



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

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Black-legged Kittiwake

📷 Susan Rosine

📍 Chatfield State Park
Jefferson County





FROM THE PRESIDENT

It's December already! . . . Wait — what? January?

Susan Blansett

I don't know where 2021 has gone, but I know I'm looking forward to 2022 . . . just as soon as we get through December. Right?

Yes, the date on the cover of this issue of *The Lark Bunting* (and at the bottom of each page) reads "JANUARY 2022." Like monthly magazines on newsstands, our Denver Field Ornithologists newsletter publishes a few weeks early. We do this not so much for "shelf life" but simply to be as forward-looking as possible.

But we also know you're likely to read this in December, so I know what's first on my list of things to talk about this issue: the **Denver Christmas Bird Count** on Dec. 18, 2021, the last best thing of the DFO year! YOU are missing out if you haven't participated in this end-of-year event, which is coordinated through DFO's online field trip registration system.

So, I urge you first to check out our updated story about this annual effort on page 10 of this issue. Then, go to the [DFO Field Trip page](#) and sign up for one of the 24 Christmas Count trips across suburban southwest Denver.

Need more encouragement? Here are my **Top 5 reasons to join the Denver CBC**:

5. Stake out a habitat you've never birded before with really good birders
4. "Community science" may *sound* dorky, but trust me —it's fun and a hoot
3. As warm as it's been lately, you may not even need your winter gear
2. A new life-list bird could be in it for you. It has been known to happen

and (*drumroll, please*) the **No. 1 reason to join the Denver CBC**:

1. To show CBC coordinator and DFO bird whisperer **Joey Kellner** some LOVE! Joey has worked his tailfeathers off, and they're not that big to begin with!

Still looking forward, here's the second thing I eagerly anticipate in the new year: More monthly Zoom programs that help DFO reach larger audiences. Yeah! The 2021 program season (January through April, and August through November) ended as it started, with large turnouts via Zoom. (*What pandemic?*) Expect a repeat!

DFO Program Manager **Bill Turner** has cooked up a terrific lineup of speakers for January through April (check out those coming attractions in our program preview feature beginning on page 6 of this issue). And remember: You can watch most of DFO's previous speakers if you can't catch them in real time by clicking over to the Past Programs archive on the [DFO website](#). How cool is *that*?

Next, I'm looking forward personally to a long-anticipated trip in February 2022 to [Sax Zim Bog](#), northern Minnesota's winter haven for Great Gray Owls and Northern Hawk Owls, among other elusive species in those frozen northern latitudes. What lengths won't we go to for exciting birds of prey, am I right?

Fourth, I look forward in spring 2022 to climbing Dinosaur Ridge to join DFO's **Dave Hill** and our intrepid crew of [HawkWatch](#) community science volunteers again, starting in mid-March. Hiking up the ridge helps get me back in shape for summer. And 2021 was a banner year on the ridge, with more than 1,100 migrating raptors sighted, including increasing numbers of Broad-winged Hawks. What will 2022 bring? Come join us and find out! Dave will offer his superlative and fun HawkWatch training in February, so watch the next issue of *The Lark Bunting* for details about learning how to ID birds of prey at a distance. Once you've done it, you'll astound your friends like you wouldn't believe.

Finally, I look forward to more fabulous DFO field trips in 2022, near and far, both as a new trip leader myself, and a participant in trips led by others.

Until then, on behalf of the DFO Board and all who contribute to make our birding organization hum, here's to a fabulous and safe holiday season and Happy New Year 2022!

See you in the field,
— **Susan**



ON THE COVER

Two words stand out in the eBird profile of our “cover bird” this month, the Black-legged Kittiwake: *Rare inland*. So when FIVE of these ocean-going birds (they spend winter out there) are reported at FOUR different reservoirs and lakes along Colorado’s Front Range within a month’s time, birders and photographers — and *The Lark Bunting* — take note.

Lucky for us, DFO member **Susan Rosine** of Brighton captured perhaps the hardest view — in flight and vertical, a perfect fit for our cover — of this little gull with black wingtips that, as the eBird profile also notes, “look like they were dipped in ink.”

“The bird was a lifer for me,” said Rosine, who sees lots of species as a volunteer at the summer/fall banding station at Barr Lake. “I had chased the species last year in Weld County, but never could locate it.”

DFO member **Scott Somershoe**, who made it species No. 269 on his bicycle-only Green Big Year quest (he’s now up to 280!), found Colorado’s first Black-legged Kittiwake of 2021 on Nov. 1. Pedaling to Chatfield State Park on a dreary, 37-degree Monday, he pulled out his binoculars in the Plum Creek delta area on the Douglas County side of Chatfield Reservoir and spied the bird. “I’m shocked . . . I’m stunned. I’m also freezing,” he recalled later in a blog post. “I check my Sibley and Merlin apps to make sure my brain isn’t frozen, too.” One hadn’t been seen at Chatfield since 2004.

When Susan caught up with our cover bird 5 days later, on Nov. 6, it was still at Chatfield, but at the South Platte River delta on the Jefferson County side — and it was now TWO birds. Others had seen the pair, but strangely, when Rosine got there, she had the birds to herself. “The kittiwakes, other gulls, grebes, etc. were coming close . . . and the light was pretty darn perfect for picture-taking. I took tons of pictures.”

The day after Somershoe’s first discovery, teen birdmeister **Cole Sage** of Denver (he of the 405-species Colorado Big Year in 2020) spotted another at Cherry Creek SP. And on the first day of December, ace Pueblo County birder **Brandon Percival** found yet another on Horseshoe Lake at Lathrop SP in Huerfano County.

So, that’s four birds at three places. Where’s the fifth bird at the fourth?

The day after Rosine took tons of photos at Chatfield, she went birding up at Union Reservoir near Longmont in Weld County, and . . . uh-huh. She found *another* one. “Are you kidding me?” she wrote in the “Details” field of her [eBird checklist](#).

Rosine seems to have a knack with rarities. “If you see the (eBird) rare bird reports for Adams County,” she said, “I’ve had three White-winged Doves living on my property since July! I just saw them again yesterday.”

Of course you did, Susan. Thanks for sharing your kittiwake with us.

— **Patrick O’Driscoll**

The Lark Bunting is the official newsletter of the Denver Field Ornithologists. It is published monthly except for two joint issues in July-August and February-March. Submissions of original articles should be made to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Image files of photos of birds or of bird outings should be sent to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com. The editors reserve the right to accept suitable articles and photos for publication and to edit any selected materials.

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DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? **DFO News Notes** is where to share club news briefs, Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, quick-quip tales from the trail, birding life events, and pretty much any other interesting birding-and-DFO miscellany. The Lark Bunting **welcomes your contributions**. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

DFO SHUFFLES MEMBERSHIP, TREASURER DUTIES

The DFO Board has approved something of a three-way swap in club duties among DFO Treasurer **Sue Summers**, Membership Chair **Mary Cay Burger** and club member **Kathy Holland**. Summers, the club's financial officer for the past 6-plus years, was looking to try something different in her DFO volunteerism. Coincidentally, Burger was looking to step away from her longtime role overseeing DFO's membership program. Holland, with the bookkeeping skills to take over for Summers, expressed interest when DFO sought someone to run for treasurer in the DFO election next spring (treasurer is one of four elected offices with president, vice president and secretary). Figuring there's no time like the present, the three approached the DFO Board to bless the shuffle. At its quarterly meeting Nov. 17, the board voted to appoint Holland as interim treasurer (she will stand for election next April) and Summers as Membership Committee chair, effective immediately.

"I love DFO and our mission and look forward to introducing more people to the benefits of membership," Summers said. "We continue to grow, reaching a new high in membership numbers in 2021, I hope to help sustain and expand on that success in future years working with committee members like Mary Cay."

Holland, a DFO member since she retired in 2017, said she has "always liked numbers." Her day job was in natural gas marketing and risk analysis. But she also did payroll and kept the books for two fast-casual restaurants that her "retired" husband operated for about a decade — one in downtown Denver and one in Santal Fe, where they lived at the time.

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Holland, whose family moved to Littleton from California when she was age 8, relocated with her husband to New Mexico 16 years ago and returned to the Denver area 3 years ago. “I had a huge list of things I wanted to do once I retired . . . but once I started birding, I’ve only done one of them.”

Burger, known to most of us for her years of club membership work, has a long DFO past, having served on the board since 2001 and been both vice president and president. A retired pharmacist, she is a skilled birder and field trip leader, and has represented DFO in public outreach at fairs and festivals at Barr Lake State Park and other venues. No wonder that in 2017, she received DFO’s highest honor, the Ptarmigan Award, for her many contributions.

Thank you, Mary Cay and Sue, and welcome to the team, Kathy!

MEMBERSHIP OFF THE CHARTS! HAVE YOU RENEWED YET?

In her final act as outgoing Membership chair, **Mary Cay Burger** informed the DFO Board that total enrollment in the club now stands at 582, with a 21 percent increase in membership in 2021 alone. “This year we have 104 new members,” Burger reported. Here’s the breakdown:

Total: 582 members (572 paid and 10 complimentary)
Family annual (electronic *Lark Bunting*): 551
Family annual (paper/mail *Lark Bunting*): 14
Student (26 and under): 7
Comp (electronic): 7
Comp (paper/mail): 3

Burger said that as of mid-November, members had begun to renew (annual membership expires Dec. 31), with 148 paid up for 2022. “We will be sending out renewal reminders,” she added.

Which is where YOU, dear readers, come in: Have YOU renewed yet?

Whether you want to renew, join, or purchase a gift membership, the DFO website, <https://dfobirds.org/>, makes it easy:

- Go to the Membership page. You’ll be prompted to log in (or create an account if you don’t already have one). The benefits of membership are outlined there.
- Make your selections (*including optional donations, details below*). You can pay electronically through PayPal. You also can use a credit card without setting up a PayPal account, or you can send in a check.

While you’re at it, consider that giving option to donate to either the **DFO Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund** or/and **Friends of DFO**, the club’s general fund.

The grant fund provides thousands of dollars in financial aid each year for research and programs that support DFO’s mission in Colorado. (*For a compelling explanation of why these grants are important, read the guest essay by a previous grant recipient on page 22 of this issue.*)

The Friends of DFO option supports club operating expenses, including all the activities that members enjoy, from monthly programs and *The Lark Bunting* newsletter to the club website with its touch-of-your-fingertips convenience in signing up for DFO’s many field trips.

Thanks in advance for supporting DFO field trips, programs, and more with your membership dollars!

A DFO MILESTONE IN WASHINGTON COUNTY

On a Nov. 20 field trip led by **Diane Roberts** to several northeastern Colorado birding hotspots, Washington County became the 11th Colorado county where DFO has tallied at least 200 species on the club’s eBird list.

The milestone was logged at Prewitt Reservoir. For the record, Washington County species Nos. 200 and 201 were Snow Goose (25,000 of them, more or less) and Common Loon (just one of those).

Which you may ask, are the other 10 counties? Read on for their names and DFO species numbers on eBird:

Jefferson — 309; **Adams** — 273; **Douglas** — 252;
Arapahoe — 250; **Pueblo** — 235; **Boulder** — 229;
El Paso — 216; **Larimer** — 206; **Weld** — 202, and
Morgan — 200.

Welcome to the 200 Club, Washington County!

A vibrant Gouldian Finch is perched on a dark, textured branch. The bird has a black head with a white patch around its eye, a large white beak, and a bright blue ring around its eye. Its body is primarily yellow, with a large purple patch on its neck and a green patch on its back. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

Zooming into 2022: Spring programs on Australia, owls, migration, research

Bill Turner and Patrick O'Driscoll

The spring 2022 lineup of DFO's monthly programs is gelling nicely as we return to evening presentations on a wide variety of bird-related topics. After autumn 2021's first experiment with hybrid in-person/online programs, we will settle in from home this winter and early spring with all programs via the Zoom webinar app.

Look here in the coming months for Zoom registration information and links to upcoming programs, as well as for any updates and changes.

Gouldian Finch
Luke Paterson
NT Bird Specialists



UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Birding Adventures in Australia's Northern Territory

Luke Paterson
Monday, January 17, 2022
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

EDITOR'S NOTE: A logistics note for this month only — Because of a scheduling conflict, this January program is NOT on the fourth Monday of the month, as all DFO evening program normally are, but on the THIRD Monday. Again, this month only.

First up in the 2022 monthly program series is Australian birding guide **Luke “Hawk Eyes” Paterson**, who will take us on a virtual tour of the best birding sites in the tropical Top End region of Australia’s vast, diverse and sparsely populated Northern Territory.

A 21-year veteran guide on birding and photography tours in the Northern Territory, Paterson will explore the Top End’s biodiverse range of habitats. The “NT” is home to more than 400 bird species, including Gouldian Finch, Red Goshawk, Rainbow Pitta, White-throated Grasswren, and the Great Bowerbird, whose unique, altar-like courtship structure Paterson visits in this [brief YouTube clip](#).

A former assistant warden at BirdLife Australia’s [Broome Bird Observatory](#), Paterson is a winner of the prestigious Brolga Award, given in recognition of his excellence as a tour operator. He will join us from Darwin, capital of Northern Territory, via Zoom for the Jan. 17 program. Registration is required. Go to this link to sign up: https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN__ja28H2XEst6V0_J8-FMw2g



Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls

Paul Bannick
Monday, February 28, 2022
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

Join award-winning author and wildlife photographer **Paul Bannick** for a program built on his best-selling book of the same name, *Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls*.

Paul is both the author and photographer of two best-selling bird books, *Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls* (Braided River 2016) and *The Owl and The Woodpecker, Encounters with North America’s Most Iconic Birds* (Mountaineers 2008). Both of Paul’s books were well received. Washington’s State Museum, The Burke, created two traveling exhibits based on his first

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book, *The Owl and the Woodpecker*. His second book received a gold medal in the 2017 Independent Publisher Book Awards' "Animals/Pets" category. Paul's photography won awards from several prestigious photography contests, including those hosted by *Audubon* magazine and the International Conservation Photography Awards.

Bannick followed all 19 owl species in the US and Canada for his book. His presentation includes photos and video of owls in all four seasons on their territories, from courtship, mating and nesting in spring to fledging and feeding young in summer, and then dispersal in autumn and migrations and competition for food in winter. His book pays special attention to four species: Northern Pygmy-Owl, Great Gray Owl, Burrowing Owl and Snowy Owl.

Bannick's photography is found in birding guides from *Audubon*, *Peterson*, *The Smithsonian* and *Stokes* to the *National Wildlife Federation* and several volumes of the *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. His work has been widely published in variety of newspapers, magazines, books and publications in parks and refuges across North America and Europe. His photos also are part of several North American traveling exhibits.

Registration is required for this Zoom presentation. Look for the registration link and updates in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.



A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory birds

Scott Weidensaul
Monday, March 28, 2022
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

The program in March will be a particularly timely appetizer for the coming spring migration. Joining DFO for a Zoom program co-sponsored with the [University of Colorado's Museum of Natural History](#) will be writer-naturalist, bird migration researcher, lecturer and guide **Scott Weidensaul**, author of the best-selling book of the same name, [A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds](#).

A World on the Wing introduces readers to scientists, researchers and bird lovers seeking to preserve global bird migration patterns facing disruption by climate change and other environmental challenges. Kirkus Reviews raved that *A World on the Wing* "belongs in every birder's library."

Another of Weidensaul's more than two dozen previous books, [Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds](#) was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2000.

Weidensaul, a Pennsylvania native now living in the northern Appalachians of New Hampshire, is a fellow of the American Ornithological Society and an active field researcher. He co-directs Project OwlNet, a collaboration of 125 banding and research stations studying North American owl migration. For more than 25 years, he has also directed a major study of Northern Saw-Whet Owls.

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Weidensaul is co-founder of Project SNOWstorm, which tracks Snowy Owls, and is a founder of Critical Connections, which charts migration of birds that breed in Alaskan national parks. He also co-founded the Northeast Motus Collaboration, a network to track bats, insects and small birds via automated telemetry receivers across the mid-Atlantic and New England.

Registration for this Zoom presentation is required. Look for the registration link and more details on Weidensaul's program in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Research, Education, and Conservation Grantees Report to DFO

Multiple presenters
Monday, April 25, 2022
7 p.m. MDT

DFO's April program meeting will be a combination of presentations by researchers who received grants in 2021 from [DFO's Research, Education and Conservation Grant Fund](#). Giving a presentation, leading a field trip, or writing a progress report for DFO's newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*, are options that grant recipients may use to report to the membership about their research and how they used their grant funds.

Look for more details about this evening of scientific insight in an upcoming issue of *The Lark Bunting*.



Come count with us on Dec. 18: Yule love it!

Patrick O'Driscoll

If you're reading this in early to mid-December, the 67th Denver Christmas Bird Count is only a week or so away. Are you signed up yet? There's still time. What are you waiting for? Here's your invitation. Regrets only! Sign up now!

This annual winter tally inside a 15-mile circle of Denver's west and southwest suburbs was started by the National Audubon Society and still operates under its auspices. But it also has DFO's fingerprints — and eyes, binoculars, scopes and cameras — all over it.

The count leader and compiler himself is longtime DFO member and field trip leader **Joey Kellner**. Dozens of DFO members also volunteer annually for this mid-December canvass of species and numbers in a critical corner of the Front Range, from flats and valleys into the foothills.

And since 2019, Denver Field Ornithologists has helped by lending its easy-as-pie online field trip registration system to the cause. So all you have to do is go to the DFO website and sign up for one of 24 count zones, just like you would a regular DFO field trip.

Could it be any easier? As Kellner notes: "Fees? None! So, no excuses! Come have a great time and help count birds. Beginners and experts are all welcome!"

The "count circle" is subdivided into 24 areas. Each has an area leader as well as a DFO trip leader (a required technicality because, with the reservation system, the count is operating as if each is a DFO field trip). Not your ordinary field trip, of course. Participants canvass hotspots and birdy places within their area with one goal in mind: Count every species, and every individual of that species.

To participate, go to the DFO website's Field Trip registration page (<https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx>), choose a trip, and register! You can also contact the area leader (see chart below). If you're not choosy and would like to help in an area that needs more observers, contact Kellner himself (contact information below).

At day's end, all participants are invited in from the field to the compilation meeting where preliminary count results are shared. "Warm up, chat with other birders, and find out how the count fared," Kellner says. "It is a lot of fun." The gathering is set for approximately 5 p.m. in the multipurpose room at Chatfield State Park headquarters (south side of the lake near the Heronry Overlook). *Note: State park vehicle entry pass required. Carpool if possible!*

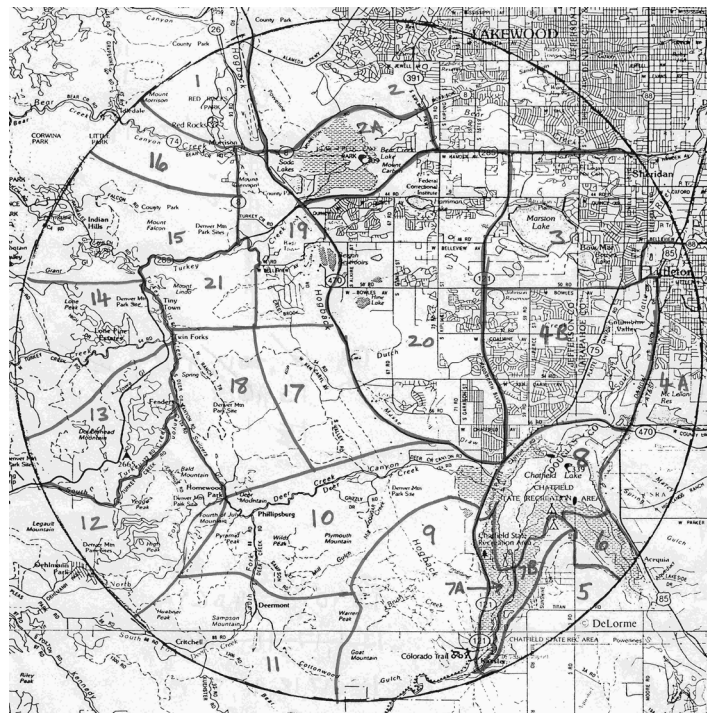
One more note if you attend the compilation meeting. Because of the Covid-19 surge, Colorado Parks & Wildlife requires that everyone wear a mask at indoor meetings in its facilities. "We are all used to that," Kellner adds, "so it shouldn't be much of an issue." Unfortunately, the restrictions did force Kellner to cancel the after-count potluck dinner. But stay tuned for next year's!

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67th Denver Christmas Bird Count, Saturday, Dec. 18, 2021

Count Leader/Compiler: Joey Kellner, 303-978-1748 or SWDenverBirding@gmail.com

AREA NUMBER & LOCATION	AREA LEADER	CONTACT INFO	DFO LEADER
1. Red Rocks Park	Dan Stringer	720-854-5911	Mary Cay Burger
2. Lower Bear Creek	Scott Somershoe	615-829-3573	David Suddjian
2A. Bear Creek Lake Park	Mary Geder	303-981-8823	Mary Geder
3. Bow Mar/Marston	Mark Amershek	720-243-1521	Mark Amershek
4A. Lower South Platte (East)	Ed Holub	303-979-2194	Jill Boice
4B. Lower South Platte (West)	Glenn Walbek	720-560-3671	David Suddjian
5. Highline Ditch	Nancy Crews	303-842-2833	Doris Cruze
6. Plum Creek	Norm Erthal	303-917-2596	Gregg Goodrich
7A. Middle South Platte (West)	Sue Summers	253-678-3721	Sue Summers
7B. Middle South Platte (East)	Frank Coons	970-640-9902	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 Farms)	Michael Lester	201-306-8221	Diane Roberts
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	Karen Strong
14. North Turkey Creek	Ed Furlong	303-956-8321	Susan Blansett
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	Leader Needed	-----	David Suddjian
18. Garrison Gate	Patrick O 'Driscoll	303-885-6955	Patrick O 'Driscoll
19. Morrison/Willowbrook	Chris Gilbert	804-214-1508	Chris Gilbert
20. Willow Creek	David Suddjian	dsuddjian@gmail.com	David Suddjian
21. Mount Lindo/Willow Springs	Chris Sherry	303-807-3645	Patrick O 'Driscoll





DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope: Up close with field trip leader Mark Amershek

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

Name: Mark Amershek

Home city: Denver

Age: 73

Occupation: Oil & gas finance (retired)

How and when I became a birder?

In 2009, I was going with some friends on vacation to Costa Rica. About six weeks before our departure, the tour company called to say they were changing the trip from basically a tourist trip to one specifically set up for birdwatching. At that point, I had never birdwatched in my life. But I told them yeah, I'll still go. So I went to Mike's Camera and bought a \$200 pair of Nikon binoculars and away I went. I learned that you can't really go to Costa Rica and not fall in love with birds, and from that point on, I was in love. I'm a kid from eastern Kansas. I had never seen anything like the birds I saw in Costa Rica. That fall, I took the Denver Audubon beginning birding class with **Hugh and Urling Kingery** and from then on, it was just birds, birds, and more birds.

When and why I joined DFO?

I was taking trips with Denver Audubon in 2010 or early 2011, great trips, probably once or twice a month. And then someone, I can't remember who, told me, "Well, if you want to go on more trips, you should contact Denver Field Ornithologists." DFO had more trips going almost every weekend, and with good birders, too. From that point on, I also started going to the evening program meetings.

First DFO trip I went on?

I can't really recall now, but it was probably one of **Paul Slingsby's** trips. I really liked his outings. Paul used to go all over the place. It could have been Chico Basin, or Pueblo, or maybe up north on the Pawnee Grasslands. That was so many trips ago!

First field trip I led?

I knew **Christie Owens**, who lives up in Longmont and used to run several DFO trips. I'd birded together with her on some of those. In August of 2013, she was running a trip to Rocky Mountain National Park. Something came up very urgently, and she asked, "Would you mind taking over running this trip for me? You know how to handle it, don't you?" I said, "Well, yeah, I think so." Back then, leading field trips was kind of informal. There was definitely no learning curve. If you wanted to lead a trip you just basically created a trip somewhere. By then, I had basically had about four years of birding, but it had got very intense for me very quickly. I learned quickly.

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Favorite trip destination and why?

88th and Platte. 88th Avenue and the South Platte River is year-round multi-birding. I have never struck out — there is always something there to see, no matter what season or day of the week. It was where I first ran into a Barrow's Goldeneye. That remains the highlight of a trip to 88th and the South Platte. I lead that trip at least three, four, maybe five times a year. Whether you're walking north or south, downstream or up, it makes no difference. It's just a great place to see birds.

Best DFO trip ever?

John Breitsch's [August 2019 trip to southwestern New Mexico](#). Fantastic, well designed, well researched, best ever that I've been on simply because of that. John knows what he's doing. He's a great trip leader and a funny guy. The nice thing about the trip, you're in some mountainous areas with great birds in some of those canyons, but when you go just a little bit south, almost to the Mexican border, you get some great out-in-the-desert type environment. And going down, we birded alongside the Rio Grande.

Field trip philosophy?

I have my own style. You could call it the Amershek Method. Way back when, I thought I was going to be a schoolteacher. And so basically, to me, every experience I have is a learning experience. That's my methodology in leading field trips. You have to learn something — but it has to be done in such a way that you'll enjoy yourself. This is not sitting somewhere and listening to a lecture, which I have seen on so many birding trips, where the leader is a lecturer rather than a teacher. And that's unfortunate.

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

I would give my soul to bird in Venezuela. Almost 1,400 species recorded there! But no one goes now, not even the Brits. None of the tour companies I know in the US go to Venezuela; it's too unstable politically. [Rockjumper](#), an international birding tour company, ran a four-week tour there that I signed up for — and then it was canceled. I've been to Cuba, though. I snuck in through Cancún, Mexico. Long story. As we taxied down the runway, the Cubana Airlines flight started smoking. This was an old, old Russian jet. Back at the terminal, we had to wait overnight for a replacement part. But the next morning, somehow they had leased a jet with no name on it or anything, just a big 727 for hire that got us to Cuba. Man, the birding was good, because we had the **Kirkconnells**, **Arturo Sr.** and **Arturo Jr.** Arturo Sr. wrote the book *Birds of Cuba*, so we had the best there was. We saw 25 of the 26 species endemic only to Cuba. If you ever have the chance, go. GO!

The next trip I'm leading?

Technically, I'm leading the Bow Mar/Marston section of the Denver Christmas Bird Count on Dec. 18, but that's a DFO trip just for sign-up purposes. My real next DFO field trip will be a month later at . . . you guessed it! My favorite DFO destination, 88th and the South Platte, on Jan. 18, 2022.

Your most memorable birding trip?

Birding in Honduras for a most of a week in December 2018 — while stranded during *presidential election riots*! I had booked a week-long American Birding Association trip, and I flew in the day before to San Pedro Sula, in the northwest corner of the country. I scheduled a taxi back to the airport to meet the rest of the tour group when they came in on Friday. After breakfast, I asked the woman at the hotel desk where my cab was, and she said, "No, no taxi" and pointed up at a TV in the lobby. On the screen, people were rioting in the streets! The whole country was at a standstill. People cut down trees, dragged them onto bridges, piled up old tires and set everything afire.

Continued on page 14



Amershek, kneeling, on a DFO field trip

IN THE SCOPE *cont from page 13*

About 5 p.m. I got a call from **Liz Gordon** of ABA, also stranded but at the airport: “We can’t get to you, Mark, but we’re working on it.” But after two more calls from Liz Friday night and early Saturday, the 40 other people on the tour were on a 40-minute flight to Guatemala City to salvage the trip. Liz said they were still working to get me out. Later, she called again: A Honduran guide was going to try to reach me!

On Sunday morning, **Alejandro**, one of the best guides in Honduras, arrived in a tiny red something-or-other station wagon. After determining that no US airlines were flying in or out, he said, “You can stay in this hotel for the next 4-5 days, or if you want, you can come with me.” He was driving north to a birding lodge where two American tourists from Virginia had gone before the rioting started. In fact, that was where the ABA tour was supposed to start. “Most certainly!” I replied.

On the way, we passed burned-out convenience stores and bridges, but we made it up to the lodge . . . and went birding! I even got a couple of lifers that day. Over dinner, Alejandro said he’d try to get us over to Pico Bonito, the lodge for birders in Honduras, farther east near the Caribbean coast. Early Monday, the four of us piled into the car and took off. But about halfway to Pico Bonito, the traffic came to a standstill. Alejandro got out to talk to some guys by the roadside. “They’re burning bridges up ahead of us with trees and tires,” he reported. “Now they’re adding more tires to the fires.” So we U-turned back toward the last village we had come through. “It’s getting towards lunch, and I know a hotel with a nice restaurant there,” Alejandro said. “We’ll go out on the deck, have lunch and try to figure out what we can do.”

Ohhhkie-dokie, I wondered to myself.

So we were having lunch, beautiful view of the sea, and Alejandro was on the phone, trying to arrange a flight on a private plane. I looked out and said, “Isn’t that the Caribbean out there?” I looked down the beach. “Aren’t those fishing boats down there?” Alejandro popped up. “I’ll be right back,” he said, running down the beach to talk to a couple of fishermen. Next thing you know, we and our luggage are in a fishing boat, motoring about 40 miles up the coast, where there’s a van meeting us from Pico Bonito! *On the beach!* I spent the rest of the week birding at the lodge: 3,000 acres, gated property nestled between two rivers, great habitat, amazing birds. The Lovely Cotinga was the highlight bird.

The best thing? The guy who ran the lodge, **James Adams**, had a contact at the airport in the town closest to Pico Bonito. By Saturday, he had gotten me onto a plane back to San Pedro, and from there back to the US.



FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

DFO trips: Signing up for memorable moments

*Editor's note: **From the Field with David Suddjian** is an occasional column on topics of birding note by DFO's Field Trip chair. Your feedback and ideas are welcome. Contact David at dsuddjian@gmail.com.*

David Suddjian, DFO Field Trips chair

Every DFO field trip has memorable moments. It is remarkable, but every time we go out there is something for every participant — a special moment of encounter with a bird, or a new place, or even just having a great time with other birders on the trip.

As I write this on Nov. 29, it's just hours since I led a trip to a few lakes and ponds in the Littleton area, and we worked in a visit to the [Denver Botanic Gardens Chatfield Farms](#) to see a male Mexican Duck first seen a few days before. This handsome bird was a life-list addition for everyone on the trip, me included. It was also DFO's 398th Colorado species for the club's state list on eBird. That's a memorable moment!

This trip also happened to introduce DFO's Developing Birder theme, and I had chosen to focus on waterfowl. The trip was similar to any other DFO trip in many regards. We had some birders who frequently go on DFO field trips, and some others who rarely do. Most of the participants were relatively new to birding (one or two years at it); some others had been birding longer.

The response was encouraging for trips with this new emphasis. It filled up quickly once it opened for registration — and it continued to have a waiting list of 4-6 people until the last week before the trip. As some participants shifted around, those who stuck it out on the waitlist moved up and onto the trip roster. In the end, we even had an open spot that wasn't filled.

That's a take-home message: If you want to get on a DFO trip, you nearly always can, if you wait on the waitlist. This is just a common pattern. Many trips fill up quickly, but in the end, there are almost always openings if you're patient.

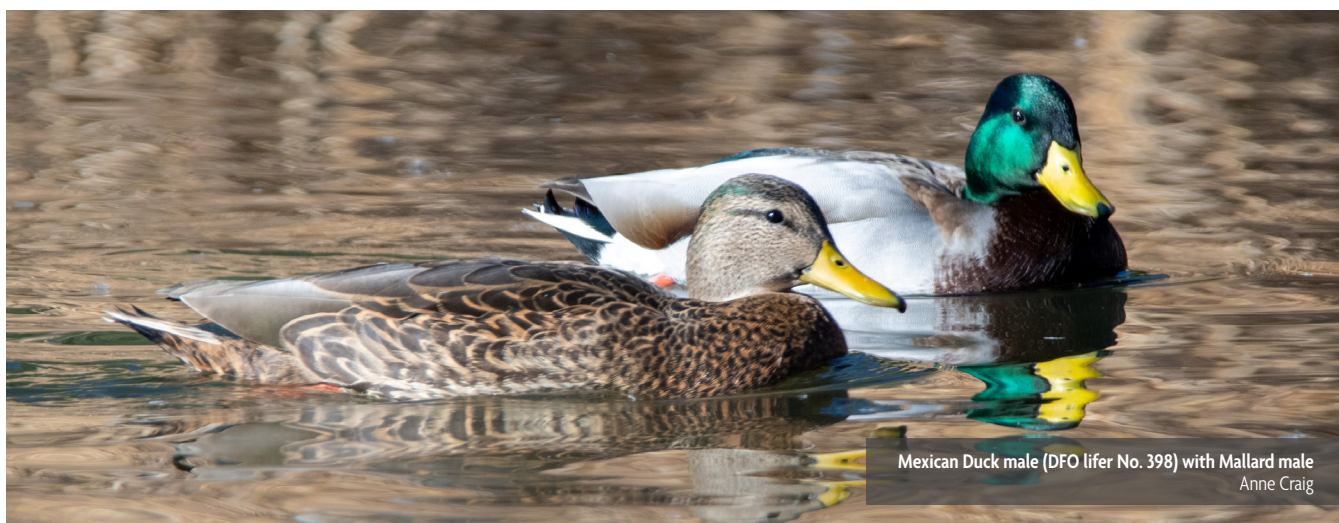
Concerns have been expressed from time to time that a limited number of members sign up for an inordinate number of spots on many trips as soon as DFO posts the new ones on the first of the month. Actually, I see this as a success. I've learned that these "frequent fliers" are seriously engaged in our outings, and they are taking advantage of great learning opportunities to build their birding skills and experience. Over the months and years, these regulars change, as new and developing birders find DFO on their journey.

I have also heard concern at times about high rates of cancellation, suggesting that registration starts too far in advance, or that some birders need to be more discerning about their schedules before signing up. Yes, there is often considerable turnover of registered participants, but this is a freedom that DFO's registration process allows and makes work. There are many valid reasons why people have to cancel. Usually, it's not negligence. Again, the waitlist means people who want to go on the trip almost always get to after all.

DFO is taking two new steps in our field trip registration process that we think will help. First, beginning on Dec. 1, we moved the time when DFO's new slate of trips is posted and available for online registration to 12 noon, not the pre-dawn hours. This allows those unable to leap on it before sunrise a chance to sign up for popular trips before they fill up. In other words, it levels the playing field regarding registration.

The second change will be to move the opening date of registration for most of our trips to 2-4 weeks ahead of the trip date, instead of the current 4-8 weeks. We plan to start this after New Year's.

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Mexican Duck male (DFO lifer No. 398) with Mallard male
Anne Craig

FROM THE FIELD *cont from page 15*

Here's how it will work: Trips scheduled for Feb. 1-15 will "go live" for registration on Jan. 15, 2022, instead of on New Year's Day. The other half of new trips, scheduled for Feb. 16-28, will be available for sign up on Feb. 1. Again, signup time will be 12 noon instead of sometime before dawn.

If a DFO trip requires a longer lead time — such as an extended-day, overnight or multiday road trip with logistical considerations — we can accommodate that, too. Meanwhile, the shortened registration timeframe for all other trips may allow field trip leaders to lead more outings, with flexibility to commit closer to the trip date.

The new year brings the promise of lots of great birds to look forward to on DFO field trips. Come join us! Be a part of what DFO is doing in the field by registering for our trips. You will be signing up for memorable moments.

Welcome to new DFO members

Caroline Armstrong, Parker; Kent Bagley, Littleton; Doug Bridwell, Littleton; Tom Casadevall, Lakewood; Carol Cwiklinski, Lakewood; Meredith Denton-Hedrick, Elizabeth; Dwayne Dickerson, Denver; Leslie Dixon, Highlands Ranch; Julie Grundmeier, Highlands Ranch; Glenn Hageman, Denver; Billy A. Harris Jr. and Linda Purcell, Denver; Linda Hodges, Colorado Springs; Debbie and Steve Kennedy, Aurora; Catherine Long, Erie; Paul Malinowski, Littleton; Emily K. Marchant, Denver; Mary and Charles "Chuck" Metzger, Centennial; Ginger Okada, Westminster; Nancy Oken, Lakewood; Barbara Retzlaff, Boulder; Valentina Roumi, Boulder; Kathryn Smith, Denver; Martha Strickland, Denver, and Sally Swartz and Rob Roy, Greenwood Village

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Susan Blansett and Mark Peyton; Ann Bonnell (mother) and Mary Ann Bonnell; Doris Cruze; Jean and Charlie Curlee; Jim Esten; David Hill; Marjorie Jannotta and Chuck Hundertmark; Judy Lane; Jim Petri and Christie Owens "In memory of Richard Mendez"; Barbara Retzlaff; Bob Righter; Denise and Danny Smith; Mary Ann Tavery; Elaine Wagner; Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele; Michael Wilson and Barbara Nabors, and Scott Yanco

Friends of DFO

Susan Blansett and Mark Peyton; Jean and Charlie Curlee; Julia Gwinn; Billy A. Harris Jr. and Linda Purcell; David Hill; Marjorie Jannotta and Chuck Hundertmark; Jim Petri and Christie Owens; Bob Righter; Valentina Roumi, and Cheryl Siefert

PROGRAM REVIEW

Fishers Peak: Colorado's new backcountry sanctuary for people . . . and birds!

Patrick O'Driscoll

The manager of Colorado's new Fishers Peak State Park, **Crystal Dreiling**, was cautious as she introduced herself to an audience of more than 90 birders at the Denver Field Ornithologists program Nov. 22 via Zoom. "I am absolutely *not* a bird expert," Dreiling warned as she began her presentation, "From 'Crazy French' to Fishers Peak: A New Colorado State Park."

But then she shared survey data about the park's birdlife and offered encouraging words about Fishers Peak's potential for supporting avian inhabitants and the binoculars-carrying visitors who will come looking for them.

For starters, inventories of breeding species on the 19,200-acre site are ongoing. Dreiling said park staff, individual Colorado birders, and a paid contractor who visits "year after year" to survey the park's breeding birds have found diversity. So far, they've recorded five species each of woodpecker and owl, eight warbler species, three kinds of vireo, Ovenbirds and "a number of other species that are breeding on the property or in the area."

That includes an active Peregrine Falcon nest on the park's namesake mountain. Dreiling said its presence will mean an annual "hard closure" around the nest from March 15 to July 31: "We don't intend to let anybody within half a mile buffer around it. We're planning the trails that way so that when (hikers) get to that closure" point on the future trail to the summit, "they can loop back on other (trail) opportunities." She added that additional seasonal closures may be added "as we learn about successful raptor nesting out there."

View the complete video of "From 'Crazy French' to Fishers Peak: A New Colorado State Park" in the Past Programs archive on the DFO website: <https://dfobirds.org/Programs/Past.aspx>

"Out there" aptly describes the park and its future. Fishers Peak is just a couple of miles south of Trinidad and borders the first 10 miles of Interstate 25 in Colorado north from the New Mexico state line. But park planners are developing "a very rugged, backcountry experience" for visitors, Dreiling said, not a "front-country" playground for fishing, full-hookup camping, boating and other such recreational pursuits. She said people already get those and more at nearby Trinidad Lake SP, which she has also managed for the past 8 years.

"From the beginning, I asked the planners that we not re-create anything that's going on at Trinidad Lake," Dreiling said. Those planners are scheduled to deliver the park's master plan early in 2022, and construction of about 20 miles of trails is set to begin in the spring.

Habitat sensitivity maps and studies for the master plan suggest most of the southern half of the park will fall under "most-protected property" status, with little to no development beyond trail construction and the maintenance of a few roads for park upkeep, emergency access and wildfire response. This will allow the park to "balance recreation opportunities and conservation," Dreiling added.

That's in keeping with the landscape. Much of the property "comes to us with lots of contours," Dreiling said. The western half is corrugated with slopes and pinyon-juniper woodlands rising to Ponderosa pine and mixed-conifer forest. On the east side, high-elevation mesas and grasslands trail down and away to the Great Plains. The property was, after all, a longtime ranch, known locally as Crazy French.

Although the site has few streams and no lakes, "we've got a lot of springs and seeps on the property, so there's surprisingly a lot of water in the higher elevations," Dreiling said. Not to mention "the opportunity for great views wherever you go," from slickrock and sandstone boulder fields to high meadows and a large mesa at the park's southern boundary that nearly borders New Mexico's Sugarite Canyon State Park.

The property was purchased for \$24 million in 2019 with the help of The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Lands, Great Outdoors Colorado and the City of Trinidad. Colorado Parks and Wildlife formally took possession in April 2020, Dreiling's bosses, eager to get "boots on the ground" of Colorado's

Continued on page 18

new treasure, pushed her to open some part of it within two months, an impossibility as the Covid-19 pandemic took hold. But Dreiling and her team were able to get a postage stamp-sized portion of the park open by the end of October 2020: 250 acres and less than 2 miles of trail.

Next spring, the park will start building about 20 miles of new trails, including a route up Fishers Peak, a flat-topped rampart with commanding views of surrounding Las Animas County and beyond. Expected to open in another 2 years or so, that trail will be no mere walk in the park — 8 miles each way, with a 3,000-foot elevation gain to the 9,366-foot summit.

Eventually, hikers, mountain bikers and horse riders will coexist on a network of trails, some designated for one or another use. “More mountain biking trails, more trails in general, wildlife watching opportunities,” Dreiling said. Master planners also must unravel the property’s more than 90 miles of interior ranch roads to determine which few will remain for park management use while the rest “go back to nature.” A modest campground and backcountry camping are also on the drawing board.

Meanwhile, mapping of park resources (vegetation, wildlife, cultural resources, reptiles, butterflies and moths, etc.) goes on. Field biologists are surveying habitat where the endangered New Mexico Meadow Jumping Mouse has been found.

Given its current tiny public-use footprint, the park has not drawn many birders yet. Twenty-nine birding checklists have been filed from the “[Fishers Peak SP/Moore’s Canyon](#)” eBird hotspot so far (including several by individual DFO members), with 70 species recorded. With our own planning and imagination, can the first DFO field trip to the park be far behind?



Planner getting community feedback
on visit to Fishers Peak State Park
Colorado Parks & Wildlife

Emails from Frank: Labor of love is adding long-passed birder's checklists to eBird

Patrick O'Driscoll

In the distant mists of mid-20th century Colorado birding lore, **Frank Justice** was one of those guys who keep records. His were meticulous and voluminous: the handwritten checklists of field trips, seasonal counts, breeding bird surveys, bird banding, and personal outings of a prominent longtime birder.

After Justice's death in 1988, his widow and fellow DFO member **Jan Justice** held onto Frank's decades-long trove, which filled filing cabinets, card catalogues, bound ledgers, bookshelves, boxes and a closet. The files are destined one day for the archives of the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. But thanks to an offhand interaction with her stepdaughter recently, Jan — now **Jan Justice-Waddington**, age 95 and a past president of Denver Field Ornithologists — is giving bird researchers earlier access to the data . . . and giving her extended family new glimpses of Jan's own fond memories of birding with Frank.

It began when stepdaughter **Mary Kay Waddington**, Jan's close friend and an avid birder herself, was visiting her hilltop home high above Coal Creek Canyon between Boulder and Golden. Jan had married Mary Kay's father, **Dave Waddington**, a couple of years after Frank's passing. They designed and built their solar-powered aerie in the early 1990s. (Dave, a pioneer solar engineer and 75-year member of the Colorado Mountain Club, died in 2017 at age 92.) The house had more than enough room for the accumulated birding files of Frank Justice, who had become fast friends with both Jan and Dave when the three were outdoors-loving students at the University of Colorado in the 1940s.

"We were in her closet for some reason," said Mary Kay, "and Jan said, 'Oh, look, those are Frank's bird records'" — boxes of bound ledgers, sheafs of marked-up mimeographed checklists, file folders, binders, books, letters and other loose papers, dating from the 1940s through 1970s. Mary Kay's interest was

piqued. "I said to Jan, 'You really ought to enter these into eBird.' And she said, 'Oh yeah, right. Well, if I had the time.' So I said, 'How about you let *me* do it?'"

Adding old checklists to eBird isn't new. Countless thousands of birders have been transferring pre-eBird paper tallies into the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's global database ever since it was invented in 2002. One of Frank and Jan's contemporaries, renowned Colorado birder and DFO member **Hugh Kingery**, resurrected his own innumerable paper checklists, including many from his daily walks to and from high school through Denver City Park from 1947 through 1950. Once added to the eBird database, Hugh's observations recorded the first 80 species on the park's eBird list.

But Frank Justice died more than a decade before eBird was born — even before email. So none of his observations had gone digital. And Jan, retired from teaching fourth grade in Denver Public Schools but still active in birding, conservation and environmental endeavors, hadn't the time to transcribe decades of checklists into eBird. She still kept them close, having shared so many birding moments with him: "I couldn't throw *those* away. They were a part of my life, like a diary,"

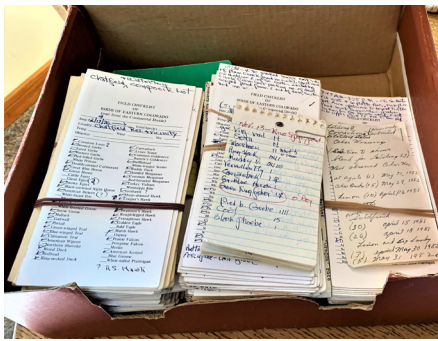
Mary Kay's generous offer meant Frank's 20th-century observations would now begin to enhance Colorado's avian historical record in the next century and beyond. But neither she nor Jan expected a bonus outcome that Mary Kay calls "family history through bird lists."

The first time Mary Kay "shared" one of Frank's newly eBirded checklists with her stepmother, Jan was shocked that it arrived as an email from "Frank Justice." That's because eBird labels and delivers list-sharing notifications in the name of the checklist's original observer — even one who died more than three decades earlier, before email or eBird membership.

Now, whenever one of those checklist emails "from" Frank lands in Jan's inbox, "it brings up memories," she said. And how: A recent one took Jan back to when she and Frank, newlyweds on the Colorado Plains in the late 1940s and early 1950s, were delving deeply and daily into birding as a flatland alternative to hiking and climbing in the mountains above Boulder.

"Reading (that checklist) just brought back the whole setting," Jan began. "I see the lake. I see the road. I see the house we

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Date 5/11/79 Hours.....to.....
Location.....
Weather Clear, 75-80 Windy to 25 MPH

LOONS	Gr. W. Teal
	Bl. W. Teal
GREBES	Cinnamon
Holboells	Shoveller
Horned	Wood Duck
Eared	Redhead
Western	Ring-necked
Pied-Billed	Canvas-Back
FELICANS & CORMORANTS	Scaup
Wh. Pelican	Golden-Eye
D.C. Corm't	Bufflehead
Water Turkey	Old-Squaw
HERONS & BITTERNS	Scoter
Gr. B. Heron	Ruddy D.
Am. Bittern	Am. Merg.
Am. Egret	Hooded M.
Snowy Egret	Red-Br. M.
Green Heron	
Night Heron	VULS, HAWKS, EAGLES
L. Bittern	Turkey Vul.
IBISES	Goshawk
Wood Ibis	S. Shinned
W.F. Glossy I.	Cooper's
SWANS & GEESE	Red-Tailed
Can. Goose	Swinson's
Wh. Fr. Goose	A. Roughleg
DUCKS	F. Roughleg
Mallard	Golden Eagle
Black	Bald Eagle
	Marsh Hawk

PHOTOS TOP TO BOTTOM:

A boxful of Frank Justice's bird checklists

Frank Justice in the field

Frank's 47-year-old spring checklist from Prewitt Reservoir

EMAILS FROM FRANK *cont from page 19*

were in at the time, a little farmhouse 3 miles west of Brush. We would go down from the house to see what birds were at Dodd Bridge, over the South Platte." That crossing today is [Jean K. Tool State Wildlife Area](#), a small but notable stop along Colorado's Interstate 76 birding corridor. "There was usually nothing special, but then some bird would show up that we hadn't seen before," Jan continued. "There was always that suspense, that we would see something new."

In an email conversation about old checklists last September with other birders on Colorado Field Ornithologists' CoBirds listserv, Mary Kay described her eBirding of Frank's checklists as "a lovely way of sharing (Jan's) history — she receives a shared list and tells me wonderful stories about where they were and the kinds of things happening (then) as the lists remind her of them. Who knew that bird lists could provide a way of relating and sharing family history!"

Frank Justice recorded his first checklist in a bound ledger more than 73 years ago. Dated April 10, 1948, it is a street-by-street record of a birding walk he took from 17th Street in Boulder to the Hale Building on the University of Colorado campus, where he and Jan first met as students.

"He was so meticulous about these," Mary Kay said of the oversized, bound volumes that reach from the late '40s into the 1950s and beyond. Opening one on the table beside her, Jan read aloud a Feb. 15, 1953 entry describing a survey visit to a Black-billed Magpie nest: "12 feet above ground, 2 eggs incubating." Given the tangled and impenetrable-ball-of-sticks construction of a magpie nest, their interviewer felt compelled to ask: How could Frank know there were eggs in there? "You climb the tree, you reach in," Jan replied. "What else can you do?"

So many species names have changed in the decades since then that even an accomplished birder like Mary Kay has to hunt for the modern names of species whose old names would stump many birders. One of Frank's mimeographed checklists included Pigeon Hawk (today's Merlin), Holboells Grebe (Red-necked), Water Turkey (Anhinga), Oldsquaw (Long-tailed Duck), and Marsh Hawk (Northern Harrier), among others.

Trickier than updating species names is matching historical location descriptions to the nearest eBird hotspot or the approximate geocoordinates of the place. "You've got to put a point in (eBird) for the exact location. That's probably the most time-consuming part," Mary Kay said. "The checklists start in the '40s and I'm only up to 1952 so far." Frank Justice kept such detailed notes, she usually can get close to the likely spot with online research and maps.

Mary Kay did not become Jan's stepdaughter, of course, until a couple of years after Frank's death. But she had known him since childhood. The Justices and Waddingtons had interacted across two generations, from college pals to young marrieds with kids to ripe old age, in numerous pursuits, outdoors and in. "Mary Kay calls us clones," said Jan.

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A Boulder native, Jan met both future husbands at CU during World War II. She and Dave, a native of Westcliffe, were avid hikers and platonic friends. Frank, from Greenfield, MA, had hiked and written about the Appalachian Trail as a teen. All three joined the University of Colorado Hiking Club, trekking Front Range trails and climbing 14'ers. Both Frank and Dave were Navy men. After the war, Jan and Frank married in 1946 and had their first of four sons while still in school.

Their last semester at CU, “we decided we wanted to take a class together, and we took Dr. Alexander’s ornithology class,” Jan said, referring to distinguished CU biologist and ornithologist **Gordon Alexander** (1901-1973). “We were not really birders at that time, not much beyond robins. But when he took the class out east of Boulder to wonderful habitat with a big heronry, we were just fascinated.”

After graduation, they moved to northeastern Colorado for Frank’s first job as a public health officer. He inspected restaurants and school cafeterias in a six-county region that included Sterling and Fort Morgan. Eventually he rose to run the department.

It was the right place and time to take up birding. Birders had barely glassed that part of the state. Soon, Frank and Jan were trapping and banding birds (even right in their State Street yard when they lived in Sterling), and they did some of the first breeding bird surveys on the Colorado Plains. “We had to bird because we couldn’t climb,” Jan said. They missed the mountains, and when an opportunity opened at the Denver Department of Health & Hospitals, the Justice family moved back to the Front Range for good in 1956.

Now that they were among other birders, “we joined DFO and CFO just after they became separate clubs,” said Jan. She led field trips, mostly to her favorite destination, Chatfield Reservoir (before it became a state park). In 1981, she became president of DFO while Frank was serving on the board of CFO.

Since college, they had remained in touch with Dave Waddington, who with his wife, **May**, had daughters Mary Kay and **Susan**. Both couples liked to square-dance, too. It was after the Justice boys met the Waddington girls in the Junior Colorado Mountain Club that the two families fully reconnected. “My sister and I even dated two of the Justice boys,” said Mary Kay — middle sons **Stan** and **Dean**.

Mary Kay eventually took up birding at Oberlin College, where her roommate was a birder. Back home in Colorado, she went birding occasionally with Frank and Jan. “Frank showed me my first Long-

eared Owl, birding out at Chatfield. That’s my fondest memory of him,” said Mary Kay, who now has, and still uses, his spotting scope.

“Birding was Frank’s escape,” Jan said. “He needed it,” with a high-pressure job as chief of the Denver health department’s housing section. He was also a poet and writer, and he and Jan pursued wild mushrooms with the Colorado Mycological Society. A smoker like so many of his generation, Frank eventually succumbed to lung disease in 1988. (Hugh Kingery gave the eulogy at his funeral.)

“One year later, being a very proper English gentleman, Dave Waddington showed up,” Jan continued. He asked her out on a date to an Audubon program at the Denver Museum of Natural History. Another year later, the old college friends married in 1990 at the Lookout Mountain Nature Center above Golden, and Jan became adult Mary Kay’s stepmother . . . and a good friend.

Besides transcribing the Frank Justice records into eBird, Mary Kay Waddington is a private instructor in the harp and an author on the Suzuki Method in her instrument. She lives in the Englewood house where she grew up. Her stepmother volunteers from home for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, tallying sightings for a Coal Creek Canyon network that observes bears, mountain lions, moose, and of course, birds.

Although at 95 she is well dug in at home with its endless view from 8,360 feet, Jan Justice-Waddington said she still goes birding “every single day — to CoBirds!” There among the CFO email community, she enjoys when Colorado birders post notable sightings. “They’re reminding me of birds I’ve seen,” she added, “and many I have not.”



Jan and Mary Kay Waddington pore over Frank’s birding ledgers
Patrick O’Driscoll

Small grants like DFO's increase fair access for students to do vital avian research

Editor's note: As most DFO members renew their memberships at year's end, we publish this essay by a previous recipient of our Research, Education, & Conservation Grant as a reminder. When you renew, consider a generous gift to help scientists, especially those in college, conduct research valuable to the welfare and our understanding of the birds we love.

Scott Yanco

Participation in scientific research as a college student plays an outsized role in the lives and future careers of aspiring scientists. Those who are able to conduct authentic research during their undergraduate years are more likely to persist in their fields and, thus, more likely to become scientists.

Academic research experience also can make a difference in getting into graduate school, publishing research findings, obtaining project funding and more. Doing research as an undergraduate at Colorado College was paramount in helping me envision myself as a scientist and build the skills to further my career.

Unfortunately, only a few students obtain these important research experiences. Even more problematically, those who identify as underrepresented minorities are disproportionately excluded from undergraduate research opportunities.

While many factors lead to the over-representation of wealthy white men in ornithological research, limited access to formative research experiences for underrepresented minorities is an important one. Many undergraduate research projects require students to volunteer their time. Such opportunities are limited to those who can afford to do unpaid work. This reality often excludes underrepresented minorities.

Although I am not a member of an underrepresented minority, I would have been unable to do undergraduate research without pay. Without access to even small amounts of money to make my engagement in scientific research possible, I might not be writing to you today as a scientist.

This is where Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Education, & Conservation Grants program offers a unique advantage. Unlike many other funding opportunities — including those from many national ornithological societies — DFO's program allows its funds to support undergraduate researchers. While working on my PhD at the University of Colorado Denver, funding for my dissertation's field and lab work came from small grant programs like DFO's.

It is hard to overstate the effect such funds can have, especially at a school like UCD, whose enrollment includes many first-generation, non-traditional, low-income, and underrepresented minority students. Many of them work off-campus jobs, which can make full-time volunteer work at a remote research study site unrealistic if not impossible.

DFO's funding allowed me to pay the undergraduate students who helped in my PhD research. This made a real and substantive difference in who gained authentic research experiences and *how many* of them I could support. The majority of those who participated in my research fit, in one way or another, the exact demographics historically excluded from science. These students assisted in the lab, in the field, and at the computer. They acquired key skills, from capturing Flammulated Owls in the San Juan Mountains to preparing feather samples for stable-isotope analysis in the laboratory. As I write this, many of them continue to pursue their career goal of becoming scientists.

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Yanco with Flammulated Owl
Scott Yanco

This all starts with organizations like DFO making such funds available — which starts with the individual contributors who make the grants possible. The benefit to DFO's mission of understanding and conserving birds and their habitat is clear. But so are the broader benefits to society, including who has access to tools critical for becoming scientists and, therefore, what tomorrow's scientific community will look like.

I will always be grateful to DFO, both for its support of my research and for making it possible to include talented young scientists whose involvement might not have been possible otherwise. Thank you, and here's to a more inclusive future for ornithological research.

Scott Yanco, PhD, is a postdoctoral associate in the Center for Biodiversity and Global Change and the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Yale University. Yanco received grant funding from DFO for four years (2017-2020) for research on Flammulated Owls in Colorado.



Denver Field Ornithologists Membership Application

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