



# THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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DFOBIRDERS.ORG

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

The last straw – for the birds  
and our planet

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## UPCOMING PROGRAM

I Like Shrikes (and More)  
Dave Leatherman  
November 25

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## PROGRAM REVIEW

Birding Ecuador: the good,  
the bad, and the lovely

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## FEATURED ARTICLE

DFO to help lead 66th  
Denver Christmas  
Bird Count on December 14

## PHOTO OF THE MONTH >>

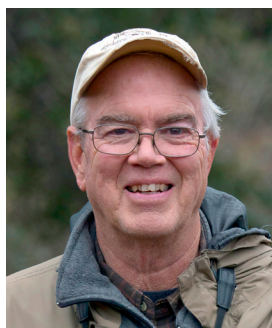
### Cedar Waxwing in Hawthorne Bush

📷 Jim Esten

📍 Denver, Colorado







# I Like Shrikes (and More)

Monday, November 25  
Dave Leatherman

DFO's November program will be mostly about shrikes, a pair of species our elders referred to as "butcher bird." In truth, they are no more brutal than a chickadee that gobbles 300 aphids alive for brunch; they just do their killing out in the open and hang it high for the observant birder to see.

In so doing, shrikes offer insight into their fascinating life style. Career forest entomologist and active birder Dave Leatherman will discuss the cycle of the Loggerhead Shrike on the eastern plains of Colorado, touch on its winter relative the Northern Shrike, and see how you feel about these raptorial songbirds when it's all said and done. Are they butchers? Depends of what's impaled and which of us is the judge.

The evening will finish with screen-projected photos intended to test your identification skills. The teacher (Leatherman) will not call on you but you are welcome to shout out your brave opinions. No guess is a bad guess. Each ID will be discussed as a learning exercise. It's an open book quiz so bring your field guide.

Leatherman was born and raised in Columbus, OH. Interested in nature since childhood, he counts his early mentors as Dr. Edward Thomas and Milton Trautmann. He earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Marietta College and a master's in forestry from Duke University.

Leatherman served as the forest entomologist for the Colorado State Forest Service from 1974 to 2005. He is active in the Colorado Field Ornithologists, has seen 457 species in the state, and been part of finding four First State Records, the latest being a 2016 Couch's Kingbird in Lamar. His passion for the last 30 years has been investigating the food habits of Colorado birds, chronicled in his "The Hungry Bird" column in CFO's quarterly journal, *Colorado Birds*.

7 PM | Free and open to the public  
Unity Spiritual Center of Denver  
3021 S. University Blvd.  
Denver, Colorado

**The Lark Bunting** is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for August. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at [sharontinianow@gmail.com](mailto:sharontinianow@gmail.com). Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be made to the photo editor at [jcesten@gmail.com](mailto:jcesten@gmail.com). The editors reserve the right to select suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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# Birding Ecuador: the good, the bad, and the lovely

**Tim Johnson**

On Oct. 28, about 60 DFO members turned out to hear Chuck Hundertmark and Gregg Goodrich revisit their birding trip to Ecuador in February 2018. Four other companions shared the adventure, and they were led by well-known guide and author Lelis Navarette. Their talk also included descriptions of a pre-trip by Goodrich and Ann Troth to Ecuador's Antisana Ecological Reserve and the Galapagos.

Hundertmark summarized the trip by explaining the title of the presentation. The “good” things were the food and lodging, the companions, and the birding. The “bad” things were endless rain and associated low visibility, long drives on occasionally sketchy roads, and the lack of ability to return to especially productive sites. The “lovely” referred, of course, to the birds themselves. He recommended May as the least rainy month and noted that many types of tours exist to suit individual interests: birding, conservation, nature in general, photography, and so forth.

Ecuador's terrain covers 109,453 square miles, just a bit larger than Colorado. The terrain ranges in elevation from sea level to above 20,000 feet. The incredible diversity of habitats in a relatively small area is one reason why 1,635 bird species have been recorded there.

I can't resist pointing out that Ecuador could be considered the birthplace of the sciences of biogeography and ecology. The renowned naturalist Alexander von Humboldt visited Ecuador's mountains in 1802, and according to

*Continued on page 5*



**Crimson-rumped Toucanet**  
Chuck Hundertmark



**Blue-winged Mountain Tanager**  
Chuck Hundertmark



FROM THE PRESIDENT

# The last straw – for the birds and our planet

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## Dave Hill, President

I was reading *Outside* magazine the other day and was inspired by an article that began by talking about plastic straws in the news this past summer. Author Marc Peruzzi acknowledges that plastic straws are indefensible. He says that an estimated 390 million of them go into our landfills DAILY. Too many of them never make it into the trash but end up in the flow of litter into the environment.

In fact, plastic straws are among the top 10 components of the vast and worsening blight of plastic marine debris across the globe. Nearly 7.5 million plastic straws were found along U.S. shorelines during a recent cleanup research project.<sup>1</sup> So much needless destruction, and from such a needless form of waste. Yes, straws are necessary, everyday tools for the sick and disabled, but most people can get along fine without them.

Sharon Tinianow assisted me with some research on the plastic straw issue. They may be small, but their impact is insidious, especially on the birds we all love to watch and work to conserve. Straws are made of type 5 plastic, which most recycling programs don't accept. Discarded straws break down in the environment to microplastics that birds and fish on which they prey ingest. These tiny bits are everywhere in the marine world: in 59 percent of seabirds, 100 percent of sea turtle species and more than 25 percent of fish sampled from seafood markets around the world.<sup>2</sup>

You have probably seen the images of marine wildlife lying dead on beaches and islands. As birders especially, our hearts break at the sight of an albatross carcass beside what killed it – all the colorful plastic bits and pieces consumed when the seabird mistook them for floating food. Did you know that by 2050, virtually every seabird species on the planet will be eating plastic?<sup>3</sup> It is estimated that 1 million seabirds die each year from ingesting plastic, including straws.<sup>4</sup>

Against this dire outlook, what can we do as individuals? Although change requires sacrifice, it's not much harder than

saying “no” to plastic straws and recycling plastic waste. Choose the right over the easy, and the environmental effects can be minimized. Consider doing the following:

- Support brands that use recyclable materials. Visit the [Plastic Soup website](#) to learn what the numbered designations mean for different plastic products.
- Educate yourself about what goes where when it comes to recycling. Check out the video on the [Recycle Across America website](#).
- Check out your municipality's own resources for waste and recycling. A great example is Denver's [Refuse and Reuse pledge](#).
- Think before you drink! Aluminum or glass containers are always preferable to plastic. Reusable is better than single-use.
- Take the DFO “Bring A Bag When You Bird Challenge” – see Susan Blansett's article in this newsletter and learn all about it.

Peruzzi goes on to state that we need to do a lot more than ban plastic straws. Even cutting single-use plastics is a just a start. He advocates for a green revolution and says that our hearts and souls need to stretch beyond our individuality and find ways to work collectively. We all play a part in this problem – and in fixing it, for the sake of ourselves . . . and the birds.

*Marc Peruzzi, is a contributing editor for Outside magazine. His article, Inconvenient Truths, appeared in the November 2019 issue.*

## Sources

<sup>1</sup> Borenstein, Seth. (2018). *Science Says: Amount of straws, plastic pollution is huge*. Retrieved from <https://phys.org/news/2018-04-science-amount-straws-plastic-pollution.html>

<sup>2</sup> The Ocean Conservancy. *Fighting for Trash Free Seas*. Retrieved from <https://oceanconservancy.org/trash-free-seas/ November 2019>.

<sup>3</sup> Our Last Straw Facts and Figures. Retrieved from <https://www.ourlaststraw.org/facts-figures> November 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Get Green Now blog. (2018). *The Environmental Impact of Plastic Straws – Facts, Statistics, and Infographic*. <https://get-green-now.com/environmental-impact-plastic-straws/>

# Gifts, Grants, and One More Membership Reminder

**Mary Cay Burger and Sharon Tinianow**

Last month we reminded our readers that it is membership renewal time. Annual Denver Field Ornithologists memberships expire on Dec. 31, 2019. You can print the membership form from this newsletter and mail it in, or you can [renew online](#). You can pay for up to three years at a time and your online profile shows when your membership expires.

A DFO membership makes a great gift for the birders and aspiring birders on your gift list. It's a great way to connect to the birding community in the front range. And for those new to birding, what better way to get started? The membership renewal page of the DFO website includes gift membership information.

And finally, consider a year-end donation to the DFO Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund. The fund helps fulfill an important part of DFO's mission: *the preservation of birds and their habitats*. It's easy to donate: Just add the amount you wish to contribute in the designated field online when you renew your membership.

These modest grants provide critical support for scientists and educators whose work contributes to our larger understanding of birds and bird conservation. Last year, DFO members funded nearly \$6,000 in new grants for these worthy projects. You can find out more about past projects and how to donate on the [DFO website](#). Thank you in advance for your consideration.

## BIRDING ECUADOR *continued from page 3*

the journal *Science* (Sept. 13, 2019), it was there that he first recorded in his notes the central epiphany of ecology – that everything is connected. Humboldt also introduced the concept of isotherms – zones of similar temperature and climate that connect mountains across the globe and correlate ecosystems with both altitude and latitude. These ideas have only gained in importance since Humboldt's time.

On this single trip, Hundertmark spotted about 502 of Ecuador's 1,635 species. Among the highlights of the trip, by location:

- **Sachatamia Lodge:** a large variety of tanagers and hummingbirds. The tanager family is highly diverse in Central and South America, representing about 12 percent of neotropical species or roughly 300. The same is true of hummingbirds; about 130 species have been recorded in Ecuador
- **Rio Silanche Bird Sanctuary:** six hours in a canopy-level tower in the rain, but lots of variety
- **Yanacocha Reserve:** Sword-billed hummingbird
- **Cabanas San Isidro:** San Isidro Owl
- **Bella Vista Lodge:** Masked Trogon and White-throated Quail Dove
- **Yarina Lodge:** Hoatzin and five species of owl

Goodrich's pre-trip to the high portions of the Antisana, a 500-square-mile preserve surrounding the Antisana volcano, netted him Andean Condors. His sojourn in the Galapagos was unusual in that it was undertaken from a land base rather than from aboard a cruise ship. Goodrich and Troth joined the rest of the group in Quito, Ecuador's capital city, whence they journeyed to a number of birding hotspots.

If you wish to see a comprehensive list of birds the group saw, lodges they stayed in, and their driving or hiking itineraries, consult the video on the Past Programs page of the [DFO website](#). The presentation consists primarily of about 80 slides, each containing multiple bird images, and a few maps with itineraries. If you missed the presentation, it is well worth viewing.



# DFO to help lead 66<sup>th</sup> Denver Christmas Bird Count on December 14

## Joey Kellner

Everyone is encouraged to participate in the annual Denver Christmas Bird Count (CBC) sponsored the National Audubon Society on Saturday, Dec. 14. There is no fee to participate, so no excuses. Come have a great time and help count birds. Whether you are a beginner, a novice, or an expert, all are welcome!

Here is how it works:

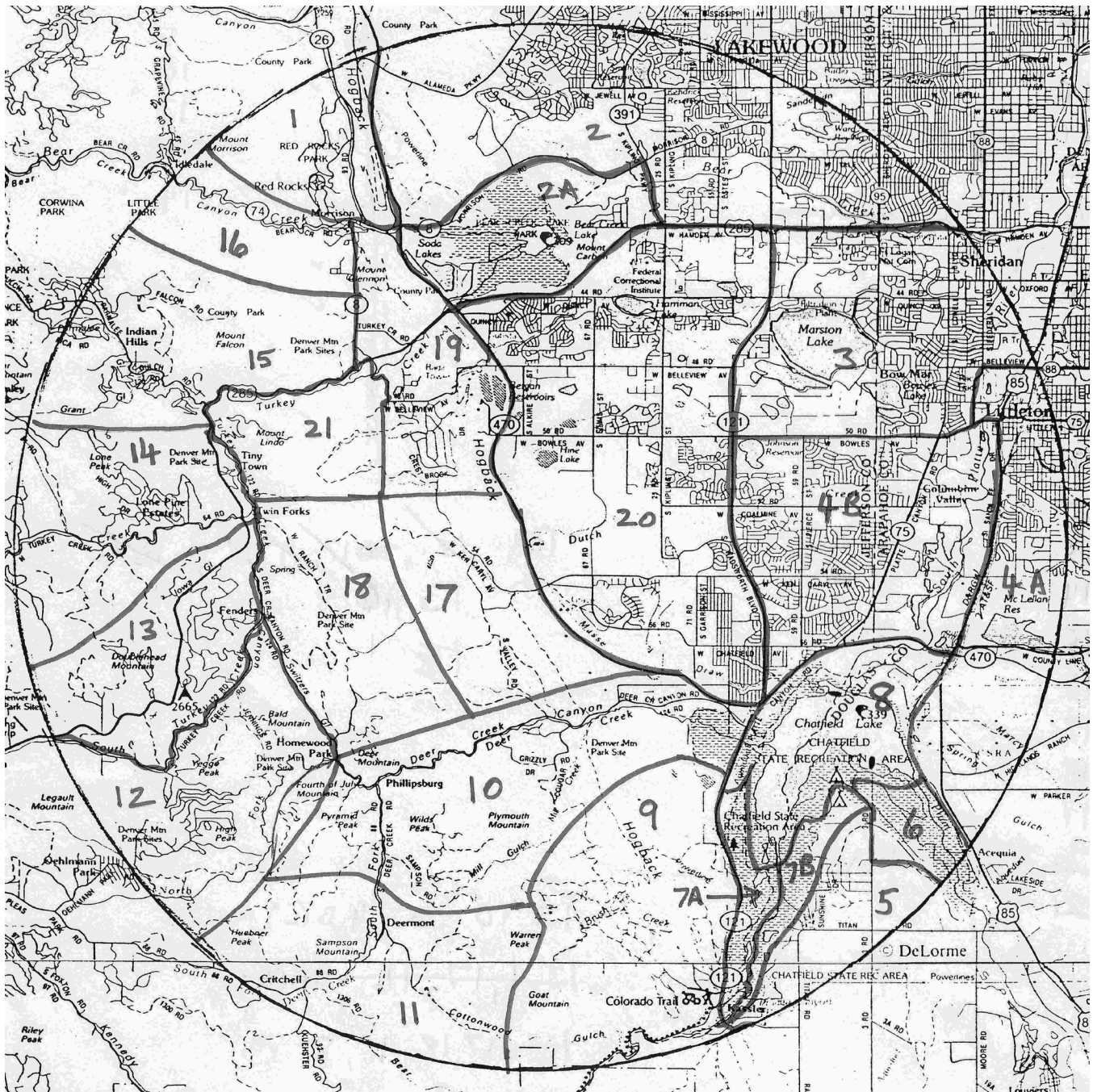
The 15-mile diameter “count circle” is subdivided into 24 “count areas,” each with an area leader and a DFO field trip leader. This is new this year, with all count areas having been set up as separate DFO field trips. To participate, [sign-up online at the DFO website](#) just as you would for any DFO field trip. Alternatively, you can contact the area leader directly using the list below. If you would like to help in an area that still needs additional observers, contact Denver CBC count compiler Joey Kellner by phone at 303-978-1748 or via email at [SWDenverBirding@gmail.com](mailto:SWDenverBirding@gmail.com). Bob Shade is serving as the coordinator for bird feeder reports within the count area, which covers a circle from Jewell and Wadsworth in the northeast around to Red Rocks Park, Idledale, Indian Hills, Tinytown, Waterton and Chatfield State Park, McLellan Reservoir, to Littleton town hall. Feeder volunteers can contact Bob at 303-975-2476 or [wrshade3@gmail.com](mailto:wrshade3@gmail.com).

Area number and location	Area leader	Phone number	DFO leader
1. Red Rocks Park	Dan Stringer	720-854-5911	Wendy Webbings
2. Lower Bear Creek	Scott Somershoe	615-829-3573	Dale Pate
2A. Bear Creek Lake Park	Mary Geder	303-981-8823	Mary Geder
3. Bow Mar/Marston	Bill Hopping	303-809-3053	Mary Cay Burger
4A. Lower South Platte - East	Ed Holub	303-979-2194	Colleen Nunn
4B. Lower South Platte - West	Dean Shoup	720-272-9042	TBD
5. Highline Ditch	Nancy Crews	303-842-2833	Doris Cruze
6. Plum Creek	Norm Erthal	303-917-2596	Christie Owens
7A. Middle South Platte - West	Charlie Lawrence	303-795-9126	Megan Miller
7B. Middle South Platte - East	Urling Kingery	303-814-2723	Bea Weaver
8. Chatfield State Park	Joey Kellner	303-978-1748	Joey Kellner
9. Upper South Platte *	Jill Holden	720-288-4018	Mary Keithler
10. Lower Deer Creek (Chatfield Arboretum)	Michael Lester	201-306-8221	Ira Sanders
11. Upper Deer Creek	Paul Slingsby	720-347-5169	Paul Slingsby
12. Yegge Peak	Cynthia Madsen	303-770-6534	Cynthia Madsen
13. Doublehead Mountain	Amy Davis	303-549-7759	TBD
14. North Turkey Creek	TBD		TBD
15. Indian Hills	Dick Prickett	303-674-0217	Gregg Goodrich
16. Upper Bear Creek	Laura Steadman	843-319-5086	Laura Steadman
17. Ken Caryl Ranch	Tom Bush	303-919-5040	Karen Drozda
18. West Ranch	Bob Shade	303-975-2476	Patrick O'Driscoll
19. Morrison/Willowbrook	Chris Gilbert	804-214-1508	Chris Gilbert
20. Willow Creek	David Suddjian	831-713-8658	David Suddjian
21. Mount Lindo/Willow Springs	Bob Shade	303-975-2476	Patrick O'Driscoll

\* To participate in this area, you must contact the area leader no later than Monday, Nov. 25.

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After spending a day in the field counting birds, all participants are invited to attend the compilation meeting and potluck to feast, warm up, chat with other birders, and find out how the count fared. It is a lot of fun. The compilation meeting will begin at approximately 5 p.m. at Chatfield State Park headquarters, located on the south side of the reservoir near the Heronry Overlook. A Colorado State Parks vehicle entry pass or day use pass is required, so please carpool if possible. Feel free to bring a dish or desert to share at the potluck that follows. Cheryl Teuton will once again coordinate the potluck. Please contact her at 303-912-3341 to let her know what dish you can bring.



# DFO-funded research: Chatfield bird diversity before reservoir expansion

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**Project title:** Bird diversity in Chatfield State Park before implementation of the Chatfield Reservoir Reallocation Plan

**Authors:** Dr. Erin Bissell, Rani Lamberty and Vinson Turco

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***In 2017, DFO awarded \$1,800 to Dr. Erin Bissel of Metropolitan State University of Denver to study bird diversity at Chatfield State Park before the Chatfield Reservoir Reallocation Plan began tree removal, grading and other extensive reconstruction work. This article by the project authors describes the study and its findings through 2018.***

Chatfield State Park provides critical bird habitat in the Denver metro area and is designated an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society, with more than 350 bird species observed in the park, 212 of which qualify as resident or frequently seen.<sup>1</sup> The park is also a popular recreational destination, with more than 1.6 million visitors a year.<sup>2</sup> Located at the confluence of Plum Creek and the South Platte River, the park's Chatfield Reservoir provides flood control for Denver and water rights to surrounding municipalities. With the state's population forecast to double by 2050, rapid population growth will create more demand for water. In response to this growing demand, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers undertook the Chatfield Reservoir Reallocation Project in 2017 to increase water retention in the reservoir.<sup>3</sup>

Increased flooding of parklands because of the reallocation plan could eliminate an estimated 562 acres of shoreline habitat. The affected acreage includes two distinct types of riparian cottonwood forests – younger, dense stands of cottonwood (stand forest) and more widely spaced, older legacy trees (legacy forest).<sup>3</sup> In 2016, we began a long-term study to estimate bird abundance and diversity in these habitats. Both forest types are likely to experience lengthier flooding during spring snowmelt runoff as a result of the reallocation plan, but younger trees may not be as resilient

to the projected changes in hydrology. One goal of our preliminary data collection was to evaluate differences in birds' use of habitat in the two forest types. Our study also offers training opportunities for undergraduate ornithology and botany students in the Biology Department at Metropolitan State University of Denver. Ornithology students conducted the bird counts reported here and botany students collected vegetation data at the same sites.

In 2016, before reallocation plan work began, we identified 10 sites in the stand forest and 10 in the legacy forest for data collection. In 2017, we reduced the number of sites to five each so that we could also collect data at three control sites in Denver Botanic Gardens Chatfield Farms just upstream on Deer Creek from the park. Three additional control sites were added in 2018 at Bear Creek Lake Park about 5 miles northwest of Chatfield. (None of the control sites will experience modifications with the Reallocation Plan.) At each site, a focal tree or stand was designated as the location for bird point counts and vegetation data collection. Point counts began with a five-minute acclimation period, when observers stood silently to allow birds to recover from disturbance caused by the observers' approach. During a five-minute observation period immediately after each acclimation period, two observers identified and recorded all birds seen or heard within a 50-meter radius as well as their estimated distance from the point of observation. The counts began at sunrise and typically finished before 9 a.m. Both observers relied primarily on audio detection, with visual confirmations typically only within 15-20 meters because of obstructions by the tree canopy. Observers conducted the counts individually and then compared notes at the end of the count. Birds recorded by the observers were typically consistent, with

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MSU students assessing  
habitat at Bear Creek  
Erin Bissell

#### DFO-FUNDED RESEARCH *continued from page 8*

occasional exceptions when a bird was not recorded by both. After reconciling the lists, the observers recorded bird species, number of individuals, and their distance from the observers.

Several bird species were commonly observed during most point counts and remained consistent across years. During spring and summer, the bubbly song of House Wrens dominated, and when they were not singing, their chattering and scolding from the underbrush resonated throughout the area. Another prominent song heard during data collection was the “sweet sweet, I’m so sweet” of the Yellow Warbler. We also observed Black-capped Chickadees during most counts, and when the House Wrens and Yellow Warblers left for the winter, the “chicka-dee-dee” and soft whistles of the chickadees remained and became even more prominent. We also observed many other residential regulars to the Front Range, including Spotted Towhees, Northern Flickers, Song Sparrows, White-breasted Nuthatches and American Robin. We also observed migrants such as Gray Catbirds.

Analysis of the 2016 and 2017 data indicated no difference in the number of bird species between the two habitat types but more individuals in the older, legacy sites. In 2018, we compared bird counts with vegetation data and found that the number of bird species is influenced, in part, by specific aspects of the plant understory. Before the reservoir reallocation work began, more bird species were associated with sites that had less canopy cover and lower tree density.

During the winter and spring of 2018-2019, reallocation work removed dense shrub undergrowth, dead snags, and unhealthy cottonwood trees from areas projected to be in the expanded floodplain. Given the bird species observations described above, it is possible that these changes may improve existing bird habitat. On the other hand, removal of this vegetation may reduce food resources and shelter for resident bird species. We plan to continue observing how these changes in tree density and plant understory influence bird diversity and abundance in the affected areas.

We want to thank Denver Field Ornithologists for providing funding for this project. This project could not be sustained without ongoing participation of current and former undergraduate students at MSU Denver, including Gabriel Davis, Amy Dehring-Jensen, Kayla Drake, Kevin Dykstra, Kasi Garcia, and Ricky Martinez, who helped Rani Lamberty and Vinson Turco conduct bird counts. Joel Such, a high school student, also participated in the bird counts. Shania McCain, Ashley Purcell, Colette Ramey, Kayla Bridges Starr, and Trevor Starr helped Dr. Bissell collect vegetation data. Dr. Nels Grevsted and MSU Denver alumnus J.P. DeLong assisted with statistical analyses. We received additional financial support from the Colorado Field Ornithologists and the Marr Fund of the Colorado Native Plant Society. Equipment was provided by the Biology Department at MSU Denver.

#### Sources:

<sup>1</sup> Ornithology A and CL of Ebird [Online]. [Accessed March 1, 2017]. Available from: <http://ebird.org/content/ebird>.

<sup>2</sup> Chatfield Storage Reallocation Project. 2017. [Accessed 2019 Oct 31]. Available from: <https://chatfieldreallocation.org/about/chatfield-state-park/>

<sup>3</sup> ERO Resources Corporation and Tetra Tech EC. 2013. Chatfield reservoir compensatory mitigation plan prepared for the Army Corps of Engineers.

# What birds to look for and where to look for them

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**DFO Birders:** In 2019, *The Lark Bunting* is re-running a series of popular columns from 2009 that may be helpful once again. The purpose of these columns is to give you an idea of what birds to look for that month and where to find them. I have enlisted the help of some well-known birders around the state. We hope this column will be of use in your 2019 birding.

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## Ira Sanders

In December, the average high in Denver is 47 degrees and the average low is 19, both up 2 degrees from 10 years ago. The high is down 10 degrees and the low is down 8 degrees from November, although it has reached 75 degrees and has fallen to minus-25 degrees in the past. Alamosa has recorded a low of minus-42 degrees. Average snowfall for Denver in December is 8.1 inches. The greatest amount of snowfall recorded in Denver was 45.7 inches and occurred from one multiday storm in 1913. By comparison, the March 2003 blizzard left 31.8 inches at Stapleton and 19 inches at DIA.

Many of the places I pointed out last month are still good bets for waterfowl in December. The South Platte River, Barr Lake, and Cherry Creek and Chatfield state parks' reservoirs won't be frozen over in December. Pueblo Reservoir at Pueblo Lake State Park doesn't freeze over and is good all winter. If you want to see **loons**, with a good possibility of seeing four of the five North American species (though all five have been seen in Colorado), good places to look are Marston Reservoir in Denver County, Lake Pueblo, Standley Lake in Jefferson County, Boulder and Baseline Reservoirs in Boulder County, as well as Cherry Creek and Chatfield Reservoirs.

Gulls (yes, I know that is a dirty word to some birders) become more abundant with a greater variety as December marches along. Cherry Creek State Park has had **Glaucous-winged Gull**

more than once and on one occasion, I saw eight species of gulls just at the marina. Lake Loveland, the Larimer County landfill, and Horseshoe Lake in Larimer County can have great variety as can the reservoir that lies between Interstate 76 and the South Platte just north of 74th Avenue in Adams County. More than one **Glaucous Gull** was here on New Year's Day 2009. At times you can get 10 species of gulls at Lake Pueblo at the south marina.

**Gyr Falcon** is a rarity that may show up in winter in Colorado. Last winter there was a Gyr at the Larimer County Landfill for at least several weeks. However, because eBird has been changed to hide dates and locations for certain sensitive species, even if long gone from where they were seen accidentally, I can't tell you the exact dates though it was reported on Dec. 27, 2018. [Editor's note: As of this writing, a Gyr Falcon was reported in the same Larimer County location on Sunday, Nov. 3 and was seen again Nov. 4 and 5.] The area around the Rawhide power plant, north of Ft. Collins can also be a good area to check, but one could be found anywhere on the eastern plains if there is a southward eruption of this impressive falcon, the largest in the world. You also can't rule out the mountains, either, as one was seen at Walden Reservoir in Jackson County from Nov. 5 to Dec. 24, 2006.

**Snow Bunting** is another rarity that may be found on the eastern plains or in the mountains. These birds like the edge of lakes and reservoirs as evidenced by sightings at Jackson Lake State Park in Morgan County, Prewitt State Wildlife Area in Washington and Logan counties, Pueblo Lake near the dam and, in 2008, at Antero Reservoir in Park County. When you encounter flocks of **Horned Larks** on the prairies, scan for birds with large white wing patches and, if you see it, you have your Snow Bunting.

**Long-eared Owls** are another visitor that is easier to find starting in December. The Russian olives at Jackson Lake State Park annually host these owls and they have also been seen at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR and Barr Lake State Park. If you are feeling very hardy, Guanella Pass above Georgetown is a spot to look for **White-tailed Ptarmigan** in their snow-white winter plumage. Look under willows and for signs of them in the droppings and tracks they leave. Ptarmigan can actually gain weight over the winter by feeding on willow buds. The paving project over Guanella Pass was completed in 2015 so access is easy if the road isn't closed by snow.

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# Introducing the DFO Bring-a-Bag-When- You-Bird Challenge

## Susan Blansett

After a recent experience on a DFO field trip, an idea came to me. What if we all picked up the trash that we inevitably come across while birding? Removing cans, cups, plastic bags, fishing line and other detritus from natural areas will help preserve the wildlife we treasure. I imagine that many of you already do this, so let's "up our game" with a challenge.

Here are the details:

- This is a TOTALLY VOLUNTARY challenge – for individual DFO members participating in field trips – and is NOT suggested in any way as a responsibility of trip leaders!
- Keep a garbage bag in your backpack or pocket whenever you go birding.
- When out in the field, pick up trash you observe along the trail as you bird.
- Take a photo of yourself (and your mates, if others help) with the filled bag o' rubbish, before depositing the bag in a suitable receptacle.
- Email the photo to the administrator/person in charge of the trail, park or other location where you birded (it's easy to find most of these contacts online), along with a friendly message about what you did, how much you appreciate that location/habitat, and letting them know the "cleanup was courtesy of DFO."
- Post the photo on the DFO Facebook Page, along with one or two sentences about where you were and who helped. Be sure to note that you did this as part of the DFO BRING-A-BAG-WHEN-YOU-BIRD CHALLENGE. Challenge others to do the same – all in good fun!

There are several benefits to the challenge, starting with the good feeling you'll get helping to keep natural habitat "natural." You will also set a great example for others by performing a public service. You will create goodwill for DFO with those who manage all the places we bird! Finally, you will help DFO "walk the talk" of environmental responsibility and respect of wildlife and their habitats.

DECEMBER BIRDING *cont. from page 10*

**Rufous-crowned Sparrows** can be found at the end of Tunnel Drive west of Cañon City and have already been reported from this location from June through October. Sometimes a **Golden-crowned Sparrow** has been reported in this area, hanging around with the flocks of **White-crowned Sparrows** that winter there. If you go to Cañon City, don't fail to check the pines in the local parks and around The Abbey at the east side of town for all three species of sapsucker. Speaking of which, **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** are annual visitors to City Park in Pueblo. Look in the big pines at the east end of the park. Look carefully, as the sapsuckers frequently sit motionless on the trunk of the tree.

**Bohemian Waxwings** can be incredible during invasion years. Chatfield State Park has had hundreds in the campgrounds and you need to look anywhere there are fruit or crabapples on trees, like in and around Greenlee Preserve in Boulder County. Make sure you check all waxwings for the cinnamon undertail coverts of the Bohemian Waxwing, which is larger than the more commonly seen **Cedar Waxwing**.

The annual Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) are conducted during the last two weeks of December and into January. Count leaders are always looking for more help in covering their areas and novices are as welcome as experts at all counts. Be sure to read the article elsewhere in this newsletter about the DFO count being held on Saturday, Dec. 14.



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# DFO Board begins strategic planning effort

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The Denver Field Ornithologists Board of Directors met on Oct. 5 to begin creating a strategic plan for our organization that will guide our activities through December 2022. At the all-day retreat, professional facilitator Laureen Trainer guided board members through a series of discussions that led to the adoption of four overarching goals:

## **Integrate conservation in everything we do**

- Determine what conservation means to DFO, given that we are a birding organization, our primary focus is the front range of Colorado, and we provide ornithological expertise in an urban area
- Develop a process for taking positions on conservation issues and communicate those positions to members and nonmembers
- Determine how DFO as an organization will “walk the talk” of conservation through policies we adopt and practices we model

## **Attract new members, especially those ages 18-55 and families**

- Develop a membership committee of at least four members who will elect a membership chair
- Create new membership categories based on feedback from the recent member survey
- Roll out projects, field trips and programs to engage new members

## **Improve and enhance the quality of member experience**

- Develop programs and workshops that are relevant to today's audiences
- Provide the necessary leadership skills training for field trip leaders and workshop leaders
- Expand the diversity of field trips offered

## **Establish meaningful partnerships with like-minded organizations to further bird conservation and enhance the quality of membership experience**

- Identify potential partners, partnerships, and contacts
- Identify the events, issues, and circumstances where partnership is desirable or essential
- Develop a process for evaluating potential/real partnership opportunities

The discussions that led to these goals were informed in part by responses to a recent member survey. These goals seek to build on what DFO now does well. The next step is for the board and DFO committees to create plans to complete this vital work over the next three years. One of the keys to implementing goals successfully is to add new members to existing committees and create new committees where needed. That means lots of new volunteer opportunities for all DFO members in the coming year. If you are interested in being a part of this exciting future for DFO, please fill out the form on the [volunteer page of the DFO website](#). Or, contact any member of the DFO Board to express your interest. A list of board members appears in every issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Many thanks to the committee that planned the board retreat. Susan Blansett led the planning effort, assisted by Dave Hill, Debbie James, Bea Weaver, Karen von Saltza, Bill Turner and Sharon Tinianow.

## **Welcome to new DFO members:**

Karen Bellina, Denver; John-Edd Brown, Denver; Virginia Dickinson, Denver; Kathy Holland, Centennial; Deborah Lind, Englewood; Donna Mangum, Aurora; Sofia Aguilar and Michele Ostrander, Denver; Ron Schneider and Celia Schneider, Castle Rock; Mort Wegman-French, Boulder; Lyn and Warren Wickelgren, Denver

## **Thank you for your contribution to the Research, Education, and Conservation Grant Fund:**

Judy and Rick Creswell, Sonja and Grace Hahn, Sue Hall, Roy Hohn, Kathy Holland, Tim and Candice Johnson, Deborah Lind, Ron Schneider and Celia Schneider

# Speciation speculation: Which species might split next?

## Chris Goulart

Almost 10 years ago, the ornithologist, author and bird illustrator David Allen Sibley published a blog that detailed his predictions for the next 10 species “splits” – the annual species checklist updates from the American Ornithologists’ Union’s North American Checklist Committee (NACC). This committee reviews speciation within avifauna – the formation of new and distinct bird species – in the Western Hemisphere and makes determinations about which bird groupings are designated as species, sub-species, or races. The group also determines common naming conventions and accepts scientific names. Each year, bird listers (and I do realize that not all birders are listers) anxiously await the checklist’s release.

Ten years later, we find that four of Sibley’s predicted splits came true:

1. Eastern and Mexican Whip-poor-will
2. Pacific and Winter Wren
3. The Xantus’s Murrelet split into Scripps’s Murrelet and Guadalupe Murrelet
4. The Western Scrub-jay split into Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jay and California Scrub-Jay

His other six predicted splits (Yellow-rumped Warbler, White-breasted Nuthatch, Willet, Spruce Grouse, Marsh Wren, and Fox Sparrow) did not occur. In addition, Sibley mentioned other possible splits including Curve-billed Thrasher (Eastern and Western), Eastern Meadowlark (Eastern and Lillian’s), Red Crossbill (which actually did have a split last year with designation of the Cassia Crossbill as a separate species), and Savannah Sparrow (Continental and Belding’s).

I agree with Sibley that all these splits are likely to occur within the next decade. In the interest of adding my own thoughts to the mix, I humbly submit for your review my thoughts for the next ten species splits.

### 1. Red-tailed Hawk and Harlan’s Hawk

Harlan’s was actually considered a separate species from the Red-tailed Hawk until 1974, when the committee lumped them back together again. The Red-tailed Hawk is one of the most morphologically diverse birds in North America. In fact, Clark stated that morphological differences between Harlan’s and Red-tailed are greater than any other subspecies in the entire family Accipitridae.<sup>1</sup> Among other key differences:

- There is only limited cross-breeding at the geographical zone of intergradation
- Juvenile Red-tailed Hawks look significantly different than the adults, while juvenile Harlan’s Hawks look almost identical to adults
- Harlan’s leg feathers extend almost all the way down the leg, unique among Red-tailed subspecies, and
- All Harlan’s Hawks are entirely migratory, also unique among subspecies

### 2. Red-Shouldered Hawk, Eastern and Western sub-species

The eastern and western subspecies of Red-shouldered Hawk have been reproductively separate for at least 150,000 years, with no gene flow between populations. Today, the western subspecies is smaller than all eastern subspecies, and it exhibits variations in call and hunting behavior. Finally, the Western subspecies has more red on the shoulders, more barring on the breast and generally wider bands on the tail. The young of western birds appear more like the adults at a much earlier age and almost seem to lack a juvenile stage after their first full molt. According to the Global Raptor Information Network, “Using both mitochondrial and nuclear genes, Hull et al.<sup>2</sup> found significant population distinction between Eastern (B. l. lineatus/alleni/texanus) and Western (B.l. elegans) subspecies.”

### 3. Northern Pygmy-Owl and Mexican Pygmy-Owl

Although there are seven subspecies of Northern Pygmy Owl, they are typically arranged into two groups based on vocalization and size. The Californicus group includes the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Slope subspecies. The Gnoma group includes birds in extreme Southeast Arizona and Mexico.<sup>3</sup> Their vocalizations also differ, with Californicus subspecies delivering single-note hoots more slowly and Gnoma subspecies delivering much more rapid double hoots.<sup>4</sup> Also, the Gnoma owls in SE Arizona and Mexico tend to be smaller and with shorter wings than the more northerly Californicus owls.

### 4. Eastern and Western Warbling Vireo

There are two clearly discernable subspecies of Warbling Vireo: Eastern Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus gilvus*) and Western Warbling Vireo (*V. g. swainsoni*). Some taxonomists actually break up the species into seven subspecies! But according to *Birds of North America*, the eastern and western races “differ in overall size, *gilvus* averaging larger than *swainsoni* in bill size (depth and length), wing chord, and mass.” In fact, the western subspecies is 25 percent smaller than the eastern. Also, Barlow noted in 1999 that *swainsoni* has a choppy song with more breaks, highs and lows.<sup>5</sup>

*Continued on page 14*

### 5. Mexican Duck and Mallard

Some rogue citizen scientists at ebird ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)) have already elevated the Mexican Duck to full species status. Genetic evidence does suggest that the Mexican is more closely related to the Black Duck and Mottled Duck than to the Mallard.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the Mallard but like the Mottled, the Mexican Duck is not sexually dimorphic.

### 6. Great Blue Heron and Great White Heron

The Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) is split into as many as 10 subspecies, but the Great White Heron (*Ardea herodias occidentalis*) is the most distinct. The *occidentalis* subspecies is uniformly white with a very yellow bill that has little if any gray on it. This subspecies is found in South Florida including the Keys, and on Cuba, Jamaica, other islands in the Northern Caribbean, and the Yucatan. Although hybrids between Great White and Great Blue are known in Florida, the subspecies' assertive mating has exceptionally high nesting occupancy with members of the same subspecies, avoiding interbreeding in most cases. Also, in Florida the Great White and Great Blue tend to mate at different times.<sup>7</sup>

### 7. Eastern Bluebird and Azure Bluebird

Of the seven known subspecies of Eastern Bluebird, the predominant form lives in the eastern U.S. and Canada, while all others are in the American Southwest and Central America. The eastern subspecies' greatly enhanced coloration and longer and narrower bill separate it from all the others. Those six southern and western subspecies have overlap, but there have been no known pairings with have the eastern. In Arizona, the Azure subspecies has different coloration (less bright blue and browner sides and cheeks) and behavior (completely non-migratory). Song difference has not yet been documented.

### 8. Purple Martin, Interior Martin and Western Martin

The three subspecies of Purple Martin appear to have reproductive isolation. The classic eastern Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) is in the East while the *P.s. hesperia* subspecies inhabits the American Southwest and western Mexico and *P.s. arboricola* is in the mountains of the West. They differ morphologically, too: *arboricola* is the largest, *hesperia* is whiter underneath and paler overall, and both *arboricola* and *hesperia* do not require human interventions for nesting.

### 9. Yellow Warbler, Mangrove Warbler, and Golden Warbler

The Mangrove Warbler is considered a Yellow Warbler subspecies that lives in far south Texas and eastern Mexico. The Mangrove male has a completely tan/rufous head, and the

subspecies breeds only in coastal mangrove forests and does not migrate. The Golden is a non-migrating Yellow Warbler subspecies found on Caribbean islands and occasionally in far South Florida and the Florida Keys. The male has a dark brown cap and significantly darker brown streaking on the breast. Reproductive isolation of all three subspecies has been clearly demonstrated.

### 10. Brown Creeper and Mexican Creeper

In a January 2011 posting on his Sibley Guides website, Sibley makes a valid argument for treating the Brown Creeper as more than one species. According to research conducted by Manthey et al. in 2011, the species' genetic profile supports a division into four species: Eastern, Interior, Pacific and Central American.<sup>8</sup> In North America this would roughly follow the profile of the sapsuckers and the Solitary Vireo clade.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, a few other species that might well be split in the coming years: Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Southwestern Cuckoo; Indigo Bunting and Desert Bunting; Swainson's Thrush and Medville Thrush.

#### Sources:

<sup>1</sup> Clark, W (2014) Global Raptor Information Research [http://www.globalraptors.org/grin/researchers/uploads/155/harlansplumagesdifferrev2-14\\_11.pdf](http://www.globalraptors.org/grin/researchers/uploads/155/harlansplumagesdifferrev2-14_11.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Hull, et Al. (2008). "Comparative phylogeography and population genetics within *Buteo lineatus* reveals evidence of distinct evolutionary lineages." *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 49: 988–996

<sup>3</sup> Holt, Denver and Petersen, Julie L. (2000). "Northern Pygmy-Owl." *Birds of North America* (<https://birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/species/nopowl/introduction>)

<sup>4</sup> König, C. (1994). "Biological patterns in owl taxonomy, with emphasis on bioacoustical studies on neotropical Pygmy (*Glaucidium*) and Screech owls (*Otus*)." In *Raptor Conservation Today*, edited by B. U. Meyburg and R. D. Chancellor, 1-19. Berlin: Pica Press.

<sup>5</sup> Society, National Geographic. (1999). *Field guide to the birds of North America*. 3rd ed. Washington, D.C: Natl. Geogr. Soc.

<sup>6</sup> Lavretsky, P., J. M. Dacosta, B. E. Hernández-Baños, A. Engilis, Jr., M. D. Sorenson, and J. L. Peters (2015). "Speciation genomics and a role for the Z chromosome in the early stages of divergence between Mexican Ducks and Mallards." *Molecular Ecology* 24 (21):5364-5378. doi: 10.1111/mec.13402.

<sup>7</sup> McGuire, H.L., Taylor, S.S. & Sheldon, F.H. (2019). "Evaluating the taxonomic status of the Great White Heron (*Ardea herodias occidentalis*) using morphological, behavioral and genetic evidence." *The Auk*, 136(1):uky010.

<sup>8</sup> Manthey, J. D., J. Klicka, and G. M. Spellman. (2011). "Cryptic diversity in a widespread North American songbird: Phylogeography of the Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*)." *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 58:502–512.

<sup>9</sup> Moore, Nick (Fall 2016). "A Closer Look at Colorado's Brown Creepers." *Colorado Birds*, Colorado Field Ornithologists Volume 50 #4



# DECEMBER FIELD TRIPS

Register for DFO field trips on the website or contact the leader directly. Bring your own binoculars, water, snacks and/or lunch, insect repellent, and sunscreen. Dress for the weather. Directions and detailed descriptions of each trip can be found on the website. January field trips will appear on the website on December 1. Please be considerate and delete your reservation if you are unable to attend a trip for which you have registered.

## **First Creek at RM Arsenal Sunday, December 1**

**7:00 AM - 11:30 AM**

Patrick O'Driscoll  
Email: patodrisk@gmail.com  
Phone: 303-885-6955  
Trail Difficulty: Moderate

Start the final month of 2019 with the winter birds of First Creek. Expect lots of raptors (hawks, eagles, falcons), some cold-season songbirds (solitaires, juncos), waterfowl and First Creek's year-round regulars.

## **North-Central Colorado Monday, December 2**

**6:30 AM - 4:00 PM**

John Malenich & David Suddjian  
Email: john.malenich@comcast.net  
Phone: 303-359-9456  
Trail Difficulty: Moderate  
Maximum Participants: 12

We will bird a variety of locations along the Northern Front Range in Boulder, Larimer and/or Weld Counties seeking interesting waterbirds, raptors, and landbirds of the late fall season.

## **Annual Barrow's Goldeneye Count to Silverthorne Wednesday, December 4**

**7:30 AM - 5:30 PM**

Paul Slingsby  
Email: paslingsby@comcast.net  
Phone: 720-347-5169  
Trail Difficulty: Easy  
Maximum Participants: 12

We will count Barrow's Goldeneyes and other birds at the Silverthorne water treatment plant and then drive to Hot Sulphur Springs (rosy-finches), Lake Granby, Shadow Mountain Lake, and Grand Lake. Spotting scopes, binoculars, and 2-way radios will be useful.

## **Park County Explorations Tuesday, December 10**

**6:30 AM - 3:00 PM**

David Suddjian  
Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com  
Phone: 831-713-8659  
Trail Difficulty: Moderate  
Maximum Participants: 8

This trip will visit northeastern and northern Park County, seeking rosy-finch flocks and other winter mountain specialties in forest and open habitats, and in towns. Contact the leader.

## **Denver Christmas Bird Count Saturday, December 14**

**Times and locations and leaders vary**

Full listing in the CBC article in this newsletter and on the Field Trip registration page on the DFO website. All are welcome to join in this effort! A meeting to compile results and a potluck will follow this fun day in the field counting birds.

## **Southwestern Metro Area Monday, December 16**

**7:00 AM - 1:00 PM**

David Suddjian  
Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com  
Phone: 831-713-8659  
Trail Difficulty: Easy  
Maximum Participants: 8

This will be a Monday morning post-Denver CBC exploration to seek and enjoy some of the good birds found on Saturday's count, hopefully including some rare species. And maybe we'll find something new.

## **South Platte Park Friday, December 27**

**2:30 PM - 5:30 PM**

David Suddjian  
Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com  
Phone: 831-713-8659  
Trail Difficulty: Moderate  
Maximum Participants: 8

This late afternoon-to-sunset trip will focus on South Platte Park Reservoir and the nearby areas of South Platte Park. We should enjoy a nice variety of waterbirds, and may have an opportunity to study gulls at the reservoir. Plan to walk about 2 miles on snowy paths. Bring a spotting scope if you have one.

## **Southwestern Metro Area Monday, December 30**

**8:30 AM - 12:30 PM**

David Suddjian  
Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com  
Phone: 831-713-8659  
Trail Difficulty: Easy

This will be a short morning outing to celebrate our DFO field trip year, visiting 2-3 locations with fun birds, maybe some new rare bird. We will conclude with lunch at Tacos Selene at 5924 S Kipling Pkwy, Littleton.

## Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

Join online at <https://dfobirds.org>, or by mail.

**DFO memberships expire Dec. 31;** valid for the next year if paid after Oct. 1.

DFO provides grants to individuals or organizations whose mission includes ornithological research, education, and conservation.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Annual family membership (electronic <i>The Lark Bunting</i> )	\$	25
Annual family membership (printed <i>The Lark Bunting</i> )	\$	60
Student membership (age ≤ 26)	\$	10
Research, Education, & Conservation Grant Fund donation	\$	_____

Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Email (legible) \_\_\_\_\_

**(Must include for electronic *The Lark Bunting*)**

Check payable to DFO and send to:  
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Englewood, CO 80111-5660

