floyd needs little introduction, but in quick snapshots, he is:

- A frequent speaker at bird symposiums and festivals and a promoter-educator for young and developing birders
- Author of more than 200 bird articles and five bird books (with three more on the way) and contributor to ornithological and conservation research
- An eBirder who has filed at least one checklist a day for more than 18-1/2 years
- A photographer whose glorious bird images on [his Instagram feed](#) carry Insta-tutorials on each species

Big night: Top volunteers for 2025 honored at DFO 90th birthday bash with “Mr. eBird”

Patrick O’Driscoll

The year-long observance of Denver Field Ornithologists’ 90th anniversary in 2025 reached a history-making peak on Oct. 13. The most people ever to attend a DFO event (125) joined in the combination birthday party, volunteer awards presentation and keynote speech by DFO’s most famous alumnus, **Chris Wood**, co-founder and director of eBird.

Filling two meeting rooms in Denver’s Lowry Conference Center, the attendees mingled with friends old and new, sang “Happy Birthday” to DFO, shared in two cakes decorated with the club’s feather logo, and applauded recipients of DFO’s top volunteer honors. Then they paid rapt attention as Wood’s multimedia talk connected the dots between the hometown birding club he joined as a 7th grader and its influence on eBird, the largest ongoing community science project in the world. (To enjoy Wood’s full presentation about eBird then, now and beyond, go to the DFO website’s [Past Programs](#) page and click on *90 Years of Birding, 10 Years Ahead: DFO in the eBird Story* for the program video.)

The celebration marked just the second group assembly of members since the COVID-19 pandemic halted in-person gatherings in 2020, suspending a popular social and cultural connection among DFO members. Until then, the club had hosted three-season monthly programs since it first organized in 1935 as the Colorado Bird Club. Later in 2020, DFO resumed the monthly get-togethers via Zoom webinar, but the person-to-person element was missing — and missed.

Continued on page 13



MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO’s October and November programs

DFO archives videos of our monthly fall, winter and spring programs. If you could not attend the evening programs in October and November, click the “WATCH ONLINE” links below their titles to view the recordings on DFO’s YouTube channel. The DFO website’s “Past Programs” page contains links for these and numerous other DFO programs from recent years

MONDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2025
**90 Years of DFO,
20 Years of eBird:
Past, Present & Future**

Chris Wood

DFO alumnus and co-founder/
director of Cornell’s eBird

[WATCH ONLINE](#)

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2025
**Caught in the SNOWstorm:
Collaborative Research on
Snowy Owls**

Scott Weidensaul

Author, SNOWstorm co-founder

[WATCH ONLINE](#)



BIRTHDAY BASH *cont from page 12*

The Ptarmigan Award, DFO's highest accolade, was presented to **Bill Turner**, a 25-year member in 2026, for his years of work arranging speakers for those monthly evening programs. The Ptarmigan — established in 1988 and named for one of Colorado's rarest native birds — recognizes devotion of extraordinary time and energy to DFO. As programs manager, Bill has recruited numerous interesting and prominent figures in birding and wildlife science for monthly presentations in spring, fall and winter. Now retired as education coordinator for the Denver Zoo, he took up birding in Los Angeles earlier in his zoological career. Over the years, he also organized small group ecotourism adventures in Australia and Central America.



“There are many ways to experience nature. Birding is just one of them,” Bill said in a statement published with the award. “I hope we can all continue to support DFO and its work in education, conservation, advocacy and avian research.”

DFO's second major honor, the Peregrine Award, went to **Natalie Uschner-Arroyo**, coordinator of the club's [Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch](#) spring count of migrating raptors. The Peregrine, established in 2023, recognizes extraordinary innovation and leadership. Besides overseeing Hawk Watch's continued growth and enhanced respect among raptor counts nationally, Natalie was instrumental in 2025 in securing a significant grant from greater Denver's Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD).

All involved in Hawk Watch credit her “level-headedness, respect, thoroughness and dedication” for increasing funding, education, community awareness, volunteer appreciation and improved data quality, said Hawk Watch chair **Janet Peters**. “Natalie not only leads (the program) but also works up on the ridge spotting birds and sharing her passion for raptors with volunteers and visitors.”

Continued on page 14



125 people turned out for the program and party, a record for an in-person DFO gathering
Jim Esten

Natalie Uschner-Arroyo, Peregrine Award winner
Jim Esten

DFO's Peregrine Award includes Chen's peregrine painting, framed

BIRTHDAY BASH *cont from page 13*

Before the awards presentation, DFO volunteers coordinator **Phil Waltz** recapped the more than 4,200 volunteer hours that members had contributed to DFO through 10 months of 2025, citing individuals in the club's management and administration — including field trip leaders, officers and board and committee members — in field trips, communications, finance, publications and programs. He noted DFO was on track to set another record for field trips in a year (more than 275) and that an all-time high of trip leaders (52) had led outings in 2025 through mid-October.

By the evening's end, those in attendance had also dipped generously into their pockets to leave more than \$400 in voluntary contributions when choosing from free books on birds, wildlife and birding donated to DFO over the previous year. This “free table” at the September and October evening gatherings revived a long-running practice at DFO program meetings that had been dormant since the pandemic shutdown.



Oldest and youngest DFO members at the 90th birthday are Dick Schottler, 91, and Archer Silverman, 15
Patrick O'Driscoll



Guest speaker and DFO alum Chris Wood, center rear, with DFO hosts at the club's 90th birthday event
Jim Esten



Courtney Rella at “free table” with DFO giveaway bird books, which raised \$400 in donations
Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO programs: Monthly? Quarterly? Online? Off? Task force to explore more options

Sharon Tinianow

Fall 2025 was a season of experimentation for Denver Field Ornithologists' monthly program meetings. After 4 years of evening presentations via Zoom webinar after the COVID-19 shutdown in 2020, we returned to in-person gatherings in September and October with very encouraging results.

On Sept. 29, longtime member **Joey Kellner's** presentation on birding the "Sky Islands" of southeastern Arizona was DFO's first program in person since the pandemic. On Oct. 13, DFO alumnus **Chris Wood**, co-founder and director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird network, was guest speaker for DFO's 90th anniversary celebration.

Both meetings, held in Denver's [Lowry Conference Center](#), were well-attended. More than 70 people heard Kellner's talk, and 125 — a new record for any in-person DFO function — came to Wood's address at the DFO birthday party. Both were videotaped for those who could not attend, now viewable from the [Past Programs](#) page of the DFO website.

In November we returned to Zoom with bird researcher and author **Scott Weidensaul**, who shared insights from his study of Snowy Owls. Bouncing back and forth between in-person and online programs was an experiment to explore ideas for the future of DFO's monthly membership meetings.

The exploration continues in 2026, led by a task force appointed by the DFO president. Joining programs manager **Bill Turner** are members **Sue Summers**, **Susan Blansett**, and **Jill Boice**. The task force will explore options beyond winter and spring, as Zoom-based programs are planned for January, February and March, plus an entirely new meeting idea for April. All these efforts and more to come are aimed at addressing a nagging post-pandemic problem for DFO: lack of member-focused group social interaction beyond our day-to-day schedule of field trips. (More on that in a moment.)

The April event will be an in-person gathering with the working title, *Gear Up and Get Out 2026*. Unlike DFO's standard fourth-Monday evening meeting slot, the April meet aims for a weekend day at a central location where members can try out new and used birding gear. Members also could donate used equipment to DFO, which we'd offer for sale. Details and procedures are still being sorted out. A "Save the Date" notice will go out to all members once the date and location are set.

Also under consideration is to revive the annual DFO picnic at a local park, preceded by morning bird walks there. The club did this several times in the pre-pandemic past at various locations, from Castlewood Canyon State Park to Prospect Park in the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt.

As noted above, this is a deliberate attempt to inject our membership with more face-to-face group socializing and interaction. Since our formation in 1935 as the Colorado Bird Club (DFO's original name), members gathered at program meetings monthly except in summer. That three-month seasonal hiatus enabled members to get into the field more frequently to practice bird identification in warm weather months. By the 1950s, the club was leading field trips throughout the year, but monthly meetings continued as before.

This pattern for trips and meetings was the norm for decades until April 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic halted all in-person gatherings. While members continued to bird on their own, DFO pivoted five months later to "virtual" monthly programs using Zoom. Noted birder and author **Kenn Kaufman** was the presenter at our first Zoom meeting in September 2020. With heightened promotion and publicizing, DFO began to draw audiences two, three, four or more times larger than past in-person programs as attendees AND presenters could (and did) join online from virtually anywhere in the world.



Members mingling at an in-person program in 2025
Jim Esten

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TASK FORCE *cont from page 15*

Field trips resumed in spring of 2021, but DFO continued with webinars for eight program meetings a year in winter, spring and fall. (The club's sole attempt at a hybrid in-person/online program, in August 2022, was poorly attended.) While Zoom sessions were convenient and easy to share later on video, technology had a noticeable downside. What had always been a social event — with live audience participation in the room — was now an online and impersonal, with virtual “attendees” isolated from one another.

This lack of social interchange affected DFO in unexpected ways. We knew before the pandemic that many of the monthly meeting-goers weren't always in the ranks of members who went on field trips. Many members did both, but those larger gatherings were integral to DFO's overall social experience.

It may also be that mixing with club leaders at those meetings created and fed a vital pipeline of DFO volunteerism. Although our unparalleled field trip program still enlists new trip leaders, DFO today sorely needs more help managing our growing organization, website, operations and issue committees and other key functions that make the club go.

Whether and how to return to in-person meetings has vexed the DFO Board for years. Board members have surveyed the membership about preferences and found that typically about half of respondents favor webinars and about half want more in-person programs. Many have suggested a live hybrid of in-person AND webinar, something that other smaller clubs have been able to do. Meanwhile, attendance at our Zoom program meetings has steadily dropped in the past year, a trend similar organizations have experienced, too.

The barriers to a hybrid-meeting solution are twofold. First, DFO doesn't have a physical home that can accommodate both live audiences and interactive technology. For the first 84 years of our history, we met at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. That became infeasible after changes in museum operations with outside users. From 2019 until the pandemic we met at Unity Spiritual Center Denver — a large space but without the robust tech now needed.

Like Unity, the Lowry center has many amenities. But without the built-in technology for hybrid meetings, costs would be prohibitive for a professional videographer (as we did for our September and October in-person experiments there). We continue to seek an affordable venue to accommodate in-person and Zoom together. In the meantime, we will try other kinds of events, like the planned *Gear Up and Get Out 2026* in April, to see if attendance suggests something that appeals.

Whatever program-meeting approach DFO ultimately adopts, the choice is entirely up to you, the membership. So, vote with your attendance — and if you are interested in helping with DFO's experiment, contact us via the [volunteer form on the DFO website](#).



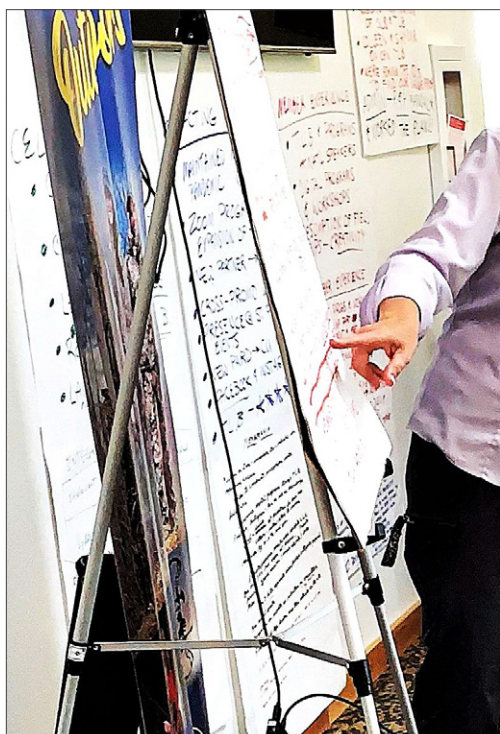
*DFO President **Sharon Tinianow** was previously vice president (2021-23) and is former editor of The Lark Bunting. She began birding in an ornithology class in college. She retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History*

CONSERVATION

DFO's recharging the batteries in its conservation mission

Denver Field Ornithologists' purpose is to promote the study of birds and the preservation of birds and their habitats

— DFO mission statement



DFO members are part of public engagement in shaping Denver's new Park Hill Park

Conservation has been part of DFO's reason for being since the very beginnings of the organization in 1935. From early initiatives to create a bird sanctuary in Denver to decades of participation in the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Counts, DFO members have devoted time and energy to preserving birds and the places they inhabit.

This devotion to bird conservation is also woven into our field trips program. We count the birds not just to add to our individual life lists, but to provide a detailed club report to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology via eBird. DFO's efforts then become part of a massive eBird database that researchers use in scientific work that, in turn, leads to further conservation initiatives.

Over the years, DFO has proactively supported bird and habitat conservation action by informing our members about related activities and encouraging their participation. The club also solicits donations to two DFO funds to further this work:

- [The Research, Education & Conservation Grant Fund](#), which awards modest financial aid to support meaningful work by researchers and educators
- [Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch](#), DFO's annual spring count of migrating raptors, which shares this community science data with the national [Hawk Migration Association](#) and eBird

To renew and enhance our club's advocacy for bird and habitat conservation, DFO president **Sharon Tinianow** has created a DFO Conservation Task Force in consultation with the board and others. She has appointed DFO members **Roger Koester**, **Charlie Chase**, **Jill Boice**, **Michelle DiGiancomo**, and **Janet Peters** to the team. They are well informed on specific local projects and will monitor key conservation issues. In the coming months, look for informational articles from the task force in DFO's quarterly journal, *The Lark Bunting*, and our monthly e-newsletter, *On The Wing*.



FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

Field Trip Achievement Awards honor DFO's 33 busiest active leaders

David Suddjian

As promised in the fall 2025 issue of *The Lark Bunting*, we're back to salute the active field trip leaders who have met Denver Field Ornithologists' cumulative achievement levels — measured in total number of field trips led since 2014, when the club began to compile individual totals. A couple of these leaders led additional trips before then, too.

Last time we recognized 22 “retired” trip leaders (mostly active birders but no longer leading DFO outings) according to seven levels of accomplishment, from a minimum of 10 trips led, then 20, 30 and 40 or more, up to higher levels of 50, 75 and 100 or more trips led. The levels are labeled with different “totem birds” that are also iconic Colorado species.

We use the year 2014 as a starting point because it is the year DFO began online recordkeeping of field trips. We hope one day to provide a reckoning of the many trips led by earlier leaders going as far back as older, undigitized records can take us.

We extend our thanks to all trip leaders, active and retired, on behalf of the thousands of participants they've led on many hundreds of outings. Today's active leaders continue to anchor DFO's unmatched tradition of free birding trips up and down the Front Range, across the eastern Plains and over the Western Slope.

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DFO field trippers in June 2025
David Suddjian



Brown-capped Rosy-Finch

100+ trips



Sandhill Crane

75+ trips



Black Swift

50+ trips



Mountain Plover

40+ trips



Burrowing Owl

30+ trips



Mountain Bluebird

20+ trips



Lark Bunting

10+ trips

2025 Field Trip Leader Achievement Awards

Active leaders (since 2014)



Brown-capped Rosy-Finch
100+ trips



David Suddjian (642)



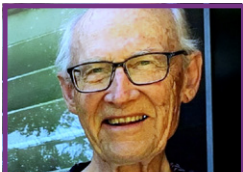
Sandhill Crane
75+ trips



Patrick O'Driscoll (80)



Black Swift
50+ trips



Paul Slingsby (52)



Chuck Hundertmark (51)



Joey Kellner (50)



Mountain Plover
40+ trips



Jason Bidgood (43)



Burrowing Owl
30+ trips



Gary Witt (31)



Mountain Bluebird
20+ trips

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Chris Gilbert (28) | Donna Stumpp (27) | Carly Crow (22) |
| Ben Jacques (28) | Charlie Chase (24) | Dave Hill (22) |
| Laura Steadman (28) | Ryan Corda (24) | Dale Pate (21) |
| Gigi Zarzuela (28) | Chris Blakeslee (23) | Peter Ruprecht (21) |
| Nate Bond (27) | Anne Craig (23) | |



Lark Bunting
10+ trips

- | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Mary Geder (17) | Jessica Miller (13) | Susan Blansett (10) |
| Jill Boice (16) | Megan Miller (13) | Cindy Breidenbach (10) |
| Mary Keithler (14) | Ajit Antony (11) | |
| Bea Weaver (14) | Cynthia Cestkowski (11) | |
| Julia Gwinn (13) | Liza Antony (10) | |

Bird is the word — and bird words nest everywhere in our language, too

Jared Del Rosso

Songs and calls make up the language of birds. But scratch the surface of the English language and you'll find that birds have another way of speaking to us.

Indeed, birds run deep in our linguistic DNA. The Romans gave us the word *auspicious*, from their practices of reading signs in the movements of birds. (Roman religious seers also “read” the entrails of sacrificed birds for omens good and bad, but that’s another topic for another time.)

On the flip side of fortune is jinx, from the scientific name for the Eurasian Wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*). This unique, Old World woodpecker was often used in casting spells and charms, perhaps because of its uncanny defensive displays. Wrynecks can [twist and rotate their heads almost 180 degrees](#), seeming to transform into snakes as they do.

The sounds birds make give us other words. *Jargon*, a favorite of today’s academics and technocrats, once merely meant the “inarticulate utterance of birds, or a vocal sound resembling it.” The verb *twitter* is one example. Before becoming a social media platform (with its iconic logo of a bird in blue silhouette), “twitter” and “tweet” were made by our feathered friends, not our thumbs and fingers online.



Eurasian Wryneck's scientific name, *jynx torquilla*, echoes the bird's ancient use in casting love spells or jinxes
© António Pena via Flickr



Do we call American crows crows because they crow?
John Breitsch

SOMETHING TO CROW ABOUT?

It is often difficult to know if humans derived words from birds, or named them with the words we use to describe them. Both the species name “crow” and the act of *crowing* come from Old English, and untangling their origins now is probably impossible. We don’t know if we crow because *crows* crow or if we call crows “crows” because they crow. We *do* know that corvids give the lie to the human insult “bird-brained.” An apt saying that is often cited (but ultimately [misworded and misattributed](#)) puts this well: “If men had wings and bore black feathers, few of them would be clever enough to be crows.”

By contrast, there are fools — the *gulls* and *gullible* — with an etymology that may have nothing to do with those sometimes clownish “sea” birds we inlanders find around reservoirs and grocery store parking lots.

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Even recent linguistic inventions may be muddy. Did nighthawks, the uncommon [crepuscular](#) birds, give us “nighthawks,” as in the title of [this famous painting](#) by **Edward Hopper**? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, using the word to describe habitually nocturnal people, those we sometimes also call night owls, dates to the 19th century. As American and European cities began to light the night with gas lamps, “nighthawks” also came to mean both after-dark thieves who preyed on “gulls” and the night watchmen hired to thwart them.

Many evenings, I have [chased nighthawks](#), which are my favorite bird and an auspice to me of the ecological health of Denver’s suburbs. But nighthawks are in widespread decline, as are their mammalian counterparts, the bats, probably in part because of declines in their flying insect prey. When bats *are* around, I find them more frightful than nighthawk the bird (but not the human nighthawk). I have had to duck at times to avoid them as they feed on unseen insects.

THAT’S JUST DUCKY

Which makes me wonder: Did I *duck* because *ducks* duck? Or are ducks called “ducks” because they themselves display that maneuver, whether diving for food or escaping above-water threats? The word origins of this one are as unclear as my questions! Clearer though is that we hope to avoid being a “sitting duck,” a “duck out of water,” or a “lame duck.” We try, however, to keep our “ducks in a row.” Perhaps the surfeit of duck idioms has to do with their long-standing place in human diet, hunting, and carnival games.

Many summer mornings, I have looked for the nighthawk’s relative, the Common Poorwill. It’s tough business, waking before an already too early sunrise and driving out to the Gambel’s Oak thickets in Douglas County. But it’s worth it. (The early bird, whether feathered or human, gets the worm, right?)

A British equivalent is to “be up with the lark,” though now that I think of it, the birder who wakes with worm-hunting robins or the skylarking larks probably misses the nightjars. Even so, I’ve gone birding on a lark. What better way to bird than joyfully and carefree, as larks are said to be?

Other avian clichés abound. As a gardener, I try not to count my seedlings before they sprout, but only because a proverb [dating to at least to 16th century](#) (and possibly inspired by one

of *Aesop’s Fables*) tells us not to do the same with chickens and when they hatch.

Most people don’t mind “killing two birds with one stone.” But some people, me included, try to rid their vernacular of violent imagery. The House Sparrows hanging around outside Denver’s coffeeshops would surely agree: a [better replacement](#) for this is “Feeding two birds with one scone.”

SPEAKING OF FEATHERS

As a birder, I don’t trust some of the best-known bird clichés. Two birds in the bush are most certainly worth more than one in the hand. (They might be rare warblers!) As for birds of a feather flocking together, that’s usually true. But every birder has had this experience: You linger on a flock of identical white-cheeked geese until a bird of a different feather reveals itself — a Greater White-fronted Goose, a Brant, even the rarer Pink-footed Goose.

Sometimes, birds of a feather are more than they seem. Only about 25 years ago, Colorado’s Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*) was considered a subspecies of the nearly identical Eurasian Magpie (*Pica pica*). We took the family name, which derives from the Latin word for *magpie*, and stretched its meaning. As both a word and a [medical diagnosis](#), “pica” refers to a tendency to eat “non-nutritive, non-food substances.” (Chalk or ashes are the examples [Merriam-Webster](#) gives.) Young corvids, magpies included, are known to test the edibility of anything that catches their eyes. I have seen first-year magpies turn my yard into a playground and buffet all at once. One pulled the product tag off a solar light, something I’d forgotten to remove. Was the bird practicing opportunistic hunting, or just taste-testing the tag?

The scientific family name for wrens blends name-calling with ornithological observation. Wrens are *troglodytes* — Greek for “cave-dwellers” and known for nesting in cavities and hunting in crevices. I’ve watched Northern House Wren parents disappear into folds in landscape fabric to collect every spider and larva hidden there. I’ve watched Rock Wrens duck into holes in logs to gather roly-polies (pill bugs). And so the family and genus names for wrens are variants of that difficult word, which also refers to the prehistoric people we once called “cavemen.” Today the term is sometimes an insult used for people whose outmoded habits and attitudes remind us of cave-dwellers.

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Black-billed Magpie
John Breitsch



Troglodytes, Greek for cave dweller, is scientific name of crevice-loving wrens, including this Rock Wren
John Breitsch

Of course, “Wren” is also a human name. Unlike “Phoebe” and “Robin,” the human name appears to have derived from the bird name, not the other way around. Some surnames – [Heron](#) and [Crowe](#), for instance – appear to have roots in people’s resemblance or relationship to birds.

Sports also make great use of birds, even if not exactly ornithologically correct bird-based mascots like Cardinals, Blue Jays, Jayhawks, Hawks, Seahawks, Eagles, Falcons, Nighthawks, and the like. And golf itself offers us “[birdies](#),” “[eagles](#),” “[albatrosses](#),” and, [rarity of rarities](#), “[condor](#).”

AD HOC? NO, ADD HAWK

Birders of a certain age might recall baseball great **Andre Dawson**’s nickname, Hawk. We describe outfielders and NFL cornerbacks, NBA defenders, and MLB outfielders as “ballhawks” for their ability to run down opposing teams’ throws and hits, not unlike how that raptor chases down prey. (But let’s be honest: Isn’t Peregrine Falcon, with its ability to snatch birds out of the air, the a more appropriate metaphor?) Speed and agility seem prerequisites for the ballhawk, though being eagle-eyed probably helps, too.

But then, what is a hawk? It’s an old word, “inherited from Germanic,” says the *Oxford English Dictionary*, perhaps referring to an action in which hawks and ballhawks alike are experts: “to seize.”

As with the ducking ducks and the crowing crows, the hawking hawk leaves us in that chicken-and-egg situation, perpetually wondering which came first: the bird or the word?

Want more? The etymologies I refer to here come from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (subscription or library access needed) and *Merriam-Webster*. **Jeremy Mynott**’s book *Birdscape* and **Tim Birkhead**’s *Birds and Us* cover some of this, too. **Peter Tate**’s *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition* does the same for European lore around the continent’s common birds. Some of that Euro-lore informs the linguistic meanings that we here in the States have attached to birds.

The Lives of Birds is a recurring feature by DFO member **Jared Del Rosso**, a birder, 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](#)

David Kenny (1951-2025): Zoo vet, wildlife lensman, DFO friend to all

Patrick O’Driscoll

Retired Denver Zoo head veterinarian **David Kenny** came to birding and Denver Field Ornithologists late in a life already filled with wild creatures. Across several decades, he traveled widely, photographing wildlife and working as an internationally prominent conservation vet with mountain gorillas, Mongolian wild sheep, African vultures, suburban deer and more.

In the 1990s he oversaw the hand-raising of the zoo’s Denver media darlings, the star twin polar bear cubs **Klondike** and **Snow**. He also worked part-time tagging condor-sized Cinereous Vultures to map the species’ range and habitat needs in Mongolia. And after Monarch butterflies caught his eye and lens, he planted a milkweed garden to foster more habitat.

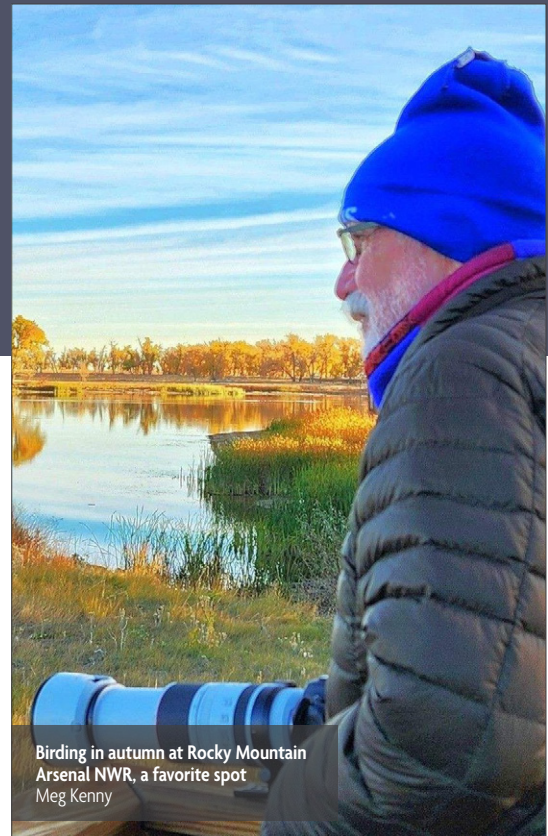
Kenny’s life of adventures, so many of them with his wife of 52 years, DFO member **Meg (Froehler) Kenny**, came to a sad end on Dec. 11, 2025. He died peacefully, with Meg at his bedside, after a long and well-fought battle with complications of esophageal cancer. He was 74.

Already sharing a passion for wildlife photography, the Kennys joined DFO together during the COVID-19 pandemic. “We went looking for places to go birding. Somebody must have suggested DFO,” Meg recalls. Photographically, “we had been big mammal people. Once we (became birders) it was explosive. Colorado gave us so many wonderful opportunities to see and learn about birds, as did this group” — DFO and the DFO Facebook Group, where Meg still posts her photographs.

If all that wasn’t enough, Dave took up painting about the same time, creating colorful, richly detailed pencil-and-watercolor works of cranes, owls, hummingbirds and more. Says Meg: “He was kind of a renaissance man without knowing it.”

The Kennys became “craniacs,” pursuing all 15 species of those elegant waders to global locations far and near, including Colorado’s two crane festivals and four trips to Nebraska’s Platte River. But their favorite birding day trip was Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. “We could have lived there,” Meg says. “We got to know so many people from DFO, just standing at the eagle deck” at Lower Derby Lake. Dave’s last field outing, in mid-

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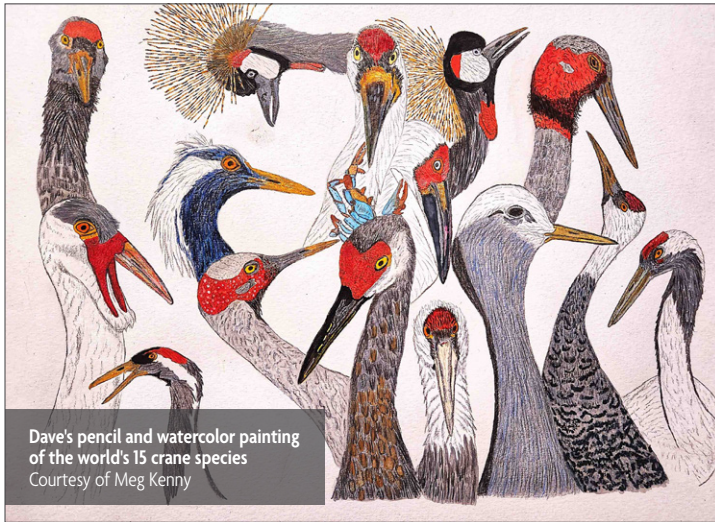
Birding in autumn at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, a favorite spot
Meg Kenny



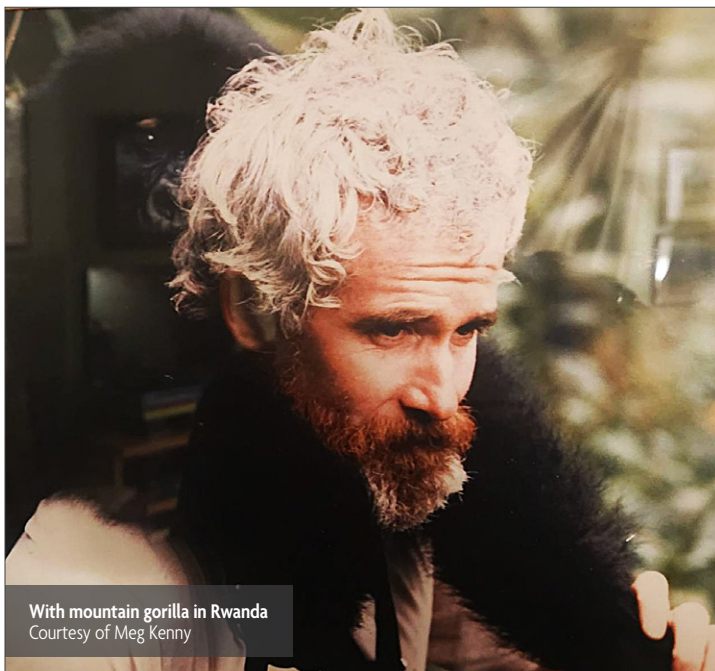
Tagging vultures in Mongolia
Courtesy of Meg Kenny



With wife Meg on safari in Tanzania
Courtesy of Meg Kenny



Dave's pencil and watercolor painting
of the world's 15 crane species
Courtesy of Meg Kenny



With mountain gorilla in Rwanda
Courtesy of Meg Kenny

DAVID KENNY *cont from page 23*

August 2025, was an invitation from **David Suddjian**, DFO's Field Trips chair, to view summer hummingbirds at the feeders at his Ken Caryl Ranch home. "He was so gracious to let us just sit in the front yard and watch," Meg adds.

Born Oct. 9, 1951 in Staten Island, NY, David Kenny grew up wanting to be a veterinarian. But he studied economics at Manhattan College in the Bronx, where he met Meg. They married in 1973. When that boyhood dream began to nag, he left business for the University of Pennsylvania's vet school. After graduation, they moved to Connecticut, where he joined a busy veterinary practice. In 1986, he got a 2-year internship at the Denver Zoo. That gig sealed his passion for wildlife and included work in Rwanda with the **Dian Fossey** gorilla study group.

In 1988 they returned to New York for Dave's 2-year vet residency at the Bronx Zoo. In 1990, Denver's zoo lured him back west for good. "Dave's soft-spoken nature belied the authority and wisdom of his perspectives and knowledge," said DFO member **Bill Turner**, a longtime colleague of Kenny at the zoo. "He was an ardent nature lover." After 25 years, Dave retired, and the Kennys embarked on more wildlife-focused adventure travel.

In his last 5 years of retirement before the cancer diagnosis, Kenny returned regularly to his birthplace to help stem a critical overabundance of wildlife: He performed numerous vasectomies on Staten Island's white-tailed deer. For his life's work, he was recently named Conservationist of the Year by the Denver-based [Katie Adamson Conservation Fund](#).

Besides his wife, Dave is survived by sisters **Kathy Fischer** and **Laura Kenny**, and brother **Patrick Kenny**, as well as nieces, nephews, friends and colleagues. A celebration of his life will be April 22 at First Plymouth Congregational Church in Englewood

Meg says that in a private moment days after Dave's passing, she asked his spirit for some sign that he was all right. "Then," she adds, "I looked out our back door" — and within five minutes, the Denver yard was visited by multiple doves, towhees, flickers, finches and juncos, plus a nuthatch, a magpie and a woodpecker. "If that's not a sign," she says, "I don't know what is."

COMMUNITY SCIENCE

DFO-led suburban Denver Christmas Bird Count sees fewer waterfowl despite mild conditions

Joey Kellner

On December 20, 37 birding parties totaling 132 people scoured the Denver Christmas Bird Count area (west-southwest suburbs), finding 102 species. After checklisting 205 total species over seven-plus decades of this count circle, the effort on a warm and breezy day added two new ones: a VERY late Hammond's Flycatcher in the **Luke Phenegar** team's Marston/Bow Mar count area, and a single late Sandhill Crane circling overhead in the **Cole Sage** team's Lower South Platte/East zone. Wow!

Otherwise, the most notable results of the 71st Denver Christmas Bird Count since 1954 involved waterfowl. Their numbers were much reduced, and several expected species were missing entirely, including Canvasback, Greater Scaup, Northern Pintail, Ruddy Duck and Wood Duck. Also a surprise was the absence of Northern Harrier, Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin and Say's Phoebe. Six species not seen on count day — White-winged Scoter, Horned Grebe, California Gull, Double-crested Cormorant, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and American Pipit — did turn up during “count week” (the 3 days before and 3 days after Dec. 20).

Factors? With such a warm and dry late fall, there was still lots of ice-free water north of Colorado. Some of the southbound waterfowl we usually count may have lingered up there until a freeze-up to force them south. Oddly, however, even with the two new birds, “half-hardy” species accustomed to lingering longer were virtually absent on count day: Only one Yellow-rumped Warbler and no Hermit Thrush, sapsuckers, cormorants, or pelicans. It was, in short, a strange year.

But there were notable rarities and record-high counts for several species. The Denver CBC found a Surf Scoter for only the third time ever, and Common Yellowthroat for just the fifth time. American Three-toed Woodpecker was recorded for only the seventh time.

The record highs included Bushtit (262 birds), Red-breasted Nuthatch (336), White-breasted Nuthatch (275), Townsend's Solitaire (347) and Lesser Goldfinch (31). The 10 most numerous species, which accounted for two-thirds of the 28,515 individuals counted, were Cackling Goose (4,860), Canada Goose (1,974), Dark-eyed Junco (1,321), House Finch (1,290), American Robin (1,162), Pine Siskin (1,160), Mallard (1,154), European Starling (1,074), Black-capped Chickadee (692) and Red-winged Blackbird (625).

Finally, six species not seen on count day — White-winged Scoter, Horned Grebe, California Gull, Double-crested Cormorant, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and American Pipit — did turn up during “count week” (the 3 days before and 3 days after Dec. 20).

Huge thanks go out to all who participated and to those who joined at day's end with food and friends at the compilation meeting at Chatfield State Park headquarters.

A final thought, which you will hear from me again before the 2026 Christmas Bird Counts: Count compilers like me depend on leaders to run the day's counts in each count area, and on birder-observers of all levels of experience to join the FUN. If you haven't participated in a CBC, please consider it next time. Socially and as citizen science, the Christmas Bird Count is one of birding's greatest annual events.

Joey Kellner, a four-decade member of DFO, is a field trip leader, compiler of the Denver CBC, club past president (1994-96), and the 2012 recipient of the Ptarmigan Award, DFO's highest honor



For a video ramble through several areas in the suburban Denver Christmas Bird Count, check out DFO member **Scott Hammel's** 2025 Denver CBC tribute on YouTube.



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

October, November, December DFO trips *In Focus*

Field trips in the three autumn-into-winter months included 67 total outings. Participants on 27 of them took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 90-year-old club. If you’re on DFO trips in January, February and March, take a few shots of your fellow trippers birding and send us the best for the spring issue of *The Lark Bunting*, due out in April 2026. Send .JPG or .PNG photo files of birders in the field, with date/location of trip and any individual IDs (if needed) to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline for our April 2026 spring-quarter issue is **Tuesday, March 31**. Thanks!



SEPTEMBER 28

Bluff Lake Nature Center (Denver County)

Leader

Jason Bidgood

Participants

Beth Partin, Kara Cooper, Ryan Janson, Beth Moran, Scott Hammel, Amy Manning, Todd Nicotra, Sean Jones

Field trippers get great looks at an Orange-crowned Warbler from the boardwalk of Bluff Lake Nature Center in Denver on a Sept. 28 morning outing that recorded 32 species

(Jason B. Bidgood)

CHECKLIST

OCTOBER 4

Bear Creek Greenbelt (Jefferson)

Leader

Anne Craig

Participants

Kris Saucke, David Suddjian, Lucyna Campo, Sandy Mathias, Michelle Puplava, Linda Purcell, Andrea Grasso

Field trippers focus on a beaver in Stone House Pond during Oct. 4 outing to trip leader Anne Craig's Bear Creek Greenbelt patch

(David Suddjian)



CHECKLIST

Continued on page 27



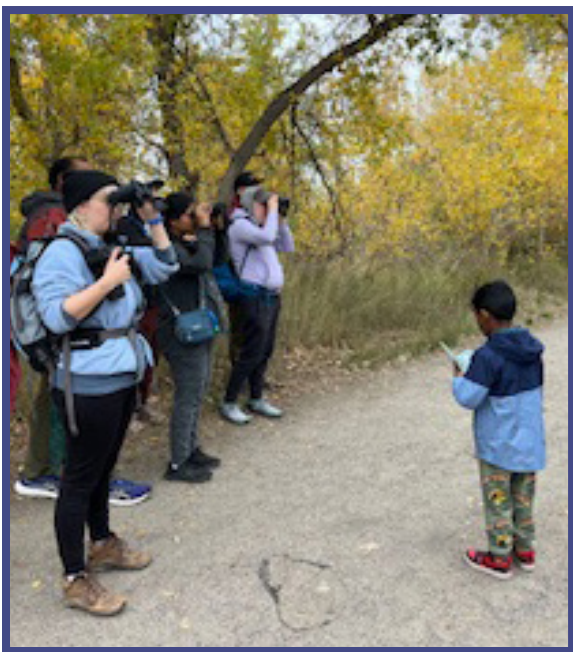
OCTOBER 8
South Republican River SWA and Pipit Hill (Kit Carson, Yuma, and Cheyenne, KS)

Leaders
Gary Witt

Participants
Kenneth Stuckey, Cynthia Breidenbach, Paula Wegert, Julia Gwinn, Melissa Wetzig, Kathy Holland, David Suddjian, Ethan Cleveland, Betty Glass, Diane Roberts, Mary Fran O'Connor

Although Pipit Hill field trippers found just a single Sprague's Pipit, the trip's eight checklists totaled 44 species across South Republican SWA and other eastern Colorado points, plus a foray into Kansas just over the state line. Among them: Swainson's, Red-tailed and Ferruginous hawks and Red-headed and Hairy woodpeckers
(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT



OCTOBER 11
Prospect Park/Wheat Ridge Greenbelt (Jefferson)

Leader
Shay Lyons

Participants
Claire Elliott, Joseph Margoshes, Kavya Achanta, Sai Pradeep Chandra Bompada, Robert George, Lynn Slaga, Faylo Kennedy, Rae Jones

Young participant on DFO outing to Wheat Ridge Greenbelt Oct. 11 tells other field trippers about the bird they're observing. The group saw the first Northern Shovelers of the season, plus Great Horned Owl, Virginia Rail and American Dipper
(Shay Lyons)

TRIP REPORT



OCTOBER 10
Bailey and foothills region (Jefferson, Park)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Aileen Giardina, Cynthia Breidenbach, Melody Serra, Sofia Prado-Irwin, Sue Summers, Susan Simpson, Caoimhín Perkins

Field trippers focus in Bailey area during Oct. 10 trip to seven spots along Ponderosa pine and mixed conifer backwoods areas around the foothills communities of Park and Jefferson counties. Among the 30 species checklisted were upland game birds including Evening Grosbeak, Townsends Solitaire, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, three kinds of nuthatches, woodpeckers and more
(Melody Serra)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 28



OCTOBER 13
Ken Caryl Valley area (Jefferson)

Leaders
David Suddjian

Participants
Kris Tita, Michelle Verostko, Robert George, Kris Saucke, Virginia Gulakowski, Melody Serra

Birders on Oct. 13 outing in Ken Caryl Valley area walk a birdy trail through private open space in Ken Caryl Ranch. They also visited part of Deer Creek Canyon Park. Plentiful birds included more than 400 American Robins (including flocks migrating south), many Western and Mountain bluebirds, scads of Townsend’s Solitaires, a lone Sandhill Crane and lots of other birds
(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT



OCTOBER 19
Fairmount Cemetery / High Line Canal (Denver)

Leader
Jason Bidgood

Participants
Amy Manning, Debra Lentz, Bridget Sanders, Lisa Seiler, Jeannie and Ronald Mitchell, Jodi Haller, Michelle Trotter, Sarah Wilson, Kris Tita, Sue Summers, James Henson

Birders scope out a distant Townsend’s Solitaire among tombstones on Oct. 19 field trip to Fairmount Cemetery in east Denver and a neighboring stretch of the High Line Canal. Trees were in peak autumn colors, and the group tallied 25 species of birds
(Jason B. Bidgood)

TRIP REPORT



OCTOBER 25
Lake Pueblo State Park (Pueblo)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Michelle Trotter, Jennifer Tonge, Robert Tonge, Dawn Rubick, Erik Playe, Linda Cunico, Jenny Germano, Melissa Wetzig, Caoimhín Perkins, Anne Craig, Ryan Corda

Field trippers view birds from South Marina of Lake Pueblo SP during Oct. 25 joint DFO/Aiken Audubon field trip to the park and nearby spots. Highlights included Red-necked Grebe, Common and Pacific loons, Green Heron, Scaled Quail, Curve-billed Thrasher, Bewick’s Wren, White-winged Dove, Mountain Bluebirds, more than 100 Wood Ducks, and more
(Melissa Wetzig)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 29



OCTOBER 29

Quincy Reservoir, Aurora (Arapahoe)

Leaders

Cynthia Cestkowski

Participants

Nadiyah Watts, Catherine Millard, Marjorie Middleton, Kevin Millard, Angela Grun, Rafa Veintimilla, Rosanne Juergens, Rae Jones, Jodi Haller, Debby Miller, Anne Craig

Redhead or Canvasback? Trailside discussion and duck ID research unfold during Oct. 29 field trip to Quincy Reservoir in Aurora. Morning chill gave way to sunny autumn birding, with many Ring-necked Ducks and Buffleheads and a few Redheads and Canvasbacks

(Debby Miller)

CHECKLIST



NOVEMBER 1

Mountain lakes and scoters (Park, Chafee, Lake, Summit)

Leader

Joey Kellner

Participants

Michelle Trotter, Caoimhín Perkins, Christopher Curwen, Lorna Thomas, Jennifer Tonge, Robert Tonge, Scott Hammel, Diane Roberts, Shai Ronen

Birders on four-county tour Nov. 1 of mountain lakes and reservoirs scan Clear Creek Reservoir in search of loons, scoters and other winter waterfowl. The group found a Black Scoter at Antero Reservoir and viewed the flyover of a flock of Tundra Swans

(Scott Hammel)

TRIP REPORT



NOVEMBER 3

Eleven Mile Canyon, Lake George (Park)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Jessica Miller, Paula Wegert, Melissa Wetzig, John Batt, Diane Roberts, Debra Strike, Judy McKeon, Olivia Salmon, Jennifer Mercer, Jodi Haller

Lunch break in Eleven Mile Canyon during joint DFO/Aiken Audubon field trip Nov. 3 to Lake George and South Platte River locations in Park County. It became “The Dipper Trip” after the group tallied an astonishing 22 American Dippers along the river. The highlight was a Green Heron in the canyon, a late and rare sighting in Park County

(Melissa Wetzig)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 30



NOVEMBER 7
Washington Park (Denver)

Leader

Ryan Corda

Participants

Jodi Haller, Emily Boswell, Sandy Mathias, Jennifer Mercer, Carolyn Bighinatti

Watching ducks on Grasmere Lake during DFO field trip Nov. 7 to Denver's Washington Park. With waterfowl as the focus, field trippers saw scores of Buffleheads, Hooded Mergansers, Northern Shovelers, Gadwalls, Mallard, American Wigeons and one sleeping Canvasback. Numerous Ring-necked Ducks and a single Lesser Scaup also offered a study in the differences between related species

(Carolyn Bighinatti)

CHECKLIST



NOVEMBER 8
Rocky Mountain Arsenal (Adams)

Leader

Jason Bidgood

Participants

Sue Plankis, Tom Dillon, Jeannie and Ronald Mitchell, Emily Scheler, Mary Ramsey, Timothy Condon, Sue Summers, Shai Ronen, Angela Grun

Field trippers getting good looks at a Downy woodpecker in the willows along Lake Mary during Nov. 8 DFO outing to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
(Jason B. Bidgood)

TRIP REPORT

NOVEMBER 9
Ken Caryl Valley area – private open space, other hotspots (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Kris Tita, Ryan Corda, Susan Swisher, Jenny Germano, Matthew Fast

Birders along trail on Nov. 9 DFO/Denver Audubon field trip to private open space in Ken Caryl Ranch, Deer Creek and South Valley Park. High numbers of several species included 25 Townsend's Solitaires, 23 Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays and 11 Red-tailed Hawks, including one that hovered and dove in front of the group to catch a small mammal for its lunch

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 31



NOVEMBER 14

Big waters of Park County (Park)

Leaders

Joe Tuttle and David Suddjian

Participants

Melissa Wetzig, Debra Strike, Paula Wegert, Mary Fran O'Connor, Anne Craig, Isaac Ho, Ann Christensen

Field trippers scope for waterfowl at Eleven Mile Reservoir in Park County on Nov.14 joint DFO/Aiken Audubon outing. Across the water directly above the blue-jacketed birder is the geographical center of Colorado, equidistant from UT, WY, KS, NE and NM. Trip highlights included Pacific and Common loons, hundreds of Buffleheads, and many thousands of other ducks and gulls

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT



NOVEMBER 16

Robert A. Easton Regional Park, Littleton (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Mary Ramsey, Andrew Wertheimer, Lynn Slaga, Bruce Raff, Scott Hammel, Kathy Holland, Liza and Ajit Antony, Mark Winfrey, Archie Millard

Birders on short DFO field trip Nov. 16 to Robert A. Easton Park in Littleton pause while circling Hine Lake. Four of 11 birders in the party were on their first DFO outing. After the park, some in the group also went to nearby Blue Heron Park

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST 1

CHECKLIST 2

Continued on page 32



NOVEMBER 19

Common Grounds Wetlands / Golf Course (Denver, Arapahoe)

Leader

George Ho

Participants

Jeannie and Ronald Mitchell, Aaron Shipe, Kris Tita, Debby Miller, Joe McCleary, Linda Purcell, Laurie Tripp, Liza Antony, Rae Jones, Jim McBride

A dozen birders view a flock of Tree Sparrows in wetlands from golf course bridge during DFO's inaugural field trip Nov. 19 to Common Grounds Golf Course and Wetlands. They shuttled around the course in golf carts labeled for birding and tallied 29 species, including a Wilson's Snipe in the reeds

(Debby Miller)

CHECKLIST



NOVEMBER 20

Park Hill Park (Denver)

Leaders

Linda Purcell and David Suddjian

Participants

Ryan Corda, Melody Serra, Virginia Gulakowski, Bonnie Prado, Jodi Haller, Debby Miller, Michelle DiGiacomo, Becky Russell, Coreen Spellman, Nancy Crowley

Birders on DFO's first field trip to Denver's Park Hill Park scan from the overgrown rough of what was once an 18-hole golf course. With new urban park's future configuration still under study, the outing aimed to add to baseline of bird data. The 19 species included a cross-section of in-town birds, including three Cooper's Hawks, American Kestrels and a Red-tailed Hawk

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

NOVEMBER 22

Waterton Canyon (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Andrea Duran, Brady Anderson, Janine Reed, Laura Schick, Matthew Fast, Ryan Corda, Sarah Feigelson, Linda Purcell

Participants in Nov. 22 field trip a few miles up Waterton Canyon pause on the trail. They found three American Dippers in the South Platte River (a life bird for three of the field trippers) and 20 Townsend's Solitaires, a late-staying Mountain Bluebird and had nice looks at Red-tailed Hawk and Downy Woodpecker

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 33



NOVEMBER 25

Lakes in Lakewood (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Andrea Grasso, Cate Millard, Coreen Spellman Bailey, Ginny Gulakowski, Robin Trevillian, Peggy Bull

Trailside cover gives birders a break from chilly breezes off East Reservoir during an afternoon field trip Nov. 25 to three lakes in Lakewood. Under blue skies, various winter ducks and a muskrat caught their eyes

(Ginny Gulakowski)

TRIP REPORT



NOVEMBER 27

South Platte Park + Carson Nature Center (Arapahoe)

Leaders

Cindy Breidenbach and Julia Gwinn

Participants

Bonnie Prado, Bridget Sanders, Debby Miller, Joel Zigman, Michelle Loader, Nadiyah Watts, Vicky Miles, Eva Gallegos, Rae Jones, Patty Wilson and 5 others

Crowd of DFO birders in search of turkeys on Thanksgiving field trip to South Platte Park. The results: 29 species, 100% great weather, zero Wild Turkeys, but a few of the 17 enthusiastic participants wore colorful turkey badges, headbands, etc.

(Cindy Breidenbach)

CHECKLIST



NOVEMBER 28

Town of Louviers + DuPont Open Space (Douglas)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Victoria Miles, Susan Blansett, Jenny Germano, Linda Purcell, Jonathan Hebel, Angela Hebel, Melody Serra, Evangeline Gallegos, Bonne Luck

On the day after Thanksgiving, field trippers walked off the feast with a DFO outing to the former DuPont company town of Louviers (dynamite factory long gone) and the open space next door. There were many birds, especially around feeders in town, and other charming things to see in the quiet village

(Melody Serra)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 34



NOVEMBER 29

El Paso County birding hotspots (El Paso)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Jessica Miller

Participants

Jennifer Tonge, Robert Tonge, Diane Roberts, Shai Ronen, Ginny Gulakowski, Michelle Trotter, Ryan Corda, Bruce Dunbar, Nga Turner

Birders on joint DFO/Aiken Audubon trip Nov. 29 around El Paso County focus on distant bird in North Cheyenne Canyon, where they also encountered a Northern Pygmy-Owl mobbed by dozens of songbirds and four Golden-crowned Kinglets feeding near eye-level, not their usual treetop spots. Other stops on a sunny, snow-free day included Big Johnson Reservoir and Fountain Creek

(David Suddjian)

4 CHECKLISTS



DECEMBER 1

Barr Lake State Park (Adams)

Leader

Ryan Diabala

Participants

Caoimhin Perkins, Sharon Kelly, Shay Lyons, Cate and Kevin Millard

Trip leader Ryan Dibala and crew pause on the boardwalk at Barr Lake State Park on a frigid Monday morning bird walk Dec. 1 with virtually the whole park to themselves. The lifting mist revealed thousands of Cackling Geese, plus a few Canadas and Snows, and eight duck species were at Pelican Point. The highlight was about three dozen Bald Eagles circling in and out of the cottonwoods and hunting along the shoreline

(Ryan Dibala)

CHECKLIST



DECEMBER 9

South Platte Park-South End (Arapahoe)

Leaders

Angela Grun and Cindy Breidenbach

Participants

Kara Cooper, Beth Moran, Michelle Verostko, Patricia Kuzma Sell, Jim McBride, Oliver Urdiales, Sandy Mathias, Eileen Warner

South Platte Park field trippers Dec. 9 pose beside South Platte Reservoir, where they successfully found two target species — Surf Scoter and two Long-tailed Ducks — on an overcast and chilly birding day

(Cindy Breidenbach)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 35



DECEMBER 14

South Platte Park-South End (Arapahoe)

Leader

Cindy Breidenbach

Participants

David Suddjian, Lauren Friesen, Kris Saucke, Debby Miller, Cate and Kevin Millard, Melody Serra, Olivia Salmon, Jennifer Mercer, Kelly Ducham, Samantha Quathamer

Birders on joint DFO-Denver Audubon field trip Dec. 14 to South Platte Park scan the reservoir for waterfowl, including Long-tailed Ducks and a Surf Scoter

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST



DECEMBER 27

Rosy-Finch Ramble (Jefferson, Park)

Leader

Ryan Diabala

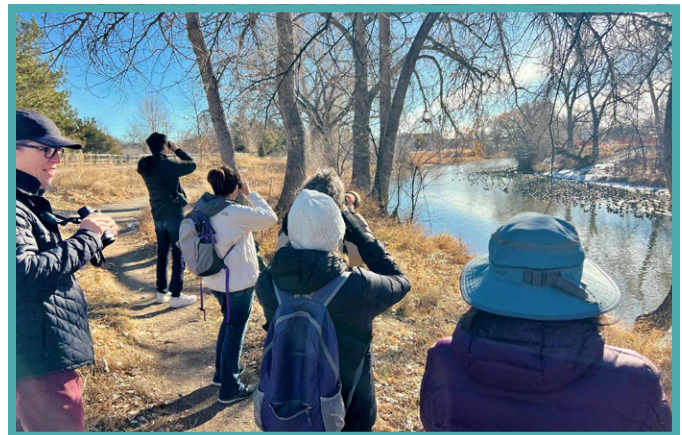
Participants

Ryan Corda, Dave Prentice, Winston Liu, Gabby Licht, Kara Cooper, Douglas Bauer, Melody Serra

Field Trippers focus on flocks of rosy-finches at feeders outside the home of a host who welcomed the Dec. 27 joint DFO/ Denver Audubon trip participants inside. The group saw all three rosy-finch species, but lopsidedly: 580 Brown-capped, but just three Gray-crowned and one Black. The “Rosy-Finch Ramble” to spots in Jefferson and Park counties found other mountain birds, too

(David Suddjian)

8 CHECKLISTS



DECEMBER 31

South Platte River, Littleton to Denver (Arapahoe, Denver)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Tim Redmond, Jennifer Mercer, Jodi Haller, Kelly Ducham, Mary Ramsey, Jeanne Marie Dillon, Kara Cooper, Beth Moran, Alice Tariot, Jenny Germano, Dina Clark

Birders scan South Platte River in Denver on New Year’s Eve during DFO’s 281st and final field trip of 2025. The outing focused on waterfowl from Katring Park in Littleton to the South Platte near Evans Avenue. A Snow Goose, a Greater White-fronted Goose and a Cackling X Snow hybrid hid among huge flocks of Cackling Geese. The winter return of a Barrow’s Goldeneye male led the parade of duck species

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

East Meets Western Tanager

A DFO alum reflects on encountering an unexpected friend in the Green Mountains of Vermont



Closeup of Vermont's rare Western Tanager, foraging on the ground
Navin Bywaters
Cornell Lab, Macaulay Library

Rebecca L. Laroche

I never expected to see this so soon after moving back home to Vermont in May. But there I was, November 14, 2025, in a backyard in Stowe, watching a Western Tanager eat sunflower seeds in front of a decaying jack-o'-lantern as the snow fell. Like so many sightings before, I was transported back to my time in the Rocky Mountains, through my long relationship with this bird.

You never forget your first Western Tanager. I remember mine like yesterday, though it was almost 30 years ago — before eBird and Merlin, before I even owned a Sibley guide. In May 1998, professionally transplanted to Colorado the previous fall, I was on a writing retreat in the Sangre de Cristos, out for my daily walk along a dirt path. As I crossed a stream, it flamed above me, yellow and orange-red with shadows of black and sparks of white. So bright, so unexpected!

I quickened my pace back to the campus where we wrote, knowing there would be someone there to tell me what it was. **Sandra**, who would become my first birding mentor, smiled, imagining how it must feel to be an Easterner seeing this beautiful bird for the first time.

Since that day, I have recorded 548 individual Western Tanagers in eBird. I've learned to recognize their calls from the tops of pines, seen them feeding among lilacs in spring, and realized the beauty of the less flashy females. With fellow members of DFO, I have discovered their nests and watched the young as they feed and find their way in the fall. I know this bird deeply.

So deeply that it lost some of its brilliance as I discovered other tanagers: the dull female Scarlet a friend I found in Pueblo, the Hepatics I began to seek out in Huerfano County, and the juvenile, Popsicle-mottled Summers that stopped by Chico Basin Ranch. I discovered, too, that tanagers in Belize come in blue. Yes, my heart would always stir with the first return of the Westerns in spring, but that first sparking gateway to other kinds of yearning.

Then I moved away for good this past May, back to my roots in Vermont's extreme green, where Scarlet Tanagers sing at the tops of different trees, brilliant red in the spring leafing. I have learned that species' hiccup-y call, but I still hope to witness their fledging. While the Scarlet and I are not yet intimate, I feel the deepening.

Here also, other colorful birds abound — as many as 30 kinds of nesting warblers, often more than a dozen in one hotspot. I find some of those we used to chase in Colorado every spring and fall, from a fleeting glimpse of a Tennessee Warbler at the top of a cottonwood to a Mourning Warbler scuttling in the underbrush. The influx of spring song (So strong!) is part of what drew me back. I yearned to know more about warblers: to find their nests, to recognize immediately their fall plumages, to know, in my bones, each song while I could.



A Western Tanager in more typical surroundings — a canyon in Colorado
Rebecca L. Laroche



Scarlet Tanager in Vermont, where it's as common as a Western is in Colorado
Rebecca L. Laroche

Continued on page 38



The out-of-place, unexpected Western Tanager in Stowe, VT backyard in November 2025
Rebecca L. Laroche

Before returning, I had bought a fixer-upper seasonal home only 5 miles from one of Vermont's two national wildlife refuges. [Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge](#), where the Missisquoi River drains into Lake Champlain, fosters large colonies of Bobolinks and Black and Common Terns. There I have seen American Woodcocks and Bitterns, Black-throated Blue Warblers, Blue-headed Vireos and so many other lovelies. It also hosts one of many regular birding walks throughout the state, meeting at 8 a.m. every third Saturday. Its route rotates among five trails on the refuge's 6,700 acres of wetland bogs. Just like DFO, its leaders keep a record of the walk's collective findings. Through this group and my proximity, I have come to treasure the Missisquoi's diversity.

What I hadn't yet found in Vermont was a group like DFO that explored the state together. Having left Denver in the years leading up to this bigger move, I knew DFO's energies were exceptional, and that wherever I landed, I'd be carrying the club's example with me.

So this June, when I rejoined the refuge's monthly gathering, I asked to make a pre-walk announcement. Now that I was back in Vermont full-time and wanting to know its birds more completely, I asked if any in the group would be interested in exploring its corners with me. I had by then bought a hybrid mini-van with great potential for such trips. Frankly, I was also looking for karmic payback for all the DFO drivers who had given me rides on Colorado outings when my own car was a far less suitable Mini. (I'll never forget the flat tire and miserable overnight in Sterling on an ill-advised trip where I'd volunteered to drive.)

I left Missisquoi that June day with eight names and emails (and have since added two more). Within 48 hours, I sent them a proposal for a trip to the boreal forest of Vermont's remote and scenic [Northeast Kingdom](#). With four enthusiastic yeses, we left within the week for a beautiful day — and my lifer Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and breeding Nashville, Palm, Magnolia, and Mourning warblers.

My summer was thus filled with extended days of warbler song and an extraordinary fall migration because extreme drought had left a swath of mudflats all along the length of Lake Champlain. One impromptu excursion for six of us in three canoes and kayaks led to dozens of Semi-palmated Plovers and Sandpipers, with all kinds of other shorebirds sent fleeing by a Peregrine Falcon. Later in October, a foray to what had once been but a narrow causeway — now flanked by mud — gave four of us our lifer Hudsonian Godwits.

The following month, when birders from across the region were flocking to Stowe in the mountainous middle of Vermont, I was in disbelief. A Western Tanager? Surely that couldn't be?! Birders on Vermont's Discord chat declared it only the eighth ever seen within the state's borders. The photos soon accumulated online: an adult male, some of its breeding orange still intact, eating seed off the rail of a backyard deck. My first impulse was to resist the chase. Surely I didn't need this bird among my hundreds of previous sightings? But then I began to see it in the eyes of one in our group. An accomplished local birder and head of his regional Audubon chapter, it would be a life bird for him — and three days in, the beautiful bird was still staying.

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We made a day of it, focusing on hotspots along the way and getting there later than the day's other chasers. The owners welcomed us easily into their yard, where they had even provided chairs. Within minutes, the bird appeared, with familiar flames of orange and yellow, shadows of black, and sparks of white. As my new birding companion danced a little at the bird's beauty, I smiled at his delight, even as I felt a seed of melancholy inside. I thought of places and companions I'd left behind in the Western Tanager's home territory, always thankful for the gifts that "Colorful Colorado" and its birding community had given me. Here was a different tanager — a Western wintering, a bird not used to perching on feeders, one losing his orange throat and seldom calling. A different kind of beauty, the vagrant rarity, out of place but still making himself at home.

As I said, you never forget your first Western Tanager. I don't imagine this will be my last, as I certainly hope to revisit the state I called home for almost three decades. But Vermont in late autumn marks a most interesting chapter in my relationship with this beautiful bird. As anyone in DFO already knows, experiencing the bird is not just about what and where, but with whom you see it.

As I re-establish myself 2,000 miles away, I know that so much of who I have become I owe to DFO. Please, please! Let me know if you ever find yourself heading for Vermont's smaller, greener mountains. I would love to introduce you to another group of kind and talented birders who know where the warblers are.



Rebecca Laroche's first love was Shakespeare, and she made a career of writing and teaching about him and his contemporaries as a professor in Colorado Springs for 28 years, during which she joined DFO. Her birding passion sparked when a Little Blue Heron flew out of a Galveston mist. Now post-career, she has taken this second love, and all that DFO taught her, home to Vermont

Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
**HAPPY WINTER AND
EARLY SPRING BIRDING!**



Vermont's rare Western
Tanager in light snowfall
Cat Abbott
Cornell Lab, Macaulay Library