



THE LARK BUNTING

QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 62 | ISSUE 2 | SPRING 2026

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Sage Thrasher
"Cactus Wren Stakeout"
Villegreen Road-CR 193.5
Las Animas County
Dave Prentice



ON THE COVER

Sage Thrasher: Mockingbird's close, misnamed cousin of the West's shrub-steppes

Patrick O'Driscoll

I wasn't born in the Great Basin, but its high-desert landscape lives in me. Since my teens, threads of Nevada family and work have infused my mind, blood and bones with that vast, fragrant sagebrush-steppe country. In college at Nevada-Reno, the ubiquitous state shrub was the name of the campus newspaper I wrote for (the *Sagebrush*) and the annual yearbook I took pictures for (the *Artemisia*, from sagebrush's scientific name).

So as a birder, I'm sweet on the interior West's odd handful of avian species with "sage" or "sagebrush" in their names: Greater Sage-Grouse (first dubbed "cock of the plains" by Lewis & Clark, 1805), Gunnison's Sage-Grouse (overlooked until 1977), Sagebrush Sparrow (named "Sage" in 1874 but renamed and split from Bell's Sparrow just 13 years ago), and Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*). That last bird, the one on *The Lark Bunting's* spring 2026 cover this month, is a charter member of the sagebrush club — though the 19th-century field scientist who first described it back in 1834 originally called it "Mountain Mockingbird."



A DFO member since 2018, **Dave Prentice** has been a birder / photographer for more than 10 years. A CO

native, he lives in Denver and is retired from the industrial design field.

In fact, its Latin-Greek scientific name still translates to "mountain mocker" — and the Sage Thrasher is closer genetically to the Northern Mockingbird (and about as chatty). It shares little beyond looks with the half dozen other thrashers here in the US (all of them larger). I think Sagebrush Mockingbird (*Oreoscoptes artemisia*?) would ring truer, but the bird-name police have more pressing issues to deal with these days.

All that aside, our Colorado cover bird was photographed March 22 by DFO member **Dave Prentice** in a spot far from the Great Basin — the birdy backroads of Las Animas County and the Commanche National Grassland area south of La Junta. The bird's cholla cactus perch is pure southeastern Colorado picturesque. Dave found it at the recent birding "stakeout" for a rare Cactus Wren, also far from its usual home grounds (AZ-NM-TX).

Guidebooks and Cornell's *Birds of the World* tend to regard the Sage Thrasher as plain or drab, but I see it as a perfect reflection of its drylands habitat. Its grayish-brown and spot-breasted plumage and those amber-yellow eyes (the hue of sagebrush's small and subtle blooms) mirror the palette of the scrub plain terrain. Even its eggs — steely blue-green, splotched with brown — suggest the silvery olive and gray of the bird's iconic Big Sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) habitat. Just like the Sagebrush Sparrow, the Sage Thrasher is elusive and, when spooked, tends not to take flight but instead scurries away through the brush along the bare ground between shrubs. Its favored food is insects.

Fun fact: Sage Thrashers are desert divas, able to sing their flute-like melody for minutes on end (Cornell's *All About Birds* notes that one male was heard singing nonstop once for more than 22 minutes).

Although bird maps depict their Colorado range as the western two-thirds of the state, the birds range widely. Last New Year's, Christmas bird counters found two of them on the boundary between First Creek @ DEN Open Space and Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. In summer, there's often a community in the brush around the Arsenal's Bluestem Loop Trail at the dirt-road east end of 64th Avenue (take the refuge entrance road all the way east, half a mile past the north turnoff for the Wildlife Drive loop).

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



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.

[VISIT THE LARK BUNTING ARCHIVES](#)

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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.



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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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Sharon Tinianow

Vice President

Charlie Chase

Secretary

Patrick O'Driscoll

Treasurer

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Susan Blansett

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Janet Peters
Courtney Rella
David Suddjian
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Gary Witt

COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND ROLES

Better Birding Skills

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Communications & Outreach

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Conservation

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David Suddjian

Finance

(vacant)

Grants

Jill Boice

Hawk Watch

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LEARN MORE

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DFO Merch Store

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](#).

To the polls! DFO is electing officers, directors now through April 19

Sharon Tinianow and Nate Bond

All dues-paying members of Denver Field Ornithologists are encouraged to vote this month in the club's annual election of officers and board directors. Ballots with the names of 11 returning and new candidates recruited by the Nominating Committee went out via email on **Sunday, April 5**. Online voting began upon receipt, but if you have not yet voted, brief bios for the candidates follow below. Please note that your ballot selections must be made **no later than Sunday, April 19**.

As in past years, election results will be announced at the club's annual meeting, which is DFO's regular April membership meeting. This year's meeting is also DFO's first Gear Up & Get Out Event on **Saturday, April 25**.

DFO officers and board directors meet together four times a year to conduct club business. The four officers (president, vice president, secretary and treasurer) serve 1-year terms and can run for re-election year to year. Board directors serve 3-year terms and also can be re-elected term to term.

This year, two current officers — Vice President **Charlie Chase** and Secretary **Patrick O'Driscoll** — seek re-election. In addition, DFO member **Vicky Miles**, recently appointed assistant treasurer to smooth the transfer of club financial oversight from departing Treasurer **Tom Econopouly**, seeks election as his successor. **Jason Bidgood**, one of DFO's most active field trip leaders, is the nominating committee's candidate for president.

"When I first joined DFO, I didn't realize the impact of the club went beyond their great field trips," said committee member **Nate Bond**, a former DFO secretary. "Serving on the board in a leadership capacity is great because it exposes you to all of the things DFO does. I encourage everyone to consider it in the future and show your support by voting for the candidates on this year's ballot."

To explore all of DFO's volunteering opportunities, go to the [DFO Leadership page](#) on the club website. For answers to any questions you may have, contact **Sharon Tinianow** at sharontinianow@gmail.com.

Positions and candidates for 2026 include:

PRESIDENT

Jason Bidgood — a DFO member since 2016, Bidgood became a field trip leader in 2022 (about 50 trips and counting) and is a member of the Field Trips Committee, which guides DFO's unmatched program of free birding outings. He has also contributed essays and numerous photographs to *The Lark Bunting*. When not birding, Jason works as an environmental engineer and project manager in contaminated site cleanups

VICE-PRESIDENT

Charlie Chase — In the early 1980s, Chase led field trips and taught classes for DFO and Colorado Field Ornithologists while curator of birds at Denver Museum of Natural History. He also chaired the Colorado Bird Records Committee. After 20 years away in Florida and elsewhere, he returned to teach at the University of Colorado and work on Rocky Mountain Arsenal bird studies and ecological restoration. In retirement, he's a bird-banding volunteer for Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, does bird surveys and other monitoring at the Arsenal, and coordinates seasonal bird counts begun by DFO more than four decades ago

SECRETARY

Patrick O'Driscoll — A retired newspaper journalist, O'Driscoll took up birding in his 50s and joined DFO in 2014. He became a field trip leader in 2016 and was elected three times to the DFO Board (2018-2024). He became editor of *The Lark Bunting* newsletter in late 2019 and converted it to a quarterly journal in 2025 for DFO's 90th anniversary year. In 2023, Pat received one of DFO's first two Peregrine Awards, for his editorial innovations and proficiency

TREASURER

Vicky Miles — A Colorado native and Certified Public Accountant, Miles humbly describes herself as a "mediocre" birder. A DFO member since 2022, Vicky spent most of her career in nonprofit finance and administration, having served as chief financial officer for both for the Denver Center for the Performing Arts and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro Denver

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jill Boice — Boice, who marks her 25th year as a DFO member in 2026, is chair of the Research, Education & Conservation Grants Committee. She has volunteered in a variety of other ways over the years, including as a raptor monitor at Cherry Creek State Park. She is also DFO's liaison to the Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership. Jill strongly advocates for DFO's involvement in local projects where our voice can make a difference

Ryan Corda — Corda began birding in DFO in early 2024 and became a field trip leader in 2025. He has led a series of weekly outings at hotspots such as Tucker Gulch, Washington Park and Prospect Park, and specialty trips to explore the Denver Museum of Nature & Science's ornithology collection and to "chase" last year the state's third-ever Wood Stork, a species last seen here in 1934

Carly Crow — A Georgia native, Crow holds a bachelor's degree in ecology and a master's in biology. Her time as a field ornithologist has taken her around the world. Asked what bird is her favorite, Carly replies that it's a forbidden question — like asking a parent to pick a favorite child. When not chasing birds, she hikes the Rockies, draws and reads. Were she to win the lottery, she would buy some land to keep chickens and bees — and run a roadside stand to sell the eggs and honey

Andrea Duran — Duran joined DFO in late 2023, having been introduced to birding after impulsively joining her sister on a guided birding trip to Ecuador. She has been on more than 40 DFO trips since, and has attended a few birding festivals, too. Andrea retired in 2020 from a career in software engineering and management in the aerospace industry

Scott Hammel — A Colorado native who also lived briefly in Florida and California, Hammel is a wildlife photographer (especially birds) with his own YouTube channel. He has bachelor's degrees in political science and audio/visual engineering, and his day job is senior project manager for an advertising platform. His favorite birds include Colorado's White-tailed Ptarmigan and the Collared Aracari, a Central-South American toucan. When not photographing birds, he's been shooting storms and tornadoes (more than 200 twisters) since becoming a storm chaser in 2008

Roger Koester — A DFO member since 2018, Koester previously served on the board as well as DFO's Conservation and Finance committees. A retired college administrator, Roger was director of financial aid at the Colorado School of Mines for 20 years

Kris Sauke — A retired small-animal veterinarian, Sauke is a Colorado native who took up birding and joined DFO in 2018 after retiring. She particularly appreciates the knowledge and experience with birds that DFO field trips and programs provide. She still works part-time for Freedom Service Dogs in Englewood

DFO ADBIRDISEMENTS!

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

Include name, email and/or phone number, and a weblink if items are offered online. Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (200-word limit). You may submit 1-2 photos or images per ad. Ads do not carry over. To renew, resubmit by next deadline (June 30, 2026).

Send AdBIRDtisement materials and/or questions to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Swarovski 8x42 NL Pure binoculars

For sale: Swarovski 8X42 NL Pure binoculars in very good condition, with extra eye cups and original case

Offered at: \$1,500 (current list price new is \$3,149)

Features include:

- Fluorite-containing HD glass elements
- Field flattener lens system
- SWAROBRIGHT, SWAROTOP, SWARODUR coatings
- Ultrawide 69° viewing angle

Terms: Cash, with pickup in Lafayette, CO, or other Front Range location by mutual agreement

Contact: Chuck Hundertmark (chundertmark8@gmail.com)



[SEE FULL SPECS](#)

Zeiss 10x42 Conquest HD binoculars

For sale: Zeiss 10x42 Conquest HD binoculars in good condition

Offered at: \$360 (list price new is \$999.99)

Features include:

- ED lenses, 90% light transmission
- Field-flattening edge-to-edge sharpness
- Compact roof prism design
- Fully multicoated optics

Terms: Cash, with pickup in Lafayette, CO, or other Front Range location by mutual arrangement

Contact: Chuck Hundertmark (chundertmark8@gmail.com)



[SEE FULL SPECS](#)

DFO TRANSITIONS

So long, Sharon: 3-term DFO president is catalyst, club history buff, board's big sis

Patrick O'Driscoll

As DFO's annual election this month ushers in new and returning officers and board members, Denver Field Ornithologists thanks seven others who are retiring or stepping down from DFO officer and director duties. They include longtime Programs Manager **Bill Turner**, Treasurer **Tom Econopouly**, and board directors **Susan Blansett** (past president), **Cyndy Johnson** (Membership chair), **Janet Peters** (Hawk Watch chair) and **Courtney Rella** (Conservation chair).

The seventh to depart at month's end will be DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who in 2026 completes nine years of high-profile service to the club. In one short decade, she has helped guide DFO through unprecedented change, from record growth in membership to a dramatic increase in outings and participation in DFO's unmatched field trips program. In three years as president (after two years as vice president and several more as a board director), she has delivered smartly organized and level-headed leadership with an agreeable nature and steady pursuit of consensus. Although she holds symbolic sway, Sharon's manner has always been more DFO big sister than head of the family.

"When I think of Sharon, I think of the years of dedication, leadership, and excellent organizational skills she has devoted to DFO," says retiring Programs manager **Bill Turner**, 2025 recipient of DFO's highest honor, the Ptarmigan Award.

Although it is customary for DFO presidents to serve two consecutive one-year terms before stepping aside, Tinianow stayed on for a third to complete one last task: the year-long celebration in 2025 of our 90th anniversary as a birding club. Besides overseeing the commemoration, Sharon had already devoted hours and hours of archival research the previous year to compile, write and illustrate a fresh new history of the club.

The result was **DFO @ 90**, an in-depth, four-part series in the now-quarterly *Lark Bunting* journal. Two-plus decades at a time, Sharon's book-length history traced nine decades of club progress and volunteerism — from its quiet founding in the Great Depression as the Colorado Bird Club through the first quarter of the 21st century — for the love of birds and the conservation of their habitat in Colorado.

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Making a point at a DFO Board Meeting in 2025
Patrick O'Driscoll



Sharon on a Genesee Mountain field trip in 2024
Patrick O'Driscoll



Tinianow, left, on bike-and-bird field trip led by Nate Bond, right, in 2024
Nate Bond

A triumphant celebration last October capped the observance with record in-person attendance, DFO birthday cakes, and an inspiring, forward-looking presentation by the club's most famous alumnus, eBird co-founder and director **Chris Wood** of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

"The clarity of her thinking" in conducting DFO's business most impresses **Susan Blansett**, Tinianow's predecessor as president (2021-23). "Sharon assesses situations quickly and identifies core issues or problems to be solved," Blansett says. "Then she plots multiple paths to yield progress and engages others in brainstorming solutions. She quickly recognizes the talents that individual members of DFO can bring and finds ways to engage them." As president, she is an *ex officio* member of every DFO committee. But that's not a phone-it-in formality of office for her, an active thinker and doer in every gathering.

Sharon is pragmatic about that. "Our bylaws stipulate that the president only votes when there is a tie," she says, "and in three years as president, I have never voted. I am proud of this because for the most part, the discussions we have at the board bring us to consensus, even on the most complicated issues. I have enjoyed being part of such a collegial group of people."

Tinianow joined DFO in 2016 after moving to Denver from the Midwest two years earlier to work in the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History. She had traveled to the annual Colorado Field Ornithologists convention in Lamar in 2016 with husband-and-wife DFO members who offered her a ride. "We were cruising down dirt roads, birding our way to the convention," Sharon recalls. "In between stops to see Lark Buntings and Burrowing Owls, which I'd never seen before, I asked them how to learn Colorado birds. They told me about DFO meetings at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science and all the free field trips."

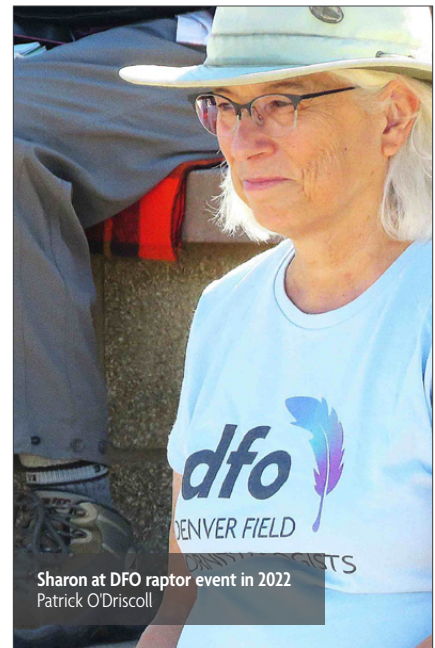
She was first elected to the DFO Board just a year later, in April 2017. Two months after that, she answered a call for club volunteers from **Kay Niyo**, longtime editor of *The Lark Bunting* when it was DFO's monthly newsletter. Niyo was seeking her own successor. "I had edited a newsletter for the Sierra Club, so that seemed like a good fit," Sharon recalls. "Kay was great about teaching me how to do the job." As editor, Tinianow helped carry the newsletter through its redesign, which debuted at the end of 2019.

Sharon was just getting started. In 2021 she was first elected DFO vice president, quickly helping to bring the club out of COVID-19 isolation and also chairing the Communications & Outreach Committee. DFO's connection with members sharpened, not just through the newsletter but person to person as club life returned to normal with in-person field trips. Already a club catalyst, Sharon helped get Ohio friend and superstar birding author and guide **Kenn Kaufman** to present a DFO evening program remotely via Zoom in fall 2020, in the depths of the pandemic. It was one of DFO's most successful programs ever, drawing hundreds of homebound viewers.

After the customary but busy two years as vice president, she barely broke stride stepping into the presidency in 2023. Her tenure featured major efforts to re-engage members after the pandemic through "coffeehouse chats," surveys about programs and preferences for Zoom vs. in-person, a return to live program events, and most recently, efforts to plan joint programs and other cooperative work with fellow Colorado bird-centric organizations, including Audubon chapters and CFO.

"Sharon is very productive and positive and has such a commitment to bringing new ideas to DFO," says **Jill Boice**, chair of DFO's Grants Committee. "I admire her tremendously."

Peters, who still volunteers with DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch, recalls a conversation with Sharon while birding together after a DFO volunteer appreciation event in 2023: "She told me she wasn't a 'chaser,' she wasn't a 'lister,' and that she didn't really like birding in big social groups. She just likes to experience the quiet and watch the birds. But as a leader, Sharon was so aware of the different ways people like to bird, and so appreciating of that."



Sharon at DFO raptor event in 2022
Patrick O'Driscoll



Sharon with DFO hosts and guest Chris Wood, center rear, at DFO's 90th birthday event in October 2025
Jim Esten

DFO NEWS

Gear Up & Get Out! April 25 DFO meet-up has used gear sale, meet & greet, Belmar field trip



SPRING! Amiright? Birds, birds, birds! But spring also means spring CLEANING — and let's face it, almost every birder's got former, backup or unused birding gear gathering dust, right? Well, has DFO got the answer for your birding spring cleaning needs? You bet your used binocs, tripods, cameras and other gear we do!

What's old to you may be new to newer birders! So bring your excess, surplus, leftover and "gently used" birding and outdoor items this month to DFO's first ever **Gear Up & Get Out** event, **10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, April 25** at The Belmar Heritage Park Visitor Center in Lakewood. If you're not selling, then you might be buying! Pick up some new or lightly used gear!

Full details about how to donate/sell gear are below. Get ready and get out your Gear Up gear now! We'll even have the [Cooper's Coffee Cart](#) selling coffee, tea and pastries. And if you want to make a nice day of it, come early for the DFO field trip to Belmar Park before the Gear Up + Get Out sale begins! Registration details above at right..

All of this is a fresh twist on DFO's annual membership meeting, which is held every April. But instead of a Zoom webinar, we're throwing this combination marketplace and mixer get-together on a weekend day when more can attend, mingle, and celebrate spring migration:

- Clear out your closet of gently used birding gear (birding optics, accessories, birding guides and books, apparel, other outdoor gear, etc.)
- Shop for new and used birding equipment at vendor tables
- Enter to win a door prize
- Learn about DFO partners Colorado Field Ornithologists and Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center
- Meet reps from [Reefs to Rockies](#) and [Partnership for International Birding](#) to explore a tour-guided adventure birding afield
- Meet DFOs newly elected officers and board of directors

To join the pre-event field trip at Belmar Park from 8:30 to 10:30 a.m., sign up on the DFO website's [Upcoming Field Trips](#) page.

If you're looking for new (or new to you) gear, check out the gently used items DFO will be selling at the event. (We will accept cash, check or credit card.) You can also browse new goods offered by [Front Range Birding](#) and [Wild Birds Unlimited](#).

If you have gear to donate or sell, here is how to do it:

- Use this online [donor/seller form](#) to provide your donation information, then bring your items with you to the April 25 event. (Note: There may be donation sites for drop-offs before April 25. More info to come)
- You can also download and complete a [printed version of the donor/seller form](#) and bring it with your items to the event
- Also note: For items valued at \$100 or more, you can opt to have DFO sell on a donation commission of 20% of the total

Questions? Visit the DFO home page and fill in the [CONTACT US](#) form at the bottom. Check the Gear UP & Get Out Sale button and leave your question. One of our GU+GO volunteers will respond.

See YOU at GU+GO!

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

NEXT BIRD BOMBS: “FEET OF FOOTHILLS” ON APRIL 23

BIRD BOMBS away! The next live mini-webinar in this free DFO series for birders is “Habitat Blast: Feet of the Foothills,” set for **Thursday, April 23** at **7 p.m. MDT**. It’s the fifth in a recent string of episodes that focus on the variety of ecosystems that birds inhabit in Colorado. Series host and DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** will explore the bird communities around the Front Range foothills’ lowest slopes, from the hogbacks to about 8,000 feet. You can watch any of the more than 40 past episodes in the Bird Bombs series anytime on [DFO’s YouTube channel](#).

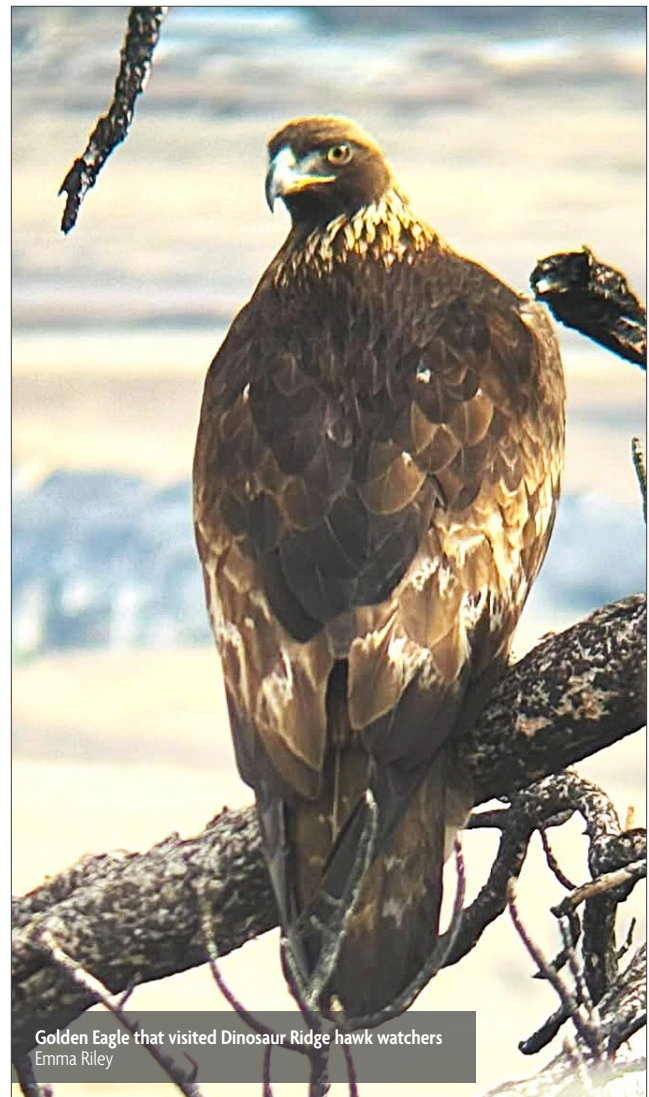


HAWK WATCH UPDATE: WE ARE GOLDEN!

DFO’s Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch spring 2026 raptor count started slowly in early March. But by month’s end, the tally of birds of prey migrating along the hogbacks of the Front Range had reached 553, about normal for most years. Hawk watch volunteer and DFO Board member **Janet Peters** notes that on March 26, counters logged 158 raptors, the highest single-day count in March for the past four years. But the month’s highlight, she adds, was a very close encounter with an unexpected visitor. On March 24, a Golden Eagle flew

in and landed on a prominent dead-s snag tree so near to the observation post that lead counter **Emma Riley** could photograph it close up using only her phone camera! And the bird remained perched there for half an hour! The denizens of Dinosaur Ridge are still abuzz over that one.

The counting season ends May 10, but this month’s next milestone is the annual [Mile High Raptors Raptorthon](#) fundraiser. The April 18 event benefits both the Dinosaur Ridge count and its national partner, the [Hawk Migration Association](#). The Mile High Raptors team seeks to count the most bird-of-prey species (and all other bird species) in a 24-hour period inside an 8-mile radius birding circle around Dinosaur Ridge. All birders are welcome to join in by counting within the circle and sharing their results with the Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch eBird account. To learn more about contributing and participating, visit the [Hawk Watch website](#).



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PERÚ EN JULIO? DFO’ER ORGANIZING MIDSUMMER TRIP

Longtime DFO member **Bob Shade** is “looking for a fourth” — not for bridge or golf, but for a birding excursion to south-central Peru July 8-15. The trip, with [Birding Ecotours](#) and local guide **Eduardo Ormaeche**, needs at least one more member and can accommodate up to eight total. Target birds are “too many to list” but include many endemics, Buff-fronted Owl, Koepcke’s Screech Owl, Andean Condor, parrots and numerous tanagers, spinetails and tyrants. Full details are on the Birding Ecotours webpage for the trip titled “[Cusco, Machu Picchu, and Apurimac Jewels](#).” Cost is \$4,771 per person plus \$411 for the domestic flight. The group flies in and out of Lima, the Peruvian capital, with one in-country flight to Cusco. There’s no formal deadline yet but if you’re interested, please contact Bob as soon as possible. Text or call 720-256-4376 or email wrshade3@gmail.com.

CU-BOULDER’S BIRD LAB BOSS HAS NEW PODCAST

Scott Taylor, director of CU-Boulder’s Mountain Research Station and [Taylor Lab](#) mentor to numerous students in evolutionary biology and other bird-related disciplines, has begun a new podcast, [Okay, But... Birds](#). Each episode is a deep but lively half-hour dive into a single bird-related question. Taylor says his approach is “part science, part storytelling, and 100% feather-forward.” The title of each episode begins with “Okay, But” and a clever question such as “Is Bird Monogamy just PR?,” “Why Do Some Birds Thrive in Cities?,” and “Is Birding Just Pokémon for Adults?” The avian topics (16 episodes so far) range widely — Merlin Bird ID, long-distance migration, brood parasitism, climate change effects on birds and more. And guests have included Cornell Lab director emeritus **John Fitzpatrick**, Pulitzer Prize-winning science writer-

author **Ed Yong** and birdsong recordist **Linda Macaulay**. Taylor’s 30-minute segments are available on Spotify, Apple, and YouTube.



FIRST SOUTHERN PLAINS BIRDFEST IS . . . SOLD OUT?!

We were about to tout the inaugural [Southern Plains Birding Festival](#) (for which DFO is a supporting organization) as a fun new gathering this spring to celebrate birdlife on Colorado’s shortgrass prairie — and to say “Get your tickets now!” But OK, check that: On the last day of March, the **May 9-10** gathering in Bent County was already officially SOLD OUT. Mark your 2027 birding calendar NOW for the second annual, the same weekend (Mother’s Day). This year’s 80 quick-acting participants are paying just \$40 apiece for up to three guided excursions from five destination choices each session (Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning) in and around the habitat preserves of the Lamar-based [Southern Plains Land Trust](#). “You’ve birded the mountains, now come bird the American Serengeti,” the trust said in promotional materials, and Colorado birders agreed. The nonprofit trust protects more than 60,000 acres of grasslands in southeastern Colorado. Those preserves sound like great destinations to visit during the traditional peak spring migration month for Colorado birding . . . NEXT year.

“WELCOME BACK, BIRDS!” ON 3 SPRING WEBCASTS

The [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) plans a series of free, live events online to celebrate this season of bird migration. The first of three webcasts is **April 9** with “Bird Songs of Spring,” a listen-and-learn session about birdsong in the season when we hear birds sing the most. A month later, “Bird Migration in Your Backyard” on **May 14** will focus on newly arrived species and questions about how they made the journey. Finally, the **June 18** webcast, “How to Support Birds All Summer Long,” deals with setting up your yard for birds and being aware of nesting signs and other seasonal behaviors.

For complete details and easy free registration, click the button below. All three livecasts will be led by Cornell Lab experts and start at **11 a.m. MDT**. If you register but can’t attend, the lab will email you recordings afterwards for viewing later at your convenience.

INFO AND REGISTRATION

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**FILM MINI-REVIEW:
LISTERS IS A HOOT AND A HALF**

Am I the last birder in Colorado who *just now* watched the best documentary on birding I've ever seen? If you know that I'm referring to [*Listers: A Glimpse Into Extreme Birdwatching*](#), then yeah, I guess I must be. If it doesn't ring a bell, head straight to YouTube and prepare to laugh your binoculars off. This 2025 film by unheralded suburban St. Louis brothers (and birding neophytes) **Owen** and **Quentin Reiser** is the *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* of birding — except it's for real, and these disheveled dudes are laugh-out-loud funnier (and smarter). Owen was already a wildlife photographer (the film is indie-jerky-freeform, but his snippets of bird footage are gorgeous). And Quentin? Between jobs, he was inspired to try a Lower-48 Big Year after browsing the family's old *Golden Guides* bird book while high on weed.

With minimal preparation, off they went on a 40,000-mile, 366-day road trip (leap year 2024), sleeping in Quentin's used 2010 Kia minivan in parking lots and roadsides, filing goofy social media short films along the way. Much mirth, mild mayhem and subtle, clever insights on birding and people ensued, as did thoughts of making a feature-length film. The two-hour running time flies by, intercut with interviews of prominent and obsessed birders at home and in the field. Spurning distribution offers from Netflix, HBO and Amazon, they released *Listers* with an equally cheeky companion book, *Field Guide of All the Birds We Found One Year in the United States*, full of Quentin's bang-up bird drawings and gentle snark. P.S.: The dudes became excellent birders, checklisting 579 species on their Big Year odyssey. Ready to watch? Join 3.6 million other viewers of their entertaining and enlightening journey for the free show, below.



MONTHLY PROGRAMS

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

DFO archives our monthly fall, winter and spring programs. If you could not attend the first three evening programs of 2026, click the "WATCH ONLINE" button below to view the Zoom recordings on DFO's YouTube channel. The DFO website's "Past Programs" page contains links for these and numerous other recent DFO programs.

WATCH ONLINE

MONDAY, JANUARY 26, 2026
**Birding former British Honduras?
You'd Better BELIZE it!**

Eduardo Ruano and Ruben Arevalo
Belizean bird guides

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2026
**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, MARCH 30, 2026
**Blue-Mmers are back!
Bluebirds and Hummingbirds**

Scott Rashid
Artist/author, director of the Colorado Avian
Research & Rehabilitation Institute



DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope: Up close with “BirdTuber” Scott Hammel

Editor’s note: IN THE SCOPE is a series of occasional Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips, club volunteers, and other interesting members who participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email The Lark Bunting at patodrisk@gmail.com

Name: Scott Hammel
Home city: Englewood
Occupation: Advertising product manager

How / when I became a birder?

Taking pictures of wild things led me to birding. I first got into photography in 2008 to preserve images and memories of my wild hobby at the time: storm chasing! With my first DSLR camera, a few lenses and a LOT of trial and error, I taught myself how. In the “off season,” I shot pictures of wildlife to stay sharp. After a few years, my hobbies flipped. I was chasing wildlife with my camera first, and tornadoes on the side.

Then came an unforgettable twist to my hobby. I was at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, where I’d been going ever since school field trips as a native Colorado kid. That day in 2018, I was focusing on bison and mule deer when a striking black-and-white bird I’d never seen before landed on a fence post

close by. As I turned to point my camera, the bird took off — and for the next hour I chased it, making blurry shot after blurry shot until I could finally get one in focus!

Clueless what kind of bird it was, I dug around online once I got home and eventually figured out it was a Lark Bunting — my home state bird, no less. Challenged by how hard I had to work for that shot, I was also intrigued. I liked trying to ID and learn about the bird. The chase pushed me not only to photograph birds, but to know which ones I was shooting.

When / why I joined DFO?

One morning in December 2022, I accidentally crashed a DFO field trip at Wheat Ridge Greenbelt. I had gone looking for Bohemian Waxwings during that memorable Front Range irruption of winter 2022-23. Seeing a group of birders ahead, I asked if they’d seen any Bohemians yet. They, too, were looking for the waxwings and invited me to join them. The leader was giving everyone great bits of info about the waxwings and why they had come so far south that winter. He turned out to be **David Suddjian**, Denver Field Ornithologists’ field trips chair. I was so impressed by the whole experience that as soon as I got home, I joined DFO.



First DFO field trip?

Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, again! Not the one I crashed. This was a few months later, a trip led by **Gigi Zarzuela** (in fact, it was her first trip as a leader). I was afraid being a beginner would expose me as some kind of fraud. My fear quickly faded once I realized how we all had different levels of birding knowledge and skill, and that I knew more than I realized.

Continued on page 14

Favorite birding destination, and why?

Locally, I love going to the tiny town of Louviers in Douglas County. I always find great birds, and DFO usually leads trips there each season. Between the villagers' bird feeders, the numerous mature trees and the wooded DuPont Open Space next door, the number of good birds there is still a surprise. It's a sleeper birding hotspot.

Globally, I'll go anywhere there's a cloud forest — a visually stunning upland forest full of amazing birds. It feels tropical (and most of them are in the tropics) but without the heat, rarely rising above the mid-70s. And whenever the light turns moody, it's wonderful for photography. On a recent trip to Ecuador, when a rainy morning brought groans to our tour group, I thought to myself, "This is gonna be *great!*" The image I got of a Turquoise Jay that day oozed with darkness and feeling. On a trip to Panama, the [cloud forest](#) in Chiriqui Province gave us trogons galore, including the aptly named Graceful Black-throated Trogon. To me, cloud forest habitat is pure perfection.

How / why I got into making birding videos?

Just before the pandemic, I was planning a Yellowstone/Grand Teton photography trip. While on YouTube researching hot spots, I found a guy named **Steve Mattheis** with tons of great videos about both parks. His YouTube channel videos were so inspiring that I thought, "Hey, I could be that guy for Colorado wildlife!" I couldn't find anyone else doing that here, so I started making videos of my Colorado photography outings just for fun.

My first videos were lousy: horrible audio, bad voice-overs, and worse, no storytelling. How could I continue taking still photos (my true passion) and also record enough quality footage to make YouTube episodes? Wildlife YouTubers used to get by with a few words — "I went to location X and saw these birds" — and then roll the clips. Not anymore. Viewers expect more. They want a story. Once I refocused on storytelling, the number of views on my [YouTube channel](#) began to go up dramatically.

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Turquoise Jay that Scott found in Ecuadoran cloud forest
Scott Hammel



Aptly named Graceful Black-throated Trogon, seen by Hammel on trip to Panama
Scott Hammel



Scott in the field
Scott Hammel

That got me invited into YouTube's partnership program, where you can earn money by running ads in your videos. I've read that 93% of people who start YouTube channels don't make it to partner, so it was a big deal for me. I'm nowhere close to making a living at it, but it's still awesome. I'm also in an online group with a bunch of other "BirdTubers" (as bird-video people call ourselves) from all over the world, bouncing ideas off each other, workshopping videos and collaborating. They've become a second family to me.

Best DFO field trip ever?

I'd say it's a tie between two kinds of outings. First is one of David Suddjian's early-morning Northern Saw-whet Owl trips in winter near Ken Caryl Ranch in Jeffco. They're awesome. I even bring my thermal vision scope to help see the birds better in the near darkness. The other is any Chico Basin Ranch outing led by trip leader **Jessica Miller** of Colorado Springs. It's always amazing during migration, but Jessica also does a great job getting us in there when the ranch is far less open than it used to be. If you've never gone, get down to Chico!

Why I bird?

I mentioned the challenge of pursuit, learning to ID birds, and the satisfaction of capturing them on camera. Specific day-of reasons differ every time I go out. When I have a certain species or birding place to focus on, I'll be locked in the whole time. In January, I set out to see our home-grown Brown-capped Rosy-Finches in the Colorado high country. I thought it would be one easy outing. It took me two weeks! I was haunted by bad timing. Other eBird checklists were seeing hundreds of rosy-finches at the same locations! I even made a funny [YouTube video](#) about the quest that nearly broke me. Most other times, I'm relaxed and out simply to see what I can see. But sometimes when I'm shooting footage, the million things in my head about the video make the birds, sadly, almost secondary.

A place I'd like to bird where I never have?

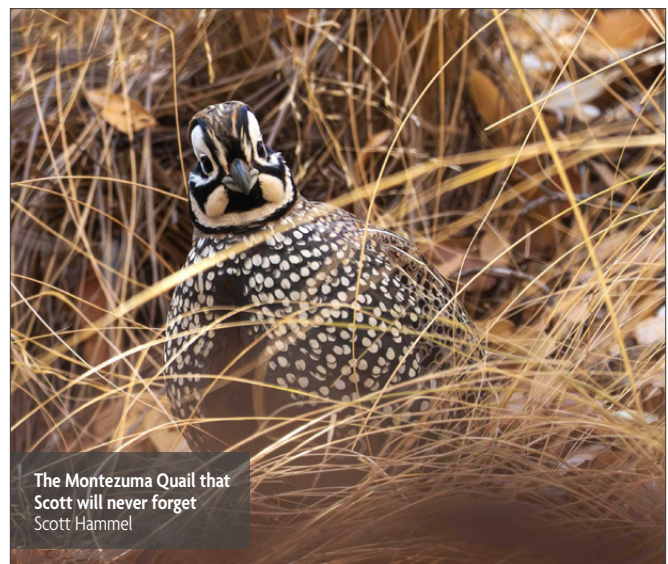
My next bucket list location is South Africa, specifically Kruger National Park. Among incredible South African birds I'd love to see are the Lilac-breasted Roller and the Martial Eagle. Birds wouldn't be my sole focus — I'd love to see leopards and African wild dogs, too.

Where I'll make my next birding video?

Right now I'm editing a six-episode series about my birding trip to Panama in February. I shot more than 875 gigabytes of photos and video in two weeks, so there's a lot to sort through! After that, I plan to shoot a video later this spring about the Gunnison Sage-Grouse. I'm also working on a video on the ethics of wildlife and birding photography, which will no doubt be a little spicy. I'm also looking into doing a "behind-the-scenes" video at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science.

Most memorable birding experience?

Just a year ago, in April 2025, I had an incredible encounter with an uncommon and very secretive bird in southeastern Arizona, where my parents live near Tucson in the winter. (How great is it to have a home base in one of the best birding spots in the world?) I was down for spring migration, and to surprise my dad, I hired a guide for the day to take us to someplace we'd never birded before. The guide suggested Miller Canyon, and we were up and off early. At the last pit stop before hiking the lower canyon, I emerged to find our guide pointing out back, behind the bathroom. He thought he was hearing a [Montezuma Quail](#)! He suggested we check it out before heading up canyon. Sure enough, just a short walk away, the shy and elusive bird with that hilarious, clownish head emerged from the rocky desert. We stood there, frozen, as it approached and then circled around us! It seemed genuinely curious, and gave us amazing looks (and photos) for about five minutes before disappearing back into the rocks. One of my best-ever bird sightings was literally 50 yards from an outhouse in the desert — and I got to share the view with my dad.



The Montezuma Quail that Scott will never forget
Scott Hammel



THE LIVES OF BIRDS

Field notes from the underground: Colorado's subterranean nesters

Jared Del Rosso

Survey 100 people, in the style of TV's "Family Feud," about the places where birds nest. Tally their answers. When you announce (like the TV host), "Survey SAID?," I'll bet "UNDERGROUND" wouldn't crack the top five responses. Probably no one but a birder would think to mention this rather odd nesting habit for some feathered creatures that fly.

Here in Colorado, we know better. Exhibit A is the Burrowing Owl, one of our most photogenic and photographed owl species. But don't let the name mislead you. Burrowing Owls may nest below ground, but in the plains, deserts and basins of the West, they rarely excavate their own subterranean homes. Like seasonal renters, they move into burrows previously dug by mammals. (Airbnb on the prairie!) Come to think of it, "Burrow Owl" would be more accurate.

Prairie dogs are the best-known providers of the birds' temporary digs, but Burrowing Owls also use the holes of ground squirrels, badgers, skunks, marmots, armadillos, kangaroo rats, and even tortoises. Not having to dig allows them to focus on furnishing their nests, and they do so in another odd but purposeful way. Burrowing Owls feather the beds of their nests not with feathers but with dried livestock manure. This "bedding" is thought to have a double and perhaps even triple purpose. It attracts insects that the owls hunt and eat, and it signals to other owls that a burrow is occupied. It may even mask the owls' smell from predators.

Although Burrowing Owls may be Colorado's only truly subterranean nesters, a host of other familiar bird species nest in deep holes and earthen cavities that are certainly "under ground" if not actually *underground*.

Belted Kingfishers are one of our most common and widespread tunnel nesters. They tend to dig their own into earthen banks near water. Where I bird in the southern suburbs of Denver, this usually means in the soil banks of small creeks. Both females and males excavate their nesting holes, digging with those stout, pointed bills. They also kick the dirt out of the tunnel with feet whose fused outer two toes may help make the digging easier. The job typically takes 3 to 7 days for a 3- to 6-foot tunnel that dead-ends in a nesting chamber.



Burrowing Owls near and in underground home at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
George Ho

Belted Kingfishers don't build nests, per se, in these chambers. The Cornell Lab's [Birds of the World](#) notes that during incubation, "regurgitated pellets . . . of undigested fish bones and scales and chitinous exoskeletons of arthropods may accumulate, forming a somewhat insulative layer between eggs" and the chamber's bare floor. (A Burrowing Owl's dried-manure bedding doesn't sound so bad by comparison, does it?)

Like Belted Kingfishers, aptly named Bank Swallows also dig their own burrows — in colonies of individual 5-foot horizontal shafts into riverbanks, cliffs and bluffs near water. These little birds throw their whole bodies into the effort. "Dislodged material . . . is ejected with vigorous kicks and wriggling body and wing shuffling movements," *Birds of the World* tells us. Males start the digging. Once a female chooses a mate and his nest site, they share the work.

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Subterraneans_Burrowing Owls peek out of their underground home at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
George Ho



Belted Kingfisher nest hole in bank of First Creek inside Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
John Breitsch



Mountain Chickadee
John Breitsch

LIVES OF BIRDS cont from page 16

Although I rarely encounter Bank Swallows in the southern suburbs, another tunnel-nester is more common: Northern Rough-winged Swallow. Kingfishers and Northern Rough-wings share habitat in Centennial and are fairly common along its creeks and canals. This is no accident. Like Burrowing Owls, the swallows often reuse the burrows of other animals, including kingfishers (and even Bank Swallows). Unlike the sparsely furnished holes of those two species, the “proper” nests of Rough-winged Swallows contain twigs, stems, grasses, conifer needles, mosses, mud, dung, and, as the poets of *Birds of the World* put it, “miscellaneous bits of rubbish.”

More varied is the nesting of our two most common swallows, Cliff and Barn. Natural nest sites for both species include caves, though Barn Swallows today use such sites infrequently now. Both also favor edges and covered locations on human structures. You can find Cliff Swallow nests under busy overpasses and near the top of shopping center facades. Barn Swallow nests can be just above eye level on storefronts, but also in the almost-underground entrances to underground parking garages at large shopping centers. The latter sites cater to birds and birders alike. I have watched Barn Swallows hunting insects around garage lights well past sunset, a diurnal species taking advantage of artificial “day.”

Chickadees nest in cavities, almost exclusively above ground. But three years ago this July, DFO birders on a trip led by **David Suddjian** found a Mountain Chickadee nesting in a rotted stump only 3-4 inches above ground level. Ever the careful observer, Suddjian returned the next day to investigate this unusual choice of chickadee nest site. He reported the following on his eBird checklist:

“The adult approached from a nearby pine trunk or nearby Douglas-fir foliage. From those points it flew directly down to the cavity in the ground and disappeared. It soon emerged at the usual short interval for feeding nestlings, and without food, but the young could not be heard. Upon exiting

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the adult would pause for a moment on the stump at ground level and then fly up and off.”

The same goes for some Black-capped Chickadees, who are known to nest in cavities at “ground level,” *Birds of the World* confirms.

Although not quite birds of the underworld, wrens are so well known for nesting in cavities and foraging in dark edges, holes, and crevices that science named their family *Troglodytidae*, or “cave-dweller.” The genus name for the common and widespread Northern House Wren shares these Latin roots, though the lifestyles of Rock and Canyon wrens are more deserving of the cave-dweller label. House Wrens only occasionally nest in cave-like openings, while Rocks and Canyons typically nest in crevices and ledges.

Like Burrowing Owls, some Rock Wrens may nest in rodent burrows, too, though the ornithological record is spotty at best. What is clear is that Rock Wrens alone, not Burrowing Owls or kingfishers, often enhance their nest sites in crevices or holes in an unusual way: “Paving” the nest and a “stone patio” leading into it with flat rocks! A [2014 study](#) of Rock Wren nests in northern Colorado (*Paving the way: Multifunctional nest architecture of the Rock Wren*, The Auk, **Nat Warning & Lauryn Benedict**) showed that these stone “pavers” have important structural effects. They protect nests from rainfall, and they amplify the noise of approaching predators. (They also may help regulate and retain heat in the nests.)

For good enough reasons, DFO will probably never host a field trip to a parking garage, creek bank, rodent tunnel or other underworlds in search of the clever species that nest somewhere within them. But we could do worse than look for birds ourselves in these unexpected yet still essential habitats.

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



FIELD TRIP REVIEW

Field Tripping: Sandhill Cranes and 76 other San Luis Valley avian delights

The trip: San Luis Valley (Alamosa, Chaffee, Conejos, Costilla, Rio Grande, Saguache, and stops in Huerfano, Park and Pueblo)

Date: Tuesday-Thursday, March 10-12, 2026

Leaders: David Suddjian and Ryan Corda + 10 participants

Species: 77 across 85 eBird lists

David Suddjian

In early March, 12 enthusiastic DFO members made the club's second tour to southern Colorado's San Luis Valley for three days of spectacular birds and scenery. The crane music was sublime — as were the rest of the birds and stops on our six-county odyssey.

The valley's Sandhill Cranes, celebrated this time each March at the [Monte Vista Crane Festival](#), were a marvel: up to 20,000 birds in and around the national wildlife refuge of the same name, resting and recharging on their spring journey to breeding grounds farther north.

We enjoyed many other highlights across the valley as we birded through six southern Colorado counties. Among the vivid memories of the more than six dozen species we checklisted along the way was our lunchtime encounter with a cooperative Northern Pygmy-Owl in a campground tree . . . a rare Mexican Duck . . . Pinyon Jays and Sagebrush Sparrows, two inhabitants of the valley's upland steppe country . . . nesting Great Horned Owls, thousands of ducks and so many more.

For nine of the 12 birders in our party, this was their first visit to the San Luis Valley. All found opportunities to make new friends. I asked our trip participants to share their thoughts, some of which follow here.

Continued on page 20



Uprising of thousands of Sandhill Cranes at Monte Vista NWR
Dave Prentice



All eyes and cameras on the Northern Pygmy-Owl
Dave Prentice



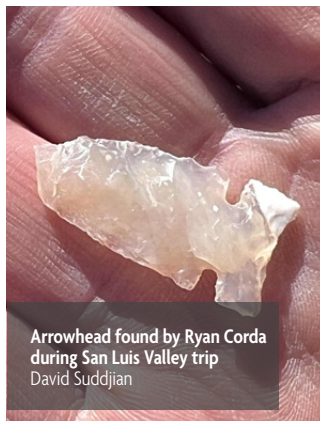
What they were looking at — Northern Pygmy-Owl
Melody Serra



Under big sky at Sagebrush Sparrow hotspot off Medano Road in San Luis Valley
Judy McKeon



Sagebrush Sparrow in San Luis Valley
Melody Serra



Arrowhead found by Ryan Corda during San Luis Valley trip
David Suddjian



Sandhill Cranes near Monte Vista in San Luis Valley
Dave Prentice

FIELD TRIPPING cont from page 19

My heart is full today after a few days with you and our fellow birders under that big San Luis sky . . . A highlight for me was the sunrise as we watched flock after flock of Sandhill Cranes come in to feed for the day, scratching, foraging, jumping, flapping and sounding off. Also the Pygmy-Owl at lunch one day and the Brown Creepers at another. I also loved simply standing in those immensely vast spaces, in the beauty and richness of the natural world. How much I appreciate DFO. Discovering the programs it offers has changed and enriched my life.

— Jodi Haller

It was amazing to find 77 birds in three days and fun to explore five counties new for me. I really enjoyed our group; it was good to bird and socialize with everyone. My favorites were Pygmy-Owl and the Sagebrush Sparrows. That arrowhead find was really meaningful — crazy to think that it could be 1,600-plus years old!

— Dave Prentice

Thanks David and Ryan for planning and leading a wonderful three days . . . Learning about the flora was an added bonus! It is always fun meeting up with old friends and making new ones, sharing stories and our passion for birds. The Northern Pygmy-Owl was a lifer for me! And finally seeing and getting photos of the Brown Creeper was a first, too.

— Linda Cunico

This trip was amazing! I cannot thank David and Ryan enough for organizing, driving, and sharing their wealth of knowledge with us. We are incredibly lucky to have this birding community and the abundant field trip offerings DFO provides.

— Melody Serra

Exploring the beautiful, far corners of the San Luis Valley with everyone was a great adventure. The cranes were an absolutely amazing spectacle, in numbers so large it's almost hard to comprehend. A huge thank you to you both for organizing, keeping the multitude of checklists, and wrangling all of us. I really enjoyed the good company and great birds.

— Ginny Gulakowski



FIELD SCIENCE

Is this the year you'll help BBS track breeding bird species across Colorado?

David Suddjian

Half an hour before sunrise, you are standing beside your car along a deserted stretch of road on Colorado's Great Plains. As the eastern sky lightens, the birds are singing. You've set the timer for your first 3-minute stop to watch and listen for them.

This is the first of 50 observation points you will visit this day along a 24½-mile route, half a mile at a time, of the [North American Breeding Bird Survey](#). It's a promising start: Three Horned Larks are larking and a Lark Bunting is singing. There's a Mourning Dove, Western Meadowlarks, a pair of Western Kingbirds, and — yes, that's a Say's Phoebe calling near the farmhouse across the road. Three minutes in, and you've just begun your 5-hour shift in one of the most important yearly bird science efforts on the continent.

The BBS turns 60 this year, and dozens of skilled Colorado birders will soon fan out along scores of survey routes to do our state's part. But not all of the routes are covered. As peak breeding season kicks in from late May to early July, the Colorado BBS needs a few more experienced birders to join in this vital work.

Colorado hosts 135 BBS survey routes distributed throughout the state. Many have veteran observers who have covered the same tracks annually for many years. Other routes undergo natural turnover as one observer retires and another birder picks up that vacancy. A few other routes haven't been surveyed in several years. The state now has about 15 "vacant" routes available to knowledgeable birders who can commit to adopting a route for at least three years. (*See list on next page*)

As noted above, each 24.5-mile route requires about 5 hours to finish, with "point stops" every half-mile. At each point, the surveyor listens and watches for 3 minutes to record every bird heard or seen within a quarter-mile radius. The routes are sampled just once a year, and they follow the same roads and make the same stops each time.

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The author pausing to listen and look for birds along Road 26 on the Powderhorn BBS route in Gunnison County



View along BBS route near Paonia on Colorado's Western Slope
David Suddjian

More than 4,100 routes across the continental US and Canada produce an index of bird and species abundance that analysts use to estimate population trends on various geographic scales. For a glimpse of what the BBS is about in Colorado, view this recent video, [Ups and Downs in Colorado](#), from DFO’s “BIRD BOMBS” webinar series.

As I note in this video, the BBS gets you to explore and learn a new birding area. And I guarantee you, 100%, that your birding skills are going to improve. Plus, of course, you’re contributing to an important scientific study. For me, the BBS is one of the great highlights of my birding year. If you’re a good birder, I hope you will consider it.

Surveyor requirements are straightforward:

- “Wheels” to travel and complete your route in the required time and order
- Good hearing and eyesight
- Ability to identify the area’s breeding birds by sight and sound

Knowledge of bird songs and calls is extremely important, because most species counted on the surveys are detected by sound. Yes, it’s a fairly challenging task, to detect everything around you in just a 3-minute window. It can get kind of tiring after you’ve done that 50 times, but it’s also fun and satisfying.

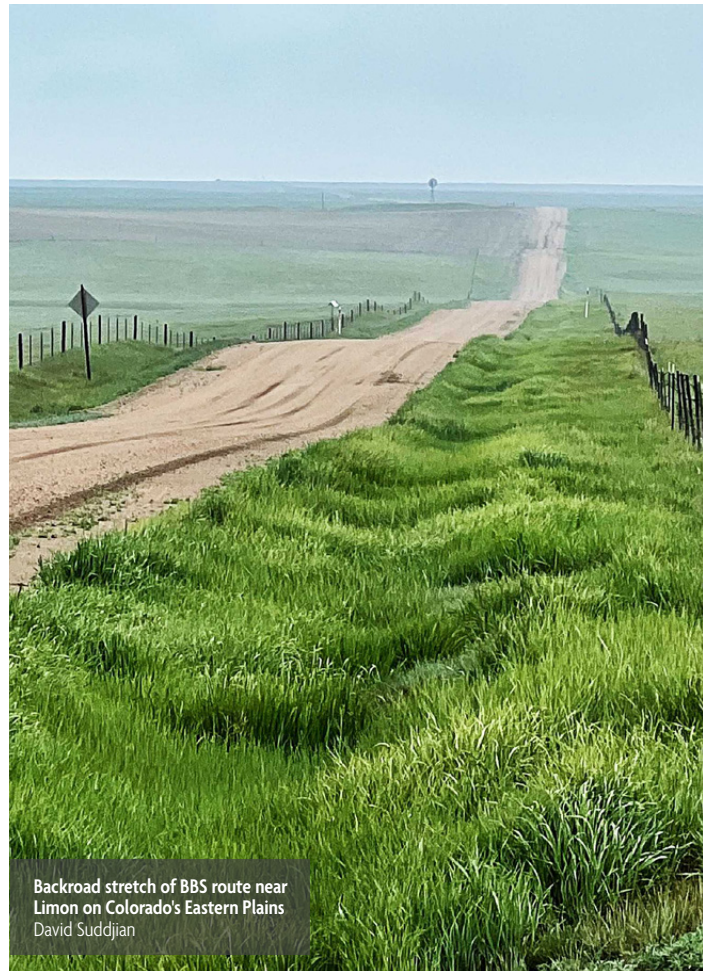
Can you volunteer to adopt a survey route? Learn more about the BBS at its [US Geological Survey webpages](#), and view available Colorado routes at <https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/RouteMap/Map.cfm>. If you’re interested in a route or have Colorado questions, please contact me directly at dsuddjian@gmail.com because route requests made via the BBS national webpage may not reach me. Thanks!

David Suddjian, Field Trips chair of DFO, is state coordinator of the Colorado Breeding Bird Survey. He first participated in the BBS in 1992 in his native California. He surveyed two routes a year there through 2013, when he moved to Colorado. Today he surveys 10 routes himself across the state each season

Vacant BBS routes

UPDATED APRIL 5, 2026

Rte #	Rte name	County location
20	Boyero	Lincoln
44	Bethune	Kit Carson
52	Dolores River	Dolores
55	Alamosa	Conejos, Alamosa
59	Pleasant View	Dolores
126	Cone Mtn	Las Animas
153	Rio Grande Res	Mineral, Hinsdale
207	Amherst	Phillips, Sedgwick
214	Kirk	Kit Carson
220	Haswell	Bent, Kiowa
314	Burlington	Kit Carson, Yuma
321	Sheridan Lake	Kiowa, Prowers
322	McPhee Resvr.	Dolores, Montezuma
324	South Fork	Rio Grande
373	Lizard Head Pass	San Miguel, Dolores



Backroad stretch of BBS route near Limon on Colorado’s Eastern Plains
David Suddjian

2026 DFO grantees: Nature ed, bird rehab, chickadees, winter raptors and more

Jill Boice

Seven bird-related science, conservation and education projects in Colorado are this year's recipients of grants from the DFO Research, Education, and Conservation Fund. Seven grant applicants will receive a total of \$12,360, a new record amount for the annual grant awards.

The awardees include a children's nature center destroyed by fire last fall, four college research projects ranging from chickadees in the foothills to Bobolinks on the Plains, a Front Range rehab center for injured wildlife, and a Boulder County group's program to monitor birds of prey in winter.

DFO has made these fund grants since 1994, when **Mary Hope Robinson** donated \$15,000 to establish the club's Educational Endowment Fund. In 2012, the name was changed to the DFO Research, Education, and Conservation Fund. Thanks to the generosity of donors including club members, DFO is able to support more grants each year with modest financial supplements to research and science-related projects.

The 2026 awardees and their grants are:



Boulder County Nature Association, Boulder, \$1,500

The association's Winter Raptor Monitoring Program aims to conserve appropriate habitat for raptors. It tracks population effects in areas where prairie dog towns have been poisoned. The grant will help cover the cost of a mobile data application to help integrate program data with Boulder County Parks and Open Space

Photo: Northern Harriers harrying a coyote during Boulder County Nature Association's raptor monitoring (Peter Ridgeway)



Sabrina Brooks, doctoral student, CU-Boulder, \$2,000

Brooks is studying how heavy metals exposure affects Barn Swallow survival in both breeding and non-breeding ranges. The birds' tail feathers carry a biochemical record of heavy metal exposure. She seeks to understand whether survival is equally sensitive to exposure at different points during the annual cycle and if exposure at multiple time points causes non-additive declines in survival. Barn Swallows' global distribution and proximity to humans make them an ideal candidate for study

Photo: Barn Swallow (John C. Breitsch)



Lucas Florsheim, doctoral student, CU-Boulder (The Taylor Lab), \$2,000

Florsheim's research project, *Investigating historical introgression in Colorado chickadees using museum specimens*, studies hybridizing of Black-capped and Mountain chickadees in Colorado over the past century. It seeks to reveal how landscape change has affected gene flow and hybridization outcomes

Photo: Lucas Florsheim of CU-Boulder with chickadee in hybridization study



George Lucas, master’s student, Colorado State University, \$1,360

Lucas’s research project, *Conservation Genomics of a declining Colorado Grassland Bird, the Bobolink*, includes mapping of genetic variation across the range of the bird’s range to examine spatial patterns of genetic health. His work results are aimed to help local conservation groups allocate limited resources to benefit Bobolinks

Photo: Bobolink, Chico Basin Ranch (Bob Maynard)



Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Longmont/Lyons, \$2,000

The grant will enable Greenwood, the largest wildlife rehab center on the Front Range, to cover costly viral testing and treatment of wildlife for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, aka bird flu. Last year the center handled 2,990 birds of 109 different species. Substantial numbers were waterfowl, which required that they be evaluated for possible bird flu. A Greenwood representative will be at DFO’s Gear Up & Get Out birding expo on April 25

Photo: Greenwood Wildlife Rehab staff evaluating American White Pelican (Mysti Tatro)



Sara Padula, doctoral student, CU-Boulder (Taylor Lab), \$2,000

Padula, also a DFO grantee in 2025, received this year’s grant to continue her investigation of memory-based cognition among chickadees captured and tagged near the CU Mountain Lab. She uses a sophisticated feeder array to study their learning and memory skills. She says her continuing work will “provide a robust framework for testing how memory and flexibility evolve in response to ecological and evolutionary pressures”

Photo: Sara Padula of CU-Boulder holds transmitter-tagged chickadee in feeder-memory study (George Ho)



Wild Bear Nature Center, Nederland, \$1,500

Since 1995, Wild Bear Nature Center has been inspiring people of all ages to connect with the natural world through hands-on environmental education. On October 9, 2025, a fire destroyed their building, and many others in Nederland, CO. They are now rebuilding. DFO granted them \$1500 towards the cost of new optics and materials for bird walks. The nature center has offered to plan a field trip so that DFO members can see their facilities this summer

Photo: Children on Wild Bear Nature Center bird walk scan from covered bridge in Nederland (Sally Brady)



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

Photo: Woodhouse’s Scrub Jay in oakbrush (Jason B. Bidgood)



Red-winged Blackbird
John C. Breitsch



Western Flycatcher
Meg Reck

Welcome to new DFO members

Hannah Branning, Elizabeth Branning and Susan Spalding of Castle Rock; Nea Brown and Bob Gowdy, Denver; Leroy Crotts and Jean Maguire, Denver; Mark Duey, Castle Rock; John C. Gibert and Lene Jaqua, Westminster; Grace and Sonja Hahn, Loveland; Margarete Schlaug-O'Brien and Paul O'Brien, Denver; Brendan Oldham, Fort Collins; Michelle Wilfong-Oliphant, Littleton; Mike Rome, Colorado Springs; Mary Ann and Michelle Swain, Castle Rock; Henry and Kit Williams, Morrison

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Meredith Anderson; Helen Berkman; Susan Blansett and Mark Peyton; Hannah Branning, Elizabeth Branning and Susan Spalding; Karel Buckley; Nathan Crow; Ryan Dibala; Laurie Duke; Andrea Duran; Grace and Sonja Hahn; Ed Janoff; Sharon Kelly; Roger Koester; Roger Koester in memory of John Breitsch; Lora Lehman; Lynne Miller; Colleen Nunn; Paula Ortlieb; Sarah Pascoe; Kate and Kyle Sandersen; Peter Stoltz; Lori Swenson; Michelle Verostko; Doug Ward; Tom Whitten; Robyn and Jeremy Winick

Friends of DFO

Susan Blansett and Mark Peyton; John Drummond; Kathy Hawkins; Sharon Kelly; Lora Lehman; Barry Levene; Felice Lyons, *in memory of John C Breitsch*; Caitlyn O'Neil; Dee Sato

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Tom and Debbie Behnfield; Susan Blansett and Mark Peyton; Steve Dwyer; John C. Gibert and Lene Jaqua; Scott Hammel; Ruth Hellman and Bill Schreitz; Sharon Kelly; Senja and Mark Meiklejohn; Michelle Verostko





FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

January, February, March DFO trips *In Focus*

Field trips in the three winter-into-spring months included 84 total outings. Participants on 28 of them took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 91-year-old club. If you’re on DFO trips in April, May and June, take a few shots of your fellow trippers birding and send us the best for the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, due out in July 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 July 2026 summer-quarter issue is Tuesday, June 30. Thanks!



JANUARY 1

Pueblo Area (Pueblo County)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Ryan Corda, Juliana Hebel, Victoria Miles, Jonathan Hebel, Lauren Friesen, Melody Serra, Angela Hebel, Matthew Fast, Erik Playe, Olivia Salmon, Scott Hammel, Paula Wegert, Jennifer Mercer, Joyce Michael

Field Trippers sort gulls from the South Marina Beach at Lake Pueblo State Park on DFO’s annual New Year’s Day excursion to Pueblo hotspots, co-sponsored this year with Aiken Audubon. On a day that was windy and cloudy but not cold, the group checklisted 68 species, including eight kinds of gulls, two loon species, an array of ducks, and a few Pueblo specialties not found in the Denver area
(Melody Serra)

12 CHECKLISTS

JANUARY 3

New Year’s Birding Blitz (Arapahoe, Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Robert Tonge, Jennifer Tonge, Cynthia Breidenbach, Jodi Haller, Michelle Stringer, Kelly Ducham, Isaac Ho, Ryan Corda, Jenny Germano, Kenneth Stuckey, Coreen Spellman

Participants in the 2026 edition of the “New Year’s Birding Blitz” visited several spots in Arapahoe and Jefferson counties on Jan. 3. The joint DFO/Denver Audubon excursion was not an official “big day,” but it still checklisted 60 species on 11 stops

(Isaac Ho)

TRIP REPORT



Continued on page 27



JANUARY 16

Washington Park ducks (Denver)

Leader

Ryan Corda

Participants

Meg Kenny, Beth Partin, Sarah Jenkins, Emily Boswell, Carolyn Bighinatti

Ryan Corda leads DFO field trippers on walk around Washington Park's lakes to appreciate the subtleties of ducks on a windy, cold but invigorating and informative outing

(Meg Kenny)

CHECKLIST



JANUARY 21

Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Anne Craig, Linda Purcell, Christina Schroeder, Meg Kenny, Dale Vodehnal, Benjamin Shay, Jim McBride, Coreen Spellman, Cynthia Breidenbach, Luke Jaramillo

Birders at Lower Derby Lake viewing area on DFO field trip Jan. 21 to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. Plenty of birds, as well as bison, prairie dogs, a coyote and more

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT

JANUARY 24

South Platte River @ 64th (Denver, Adams)

Leader

Linda Purcell

Participants

William Knapp, Sarah Wilson, Kelsey Robb, Ed Janoff

Participants in Jan. 24 field trip to the South Platte River industrial zones north of the Denver city limits scan for birds from one of the bridges on a rare snow day in winter 2026

(Linda Purcell)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 28



JANUARY 25

South Platte Park (Arapahoe)

Leaders

Cindy Breidenbach and David Suddjian

Participants

David Suddjian, Mary Ramsey, John Whitaker, Laurie Tripp

Group photo on Jan. 25 trip to cold and very South Platte Park and reservoir. Highlights included 5 Long-tailed Ducks, 4 different grebe species (Horned, Eared, Pied-billed, Western) and 3 merganser species (Red-breasted, Hooded, Common)

(Cindy Breidenbach)

CHECKLIST

JANUARY 30

Field Trips + photography, Wheat Ridge Greenbelt (Jefferson)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Dave Prentice

Participants

Jonathan Shikes, Olivia Salmon, Kara Cooper, Cheryl Ames, Kris Tita, Luke Jaramillo, Michelle Loader

Bundled for winter, field trippers scan Bass Lake on joint DFO/Denver Audubon outing Jan. 30 to Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, with a Birds + Photography focus led by Dave Prentice. The four-hour field trip checklisted a dozen kinds of waterfowl and two dozen other species

(Dave Prentice)

CHECKLIST



JANUARY 28

Genesee Park & Denver Mtn Parks (Jefferson)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Judy McKeon

Participants

Ryan Corda, Kelly Ducham, Coreen Spellman, Luke Jaramillo, Sara Jaramillo, Nathan Crow, Anne Craig, Jim McBride, Jodi Haller, Isaac Ho, Rae Jones

Participants in Jan. 28 field trip to foothills parks in Jefferson County pose with Snowy Owl sculpture in Bergen Park.

The most bird action was in Genesee Mountain Park, which included fine views of Red Crossbills and an astonishing 100 or so Clark's Nutcrackers

(Judy McKeon)

TRIP REPORT



Continued on page 29



FEBRUARY 8

Super Duck Sunday IV, South Platte Park (Arapahoe)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Gigi Zarzuela

Participants

Ryan Corda, Gabby Licht, Morgan Kahle, Sue Plankis, Marie Mager, Rob Kesselring, Nadiyah Watts, Kathy Barnum, Lynn Slaga, Scott Levine, Matthew Fast, Daniel Sieger, Melody Serra

Participants in DFO's annual pre-Super Bowl "Dabblers vs. Divers" outing pose for team photo. The contest to spot the two general types of ducks by species and breeding behaviors was neck and neck until Divers surged ahead in a fourth-quarter blowout. Final score: Divers 87 points, Dabblers 61. Long-tailed Duck was voted MVP. At a tailgate potluck afterwards, co-leader Gigi Zarzuela handed out handmade duck trading cards

(Tyler Johnson)

TRIP REPORT



FEBRUARY 12

Aurora Reservoir (Arapahoe)

Leaders

Cynthia Cestkowski and David Suddjian

Participants

Bonnie Prado, Cynthia Breidenbach, Luke Jaramillo, Caoimhin Perkins, Jeff Dawson, Linda Purcell, Laurie Tripp, Diane Roberts, Courtney Rella, Melody Serra, Christopher Curwen

Field trippers on Feb. 12 outing to Aurora Reservoir scan winter geese from the Swim Beach. There were so many to sort — about 19,000 Cacklings, 15 Snows, 2 Ross's, a Greater White-fronted, a handful of Canadas, and several hybrids. Also present: a wintering Pacific Loon

(Cynthia Cestkowski)

CHECKLIST



FEBRUARY 15

Birds + Geology: Red Rocks Park (Jefferson)

Leader

Jason Bidgood

Participants

Kelly Ducham, Peter Kaufman, David Suddjian, Kelsey Robb, Jim McBride, Max Miller, Emily Boswell, Lynn Slaga, Sara Jepsen

Participants on Feb. 15 field trip to Red Rocks Park zero in on a pair of Golden Eagles above the distant ridgeline

(Jason B. Bidgood)

4 CHECKLISTS

Continued on page 30



FEBRUARY 20

Rosy-Finch Ramble (Jefferson, Park)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Joseph Tuttle, Ann Chavtur, Julia Johnson, Cynthia Breidenbach, Jay Miller, Rae Jones, Luke Jaramillo, Benjamin Ewing

Birders enjoy an indoor vantage point during joint DFO/ Aiken Audubon “Rosy-Finch Ramble” in the mountains of Jefferson and Park counties. The field trip checklisted more than 550 Brown-capped and 15 Gray-crowned rosy-finches. Other highlights: two Rough-legged Hawks, eight Pine Grosbeaks, Northern Shrike, Clark’s Nutcracker, Cassin’s Finch, two moose and more

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT



FEBRUARY 22

Birds + Geology: Pawnee Buttes (Weld)

Leader

Jason Bidgood

Participants

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

Birders on DFO trip to northeast Weld County walk the Pawnee Buttes trail as they explore the shortgrass prairie and learn about the area’s twin geological features. Highlights included many Horned Larks and a pair of Golden Eagles on the east butte. Surprises were Dark-eyed Juncos, American Robin, and a Northern Flicker along the trail

(Jason B. Bidgood)

TRIP REPORT



FEBRUARY 23

Denver Botanic Gardens @ Chatfield (Jefferson)

Leader

Judy McKeon

Participants

Stephanie VanEsselstine, Oliver Urdiales, Anna Puchalski, Michelle Burdis, Sean Warren, Jodi Haller, Anne Craig, David Suddjian

Field trippers walk through Denver Botanic Gardens at Chatfield during Feb. 23 outing that explored several habitats and saw nesting raptors

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 31



FEBRUARY 24

Northeast Colorado (Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Washington, Weld, Yuma)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Anne Craig, Benjamin Ewing, Coreen Spellman, Isaac Ho, Jodi Johnston Haller, Judy McKeon, Kelly Ducham, Ken Stuckey, Lara Cueni, Luke Jaramillo, Ryan Corda

Participants on Feb. 24 joint DFO/ Denver Audubon trip through northeastern Colorado pose in the grass on their 41-species, 34-checklist day. They saw thousands of geese (and six Trumpeter Swans) among many others, including two Greater Prairie-Chickens and two Rough-legged Hawks among eight kinds of hawks, eagles and falcons

(Anne Craig)

TRIP REPORT



MARCH 10-12

San Luis Valley (Alamosa, Chaffee, Conejos, Costilla, Huerfano, Park, Pueblo, Rio Grande, Saguache)

Leaders

David Suddjian and Ryan Corda

Participants

Melody Serra, Jennifer Tonge, Virginia Gulakowski, Robert Tonge, Luke Jaramillo, Linda Cunico, Jodi Haller, Judy McKeon, Betsy Goodwin, Dave Prentice

All eyes (and lenses) are on a Northern Pygmy-Owl in Conejos County's Magote Campground on March 11, day two of a three-day DFO field trip to, through and around the San Luis Valley. The excursion tallied 77 species on 85 checklists and featured thousands of Sandhill Cranes at the Monte Vista Crane Festival, thousands more ducks and geese, 11 Brown Creepers in one cemetery, six Great Horned Owl nests, Mexican Duck, Sagebrush Sparrows and more

(Dave Prentice)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 32



MARCH 13

Wheat Ridge Greenbelt (Jefferson)

Leader

Ryan Corda

Participants

Jacqueline Gorman, Aileen Giardina, Kit Williams, Henry Williams, Kelly Ducham, Jim McBride, Cheryl Ames

Birders zero in on a most cooperatively posing Brown Creeper during this Friday afternoon outing in Wheat Ridge Greenbelt. Highlights included nesting Double-crested Cormorants and Great Blue Heron and a Sharp-shinned Hawk flyby

(Ryan Corda)



MARCH 15

Barnum Park and Weir Gulch (Denver)

Leader

Linda Purcell

Participant

Jim McBride

Jim McBride, one of two participants on March 15 field trip to Denver's Barnum Park and Weir Gulch, peers through snow at one of the 24 species they managed to checklist in marginal conditions

(Linda Purcell)

TRIP REPORT

CHECKLIST



MARCH 19

Lakewood, various locations (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Melody Serra, Zoe Che, Michelle Verostko, Eric Rau, Christopher Curwen

Participants scan Main Reservoir in Lakewood during a March 19 field trip that also included Cottonwood Park and the Bear Creek Greenbelt. Despite an un-wintery high of 83 degrees, there were birds to enjoy, from Wood Ducks and Bushtits to a Great Horned Owl, not to mention other critters from muskrat to red-eared slider turtles

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 33



MARCH 20 Western Littleton, various locations (Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Coreen Spellman, Jim McBride, Linda Purcell, Marie Kilty, Susan Blansett, Marjorie Middleton, Virginia Gulakowski, Deborah Carstensen

Field trippers scan Eagle Meadows Park in western Littleton during March 20 outing to three locations in the suburb southwest of Denver

(Linda Purcell)

TRIP REPORT

MARCH 20 South Platte Park, south end (Arapahoe)

Leaders
Cindy Breidenbach, Julia Gwinn, Holly Hunter

Participants
Sean Warren, Ann Christensen, Colleen Bergquist, Patricia Kuzma Sell, Linda Vincent, Eva Gallegos, Bonnie Prado, Susan Everett, Arianne Joy Alfonso

Participants on joint DFO-Denver Audubon field trip March 20 to South Platte Park pose in the birding blind at Bufflehead Lake. The birders checklisted 32 species, including a Merlin and five Horned Grebes. On the way out, several in the group stopped at South Platte Reservoir to see the Surf Scoters and Long-tailed Ducks continuing there since early December

(Cindy Breidenbach)

CHECKLIST



MARCH 22 Birds + Geology, Paint Mines Interpretive Park (El Paso)

Leader
Jason Bidgood

Participants
Kelly Ducham, Jacqueline Gorman, Jodi Haller, Jenny Germano, Kris Saucke, Christopher Curwen, Brian Haller, Soren Power Parker, Virginia Gulakowski

Field trippers pose among hoodoo spires in Paint Mines Interpretive Park, where Jason Bidgood, far right, led DFO's first outing to this colorful assemblage of 55 million-year-old fossil soil formations. The Birds + Geology trip explored one of Colorado's most interesting geologic areas, where eons of weathering of soft clay deposits beneath a hard cap of Pikes Peak granite fragments formed the hoodoos

(Jason Bidgood)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 34



MARCH 22

Wheat Ridge Greenbelt (Jefferson)

Leaders

Lynn Slaga

Participants

Sofia Prado-Irwin, Steve Dwyer, Sarah Wilson, John Batt, Becky Russel, Patricia Kuzma Sell, Kelsey Robb

Wheat Ridge Greenbelt field trippers pose trailside on productive March 22 outing. The group logged 44 species, including a handsome male Wood Duck and a stunning male Cinnamon Teal (Lynn Slaga)

CHECKLIST



MARCH 24

Staunton State Park (Jefferson, Park)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Cynthia Breidenbach, Kelly Ducham, Coreen Spellman, Sue Plankis, Soren Zappia, Mary Fran O'Connor, Michelle Verostko

Looking and listening for birds along the David Ponds Trail during a joint DFO/Denver Audubon field trip March 24 in Staunton State Park. Besides Evening Grosbeaks and many returning robins, the team compiled an astonishing tally of woodpeckers: 15 Williamson's Sapsuckers, 12 Hairy Woodpeckers, 8 Downy Woodpeckers, and . . . FIFTY-FOUR Northern Flickers!

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

MARCH 26

Beaver Ranch Park (Jefferson)

Leaders

David Suddjian

Participants

Jim McBride, Kelly Ducham, Benjamin Ewing, Dave Prentice, Susan Harper, Kathy Holland

Field trippers pause during March 26 outing to Beaver Ranch Park, where Evening Grosbeaks were all around the main parking lot and the disc "golf" course (go to see them before it opens at 8 a.m.). Highlights among the 20 other species included Williamson's Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, five dozen Mountain Chickadees and three kinds of nuthatches

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST

Continued on page 35



MARCH 28

Deer Creek Canyon (Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Coreen Spellman, Jenny Germano, Sean Warren, Vivien Varga, Ryan Corda,

Jim McBride, Nga Turner

Field trippers on March 28 outing within Jeffco's Deer Creek watershed from high country to lowlands look skyward during stop at Pleasant Park Grange. The joint DFO/Denver Audubon trip checklisted 38 species, with highlights including Red Crossbills, Golden Eagles, White-throated Swifts, Mountain and Western bluebirds, Brown Creeper, Townsend's Solitaire, Turkey Vulture, and nesting Red-tailed Hawk, among others

(David Suddjian)

CHECKLIST



MARCH 29

Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch (Jefferson)

Leader

Jason Bidgood

Participants

Vivien Varga, Nga Turner, Sunny Heo, Kit Williams, Henry Williams, Mary Kealey, Teresa Foley, Benjamin Shay

Participants pose atop Dinosaur Ridge during March 29 joint DFO/Denver Audubon field trip to the Hawk Watch spring raptor count's observation point. Besides a variety of raptors on this migratory route, field trippers saw Steller's Jay, White-throated Swifts, Common Ravens and more

(Jason B. Bidgood)

TRIP REPORT



MARCH 30

Bailey region (Park, Jefferson)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Anne Craig, Oliver Urdiales, Coreen Spellman, Sue Plankis, Shay Lyons, Joey Caskey, Olivia Salmon

Field trippers look and listen for bluebirds, flickers, and nuthatches in woods during DFO/Denver Audubon outing March 30 to locations around Bailey in Park County. Target species found included Dusky Grouse, Band-tailed Pigeon, and Evening Grosbeak (lots of the latter)

(Oliver Urdiales)

11 CHECKLISTS

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Birding spring with Wilberding
**A DFO lensman's gallery
of migration in a season
of renewal**



Eastern Kingbird, Cherry Creek SP, May 2025
All photos by Tom Wilberding

Patrick O'Driscoll

Our Colorado winter was hardly wintry, and the early and warmer spring suggests it's nearly summer already. But oh, the places we'll still go to see the return of spring migrants, regardless of time or temperature.

Last year, the spring arrivals drew longtime DFO member and photographer **Tom Wilberding** of Littleton to a few of his favorite local haunts to capture the season's returning birds. Equipped with some slick photographic gear and an eye for fresh beauty in ordinary (and extraordinary) birds, he brought home countless images to winnow in Adobe Lightroom Classic ("a fun tool") and "edit the keepers, about one out of 20" frames, he says.

A retired home builder who took up birding at age 51, Tom admits to scratching an itch for listing of Colorado species "in all my nearby counties" over the past couple of years. "And most opportunities are in the spring," he notes. But whenever listing threatens to morph into a competitive rat race, "I say to myself, 'Well, I enjoy the sun, fresh air and exercise, right?'"

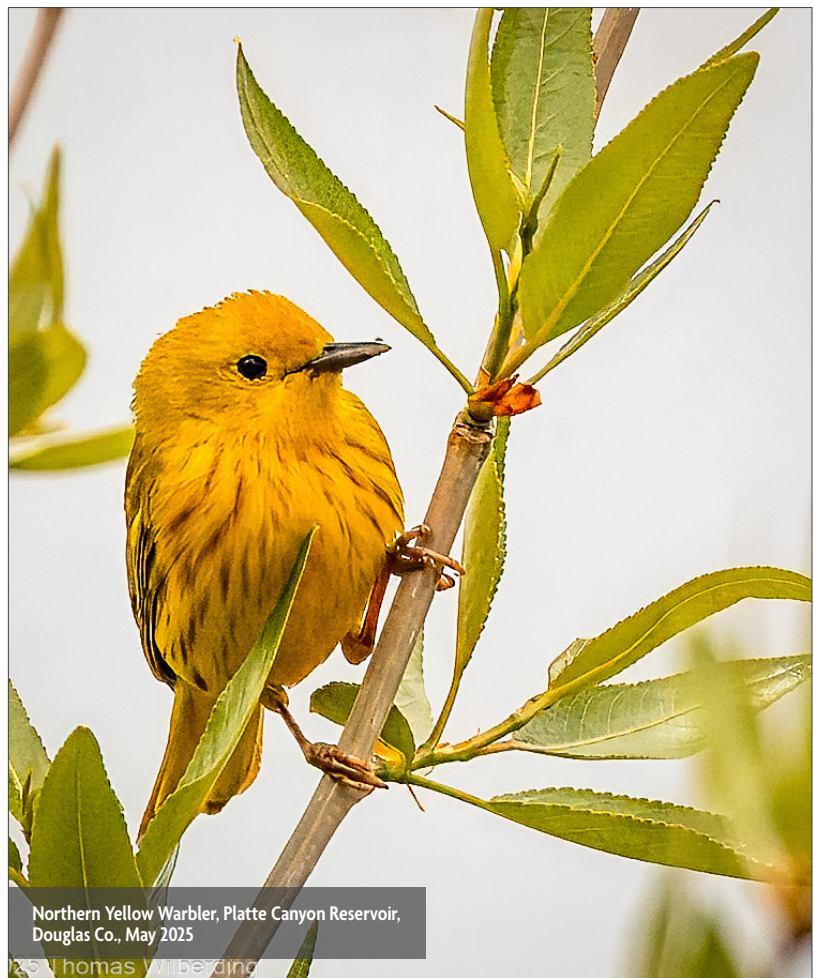
And that's where his photography presses forward. "I simply like to take photos of birds so I can ID them later and enjoy their beauty," Wilberding says. "And I like to share them on Facebook from time to time." In fact, the springtime images in this gallery were among those he piecemealed out on DFO's Facebook Group page through the weeks and months of 2025 spring migration.

For the photographic record, Tom snapped them with a Sony A1ii Mirrorless Camera, through a Sony FE 300mm f/2.8 GM OSS Lens, usually with a 1.4x magnifier (or a 2.0x for more distant birds). He credits the equipment's wizardry: "I am often amazed at their results. Modern technology is a wonder."

And so are his images here. Thank you, Tom, and welcome, spring!



Ovenbird, High Grade Road, JeffCo, June 2025



Northern Yellow Warbler, Platte Canyon Reservoir, Douglas Co., May 2025

© 2025 Thomas Wilberding



Black-necked Stilt and Willet, Pelican Point,
Bear Creek Lake Park, May 2025



Western Tanager, Deer Creek Canyon Park, JeffCo., June 2025



Common Merganser, South Platte Park,
Arapahoe Co., May 2025



Horned Lark, Antero Reservoir,
Park Co., May 2025



Northern Pintail, Andrick Ponds SWA,
Morgan Co, spring 2025.



Gray Catbird, Platte Canyon Reservoir, spring 2025

2025 Thomas Wilberding



Greater Yellowlegs and two Lesser Yellowlegs,
Chatfield SP, April 2025

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



Marbled Godwit, Chatfield SP,
marina sandspit, April 2025