



# THE LARK BUNTING

QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 62 | ISSUE 3 | SUMMER 2026

DFOBIRDS.ORG

## FIELD TRIPS + NEWS

Summertime? Himmertime!  
DFO program, trips galore!

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From East, West

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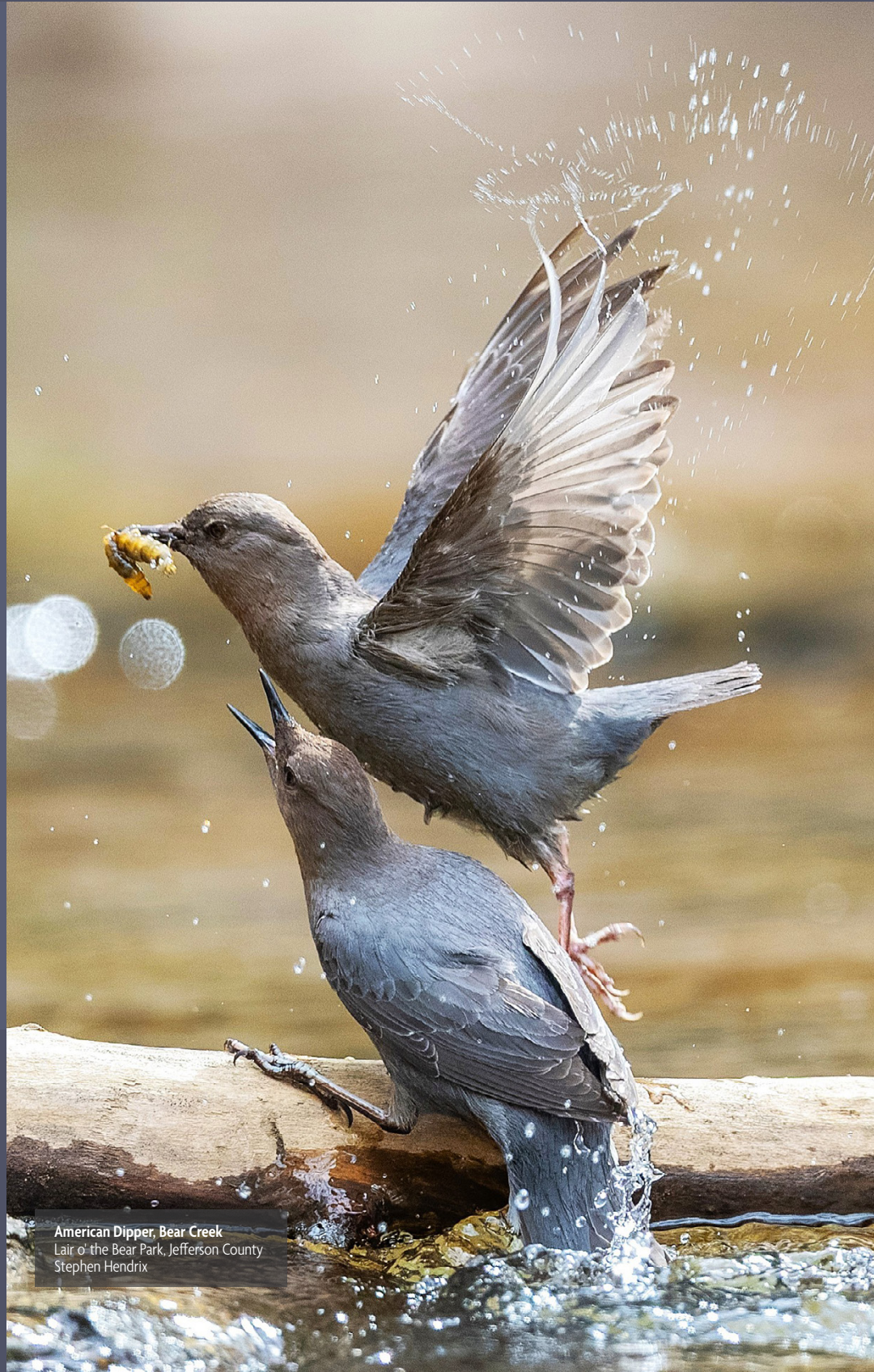
New era coming for  
DFO website and more

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Why photograph birds?  
A photo gallery answers

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American Dipper, Bear Creek  
Lair of the Bear Park, Jefferson County  
Stephen Hendrix



## ON THE COVER

# Colorado's rock star of the rapids: Unique songbird that acts like a duck

**Patrick O'Driscoll**

With apologies to the sloganeering co-founder of *The Denver Post*, **Frederick G. Bonfils**: " 'Tis a privilege to *bird* in Colorado." And how fortunate we are to *live* with a front-row view of the antics of the American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*), the delightful species on the front (and back) covers of our summer issue of *The Lark Bunting*.



Originally from the Midwest, **Stephen Hendrix** is a Denver software engineer. A DFO member since

2024, he took up birding and amateur bird photography several years ago

What other bird takes to water, swims, dives, feeds, and has dense plumage like a duck . . . yet looks, sings and defends its territory like a sassy songbird? The dipper *walks* underwater, scouring streambeds for the fat larvae of flying insects. And it blinks at you with a feathery and flashy white eyelid we've yet to figure out a purpose for.

The species' behavior so captivated pioneering 19<sup>th</sup>-century conservationist **John Muir** that he devoted an entire chapter of his classic work, *The Mountains of California*, to the "Water Ouzel" (dipper's name in Muir's day) that he often encountered in his Sierra Nevada wanderings.

Here in Colorado, we're in the middle of the dipper's Lower 48 territory, near enough to swift and rocky Front Range streams to see the bird any time of year. The Cornell Lab's *All About Birds* reminds us that the American Dipper *is* "North America's only truly aquatic songbird," but we knew that. Did you also know that the definitive overview of the species in Cornell's *other* reference work, *Birds of the World*, was co-authored by the dean of Colorado birders, **Hugh Kingery**? No wonder DFO's longest-serving member (Hugh joined in 1953) has had "OUZEL" as his car's vanity license plate.

I don't have any new ouzel oohs and aahs to add — just a couple of fun facts and a cool story about our cover birds from **Stephen Hendrix**, who photographed them this spring on Bear Creek in Jefferson County's Lair o' the Bear Park.

Fun (possible) fact: We know dippers bob and "dip" when pausing on rocks midstream before diving back in — but do we know why? No one is certain, but the informed belief is that they may mean to blend into the turbulence of the rapids around them to avoid detection by predators.

Fun (actual) fact: American Dippers in the US and Canada are one of five subspecies (the others are in Mexico and Central America). Our subspecies, *Cinclus mexicanus unicolor*, is so named because the birds are essentially one color (I call it gunmetal gray), though in the right light, the head can be brownish.

Finally, the backstory on the two dippers on the cover. The photographer says they are bird parents bickering over who gets to feed the babies. "One flew in with the larva, and a tug-of-war ensued," says Hendrix, who spent a lot of time this year shutterbugging this pair and another couple farther downstream. "The photo shows the 'thief' about to fly off with it to the chicks, while the adult who caught it strenuously objects."

---

**Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor of *The Lark Bunting*, joined DFO in 2014. A retired newspaper journalist, he took up birding in his 50s. His "patch" is Denver City Park, where in 2025 he recorded Colorado's first Wood Stork sighting in 91 years



***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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## CONTRIBUTE TO THE JOURNAL AND NEWSLETTER

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

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

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



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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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## LEARN MORE

### Membership — Join or Renew

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

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



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

# As DFO updates and improves our website, witness the work of volunteers — like you

### Jason B. Bidgood

*The more things change, the more things stay the same.*

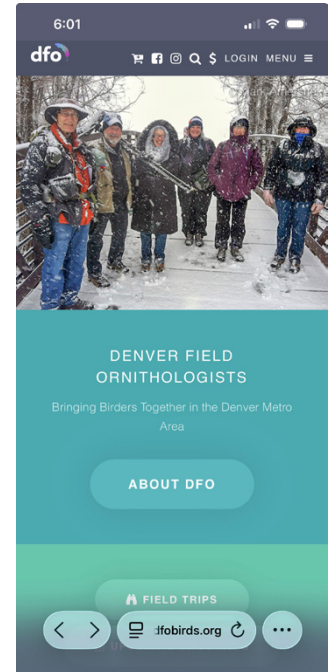
This phrase came to mind recently as I clicked through a sampling of *Lark Bunting* issues published over the past 50 years. In that time, DFO's longtime publication has evolved tremendously — from print-on-paper reporting of the previous month's field trips and advertising upcoming outings, to a digital platform sharing birding experiences through our photos and essays online. This publication used to be DFO's monthly newsletter. Last year we converted it to a quarterly journal. But we still read it like a magazine on the DFO website, even as we share more immediate club news and announcements in a separate e-newsletter, *On the Wing*, that lands each month in your email inbox.

One of the few things that hasn't changed in *The Lark Bunting* in more than five decades is the page where we welcome new members. As a membership organization, we could not exist without people willing to pay our (modest) annual dues, donate more to the cause, and volunteer their time. In my first three months as DFO president, I'm quickly gaining a greater appreciation for all the volunteers who make field trips, programs, club communications, and [Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch](#) possible. Although many of the volunteer roles have changed over time, the overall mission has not.

You may have heard that changes are in the works for [DFO's website](#). Over the past several months, DFO's volunteer team and I have been developing a plan to update the site and identify new web tools and systems to manage our organization. The main goal is to ensure that we can maintain and update the website as our needs change in the future. We are striving to improve the site's appearance and navigation, two examples of your feedback from our member survey about the website back in May.

In the process, I've looked at many other birding groups' websites, gaining inspiration from some. But I have yet to find any other that has the same deep level of functionality for field trips that DFO has. Imagine it: a system that gives 50 or more field trip leaders instant access to plan and schedule trips, provides for quick review, approval and activation, and allows participants easy online registration. We have that now. And our system's ability to automatically send email alerts to those on waiting lists when spots open up? No other birding organizations have that, either.

Our field trip system may be a little dated. It doesn't have the same bells and whistles as, say, your latest fitness class app. But it was custom-built for DFO and has served us well over the years. Finding a customizable new system with the same functionality and flexibility for the future is the greatest challenge of this process. As an organization whose first and highest purpose is providing hundreds of free field trips a year, DFO is definitely working on it.



*Continued on page 6*

Three or four decades ago, website platforms and email systems were nonexistent worries for DFO, but no doubt they had other struggles. The first time I registered for a field trip, our web-based registration system was already in place. Signing up was a breeze. It's difficult to imagine the challenges DFO faced managing field trips in the age of snail mail and landline phones. But I'm confident that our club overcame them because of dedicated member volunteers, just like the ones who make our field trips, programs and communications work today.

The next time you visit our website, do me a favor: Scroll down the homepage and click on the "[VOLUNTEER](#)" link. Then ask yourself: What can I offer DFO with my time, skill or interest? Let us know by filling in the "volunteer interest" form with your name and email, and checking any current needs there that interest you. Even better, fill in the "OTHER INTERESTS" box at the bottom with what you'd like to help with, or if you have a skill or familiarity in something you think DFO can use. There are so many ways to contribute to DFO. Click "SEND MESSAGE" and let's talk.

---

**Jason B. Bidgood**, a DFO member since 2016, became our newest president in April of this year. He has led DFO field trips since 2022 and has been a member of the field trip committee since 2024. When not birding, he can often be found at his local climbing gym or out for a run



DFO birders at Tucker Gulch in 2025  
Nancy Crowley

## Welcome to new DFO members

Lee, Marsee, Skylar, Meghan, Drue and Bill Banta of Englewood; Michael Bein, Westminster; Aree Bly and Tom Leonard, Bow Mar; Ray and Nicole Bunting, Denver; Deborah Cables and Peter Dascalos, Lafayette; Lori and Jeffrey Kaes, Littleton; Mark and Eivor Kuchta, Golden; Daryl Ann and John Letts, Highlands Ranch; David and Anna Lilierose, Aurora; Preston and Mary Mack, Denver; Vincenzo Redditt, Denver; Wesley Rich, Boulder; Deborah and Matthew Schultz, Morrison; Franklin and Fran Whitehurst, Littleton

## Thank you for your contribution

### Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Dena Abitz, Aree Bly and Tom Leonard, Lori Sharp

### Friends of DFO

Dena Abitz, Franklin and Fran Whitehurst

### DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Dena Abitz, Lee and Linda Farrell,  
Deborah and Matthew Schultz,  
Harald Stark and Sandy Johnson



# 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](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com)



## ANN JOHNSON (1950-2026) WAS DFO'S WEB GURU

An avid Iowa birder and computer whiz who helped DFO and other birding organizations thrive in the online age has died. **Ann Louise "AJ" Moore Johnson** of Indianola passed on March 23, 2026 at age 76. A

career employee of the Iowa Department of Human Services, she grew up learning about birds at the knee of her grandmother, who took her on many birding hikes into the field. Ann later became a leader in the Iowa Ornithologists Union, where she spearheaded work with rare and uncommon species. She developed such great ability with computer systems in her day job that she helped established the IOU's website and went on to set up websites for numerous nature-oriented organizations.

Johnson's work later in redesigning and organizing DFO's website, for whom she remained a remote, on-call webmaster until her death, earned her DFO's highest honor, the Ptarmigan Award, in 2023. In presenting the award, then-DFO president **Susan Blansett** praised Ann for her "incredible responsiveness," ready to troubleshoot DFO web problems at almost any hour "with a can-do attitude . . . What Ann has done for us . . . has enabled the growth of DFO, especially in the sophistication of our public-facing online presence."

Johnson led many Iowa groups on field trips, including bird tours to Mexico and Arizona, and she was co-author of the field guide *Iowa Birds* (2005). She also took up odonatology, the science of dragonflies and other predatory flying insects, writing a field guide to that, too: *Dragonflies and Damselflies in your Pocket* (2009).

[FULL OBITUARY](#)

## 2026 ELECTION RESULTS: NEW DFO LEADERSHIP

Ten-year DFO member and frequent field trip leader **Jason B. Bidgood** was confirmed in April as Denver Field Ornithologists' new president in the club's annual online election. Eight other newcomers to the club's management team (officers and directors of the DFO Board) were also elected. In addition, DFO vice president **Charlie Chase** and secretary **Patrick O'Driscoll** were re-elected to new one-year terms as officers. Outgoing president **Sharon Tinianow** remains involved as immediate past president.

Also elected is the new DFO treasurer, **Vicky Miles**. Six more members were elected to three-year terms as first-time directors, including new board members **Jill Boice**, **Ryan Corda**, **Carly Crow**, **Andrea Durán**, **Scott Hammel**, and **Kris Saucke**. Also elected is **Roger Koester**, who served several years on the board earlier this decade. They make it an 12-member DFO Board, whose continuing members include **Mike Fernandez**, **Mary Geder**, **David Suddjian**, and **Gary Witt**.

A total of 165 people cast ballots out of the current DFO membership of 545, or about a 30% turnout of eligible voters. Although considerably less than a majority of members, the total far exceeds in-person vote tallies historically. In the years before the COVID-19 pandemic, DFO elections were held in-person at the annual April program meetings, which never exceeded more than several dozen members in attendance.

## NEXT BIRD BOMB: HUMMINGBIRDS OF SUMMER, JULY 9



Hummingbirds are a summertime highlight for Colorado birders, with four species in the mix: Local nesters Broad-tailed and Black-chinned, and migrant Rufous

and Calliope. The next episode of DFO's "BIRD BOMBS" webinars is "Summer Hummer Celebration!" The Zoom presentation by DFO Field Trips chair **David Suddjian** on Thursday, July 9, 7 p.m. MDT, will focus on essential identification tips for these Colorado species. To review and sign up for DFO's hummingbird-focused field trips this summer, visit the DFO website's "[Upcoming Trips](#)" pages. Check any trip marked with the "Summer Hummers" icon. Watch for more trips to be added in late July and August.

To review and watch any of the more than 40 past BIRD BOMBS episodes, visit [DFO's YouTube channel](#).

[REGISTER FOR WEBINAR](#)

## PROGRAM PREVIEWS

# For DFO fall programs, here are save-the-dates from August to November: And did somebody say PICNIC?

### Patrick O'Driscoll

As Denver Field Ornithologists prepares to wrap up the second half of Year One in our 91-year-old club's pre-centennial decade, we're changing things up for the first program after DFO's regular summer break.

Club veterans know by heart that the fourth Monday of the month is evening program night. Normally that would mean Aug. 24 this year, but hold onto your binoculars: What if it's the FIFTH SATURDAY instead . . . and NOT at night? Well, mark **Saturday, Aug. 29** on your calendars, friends, for a different kind of first fall program altogether. After a five-year absence, it's the return of . . . **the DFO summer picnic!**

In a break from potluck tradition, this DFO get-together will be catered! (In lieu of potluck donations, lunch will cost \$10/person.) The scheduled time window is 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. MDT. The picnic location is the last major detail still pending, but stay tuned for word soon from new DFO Programs chair **Carly Crow** and her cool crew of picnic planners.

As in past years, we'll likely picnic in a parkland setting with opportunities for a pre-picnic field trip and birding nearby. For the record, DFO's most recent club picnic was in 2021, a triumphal burgers-and-brats return to comingling again after the COVID-19 pandemic shut everything down in 2020, including that year's picnic.

For this and the rest of DFO's autumn programming lineup, expect more particulars to emerge in July and beyond. As you'll see below, meeting days and dates are changing, too, and the September and October meetings will also be in-person. This reflects member wishes for more live-and-in-person gatherings, particularly after the great success of DFO's return to live events last year — field trip wizard **Joey Kellner's** Sept. 29, 2025 program on the bird-rich "sky islands" of southeastern Arizona, and record-setting attendance for DFO alum and eBird guru **Chris Wood** at DFO's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday bash on Oct. 13, 2025.

To the right are the expected program dates for the rest of 2026. Between now and the next issue of *The Lark Bunting* in October, look for more details in DFO's monthly *On the Wing* email newsletter as well as on DFO's social media platforms.



DFO folk chow down in Prospect Park at the last previous DFO picnic in 2021  
Patrick O'Driscoll

### SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

#### DFO catered picnic!

11 a.m. – 2 p.m. MDT. Location and more details to come in July and August. \$10/person

### SEPTEMBER

#### In-person guest speaker

Topic, presenter, location and date pending (Thursday, Sept. 24 or Monday, Sept. 28).  
Details to come

### FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30

#### DFO Volunteer Recognition & Awards

This special Friday night gathering is an in-person social, with awards followed by group fun: a "Bird Trivia" team contest, with bird-related costumes encouraged! Time, location and more details to come

### MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23

#### Program TBD

Topic, presenter and date pending

## SUMMER BIRDING

# Got hummingbirds? DFO does — Hum along with us on midsummer field trips, program

Did you know that four species of hummingbirds regularly flit and buzz among us in Colorado this time of year?

DFO is celebrating their return — Black-chinned and Broad-tailed hummingbirds to nest, and Rufous and Calliope hummingbirds to migrate through — with a July and August focus on these winged garden gnomes.

We've already begun some of what may be 15 or so hummingbird-focused summer field trips. And on Thursday, July 9, Field Trips chair David Suddjian will present a “BIRD BOMBS” bird ID webinar on Zoom. (7 p.m. MDT, [register here](#).)

Some of the field trips will give participants the chance to get “lifers” for the two harder-to-get migratory species. All should offer opportunities to practice newfound ID skills on species that can be hard to tell apart.

Visit the [DFO Field Trips calendar](#) and look for the hummingbird icon beside outings in the “Summer Hummer” series. And check back for additional trips well into August.



Broad-tailed  
Hummingbird female  
at Chatfield Farms  
Anne Craig



Photos top to bottom  
 DFO member Ginny Gulakowski shows off purchases  
 The free table had books and other birder paraphernalia  
 Trying out birding scopes at the gear gathering  
 Some of the optics wares on display  
 Photos by Rudy Durán

## DFO NEWS

# Gear Up + Get Out: Kicking off spring with gear sale, club mingle, bird walk

Denver Field Ornithologists' first member get-together for buying and selling birding gear and goodies had encouraging if mixed results. It offered in-person club fellowship (and shopping) on an April Saturday morning and valuable logistics, marketing and staffing lessons for next time. What's more, it broke better than even.

The Gear Up and Get Out event on April 25 drew about 50-60 members and others to Lakewood's Belmar Heritage Visitor Center. Some came to sell "gently used" binoculars, scopes, cameras and a variety of other bird-related items for sale. Some came to buy them. Outside vendors also offered brand new gear and bird-themed merchandise and services for tryout and purchase.

For all, it was another opportunity to mingle with DFO friends old and new after more than five years of mostly Zoom-based programs and events in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The two-hour bazaar was preceded by a DFO field trip in Belmar Park next door, and a [Cooper's Coffee](#) mobile cart offered espresso drinks and pastries. New gear vendors included [Front Range Birding](#) stores and birding tour outfitters ([Reefs to Rockies](#) and [Partnership for International Birding](#)). There were also tables for DFO and nonprofit partner [Colorado Field Ornithologists](#) and DFO grant recipient [Greenwood Wildlife Rehabilitation Center](#).

The event also doubled as DFO's annual meeting (always in April), with announcement of the results of the 2026 election of officers and board directors. The club's new officers include president **Jason Bidgood** and treasurer **Vicky Miles**, and vice president **Charlie Chase** and secretary **Patrick O'Driscoll** were re-elected, all to one-year terms. New directors, elected to three-year terms on the 12-member DFO Board, include **Jill Boice**, **Ryan Corda**, **Carly Crow**, **Andrea Durán**, **Scott Hammel**, **Roger Koester** and **Kris Saucke**.

Although fundraising wasn't the main reason for the gathering, DFO netted a modest profit of about \$150. The club got some of the proceeds from sales of used gear and donated items as well as a bucket of cash contributions at the books table for bird titles and smaller items donated by members. Expenses included venue rental, coffee cart guarantee and most of the proceeds for seller items valued above \$100 (80% to the seller, 20% to DFO).

"Used" was in the eye of the beholder. Older and well-worn equipment was passed over for fast-selling entry-level binoculars, scopes, tripods, point-and-shoot cameras, and bird feeders. To no surprise, "like new" clothing sold — and worn clothing did not. Ditto for niche photo gear, worn-out packs and outdated equipment.

Thanks go to the planning team of **Sue Summers**, **Vicky Miles**, **Jill Boice**, **Susan Blansett**, and outgoing DFO president **Sharon Tinianow**, as well as others who pitched in that day, including **Jim Esten**, **Bill Turner**, **Andrea Durán**, and **Mike Fernandez**. In its post-event debriefing, the team noted several pluses for the sale as a social lubricant for a club trying to bring back more in-person gatherings beyond field trips. "People were having fun — talking, shopping, having a coffee," Tinianow wrote in the team's report to the DFO Board. "Raffle for door prizes was a BIG success! (Blansett) did a drawing every 15 minutes." Topics to consider for another GU+GO event include possible expansion to a half-day "birding fair" with short presentations or a workshop.



## Now nesting in a Denver 'burb: Two trails, two new flycatchers — too cool!

### Jared Del Rosso

By eBird standards, the spot in Greenwood Village where the High Line Canal Trail and Little Dry Creek Trail meet is lukewarm for a birding “hotspot.” Both trails’ riparian corridors are narrow. Surrounding habitat is limited. Aggressive and invasive [Smooth Brome](#) grass covers much of the area’s potential scrub and grassland habitat.

With no pond, reservoir or major river, the local list of waterbirds is short. Mallards and Belted Kingfishers are common, but nearly every other duck or shorebird would qualify as a “good” bird if spotted along these two sections of trail. All told, birders have reported a modest 109 species along the High Line Canal, ranking it only 64<sup>th</sup> on Arapahoe County’s list of hotspots. With just 69 species on eBird, Little Dry Creek barely cracks Arapahoe’s top 100.

But viewed differently — say, from the perspective of a birder obsessed with insectivores — this modest stretch of trail is a miracle. Where the Little Dry Creek and High Line Canal trails meet, so too do their riparian corridors: the mostly dry canal and its hollowed cottonwoods, wild plums, and chokecherries, and the wetter creek and its lush mix of willows, still-thriving cottonwoods, and other small trees.

This confluence of streams and habitats has become a meeting place for birds, too — especially flycatchers from East and West. Over the past decade, something remarkable has happened there: [Western Flycatchers](#) (formerly Cordilleran until 2023) have descended from the mountains, and [Eastern Phoebes](#) have moved in (either new birds ranging farther west, or drifters from established nesting populations along the South Platte River).

I began birding these two trails regularly in 2018, too recently to pinpoint when these changes began. But that year, the thrilling appearance of a nesting pair of Cordillerans/Westerns guaranteed I would bird both trails regularly from then on. My first encounter, on May 24, was with the male. He was singing just steps away from the canal, near a small bridge over Little Dry. It was my first county sighting of the species, and I assumed he was just stopping by during migration.

But he persisted, and I found him again several times over the next week or so around the bridge. Most mornings he sang, so he moved up the breeding code ladder in my eBird checklists from “Singing Bird” to “Singing Bird Present 7+ Days.” Two weeks after that first sighting came fresh excitement: On June 7, I spotted a second Cordilleran! Soon the male’s singing slowed and nest building appeared to be the pair’s preoccupation.

By then I was paying regular visits to the bridge. I recruited a few other High Line Canal birders I knew — **Mary Fran O’Connor**, **Cynthia Madsen**, **Denise Reznicek**, and the late **Joe Roller** — to do the same. For the next month, we kept all eyes peeled to document any nesting behavior. We never did locate the pair’s nest, which was likely hidden underneath the bridge. But we did establish that nesting occurred. Unfortunately, our documentation story didn’t conclude with the triumphant ending we had hoped for. [Here’s how I reported it](#) on the COBirds email list-serv on July 7, 2018:

*“Today, when I arrived at the nesting location, I was thrilled to hear some begging calls from near the bridge. The pair continually visited the location with food. And then, from some movement near the apparent parents, a fledgling emerged: cowbird.”*

Was it a one-off nesting attempt, or a sign of things to come? The next year, I anxiously awaited the birds’ possible return. And back they came — as they have every year since! How things have changed for this species. Today’s Western Flycatcher is increasingly *common* along these stretches of the High Line Canal and Little Dry Creek trails. Over the past two summers, I’ve occasionally biked 5 – 6 miles of the two trails, and Westerns are present in three or four locations along my route, often near bridges or where the Little Dry veers toward the High Line.

Thanks to these flycatchers, I’ve taken much greater interest in two otherwise modest riparian corridors, birding them regularly. And thanks to their being walkable from an RTD bus line, I’ve also brought along students in my urban wildlife

*Continued on page 12*

course at the University of Denver. In fact, it was during one of those student field trips in 2024 that my birding expectations there turned topsy turvy again.

On March 28 of that year, on a class visit to the canal and High Line Canal Conservancy office, we found a single Eastern Phoebe flycatching around the same bridge that Western Flycatchers had been using for several years. The students all got a brief sighting, enjoyed the phoebe's tail-wagging behavior, and were especially interested when I mentioned that Eastern Phoebes are uncommon to rare in suburban Denver.

As I did years before with the Western, I made several return trips to the trail in search of that phoebe. Often, I'd find one singing his familiar song. I hadn't heard Eastern Phoebes much around Colorado, but in New York state where I grew up, they're so common that every house seems to have its own. In mid-April 2024, the male's singing was rewarded: A second Eastern Phoebe arrived. Later, even a third one showed up, but two of the phoebes chased off the other to maintain nesting equilibrium.

The birds returned in 2025 and 2026, and presumably they're nesting, though I haven't figured out where. Much of the likely nesting area is inaccessible to birders — either fenced off by Denver Water or nestled along a stretch of Little Dry Creek that snakes away through private property. Too bad for us: I'd love not just to document the pair's nesting behavior, but also to see the nest (from an appropriate distance) and record what it's made of. [As I wrote on COBirds:](#)

*Eastern Phoebes are known for incorporating mosses into their nests. This is what Birds of the World says: "The green moss is an invariable component in nest construction and its presence is diagnostic; late season nests during dry periods may have less moss." Mosses are scarcer in this area, but certainly not absent. There are nice collections of mosses along the creek in spots. Over-irrigated lawns also often have them, usually at their edges. These (the over-irrigated lawns) too, are present in the area. As someone with a budding interest in bryophytes, I hope to observe and possibly photograph this pair collecting mosses*

This year, I lucked into photographing one of the phoebes with nesting material, though what it was carrying was unclear. Collected from a muddy part of the canal, it looked like a mucky mix of fibrous materials.

*Continued on page 13*



Western Flycatcher  
Jared Del Rosso



Eastern Phoebe  
Jared Del Rosso



Cordilleran Flycatcher in 2018 with nest material at High Line Canal nesting site  
Jared Del Rosso



Eastern Phoebe carrying nesting material in suburban Denver's High Line Canal area  
Jared Del Rosso

The presence of these two species is more evidence of rapid change underway in the breeding bird communities of Denver's southern suburbs. In recent decades, several other species — most notably Bushtit, Chipping Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco — have become more common breeders in metro Denver. Their presence enhances the natural soundscape of the city and its suburbs. Even the modest trails around my home sound markedly different than when I moved into the area a decade ago, thanks to the eastward drift of Western Flycatchers and the westward shift of Eastern Phoebes.

I can't help wondering what might come next. As far as I know, Western Wood-Pewees don't nest along these riparian corridors, though they're fairly common in Arapahoe County. Perhaps they'll be next to breed here? And what of the phoebes? Will they gradually spread like the Western Flycatchers did, becoming locally common here and there around Colorado?



Black Phoebe singing; will this be the next uncommon flycatcher to show up on the Highline Canal?  
Jared Del Rosso

One more reason to wonder: Might the offspring of the Black Phoebes that nested along the South Platte River this spring continue the drift of that species as well? It's hard not to imagine — or at least to hope — that Black Phoebes might find Little Dry Creek adequate, as did the Western Flycatchers and Eastern Phoebes before them. May another year or three of return trips convert otherwise lukewarm birding locales into fresh species hotspots!

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DFO member and birder **Jared Del Rosso** is also a wildflower gardener and sociologist with a special interest in urban and suburban nature. He's 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: Birding the borderlands: 3 days, 2 nights, 1 bird- filled CO-NM outing

**The trip:** North-central NM, south-central CO

(Colfax, NM and Huerfano/Las Animas, CO)

**Date:** Wednesday-Friday, May 20-22, 2026

**Leaders:** David Suddjian and Ryan Corda + 10 participants

**Species:** 146 on 56 eBird checklists

TRIP REPORT

Field trips beyond Colorado's borders are rare but popular events for Denver Field Ornithologists. Even wandering a few dozen miles into a neighboring state provides new birding perspectives in fresh and less-familiar terrain.

In the heart of May's spring migration birding rush, 12 DFO members (led by **Ryan Corda** and me) embarked on a three-day excursion through three counties of north-central New Mexico and south-central Colorado — Colfax, NM and Huerfano and Las Animas, CO.

We wanted to do a trip into New Mexico, and Colfax County offered inviting destinations. The area south of Trinidad, CO is the nearest entry point, and it led us straight to [Maxwell National Wildlife Refuge](#), a bird-rich expanse of high plains prairie and playas (and our single biggest hotspot stop, with 77 species in one morning). Farther west of Maxwell was Cimarron Canyon, another gem in the forested high country on the eastern edge of the Sangre de Cristos. We included Las Animas and Huerfano counties for their diverse birding through spectacular Colorado landscapes on the way to New Mexico and back.

The result was many new birding spots for all of us. For list keeping, the 146 species included county birds, state birds and lifers for all. The highlight species were numerous: Hepatic Tanager, Grace's Warbler, an unexpected Yellow-throated Warbler, Cassin's Sparrow and so many more. They're all in our eBird trip report. Check it out!

I asked my fellow field trippers to offer their reflections on our adventure, and here's what several of them had to say.



Birding beneath the Spanish Peaks  
in Las Animas County, CO  
Gary Witt

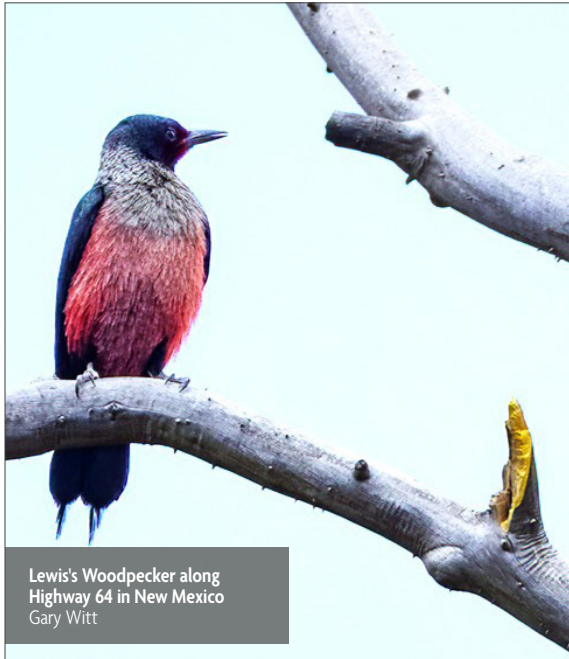


Grace's Warbler perched along  
Huerfano County Road 313  
Anne Craig

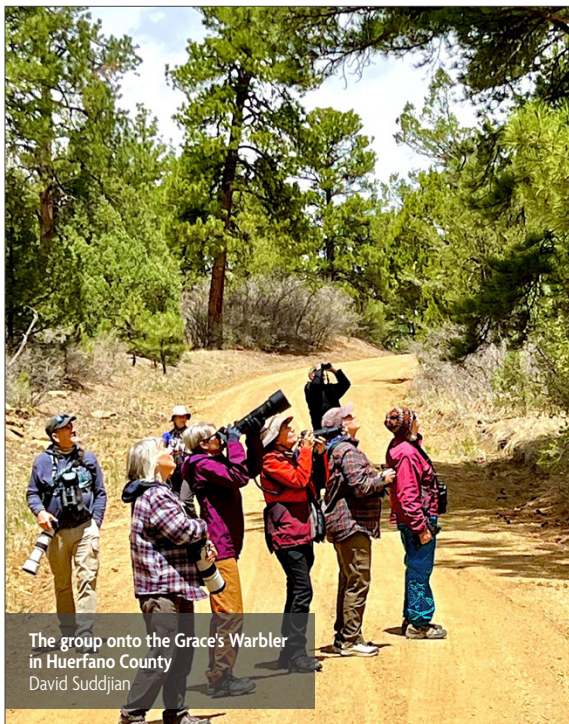
Continued on page 15



Common Raven mobbing Broad-winged Hawk above Santa Clara Creek in Colorado  
Gary Witt



Lewis's Woodpecker along Highway 64 in New Mexico  
Gary Witt



The group onto the Grace's Warbler in Huerfano County  
David Suddjian

**FIELD TRIPPING** *cont from page 14*

*THE BEAUTY AND habitat diversity within sight of the Spanish Peaks makes birding in that part of Colorado and New Mexico a treat. My bird counts in both of those Colorado counties are something to be proud of now.*

— **Gary Witt**

*I'M GRATEFUL FOR many things from this wonderful trip: All the amazing birds, many of which I had only seen fleetingly in the distant past through inferior optics . . . birding with the Spanish Peaks as a backdrop . . . the chance to look directly into the eye of a Lewis's Woodpecker through Gary's amazing scope . . . noticing the change in life zones as we moved from lower elevation to higher . . . the trees and insects . . . munching on the soft, young needles of a white fir (a sort-of sweet taste that David encouraged us to sample) — and what a cool-looking tree!*

— **Bob Brandle**

*THIS WAS JUST a great trip all the way around — the result of thought and planning. The flexibility required to pull it off was astonishing. Birding with such GREAT BIRDERS was a joy . . . as were the Mexican food and the camaraderie. The rural areas and wilds of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico were compelling and beautiful. They tugged on our sleeves to stay . . . and to return.*

— **Linda Purcell**

*I ENJOYED EXPLORING southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. Such a wide variety of birds (especially those we don't normally see in Denver). Learning about different habitats — like where Hepatic Tanagers live — was fascinating, and even more rewarding when we found a couple of them! Seeing the birds actively nesting was incredible.*

— **Jennifer Tonge**

*THIS WAS SUCH a fun birding trip, with so many new areas for me. From the Spanish Peaks to the prairie, and the woodlands to the lakes, the views were stunning, and the landscapes so diverse!*

— **Bonnie Prado**

*MY FIRST DFO multiday trip surpassed all my expectations. Not just for the birds — which were fabulous, especially the Hepatic Tanagers (LIFER!) — but for the opportunity to build deeper connections with the great people on this trip. Everyone was so helpful with each other, in the field and beyond. Collaborative and supporting. I loved it.*

— **Lynn Slaga**

*Continued on page 16*

FIELD TRIPPING *cont from page 14*



Scoping waterfowl on the reservoir at Maxwell NWR  
Jennifer Tonge



Pine Siskin munching dandelion in Cuchara, CO  
Gary Witt

COLORADO HAS ITS share of showy, single-species birding spectacles. Think of thousands of Snow Geese on a northeastern reservoir along the South Platte, or Sandhill Cranes in the fields at Monte Vista. But there are subtle spectacles, too, and we enjoyed a couple of them on this trip: dozens of Cliff Swallows feeding on sunflower stalks at Maxwell National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico . . . hundreds of Pine Siskins grazing on dandelion heads in the fields of grass in tiny Cuchara in Huerfano County. Those small birds and their single-minded pursuit of food were a delight and privilege to witness.

— Anne Craig

THE TOWN OF Cuchara was such a surprisingly birdy stop. First to greet us were all those Pine Siskins, buzzing low through the dandelions in those grassy yards. Then a handful of Evening Grosbeaks and so many Broad-tailed Hummingbirds were hovering around busy feeder stations. Beneath an overturned wheelbarrow, a Green-tailed Towhee foraged by itself. At our arrival, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet flashed its ruby crown like a cherry on a sundae — except that the cherries on top of it all were a Western Flycatcher and a Red-naped Sapsucker. What an amazing stop!

— Ryan Corda



Burrowing Owl at Maxwell NWR in New Mexico  
Gary Witt



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

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

Field trips in 2026’s three spring-to-summer months included 95 total outings. Participants on 38 of them took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 91-year-old club. If you’re on DFO trips in July, August and September, 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 October. Send JPG or .PNG photo files of birders in the field, with date/location of trip and any individual IDs (if needed) to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at [patodrisk@gmail.com](mailto:patodrisk@gmail.com). Deadline for the October 2026 autumn-quarter issue is **Wednesday, Sept. 30**. Thanks!



APRIL 1

## CU-Boulder South Campus (Boulder County)

**Leader**

Laura Steadman

**Participants**

Bruce Raff, Ann Christensen, Linda Purcell, Aaron Sefton, Gary Witt, Jim McBride

**Field trippers on Wednesday’s DFO outing trip to CU-Boulder’s South Campus pause on a fruitful walkabout of the property, They checklisted 31 species, including a singing Wilson’s Snipe, a perched Turkey Vulture, and a Northern Harrier cruising over the fields**

(Linda Purcell)

CHECKLIST



APRIL 3

## Chatfield State Park (Douglas)

**Leaders**

Cindy Breidenbach and Angela Grun

**Participants**

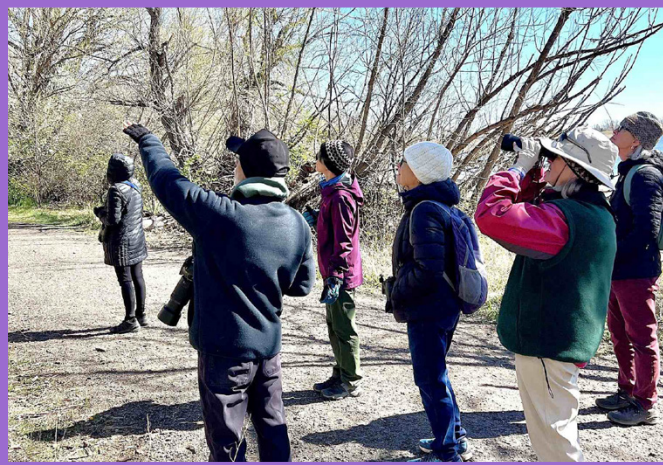
Henry Williams, Kit Williams, Brian Haller, Pat Kuzma Sell, Eileen Warner, Susan Harper, Lynn Sauer, Jodi Haller

**Participants in the joint DFO/Denver Audubon field trip April 3 to Chatfield State Park pose for a group shot near Titan 1 Pond (aka Wild Horse Pond). They followed the South Platte River upstream from Kingfisher Bridge, observing 36 species, including Wood Ducks looking to nest in a tall cottonwood. The group also saw six Bald Eagles along the route of their 3-mile birding hike**

(Henry Williams)

CHECKLIST

*Continued on page 18*



APRIL 3

## Bear Creek Lake Park + Main Reservoir (Jefferson)

### Leaders

Anne Craig and David Suddjian

### Participants

Virginia Gulakowski, Gary Weir, Alice Tariot, Bonnie Prado, Jeanne Marie Dillon, Jim McBride

**Birders scan the treetops at Main Reservoir in Lakewood during DFO field trip April 3 there and at Bear Creek Lake Park. Despite blustery conditions and wind chill, the group checklisted 39 species, including five Wood Ducks, a Wilson's Snipe, migrating Turkey Vultures, and nests of Great Horned Owl and Red-tailed Hawk. Not to mention fragrant apple blossoms at Main and a beaver pond on Bear Creek**

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT



APRIL 8

## Lincoln County birding (Lincoln, Elbert)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Sue Plankis, Ajit and Liza Antony, Bonnie Prado, Theresa Braymer, Ryan Corda, Mary Fran O'Connor, Jodi Haller, Ann Christensen, Michelle Verostko

**DFO field trippers viewing the pond along Hwy 86 east of Kiowa during April 8 outing to Elbert and Lincoln counties. The little reservoir had more ducks than anywhere else in drought-stricken Elbert County. They listed 37 species on 30 checklists**  
(Ryan Corda)

TRIP REPORT

APRIL 11

## Northeastern Colorado (Washington, Morgan, Weld)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Scott Hammel, Kara Cooper, Coreen Spellman Bailey, Sara Jaramillo, Chris Gearhart, Henry Williams, Sean Jones, Melody Serra, Kathy Holland, Kit Williams, Lauren Friesen

**Field trippers focus on birds in a farm field along County Road 59 in Weld County during joint DFO/Denver Audubon outing April 11 to numerous points in northeastern Colorado. At the top of the get-list were Greater Prairie-Chickens, one of 64 species observed at 17 different locations across three counties**  
Melody Serra

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 19



APRIL 12  
**Bluff Lake Nature Center (Denver)**

**Leader**  
Jason Bidgood

**Participants**  
Debby Miller, Kris Tita, Jodi Haller, Shay Lyons, Virginia Gulakowski, Bonnie Prado

**Birders on April 12 field trip to Bluff Lake Nature Center in northeast Denver focus on some of the 10 species of ducks they checklist. Highlights among the 41 total species seen included first-of-year looks at Black-crowned Night Herons and Yellow-rumped Warblers**  
(Jason B. Bidgood)

CHECKLIST



APRIL 13  
**Spruce Mountain Open Space (Douglas)**

**Leader**  
Chris Gilbert

**Participants**  
Kathy Holland, Nga Turner, Sean Warren, Mary Fran O'Connor, Oliver Urdiales, Lisa Powell, Isaac Ho

**Field trippers pause for group photo during DFO outing April 13 to Spruce Mountain Open Space in Douglas Count. Highlights included White-throated Swifts, Red Crossbills, two kinds of bluebirds, two different morphs of Red-tailed Hawk and 21 other species**  
(Chris Gilbert)

CHECKLIST

APRIL 15,  
**Sandstone Ranch Open Space (Douglas)**

**Leader**  
Chris Gilbert

**Participants**  
Robert Przybylo, Isaac Ho, Chip Dawes, Kathy Holland, Catherine McCloy, Dale Stevens

**Birders pose for a group selfie during DFO's April 15 field trip to Sandstone Ranch Open Space. The day was super sunny but super windy — so the cold was colder and the bird-finding harder. In the end, the field trippers checklist 23 species, including Mountain Bluebirds and a first-of-year Barn Swallow**  
(Chris Gilbert)

CHECKLIST



*Continued on page 20*



APRIL 16

## Beaver Ranch Park (Jefferson)

### Leader

David Suddjian

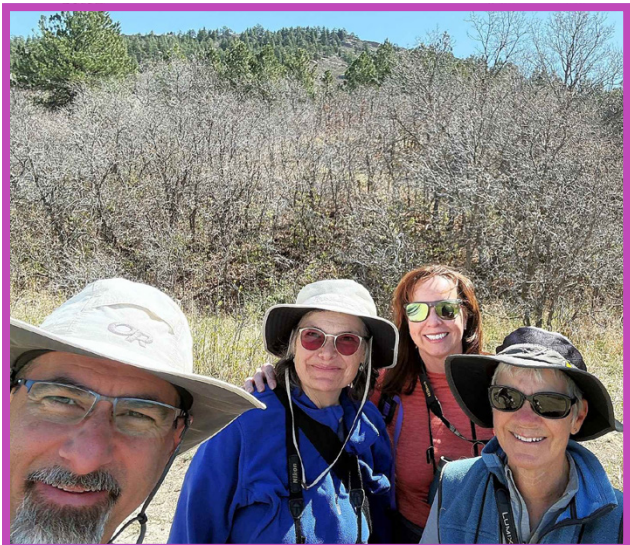
### Participants

Anne Craig, Michelle Verostko, Jodi Haller, Ryan Corda, Sean Warren, Coreen Spellman, Sandy Mathias

Participants on DFO/Denver Audubon field trip April 16 to Beaver Ranch Park home in on Evening Grosbeaks. They also encountered both Williamson's and Red-naped Sapsuckers and had eye-level views of singing Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Some of the grosbeaks were carrying nest material and were easy to find near the Bark Park and along the lower portion of the Pine Elfin Trail

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT



APRIL 19

## Columbine Open Space (Douglas)

### Leader

Chris Gilbert

### Participants

Kris Saucke, Mary Ramsey, Jodi Haller, Erik Sundell

Birders pose for group shot April 19 during a beautiful day of birding at Columbine Open Space in Douglas County. Highlights among the 30 species they listed included bluebirds, raptors, and a couple of first-of-year birds: Violet-Green Swallow and Yellow-rumped Warbler

(Chris Gilbert)

CHECKLIST

APRIL 19

## Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

### Leader

Jason Bidgood

### Participants

Jim McBride, John Batt, Virginia Gulakowski, Matthew Fast, Benjamin Shay, Taylor Wartell

Field trippers check out a group of Brown-headed Cowbirds during an April 19 DFO outing to Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. The sunrise-to-noon excursion tracked 56 bird species by sight or sound, including a Peregrin Falcon, a first-of-season Yellow-headed Blackbird, 13 kinds of ducks, a pair of Western Grebes, and a variety of migratory shorebirds

(Jason B. Bidgood)

TRIP REPORT

*Continued on page 21*



APRIL 20

## Harlequin Duck chase, Cherry Creek SP (Arapahoe)

### Leader

Ryan Corda

### Participants

Caitlyn O'Neil, Victoria Miles, David Suddjian, Anne Craig, Virginia Gulakowski, Burke Angstman, Cate and Kevin Millard, Sara Jepsen, Meg Kenny

**Birders on last-minute DFO field trip April 20 focus on an exceedingly rare Harlequin Duck off the Lake Loop at Cherry Creek State Park. The guest bird cooperated beyond expectations, hanging out in one spot for the hour or so the group visited and diving only twice. The non-breeding male was a lifer for most and a Colorado first for all, including DFO itself. Co-stars this day were Franklin's Gulls, a pair of Ruddy Ducks, a gang of Cliff Swallows, and a high-flying Osprey**

(David Suddjian)

### TRIP REPORT



APRIL 25

## Belmar Park (Jefferson)

### Leaders

Shay Lyons and Ryan Corda

### Participants

Caitlyn O'Neil, Y Hoffman, Anna Puchalski, Virginia Gulakowski, Andrea Duran, Jim McBride, Meghan Bell, Katherine Nybakken, Diana Henninger, Marcela Mikkola, Jessica Blodgett, Carol Cook, Lynn Slaga, Roma Godwin, Jessica Cabral, Alayna Nelson, Michael Fernandez, Ann Nelson, Christopher and Catherine Barr, Kimberly Roy, Tracy Thornton, Debra Lentz, Nathan Ruane, David Suddjian, Andrea Grasso, Julie Martinez, Cayce Gulbranse

**A crowd of 30 birders gathers for April 25 DFO field trip at Belmar Park in Lakewood before DFO's Gear UP + Get Out sale and mixer. The field trippers split into two groups with multiple leaders to scour the park for nesting water birds and returning spring migrants**

(David Suddjian)

### TRIP REPORT

APRIL 16

## Tucker Gulch (Jefferson)

### Leader

Lynn Slaga

### Participants

John Batt, Lauren Friesen, Virginia Gulakowski, Sofia Prado-Irwin, Tom Leonard

**"Team Tucker Gulch" poses for group shot during DFO field trip April 26 to the gulch, a popular migrant trap in Golden. On a gray, cool morning, they checklisted 32 species, including a pair of Cooper's Hawks, Lazuli Buntings, Hermit Thrush, Wilson's Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Lincoln's Sparrow among other highlights**

(Lynn Slaga)

### CHECKLIST

Continued on page 22



MAY 1  
**Chatfield State Park  
(Douglas)**

**Leaders**  
Cindy Breidenbach and Angela Grun

**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 in joint DFO/Denver Audubon field trip May 1 to Chatfield State Park pause to pose. The group checklisted 46 species on the east side of the South Platte River upstream from Kingfisher Bridge**  
(Cindy Breidenbach)

**TRIP REPORT**



MAY 3  
**Pueblo area (Pueblo)**

**Leaders**  
Jessica Miller

**Participants**  
Jason Bidgood, Shay Lyons, Craig Larson, Michale Kernan, Matthew Fast, Gary Witt, Melissa Wetzig, Lorna Thomas

**Birders scan both sides of bridge during joint DFO / Aiken Audubon field trip May 3 to Pueblo area birding spots including Pueblo SP and the Arkansas River. The search for local specialties and spring migrants yielded 80 species, including a shy Carolina Wren that wouldn't show itself and an adult-juvenile pair of Common Black Hawks**  
(Jason B. Bidgood)

**TRIP REPORT**

*Continued on page 23*



MAY 9

## Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR (Adams)

### Leader

Jason Bidgood

### Participants

Luke Jaramillo, Cayce and Chris Gulbransen, Lauren Friesen, Paul Wang

Field trippers on DFO outing May 9 to Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR watch distant soaring Swainson's Hawks from the Bluestem trail. The group marked the Global Big Day, the biggest single day for birdwatching participation in the world, by submitting six eBird checklists with the 66 species observed (Jason B. Bidgood)

TRIP REPORT



MAY 15

## Audubon Kingery Nature Center (Jefferson)

### Leader

Charlie Chase

### Participant

Debbie and Matthew Schultz, Aileen Giardina, Cynthia Breidenbach, Patricia Kuzma Sell, Steve Dwyer, Diane Hutton, Alayna Nelson, Nancy Crowley, Lindie Brewer, Madeleine Cahill, Nathan Huber, Barbara Horvath, Jack Sand

Yellow-breasted Chat in hand during DFO field trip visit to banding station at the Audubon Kingery Nature Center at the south end of Chatfield SP. Field trippers saw 17 birds banded while also walking the popular birding loop along the South Platte River on a 45-species outing (Cindy Breidenbach)

TRIP REPORT

*Continued on page 24*



MAY 16  
**Common Poorwill evening (Jefferson)**

**Leaders**

David Suddjian

**Participants**

Kara Cooper, Scott Hammel, Craig Larson, Sandy Johnson, Caitlyn O'Neil, Denise Reznicek, Sara Painter

Participants in joint DFO/Denver Audubon walk May 16 wait for Common Poorwills to sound off as evening arrives. The outing in private open space at Ken Caryl Ranch encountered an estimated 20 poorwills (most heard but several seen) in the hogback zone at the base of the Front Range foothills. The birds, among 20 total species checklisted) were a life bird for several in the group

(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT



MAY 17

**Pawnee National Grasslands west (Weld)**

**Leader**

Jason Bidgood

**Participants**

Adelia Honeywood, Coreen Spellman, Betty Glass, Michelle Verostko, Scott Hammel, Bill Turner, Timothy Condon, Caitlyn O'Neil, Jack Sanda, Lisa Shik

Field trippers scan for Mountain Plover along rural county road near Briggsdale in northeastern Colorado during May 17 outing to the west side of Pawnee National Grasslands. Highlights included Thick-billed Longspur and Burrowing Owl in the grasslands and overwhelming numbers of spring migrants in the Crow Valley Recreation Area

(Jason B. Bidgood)

TRIP REPORT



MAY 17

**Barr Lake SP (Adams)**

**Leaders**

Shay Lyons and Ryan Corda

**Participants**

Kara Cooper, Beth Moran, Olivia Salmon, Meg Mothershed, Debbie Schultz, Mary Ramsey, Matthew Schultz, Emily Boswell

Field trippers pause to pose on bridge over ditch at Barr Lake State Park, where their May 17 spring migration outing recorded 52 species in a morning-long session at the Adams County destination

(Ryan Corda)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 25



MAY 20-22

## North-central New Mexico/ south-central Colorado (Colfax, NM; Douglas, Huerfano, Las Animas, CO)

### Leaders

David Suddjian and Ryan Corda

### Participants

Linda Purcell, Anne Craig, Lynn Slaga, Robert Tonge, Jennifer Tonge, Bonnie Prado, Coreen Spellman, Gary Witt, Robert Brandle, Virginia Gulakowski

**Participants on the May 20-22 DFO field trip through parts of north-central Colorado and south-central New Mexico pause at Cimarron State Park in New Mexico. The 12-person expedition recorded 146 species on 56 checklists**

(David Suddjian)

### TRIP REPORT



MAY 24

## Ken Caryl Ranch Poorwill evening (Jefferson)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Lauren Friesen, Oliver Urdiales, Stephanie Van Esselstine, Joey Caskey, Debbie Schultz, Tracy Thornton, Nathan Crow

**Field trippers enjoy a sundown rainbow in private open space at Ken Caryl Ranch on a DFO/'Denver Audubon evening search May 24 for Common Poorwills. The results were memorable: SEVENTEEN poorwills, some of them in astonishingly close visual encounters as the birds foraged at dusk. The group checklisted 20 other species as well**

(Oliver Urdiales)

### TRIP REPORT



MAY 25

## Beaver Ranch Park (Jefferson)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Anne Craig, Lynn Slaga, Melody Serra, Erika Pemberton, Kelly Ducham, Olivia Salmon

**Field trippers on May 25 DFO outing to the Ken Caryl Valley area aim high for a bird ID. The group tallied 55 species with visits to a dozen different hotspots**

(David Suddjian)

### TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 26



MAY 29

## Ponderosa Preserve (Aurora)

### Leader

Cynthia Cestkowski

### Participants

Steve Dwyer, Jeanne Marie Dillon, Jacqueline Gorman, Jim McBride, Meg Reck, Jim Esten, Rosanne Juergens, Jess Jackman

Birders scan from the edge Ponderosa Preserve, a 60-acre island of native pines in the northern reach of Colorado's unique Black Forest on the Great Plains. DFO assists the City of Aurora, which owns this restricted-access site, with periodic field trips that add to the city's database of bird species that use the site

(James Esten)

TRIP REPORT



MAY 30

## Chatfield State Park (Douglas, Jefferson)

### Leader

Joey Kellner

### Participants

Melody Serra, Virginia Gulakowski, Curtis Higgins, Thomas Forre, Jill Holden, Kenneth Stuckey, Henry and Kit Williams, Phil Waltz, Matthew Hazelgren, Alison Kondler, Diana Cunningham, Leslie Dixon, Vedant Atodaria, Michael Ames, Paul Schrek, Charlie Schmucke

Participants on trip leader Joey Kellner's monthly DFO outing to Chatfield State Park scan from the trail May 30 enroute to a total count of 63 species as spring migrants move through the park

(Melody Serra)

TRIP REPORT



JUNE 6

## Common Poorwills @ Ken Caryl Ranch Open Space (Jefferson)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Melody Serra, Jim McBride, Kelly Ducham, Jenny Germano, Christine Macdonald, Caoimhín Perkins, Juniper Finch

Field trippers gather at private Ken Caryl Ranch Open Space on June 6 to discuss the evening's birding ahead in search of Common Poorwills. Despite prohibitively windy conditions, the group heard some poorwills calling and caught sight of foraging birds, including a poorwill pair together

(Jenny Germano)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 27



## JUNE 7 Pine Valley Ranch (Jefferson)

**Leader**  
Timothy Condon

**Participants**  
Kelly Ducham, Shay Lyons, Lauren Friesen, Rae Jones, Henry and Kit Williams, Benjamin Shay, Jacqueline Gorman, Mindy and David Densmore, Melody Luck-Serra, Katherine Peterson, Jim McBride

**Birders on DFO's June 7 field trip to Pine Valley Ranch focus on one of the 32 bird species they checklisted. Their finds included close observation of a Chestnut-sided Warbler among others, plus great views of wildflowers along the North Fork of the South Platte River**  
(Melody Serra)

TRIP REPORT



## JUNE 8 Paint Mines Interpretive Park / Fountain Creek Regional Park (El Paso)

**Leaders**  
Linda Purcell and Judy McKeon

**Participants**  
Michelle Verostko, Shelley Conger, Catherine McCloy, Debra Strike, Debbie Schultz, Duncan Duncan, Bruce Raff

**Participants in DFO field trip to Paint Mines Interpretive Park in El Paso County pause for a group photo amid the park's geological wonders. The group tallied more than 50 bird species**  
(Judy McKeon)

TRIP REPORT



## JUNE 10 Castlewood Canyon State Park (Douglas)

**Leaders**  
Cynthia Cestkowski and Linda Purcell

**Participants**  
Rae Jones, Nga Turner, Jim McBride, Kris Saucke, Christopher Curwen, Vedant Atodaria

**Field trippers on June 10 DFO outing to Castlewood Canyon State Park survey the countryside below on a nearly cloudless day. The eight birders tallied 43 species on their morning long ramble through the park in Douglas County, including a Prairie Falcon that thrilled the group with a low flyby**  
(Kris Saucke)

TRIP REPORT

Continued on page 28



JUNE 13  
**Sand Creek Regional Greenway (Denver)**

**Leaders**  
Gary Witt and Jill Boice

**Participants**  
Sarah Wilson, Virginia Gulakowski, Nga Turner, Chris Anne Handel, Shari Fleener, Jim McBride, Janelle Elias, Ryan Allen, Christine Macdonald, Ian Barrett, Nellie Pestian, Tracy Thornton, Jason Bidgood

**Field trip co-leader Gary Witt, center, gestures as birders pause along Sand Creek trail during DFO’s June 13 outing in collaboration with Sand Creek Regional Greenway Partnership**  
(Jason B. Bidgood)

**TRIP REPORT**



JUNE 16  
**Birds + Geology, Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument**

**Leaders**  
Jason Bidgood and David Suddjian

**Participants**  
Anne Craig, Coreen Spellman, Virginia Gulakowski, Jonathan Angela and Juliana Hebel, Sue Plankis, Marjorie Middleton

**Birders zero in on pair of Mountain Bluebirds returning to a nest cavity near one of the petrified tree stumps in Florissant Fossil Beds NM west of Colorado Springs. The “Birds + Geology” field trip June 16 tallied 50 bird species, including foraging Red Crossbills, a nesting Western Flycatcher, and several Williamson’s Sapsuckers**  
(Jason B. Bidgood)

**TRIP REPORT**



JUNE 19  
**South Platte Park (Arapahoe, Jefferson)**

**Leaders**  
Cindy Breidenbach and Julia Gwinn

**Participants**  
Kara Cooper, Sean Jones, Louise Morningstar, Evangeline Gallegos, Beth Moran, Virginia Gulakowski, Emily Boswell, Kelly O’Sullivan

**Field trippers pause to pose in the birding blind at South Platte Park during the monthly DFO / Denver Audubon outing June 19. A highlight of the 28-species checklist was often-heard and seldom-seen Yellow-breasted Chats perched in the open and singing. Hummingbirds, herons, egrets and pelicans, and Western Kingbirds defending their nest were other topics of conversation and attention**  
(Cindy Breidenbach)

**TRIP REPORT**

*Continued on page 29*



JUNE 19  
**Park Hill Park (Denver)**

**Leader**  
Jason B. Bidgood

**Participants**  
Kris Saucke, Jeanne Marie Dillon, Michael Fernandez, Tracy Thornton, Joe Chen, Debby Miller, Meg Reck, Patty Young, Michelle DiGiacomo, Jim McBride

**June 19 field trippers stand in the middle of Denver's Park Hill Park, where DFO's Conservation Committee is documenting what birds are using the former golf course as it undergoes a gradual transition into an urban open space park. The group checklisted 28 species**  
(Jason B. Bidgood)

TRIP REPORT



JUNE 25  
**Louviers + DuPont Open Space (Douglas)**

**Leader**  
Ethan Cleveland

**Participants**  
Kara Cooper, Beth Moran, Debby Miller, Sharon Kelly, Mary Beth Searles, Joey Kellner, Andrea Durán, Anne Craig, Bill Banta

**Trip leader Ethan Cleveland points out a bird in the trees of DuPont Open Space on a June 25 field trip there and in the village of Louviers next door. The field trippers checklisted 41 bird species — plus an uncommon Lazuli x Indigo Bunting hybrid — on their early morning outing**  
(Joey Kellner)

TRIP REPORT



JUNE 27  
**Ken Caryl Valley area (Jefferson)**

**Leaders**  
David Suddjian

**Participants**  
Susanna Donato, Christine Macdonald, Kris Saucke

**Three-fourths of a small but busy crew focus on early-morning birds during June 27 field trip to private open space at Ken Caryl Ranch. On a day of breezes and warm temperatures, the gang of four tallied 49 species while birding three spots in the Front Range hogback zone of Jefferson County**  
(David Suddjian)

TRIP REPORT

*Continued on page 30*

JUNE 28

## Genesee Mountain Park (trip leader appreciation lunch) (Jefferson)

### Leader

David Suddjian

### Participants

Shay Lyons, Joey Kellner, Jason Bidgood, Judy McKeon, Cassandra Stroud, Gary Witt, Mary Keithler, Susan Blansett

**DFO field trip leaders focus on birds along the Genesee Mountain Park trail during an outing June 28 before a picnic-style leader appreciation lunch in the park. The trip checklist totaled 32 species, including something none of the participants had ever seen: a nest of Hammond's Flycatchers (David Suddjian)**



TRIP REPORT



JUNE 30

## Clear Creek, foothills to mountains (Jefferson, Clear Creek)

### Leaders

Linda Purcell and David Suddjian

### Participants

Kara Cooper, Sue Plankis, Anne Craig, Michelle Verostko, Mary Fran O'Connor, Nga Turner

**On the last day of June, a DFO field trip explored spots along Clear Creek from the foothills to the mountains, stopping at several trailheads along the way, up the watershed to Empire. The group recorded 47 species on 11 checklists. Highlights included a Cedar Waxwing nest, Cooper's Hawk nest, nesting American Dipper and the amazing song of a Swainson's Thrush nearby**

David Suddjian

TRIP REPORT

## HAWK WATCH

# Highs, lows from Dinosaur Ridge in 2026 Hawk Watch migration report

### Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch count of migrating birds of prey this spring had mixed results. Some species were abundant and others scarce, but the count also recorded the second-lowest overall count (2,263 hawks, falcons, eagles and vultures) since Denver Field Ornithologists assumed management of the decades-long effort in 2020.

But as an expression of club activity, the 2026 edition of this annual community science project hit a new high. DFO's professional and volunteer observers set a record of 511 combined observation hours during the season (March 1 – May 10), the highest in 34 years of raptor counts on Dinosaur Ridge. It was the fifth straight year with full-time professional counters onsite, as lead counter and project lead **Emma Riley** completed her fifth season on the ridge.

These and other data and conclusions, including future priorities, are contained in a final draft of Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch's annual report for 2026, due for completion in July. The project intends to make the report available to DFO members and other interested parties soon after, once the method and timing of publication and delivery are complete.

Draft final results for several species reached notable markers in 2026:

- Second-highest count of American Kestrels since 1997, a species observed much more in 2026 than the average of the previous four years
- Second-most Ospreys since the year 2000
- Second-highest tally of Northern Harriers since 2005
- Third-most Swainson's Hawks ever
- American Kestrel was the most counted raptor species for the third straight year

A milestone species highlight was the first-ever [Zone-tailed Hawk](#) on May 1. A raptor native to Mexico, Central and South America, and parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, it is rarely seen in Colorado, let alone this far north.

Some other species-specific observations were less encouraging:

- The counts for six species were "significantly below average": Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin and Peregrine Falcon
- Red-tailed Hawk, once a perennial leader for most birds counted, charted fewer numbers than average for the third year in a row
- Golden Eagle's tally was just one-third of the 2025 total
- Ferruginous Hawk's count was the lowest since 2021

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Young volunteer scanning the sky  
Janet Peters

In the season's final daily report May 10 from Dinosaur Ridge, Riley wrote that project staff "have speculated on the reason for this, and we wonder if a warm winter and less than ideal winds during peak season impacted the movements of these birds." But she added that the team looks forward "to analysis that can help us understand these populations and how to best conserve them." (Count data go to the national [Raptor Population Index \[RPI\]](#) through the Hawk Migration Association. The RPI analyzes numbers from bird of prey tallies across the country.

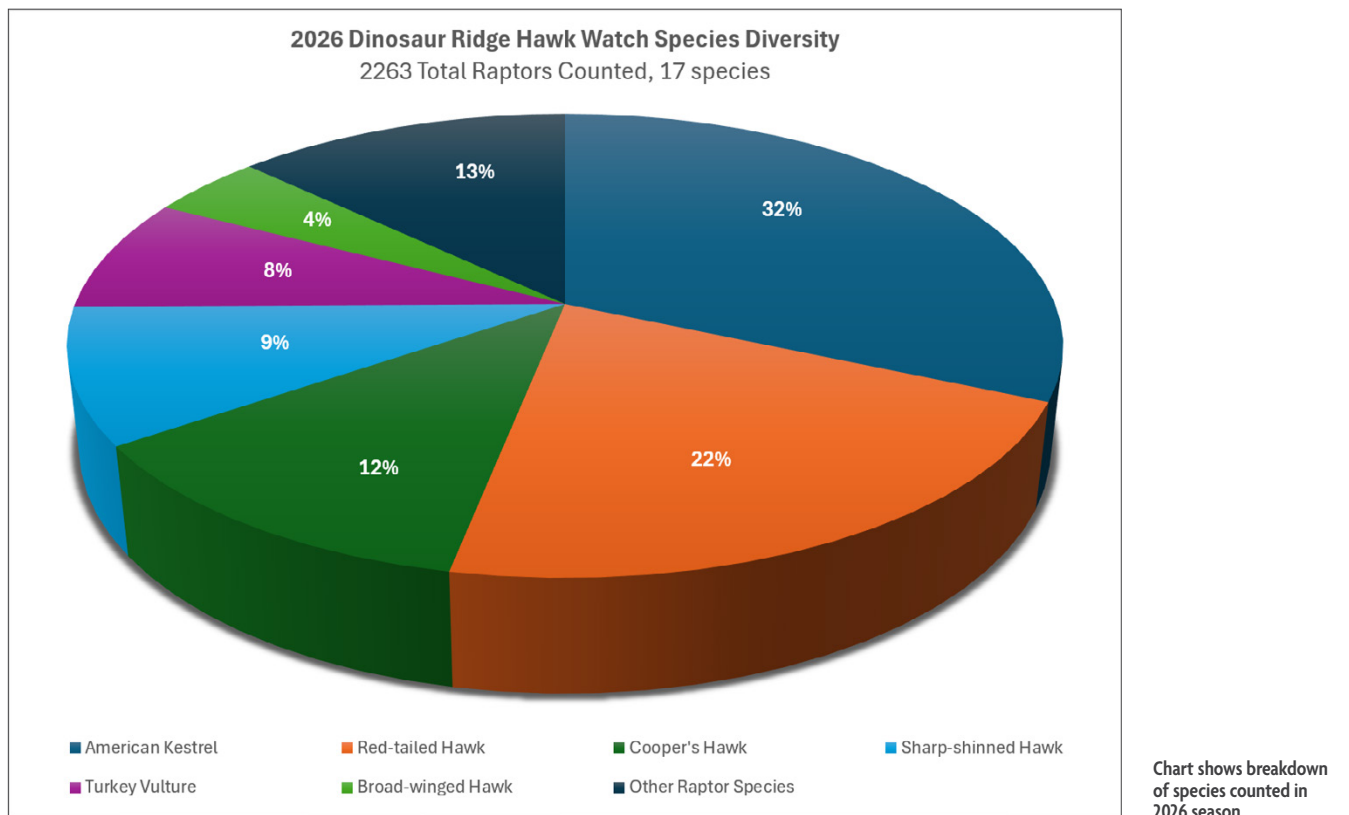
The project continues to checklist non-raptor birds on the ridge, too. Among passerine species present in strong numbers locally this season were Mountain Bluebird, White-throated Swift, Franklin's Gull, Rock Wren, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Netherlands-based [Trekellen](#), a global database of migratory bird stats, keeps [detailed numbers for Dinosaur Ridge's non-raptors](#).

DFO volunteers contributed 340 onsite hours total in 2026, helping counters spot raptors and greeting and informally educating drop-in visitors to the ridge. (Hawk Watch engaged more than 600 visitors.) DFO volunteers also worked 250 more hours in project management — volunteer coordination, website maintenance/support, fundraising, social media and communications, and the like.

With Riley, **Soren Zappia** served as a second paid, professional counter. Two college students also served paid field internships this spring: **Laura Farnsworth**, a University of Colorado Denver graduate student, and **Marina Prado-Echeagaray**, a University of Colorado Boulder freshman.

Educational outreach this season included eight field trips (DFO, Denver Audubon, and Aiken Audubon), a corporate volunteer event (Ernst & Young) and three youth education events (Denver Audubon "Habitat for Homeschoolers," Girl Scouts, Jefferson County Open School).

The 2026 season's partners include Hawk Migration Association, Jefferson County Open Space, Denver Audubon, Aiken Audubon, Colorado Field Ornithologists, and the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD). Ernst & Young provided printing services for weatherproof education materials and has generously donated towards the 2027 season.



LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

**Simple question,  
complex answers:  
Why photograph birds?**  
One DFO lensman  
responds with pictures

Photographs by George Ho



Purple Martin, at right with Cliff and Barn swallows, was unexpected

## George Ho, Jr.

I've been thinking about this ever since I began birding in earnest after retiring in 2013: Why do we photograph birds? Why *do* I photograph them?

I'm a self-taught birder equipped with the modern technologies of our time: the Merlin Photo ID app, Cornell Lab of Ornithology's [All About Birds website](#), Vortex Razor 8x42 binoculars, and a Sony RX10-IV "bridge" camera. Using all of them, I study and learn about the birds I see. Having embraced the wonder that is eBird, I upload some of those photos to my checklists and share others with friends.

We birders with cameras photograph birds to identify them by species and gender. We use them to document rare birds, or to record any bird's behavior. Photos of birds can inspire, educate, and delight millions as expressions of art, knowledge and joy.

Let me illustrate the reasons for and benefits of photographing birds by telling the stories of 10 birds my camera and I have encountered in Colorado over the years.

## Purple Martin

Five years ago, on May 17, 2021, I saw three swallows perched on a wire near Lake Ladora in Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. Looking over my photos later, I identified them as a Cliff Swallow, a Barn Swallow, and a somewhat large Northern Rough-winged Swallow. I reported them together that day on eBird checklist S88383876, one moment in another Colorado spring migration season.

Fast-forward four years and one month later, when an email landed in my inbox from an eBird reviewer working through a backlog of checklist images. "Hey George, Awesome news here," the June 20, 2025 message began. "The large swallow in your photos is a PURPLE MARTIN! First record for Adams County. Lucky dog!"

Without photos, my inadvertent discovery never would have been. Without knowledgeable eBird reviewers like that one, who knows how many rarities missed by birders like me might be lost? Their work must be tedious and cumbersome, but the diligence of eBird reviewers is beyond admiration.

*Continued on page 35*



### Groove-billed Ani

In September 2019, a scruffy black cuckoo from the shrubby drylands of south Texas and Central and South America landed along Sand Creek on the edge of Denver’s Central Park neighborhood. The first sighting of this Groove-billed Ani by **Jason Bidgood** spread like wildfire. I joined the rush to see the unusual bird in the weeds along the creek. I was rewarded on Sept. 19 when it showed me its best profile for an artful portrait. It was one of many opportunities I had to capture my best image as this very rare visitor stayed around for two weeks.



Groove-billed Ani

### American Bittern

On April 20, 2020, just a month after the COVID-19 shut downs began, an American Bittern turned up unexpectedly at Bluff Lake Nature Center in Denver. I was one of just five birders who saw this uncommon, solitary and secretive inhabitant of dense marshes, as it was gone the next day. I would have missed it had fellow birder **Marty Strickland** not asked me to go look at what she described as an unusual bird that was “stepping slowly, stiffly along amidst the reeds and occasionally making a very distinctive sound.” When we saw the long-necked, pointed-billed wader, it stood motionless for a long time — typical American Bittern behavior when threatened, I learned. It was a “lifer” bird for me, and I have not seen another since then.



American Bittern

*Continued on page 36*

## Black-chinned Hummingbird

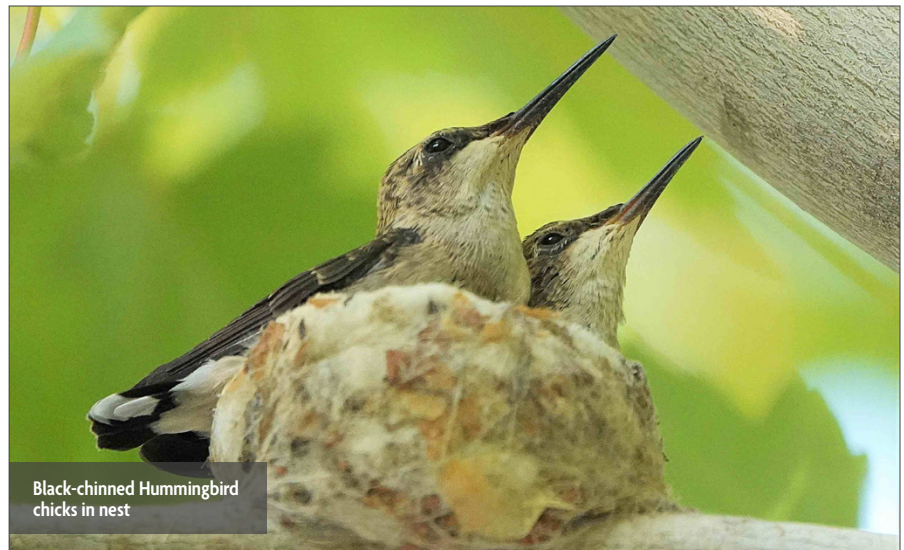
As birders know, sometimes the birds come to you. In summer of 2020, a female Black-chinned Hummingbird built her nest in the front-yard maple tree of my Central Park home. I was able to document the entire process, from her sitting on the new nest on July 18 to feeding her two chicks in August and their departure as fledglings on Aug. 28.

Black-chinneds are the most common hummingbird in my neighborhood, and this female built her nest in my tree again in 2021, fledging twin offspring again. What a delight to witness this cycle of bird life and behavior — and to record it permanently in photographs.

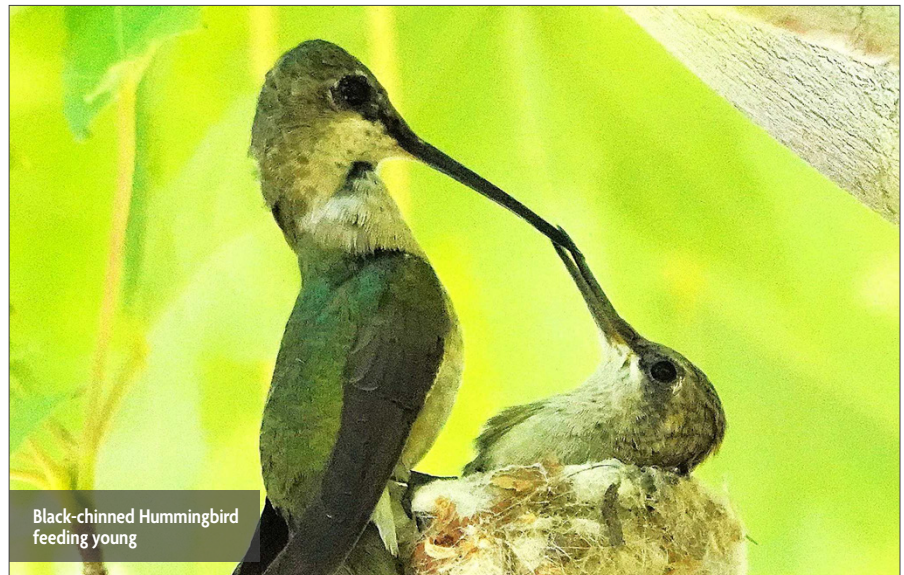
## Mississippi Kite

A crow-sized raptor found primarily in the southern US, the Mississippi Kite was seldom seen in or around Denver until 2021, when a family was found nesting high in a tall cottonwood in a neighborhood several blocks north of City Park. This photo taken Sept. 14, 2021 show a juvenile Kite about to catch a flying insect, a vital part of the species' diet. Kites have been returning to neighborhoods north and east of the park ever since, and now they nest in Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, too. I was intrigued that this bird of prey had chosen to raise broods in densely populated residential areas of single-family homes. Once I realized the kites were nesting in large, mature trees, I understood the attraction — and the apparent abundance of dragonflies, cicadas and other flying insect prey nearby.

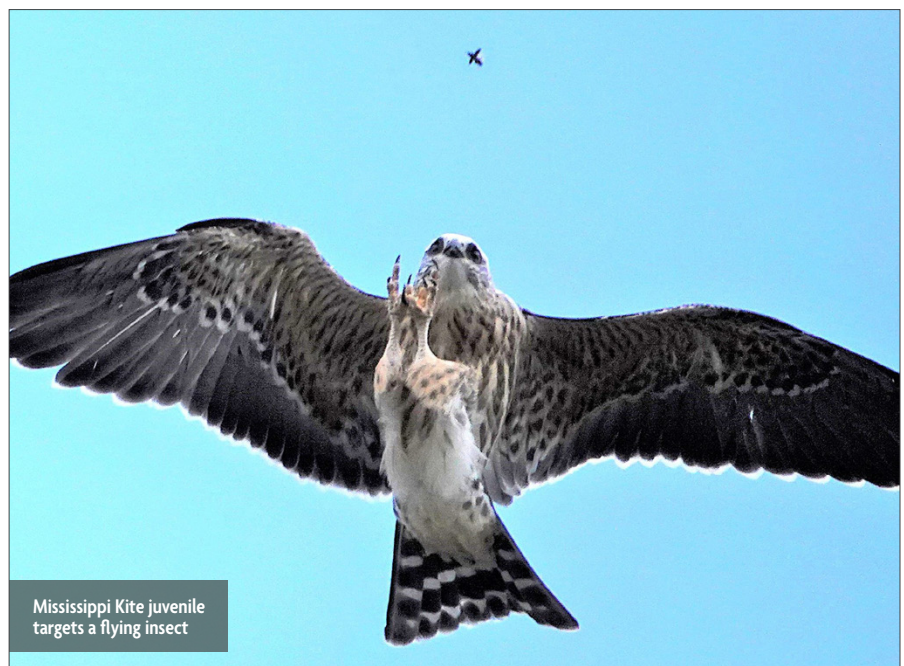
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Black-chinned Hummingbird chicks in nest



Black-chinned Hummingbird feeding young



Mississippi Kite juvenile targets a flying insect



Pyrrhuloxia

## Pyrrhuloxia

Trickily to pronounce (*peer-uh-LOX-ee-uh*) but delightful to see, Pyrrhuloxia is a permanent resident of the desert Southwest and northern Mexico. So when one of these “desert cardinals” (a close relative of Northern Cardinal) showed up at a backyard feeder and a brushy vacant lot in west Denver in 2022, the quiet neighborhood was invaded by birders and photographers. Never mind the snow on the ground — the bird ended up staying for about a month in the dead of Colorado winter. It was warming itself under the Denver sunshine when I photographed it on March 17. It was such a celebrity bird that I visited more than once despite the cold.



Yellow-crowned Night Heron

## Yellow-crowned Night Heron

For several consecutive April-May spring migrations from 2020 to 2023, a Yellow-crowned Night Heron visited Dunkirk Pond in the First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch birding hotspot. After seeing the bird reported so many times on eBird's rare bird alert for Denver County, I decided in 2022 that I had to go see (and photograph) it. I was not disappointed, capturing many images of this handsome bird. In this one on May 6, 2022, it hunts from a branch above the pond. The bird has not returned since 2023. We don't know why, but if one turns up again, I'll return to photograph it.



Long-billed Curlew

## Long-billed Curlew

Four years ago, birding on a mid-summer day at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, I had a right-place, right-time spotting of the largest shorebird species in the US. Making a late migration rest stop on July 10, 2022, this Long-billed Curlew was preening and flapping its wings after foraging along the shore of Lake Ladora. Another birder, **Lisa Pera**, and I had just finished walking the Lake Ladora loop trail when we paused to take one last look across the water from the parking lot. We saw a bird neither of us had ever seen before: a large wader with an impossibly long, curved bill. Quickly, we circled back to the opposite shore, where we got many good looks and close-up photos of this remarkable lifer.

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## Laughing Gull and Sanderling

I began this photo essay with a mistaken sighting that (eventually) was corrected by photographic expertise. I'll end it with two more from the same birding hotspot as the first — and these two were just two weeks apart.

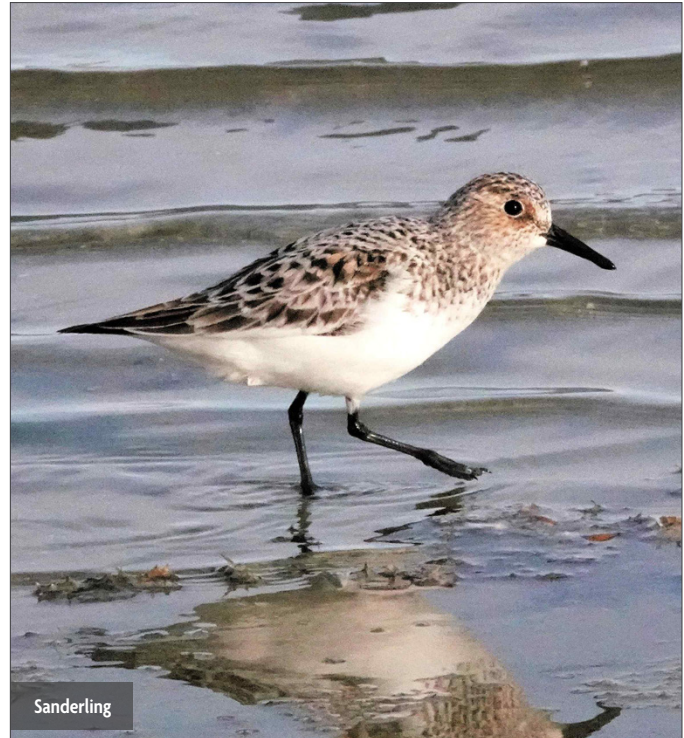
On April 12, 2023, a gull with a prominent black head showed up for the day at Lake Ladora. Seeing it standing in the shallows next to the most common gull in Colorado, a Ring-billed Gull, I figured it was a Franklin's Gull — strictly a migrant passing through to nest farther north, and not as rare as other black-headed lookalike gulls. Through my camera lens, it was smaller than the Ring-billed, but not by much. Its dark bill seemed larger and thicker, too. Clearly, this was a job for Merlin Photo ID. To my surprise, Merlin suggested it was a Laughing Gull, a coastal bird rarely seen beyond Mexico, the Gulf or the Southeastern Seaboard, and certainly not in landlocked Colorado. But there it was, another lifer for me!

Two weeks later, I was back at Lake Ladora, sorting through migrant shorebirds on April 27. I briefly sighted (and photographed) what I thought was a Western Sandpiper, a mid-sized peep in rufous-tinged breeding plumage. Dark bill and legs, too. To be safe, I asked Merlin to weigh in — and once again, I was wrong. Merlin replied with Sanderling, also rufousy but larger than Western, and with a unique trait obvious in my photo as the bird lifted one foot out of the water: Sanderling is the only sandpiper *without* a hind toe!

With Laughing Gull and Sanderling, I had two more examples of Merlin's invaluable help identifying birds accurately when I could show it the photos I'd just taken. On both occasions, I was birding solo. So that I always have a witness, I never go birding without my camera — and I always carry a fully charged spare battery and an extra memory card. That's *how* I photograph birds. And now you know *why*.

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**George Ho, Jr., MD**, a retired physician in internal medicine and rheumatology, joined DFO in 2025. He is an organizer of CommonGround Birders, an informal group at the Aurora golf course and marshlands of the same name. Besides birding, writing, and jogging, he also teaches courses to the lay public on end-of-life issues





*Until the next Lark Bunting . . .*

**HAPPY SUMMER AND  
EARLY FALL BIRDING!**

Hungry American Dipper chicks in nest along Bear Creek almost ready to fledge  
Stephen Hendrix