



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 02-03 | FEBRUARY-MARCH 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

FIELD TRIPPING

2022's record year: 20+ trips
a month, 5 a week!

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spring 2023 migration

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ON THE COVER

Winter Wren? The name says so, that's why



Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former

environmental scientist, adventurer and filmmaker on many expeditions around the world. Now retired, he still goes rock-climbing and skiing.

The first time I learned there was a “winter” wren, I wondered how and why it got its name. It couldn't be color; nothing icy or frosty about that typically brownish wren hue. Maybe some esoteric behavioral connection to the cold and snowy season?

The answer turns out to be about as straightforward as it gets: When it's winter in the East, the bird shows up. Most Winter Wrens breed in the damp forests of eastern Canada and northeastern US, then drift south into winter range across the eastern half of the country. In Colorado, where they are “very rare” visitors in any season, eBird data show that winter is also when more of our occasional sightings occur (and there have been a number so far this season).

Our cover bird for the February-March issue of *The Lark Bunting* was seen about two years ago by DFO member **Rob Raker**, a frequent photo contributor. Rob captured his appropriately ice-filled image in Lakewood's Bear Creek Greenbelt on Feb. 22, 2021.

For the record, pioneering American-Scottish ornithologist **Alexander Wilson** (he of the warbler and the phalarope, considered the “father of American ornithology”) first described and illustrated the bird in 1808. But it looked so close to the familiar Eurasian Wren that he puzzled whether it was newly distinct or just a subspecies. Eleven years later (and four years after Wilson's death), French ornithologist **Louis Jean Pierre Vieillot** went with Winter Wren (*Troglodytes hiemalis*). He coined its scientific name from two Greek and Latin words that translate to “Cave dweller of winter” — a nod to wrens' habit of taking cover and hunting for insects in crevices, cavities and undergrowth.

Still, it took until the age of DNA to definitively distinguish the Winter Wren and its West Coast lookalike Pacific Wren as separate species from their Euro cousin. Subsequent song and genetics studies where their ranges overlap further separated Winter and Pacific from each other as distinct species.

When we see Winter Wrens, they're usually bouncing around near streams, tails straight up, tiny and skittering like mice in search of food among downed tree limbs and undergrowth. Their call has been likened to a squeaky bark, like that of a Song Sparrow. Although we never see it here, Winter Wren males build several nests before pairing up with a mate and leading her around to choose the one.

Cool wren fact: Winter Wren (our smallest wren, BTW) and every other North American wren are among more than 80 wren species across the Americas — vs. only one wren in the rest of the world (yes, the Eurasian).

Population surveys suggest Winter Wren numbers are stable or even increasing. But further fragmentation of forests and more-than-partial logging pose threats. The species' reliance on old-growth forests for nesting suggests sensitivity to “forest management” — from forest-floor clearing to clearcutting of tracts in the species' breeding range. Cornell's *Birds of the World* notes that an extensive 1999 study found Winter Wrens in the Rocky Mountains two times more abundant in forests labeled “old-growth” than in those classified merely as “mature.”

There's probably a moral to the story in there somewhere about the perils of old-growth forest “*wrenewal*,” but I'll leave it at that.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**



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PUBLICATION STAFF

Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

Assistant Editor

Mike Fernandez

Photo Editor

Jim Esten

Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

Contributors this issue

Susan Blansett, Rob Raker, Jared Del Rosso, Tom Wilberding, Janet Peters, Anne Craig, Allison Peters

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.
Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

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

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtise**ments are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

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

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

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

DFO awards grants for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado.

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

DFO OFFICERS

President

Susan Blansett
susan.blansett@gmail.com

Vice President

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Secretary (interim)

Nathan Bond
dfobirds.secretary@gmail.com

Treasurer

Kathy Holland
kcloudview@comcast.net

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mary Cay Burger
mcburger3@juno.com

Karen Drozda
drozforte@aol.com

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Tina Jones
tjcalliope@hotmail.com

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com

Steve Ryder
cedarmesa@yahoo.com

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Elaine Wagner
eWagner1000@yahoo.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND ROLES

Better Birding Skills

Sharon Tinianow (acting)
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Communications & Outreach

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Conservation

Steve Ryder
cedarmesa@yahoo.com

Field Trips

David Suddjian
davidsuddjian@gmail.com

Finance

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Grants

Elaine Wagner
eWagner1000@yahoo.com

Hawk Watch

David Hill
davidhill2357@gmail.com

Membership

VACANT

Nominations

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Programs Director

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Historian

Kristine Haglund
kahaglund1@aol.com

Web Administrator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

Zoom Coordinator

Peter Stoltz
dfobirds.zoom@gmail.com

DFO ONLINE

Website

dfobirds.org

Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/dfobirds

Instagram

instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists

CONTACT

Email

dfocommsgroup@gmail.com

Via website

dfobirds.org
Located at the bottom of the homepage

US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland,
Treasurer, DFO
351 E Caley Ave
Centennial, CO 80121-2201

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

With 2023, self-renewal through birding

Ah, winter in Colorado – what’s not to love? Yes, our weather has been a little severe lately, and with climate change, it seems to be getting more extreme regardless of season. But when my siblings in Florida and the Carolinas brag about their warm winters, I happily reply to their texts with photos of my busy backyard birdfeeders under 10 inches of snow, as many as 15 species coming and going like crowds at Grand Central Station. Chilly fingers notwithstanding, winter here can be a wonderfully peaceful time to be birding.

As a typical Capricorn — stubborn as a goat, but also ambitious and hard-working — I sometimes find it hard to relax. But the thing that transports me away from all that is being outdoors, with binoculars around my neck. Whether in the stillness of soft snowfall or the snap of a sunny winter day, my whole body relaxes, senses focused only on nature and the sight and sounds of birds. Inevitably, I wear a smile. Can’t help it, it’s pure joy.

Contrary to the well-ordered, self-improving stereotype of my Zodiac sign, I’ve never been much for New Year’s resolutions. But this year, admitting to myself that I had neglected my own birding and self-care for months, I resolved to focus on a singular goal: More time spent birding in 2023. That includes sharpening my skills and embracing the camaraderie of fellow birders like you and DFO. Happily, keeping this resolution will mean indulging another neglected hobby: reading.

On New Year’s morning, I went straight to my bookshelf to pull down two forgotten but valued guides to finding birds in Colorado and surrounding states: [Seasonal Guide to The Natural Year](#) by **Ben Guterson**, and [Birding Around the Year](#) by **Aileen Lotz**. As a birthday gift to myself, I also bought two books by local authors that I expect will improve my skills and lead me to explore unknown or overlooked hotspots: [How to Know the Birds](#) by **Ted Floyd** of Lafayette, and [The Best Front Range Bird Hikes](#) by DFO’s own **Norm Lewis**.

Already on DFO’s calendar are great birding resources our volunteers have lined up for this winter: monthly speakers (recruited by **Bill Turner**) and **David Suddjian**’s “Bird Bombs” mini-webinars on bird ID. And there’s the upcoming spring

season of DFO’s [Hawk Watch at Dinosaur Ridge](#) to sharpen raptor ID skills. More time in the field means more time to spend with the eBird and Merlin apps. I look forward to getting better with these popular, powerful tech tools for birding. With almost no end to the resources and learning available to birders, I want to take advantage of them all.



Blansett at Hawktober live raptor event in 2022
Patrick O’Driscoll

One more thing: Although I became a DFO field trip leader in fall of 2021, I led only two outings in all of 2022. I intend to correct that embarrassing lapse this year, with a new winter trip soon and at least one for spring. That one, though, will be after DFO’s annual election in April. That’s when **Sharon Tinianow**, your brilliant and dedicated DFO vice president, is expected to succeed me as club president. That’s also when I become immediate *past* president, with much more time to lead field trips.

DFO has taken succession planning and leadership development seriously for a long time. Having a corps of willing, capable volunteers is key for a strong nonprofit organization like ours. The names you see mentioned throughout this newsletter show how blessed we are with talented volunteers.

So thank you to every volunteer who has served in this organization, then and now. What fun, and what an honor, to work with you on behalf of all in DFO and for the birds we love. May the new year bring you as much joy as you continue to bring to me.

See you in the field . . . I promise!

— **Susan Blansett**

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

DID YOU REMEMBER TO RENEW YOUR DFO MEMBERSHIP?

If you missed our series of “DFO: It’s ALL of us” membership renewal reminders in the past four issues of *The Lark Bunting*, here’s one more reminder: Your membership may have EXPIRED. Don’t wait for our Membership Committee to come calling with more reminders. Renew TODAY!

[Click here](#) to join or renew your membership via the DFO webpage. Membership remains a tremendous bargain — just \$25 a year for a family membership, and \$10 for a student membership (age 26 and under). Your modest fee enables Denver Field Ornithologists to provide monthly programs and field trips free of charge, support avian research, conservation and education, and publish this, our official newsletter. So if your membership is off-course, rejoin the flock!

BOMBS AWAY: EVEN MORE MINI-WEBINARS ON BIRD ID!

The new year brings three “Bird Bombs” Zoom mini-webinars on bird identification this winter. New on the schedule are:

Feb. 9, 7 p.m.: “Where’s *That* on the Bird?” focuses on bird topography and the names of bird parts you need to know. [Click here to register](#).

March 9, 7 p.m.: “Colorado Blues” will discuss identification of our three bluebird species. [Click here to register](#).

Already on the schedule and next up is “**Mountain Finches,**” **Thursday, Jan. 12 at 7 p.m.** Besides Colorado’s trio of rosy-finches (Gray-crowned, Brown-capped and Black), this session includes Evening Grosbeak, Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill and Cassin’s Finch (that last species making an unexpectedly widespread appearance around metro Denver this winter). [Click here to register](#). And don’t forget: Past “Bird Bombs” sessions are archived for viewing on the DFO website’s “[Past Programs](#)” page.



NEW AUTO PAY/RENEW PASS FOR STATE PARKS ENTRY NOW AVAILABLE

Beginning in 2023, getting your Colorado state parks pass is as automatic as renewing your motor vehicle registration — because that’s how and where it’s done. The new [Keep Colorado Wild Pass](#) costs \$29, about one-third of what an annual parks entry pass used to cost. The fee is now tied to your motor vehicle renewal.

Although the charge is an automatic line item when each car, pickup truck, RV or motorcycle registration comes up, you can decline the park pass fee when you renew your vehicle in person, online, by kiosk or mail. Because the pass is non-transferable between vehicles, the charge applies to every vehicle. Owners of more than one can decide whether to opt in or out for each as registration renewals come up. But in place of the previous \$120 family pass that could be used between vehicles, \$29 per vehicle compares well for most.

After you renew, the Colorado Parks & Wildlife logo is printed on your vehicle registration card, which also becomes your entry pass. And you can use it if you enter a state park on foot or bicycle, too. Don’t own a car? You can buy a non-vehicle version of the same \$29 pass online or at a state park or local CPW office. Other questions? [Click here](#) for CPW’s frequently asked questions on the new pass.

Continued on page 7

COLORADO'S AVIAN FLU OUTBREAK: EYES ON EAGLES, HAWKS, OWLS

Although wild birds have been spared the worst of the national outbreak of avian influenza, it has still killed thousands of waterfowl and infected nearly three dozen birds of prey in Colorado. Wildlife authorities fear Bald Eagles and other species that scavenge carcasses of infected geese could contract and die of the flu, too.

Effects on commercial, domestic and “backyard” poultry were evident late last winter. Colorado egg producers have been hammered, losing upwards of 6.1 million chickens, according to the [Colorado Department of Agriculture's tally](#) of avian flu cases. Nationally, almost 58 million mostly commercial birds in 47 states have been infected.



Bald Eagle scavenging goose carcass (Patrick O'Driscoll)

EDITOR'S NOTE

We'll be right back

This, our February-March issue, is the second newsletter of the calendar year 2023. It also marks the start of *The Lark Bunting's* annual mid-winter timeout to re-charge, re-tool, rest and renew.

We'll return from our break with more stories, photos, essays, columns and reviews with the April issue of *The Lark Bunting* (coming out in the first half of February).

Thank you for your readership and interest over the past year. Got an idea, a suggestion, a great photo, or something else worthwhile for *your* club newsletter? Let us know! We grow and thrive on your feedback, whether you love us, hate us, or somewhere in between. Drop me an email at patodrisk@gmail.com and tell me how we can do our job better for you.

Have you read a new bird-related book? Write us a review. Gone on a great field trip and want to tell more about it (and share your photos)? Bring it on!

In short: Share with us *your* vision for *The Lark Bunting*. I'm all ears.

Until we return, good 2023 birding!

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor

As of late December, Colorado counted about 4,700 wild bird victims. All but about 100 were in three die-offs in migrant Snow Goose flocks in November and early December: 2,000 each in Morgan and Logan counties, and about 600 in Prowers County. But remaining victims included 35 raptors, including 15 Great Horned Owls, a dozen Red-tailed Hawks, five Bald Eagles and three Turkey Vultures.

The rest — about 70 spread among a dozen other species — were all water birds and mostly geese and ducks, except for a crow and a gull.

Michael Tincher, rehab coordinator for the Rocky Mountain Raptor program in Fort Collins, suggest a significant segment of the nation's birding community hasn't reacted with alarm because avian flu “is not impacting songbird populations. This hasn't helped to get the word out to the community as a whole.”

For a recent overview, read “[Worst Colorado avian flu outbreak kills bald eagles, threatens more wild birds](#)” in *The Colorado Sun* online news service.

JAN. 15 DEADLINE: TEEN SCHOLARSHIPS TO HOG ISLAND BIRD CAMP

Boulder County Audubon is sponsoring teenaged Colorado birders and aspiring ornithologists to a June 18-23 summer coastal bird studies camp next summer at National Audubon's renowned Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine. Scholarship applications for two remaining openings are due by Jan. 15, 2023. Boulder Audubon says many recipients of these scholarships have gone on to careers in ornithology and wildlife biology. Any young Colorado birder age 15-17 can apply. Complete details and application forms are at <https://www.boulderaudubon.org/bird-camp-scholarships>. For a glimpse of the program, go to Hog Island Camp's [Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens webpage](#). More questions? Contact Boulder County Audubon at scholarship@boulderaudubon.org.



FIELD TRIPS

Field trips in 2022? You might say DFO had a few . . . a few RECORDS

Patrick O'Driscoll

For Denver Field Ornithologists, the emphasis in 2022 was definitely on (and in) the FIELD. An end-of-year tally by DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian** shows our club smashed the old record of 222 trips in a single year (our year-long group Big Year effort in 2018) by a whopping 12 percent, with 248 total trips.

Not surprising, you say? After all, field trips have always been DFO's prime activity, right? But run the numbers and they're something to celebrate: More than 20 trips each *month*, averaging 4.8 trips each *week*. On New Year's Eve, Suddjian led a crowd of 19 other participants on DFO's final field trip of the year, a late-morning waterfowl walk through the snow at South Platte Park in Littleton. (That trip, BTW, was David's 300th since becoming a trip leader himself.)



Field Trips chair David Suddjian leads last outing of 2022 on New Year's Eve
Anne Craig

More than 500 individuals participated in at least one DFO field trip in 2022, another record (previous high: 419 in 2019). One trip participant, **Joe Chen** of Denver, was our most "frequent flier": He went on 88 field trips last year, 30 more than the next closest. Joe is best known to DFO Facebook followers as that guy who, within hours after most trips, paints and posts a portrait of a bird species he saw on the outing.

Involvement by those who lead trips also rose. As the ranks of certified trip leaders grew in 2022 with more newly trained individuals, 39 leaders led at least one or more trips each. Those trips visited 52 of Colorado's 64 counties, three of them for the first time.

Eyes and ears on those trips recorded 331 bird species in 2022, our second-highest tally after 361 species in 2018. Eight of them were new for DFO's own club "life list." The top 10 counties by species count last year on DFO field trips were: Jefferson, Douglas, Pueblo, Adams, Arapahoe, El Paso, Boulder, Park, Bent and Kiowa.

Finally, DFO trips in 2022 resulted in 1,356 complete eBird checklists, second only to DFO's Big Year 2018, with 1,627 checklists.

"The year was exceptional in other regards," Suddjian noted. "Sign-up system changes, accessibility to open trips, variety of trips, new leaders added, and number of newer birders attending."

And stand by: The list of new DFO field trips for 2023 is growing. Here we go . . .



Cranes: Ambassadors for Conservation

Rich Beilfuss
Monday, January 23
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

With deep cultural connections, extraordinary beauty and striking behaviors, Cranes are among the most loved and revered birds on earth. Tall, stately and heart-stoppingly charismatic, they are nonetheless also among the most endangered families of birds. Eleven of the globe's 15 species are threatened or endangered, and our own North American examples reflect both the plentiful (Sandhill) and the few (Whooping).

Since 1973, the [International Crane Foundation](#) has advocated for them and other crane species found across Africa, East Asia, Southeast Asia and Europe. The foundation, whose mission in part is “to conserve cranes and the ecosystems, watersheds and flyways on which they depend,” also works with local partners in more than 50 countries to rear new generations of the rarest cranes.

DFO's first evening program of the new year features **Rich Beilfuss**, foundation president and CEO, who will explore the role of cranes as ambassadors and flagships for conservation, bringing people together to save some of the most important wetlands on earth. He will share stories about long-term efforts to combat climate change, reduce water stress, and improve community livelihoods around endangered crane populations in Africa and Asia. He also will share lessons learned in North America from the successful recovery of Whooping Cranes from the brink of extinction, and efforts to secure Sandhill Cranes and biodiversity in agricultural landscapes.

Beilfuss, who has headed the foundation since 2010, works from its headquarters in Baraboo, WI, which serves as a global center for crane conservation leadership and training. The foundation employs more than 125 staff and associates, with offices in five other countries and Texas.

A licensed professional hydrologist with a Ph.D. in wetland ecology, Beilfuss has worked on water management and wetlands restoration to benefit cranes in more than 20 countries across Africa and Asia, focusing on Nepal, Vietnam, Mozambique and Zambia. He also has contributed to restoration and management of thousands of acres of prairie and savanna landscapes in the US Midwest.

The International Crane Foundation's focus on conservation of North America's endangered Whooping Crane population is featured in a 14-minute video, [Cranes: Symbols of Survival](#), narrated by longtime NBC News anchor, **Tom Brokaw**.

[Click here](#) to register for this free Jan. 23 webinar. You'll receive a link and subsequent reminder to connect to Beilfuss's program.





Daly Edmunds

Greater Sage-Grouse: Largest Conservation Effort in US History

Daly Edmunds
Monday, February 27
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

The Greater Sage-Grouse is found in Colorado and across 10 other western states in North America's largest but often overlooked ecosystem. Largely inconspicuous except when males aggregate in remote courtship leks to strut and display for mates, this species was once so prevalent that it fed many pioneers during their grueling journeys through the West.

Today, with most of these iconic birds of the sagebrush steppes found on public lands, they have become a political football. In DFO's monthly evening program for February, **Daly Edmunds** of [Audubon Rockies](#) will discuss the political intrigue that has plagued sage-grouse management. She will also review the threats to sage-grouse habitat and share the latest science on the species.

Edmunds is director of policy and outreach for Audubon Rockies, National Audubon's Fort Collins-based regional office for Colorado, Wyoming and Utah. In this role, she is responsible for furthering the organization's [Sagebrush Ecosystem Initiative](#), which works regionally to conserve the high, dry western habitat on which more than 350 wild species depend. The initiative convenes citizens, industry, government and non-government organizations to find ways to balance the needs of people and birds.

An [alarming new report](#) in September by the U.S. Geological Survey found a staggering 1.3 million acres of sagebrush habitat are being lost annually. Sagebrush was once the most widespread vegetation type across western North America. Now only half of it is left, and new demands continue to be placed on it.

Daly earned her master's degree from the University of Wyoming, studying pronghorn movement patterns. Before joining Audubon in 2009, she worked for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, National Wildlife Federation, and Wyoming Wildlife Federation.

[Click here](#) to register for this free Feb. 27 webinar. You'll receive a link and subsequent reminders to connect to Edmunds' program as the date nears.



Fighting sage-grouse males (Elizabeth Boehm, Audubon Photography Awards)



Alyssa Davidge
Claire Harris

How Historical Redlining Led Denver's Cooper's Hawks to Live Where They Do

Alyssa Davidge

Monday, March 27

7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Once known as a feared and artful raptor mainly in the deciduous and mixed forests of rural and wildlands America, the Cooper's Hawk has pioneered outward to become a regular resident of urban and suburban landscapes since the 1970s. Cornell's *Birds of the World* calls it "likely the most common backyard breeding raptor across North America."

The species' remarkably successful adaptation to urban environments like Denver's is predicated chiefly on forest conditions in the neighborhoods where we find (and enjoy seeing) it. Designed by nature to maneuver swiftly through robust woodlands in pursuit of its prey, Cooper's is most comfortable where the trees are mature and numerous.

Alyssa Davidge, the Denver raptor biologist who will present March's provocatively titled program, finds it no coincidence that those places are neighborhoods intentionally favored by the historically segregationist "redlining" housing policies that date to the 1930s. One of those practices was "redlining," which made mortgage loans unavailable or unaffordable to people of color in the predominantly minority neighborhoods where they were largely confined by segregation.

How does racism affect wildlife? Davidge says she will explore "how Cooper's Hawks use Denver" and how land management of the city because of redlining policies "may play a role in (the birds') decisions." She will examine current Cooper's Hawk occupancy in redlined neighborhoods and other land attributes across the city "to explore the effect of historical policies on today's urban raptors." Her presentation is subtitled, "Impacts of Historic Redlining Policy on Wildlife Habitat and Cooper's Hawk Occupancy."

Davidge is a second-year master's student in the University of Colorado Denver's Integrative Biology Department. Before returning to graduate school, she was a condor biologist with the Peregrine Fund, managing the California Condor population on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. She also worked several seasons banding terns and plovers for the San Diego Zoo's Conservation Research Institute, conserving spotted owl populations in the Sierra Nevada, and monitoring migratory birds for HawkWatch International and Cape May Raptor Banding Project in Washington, New Mexico, and New Jersey. Her current focus is on smarter policy decisions for the future of conservation and biodiversity. She hopes to become a wildlife biologist, with a raptor focus, for Colorado Parks & Wildlife, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, or the U.S. Geological Survey.

[Click here](#) to register for this free Mar. 27 webinar. You'll receive a link and subsequent reminders to connect to Davidge's program as the date nears.



Alyssa Davidge and Cooper's Hawk (Brian Millsap)



Birdsong and Habitats: Updates from DFO-funded Avian Research

Leah Crenshaw, Olivia Taylor
Monday, April 24
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

The final installment in the winter-spring series of DFO monthly Zoom webinar programs (co-sponsored by Denver Public Library) will be a kind of show-and-tell session with recipients of grants in 2022 from the Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Education and Conservation Fund.

At least two of the six recipients of grants in 2022 will present updates on their research at this program. All grant winners agree to report back to the DFO membership in one of three ways: An article in *The Lark Bunting* newsletter, a DFO field trip planned around the theme and field location of the research, or an oral presentation at the April membership meeting, usually an evening gathering via webinar.

In this case, two of those who will present on April 24 are studying and analyzing birdsong in Colorado, but in different birds in very different habitats: Western Meadowlarks in the Pawnee National Grasslands, and Black-capped Chickadees in canyons above Boulder.

The grasslands researcher is **Leah Crenshaw**, a master's thesis student in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. She is analyzing grassland birdsong to determine the effect human landscape development has on birds' breeding success. Other previous studies have shown the effect on avian abundance and diversity. But in her [grant application narrative](#), Crenshaw said "a notable research gap exists" in determining what effect landscape changes may have on birds' individual behaviors and fitness. Her research is against a backdrop of three-quarters of North American grassland bird species in decline.

Her DFO-funded work seeks to provide new insights into what forces underpin population changes in grassland birds so as to improve conservation of those in Colorado. Crenshaw also aims to offer land managers "data useful to promoting diversity and abundance on their properties."

The other birdsong research presenter is **Olivia Taylor**, a student in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her focus is on measuring the effects of geographic isolation on differences in song between populations of Black-capped Chickadees as a way to understand further how isolation influences birdsong evolution.

In her [grant application narrative](#), Taylor noted the critical importance of birdsong for recognition within species, defense of territories and mating. "Much like human language, bird song is learned at a young age through exposure to parents or other neighboring adults," she wrote. She aims to explore the effects of canyons as "isolating mechanisms that drive song evolution." Her hypothesis: With lack of exposure to outside individual birds and less "cultural flow," the songs of populations isolated by canyons "will diverge," and divergence will increase with distance between those populations.

Look for more details and a link to register for this April 24 Zoom program in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Oops: No November program review after all



Because of production issues, our planned review of the Nov. 28 DFO evening program — "Hawk Watch 2022: Looking Back and Forward" with field counter and coordinator **Emma Riley** — will not appear.

We had postponed it because the Nov. 28 presentation fell too close to *The Lark Bunting's* deadline for the newsletter in December.

If you did not see the presentation live on Zoom, you can view the program recording on the DFO ["Past Programs"](#) webpage.

HAWK WATCH

Rapt for raptors? Hawk Watch 2023 almost here!

Janet Peters

Wait — spring already? Yes, it's just two months until the official March 1 start of DFO's annual Hawk Watch raptor count, and there's no time like the present to prepare. Who's ready to volunteer?

The 11-week counting season for migrating birds of prey along Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County will run through May 14. Now is the time to consider helping with the spring count, one of dozens of community science counts on raptor migration routes across the country. DFO's Hawk Watch team has scheduled events for prospective and returning volunteers (*to apply, see link at the end of this article*), and for any and all looking to improve their raptor identification skills:

Hawk Watch volunteer orientation

Saturday, Feb. 25 (time TBA)

A field trip to our viewing platform atop Dinosaur Ridge, led by experienced hawk watchers. Look for the trip listing on the [DFO Upcoming Field Trips](#) page soon.

Advanced Hawks on the Wing training

Wednesday, March 1, 6:30 p.m. MST via Zoom

Subtitled "Seeing beyond the field marks with flight-based identification," this session with nationally known photographer, videographer, and educator **Josh Haas** features live video and side-by-side comparisons of hawk species seen on Dinosaur Ridge in spring migration. This enhancement of the introductory training is essential to helping volunteers better assist in the spring count. [Click here to register](#) for this 90-minute webinar.

In addition, the team has scheduled a meeting for new and returning Hawk Watch volunteers for **Wednesday, Feb. 22, 7 p.m. MST via Zoom**. **Dave Hill**, chair of DFO's Hawk Watch Committee, will lead this session. It's guaranteed to enhance ID skills and give interested volunteers a taste of what Hawk Watch volunteering is about. (*A link to join this meeting will be sent to new and returning volunteers.*)

DFO's 2022 chief hawk counter, **Emma Riley**, is returning for 2023 and will oversee the daily count on the ridge on Wednesdays through Sundays. But she'll need more eyes and ears to ensure full coverage of hawk, eagle, falcon and vulture movements through the season. Not only do volunteers spot and identify raptors — they also introduce hikers on Dinosaur Ridge to birding and the excitement of seeing birds of prey in flight up close.

To apply to be a volunteer, and for more information about DFO Hawk Watch at Dinosaur Ridge, visit the [Hawk Watch page](#) on the Denver Field Ornithologists website. If you have additional questions, you can also email DFO's Hawk Watch coordinators directly: **Dave Hill** at davidhill2357@gmail.com and **Janet Peters** at j.f.peters58@gmail.com.



Watching on Dinosaur Ridge in 2022
Allison Peters



Winter flocks on Ferril Lake
in Denver City Park
Patrick O'Driscoll

BIRDER ESSAY

A birding memory: When geese were rare

Tom Wilberding

As I write this, it's the first day of winter in Denver. Canada and Cackling Geese are everywhere — in city and state parks, on frozen ponds and open reservoirs, munching bluegrass on ball fields and golf courses, and loafing on suburban and urban lawns, their green poop speckling the sidewalks.

Too many geese, really, but I remember when there were almost none. Do you?

Come back with me to 1957 and a dreary, post-Thanksgiving weekend in Detroit. I am 10 years old, in the back seat of the family station wagon. My parents are taking me and my three siblings on a Sunday drive after church. We are crossing the Ambassador Bridge over the Detroit River and into Canada.

"Can you hear it yet?" my sister Karen asks.

"No, not yet," I reply, "but soon, any minute, I'm sure."

"Oh, hear that? We're getting close now."

"Look! Here they are. Wow! Amazing!"

This is obviously no trip to the mall for Christmas shopping: there are no malls in Detroit, or in Canada either. But something else *is* missing from Detroit: Canada Geese. None on the local golf course. None on the ball field behind the library. Few at Willow Run Airport, where my father worked before the war. Hardly any in the farm fields outside the city.

That will change dramatically in the years ahead, in Detroit and all over the US. And a major reason is where we have arrived on our Sunday drive into Canada: the [Jack Miner Migratory Bird Sanctuary](#), near Kingsville, Ontario.

Before us, on the ground and in the air, are thousands of Canada Geese. Some are gobbling corn set out for them in the big field. Most are honking. It's so loud the flock sounds like a freight train — almost frightening.

We were not birders. My father owned a pair of binoculars for football games, not waterfowl or warblers. But our family loved to drive to Canada in the fall to see these rare Canada Geese honking *en masse* like a big wild riot — like their team had just won hockey's Stanley Cup. Spectacular! And we loved learning about **Jack Miner**. More about him in a bit.

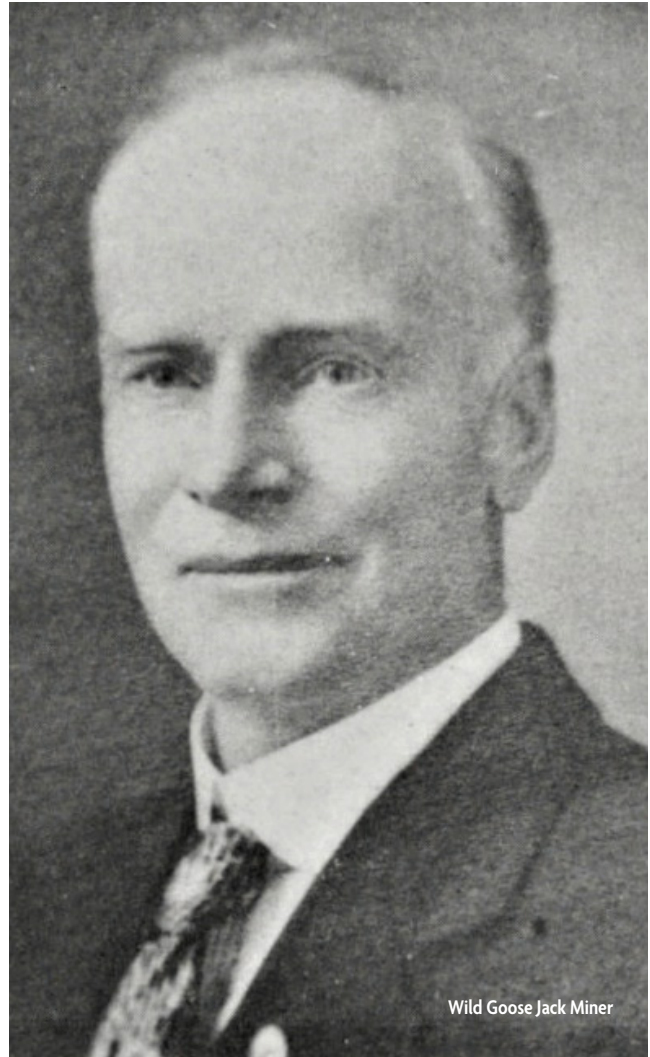
At the start of the 20th century, Canada Geese were in steep decline. Unregulated hunting was the principal reason: No seasons, no tags, no limits. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 changed that, established regular hunting seasons. But five decades later, something else had brought the species to the brink in the eastern US: drainage of wetlands vital to the bird's survival.

Continued on page 16

Efforts by conservationists would help to re-establish populations of Canada Geese — and one of those conservationists was “Wild Goose Jack” Miner, an eccentric Ontario trapper who lived from 1865 to 1944. He had no formal schooling and was illiterate until age 33. But as Johnny Appleseed sought to spread apple trees, Miner worked to revive and spread the Canada Goose. It’s no surprise that Jack’s a big deal in Canada, as is the country’s namesake goose. America’s national bird may be fierce and have talons, but our northern neighbor is very fond of its kinder, gentler symbol.

During his lifetime, Miner banded about 40,000 Canada Geese. His efforts led wildlife scientists to greater knowledge about the species’ range and contributed to passing that landmark 1918 bird treaty. He even donated his farm to the cause as that sanctuary for geese that our family visited. He promoted waterfowl sanctuaries as key to conservation.

Now for the eccentric part. Wild Goose Jack was an avidly devout Christian who saw nature as one big zoo, owned and operated by humans. He rejected evolutionary biology and ascribed to a literal interpretation of the Bible. His banding tags bore Christian phrases like “He Cares for You,” and he regarded his tagged geese as “Missionary Messengers.” Admiring their monogamous nature, he tried to protect them by killing crows and owls, immoral creatures to him. He even called for extermination of some non-monogamous wild species. For good measure, he disliked wild predators and killed hundreds of them.



Wild Goose Jack Miner

No wonder we might regard Miner as kind of a nut whose wizardry with geese got way out of hand. But the return of Canada Geese — and their overpopulation where humans live, work and play today — wasn’t all Jack’s doing. The march of human development since his day has removed natural predators and added an abundance of safe ponds and reservoirs near equally abundant food sources (regularly mown lawns and meadows in parks and subdivisions, on golf courses and sports fields). That, as much as anything, has triggered the explosion in goose numbers in our midst. In the mid-20th century, Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) and wildlife agencies in many other states also began to reintroduce geese and take other measures to help them thrive.

We’ve been seeing the results hereabouts ever since, both in permanent local flocks and in more numerous fall-winter migrant visitors (including many Cackling Geese since that species was officially separated from the Canadas in the early 2000s). The tribe of “white-faced” geese has been sharing our greenswards as Front Range human settlement has boomed.

Here’s one anecdotal example that reaches across three quarters of a century: On Jan. 22, 1947, a young birdwatcher named **Hugh Kingery** counted 20 Canada Geese in Denver City Park on his walk to class at Denver’s East High School. Fast forward to a few weeks ago, when the editor of this newsletter followed Kingery’s footsteps through the same park and counted more than 5,000 overwintering Cackling and Canada Geese on Dec. 18, 2022. Pore over and through your database of choice — eBird, CPW records, or perhaps Audubon’s decades of Christmas Bird Counts across dozens of Colorado count circles — and you’ll see similar change.

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And so, here we are. What is now a common species in American parks causes many to consider it a fat and noisy pest: the goose droppings, the depredation of crops, the honking, even territorial aggression on occasion toward humans and other animals wild and domestic that get too close. And who can forget the chorus of complaints in 2009 after that unfortunate flock of Canada Geese in the path of US Airways Flight 1549 disabled both engines, forcing heroic pilot “Sully” Sullenberger to ditch the airliner into New York’s Hudson River, miraculously saving all on board?

Despite all the negatives, I remain as fond of Canada Geese as I was when I saw and heard those thousands on that boyhood visit to Wild Goose Jack’s sanctuary. In late spring their golden goslings are adorable. And in early December, whenever I approach Arvada’s Lake Arbor, filled with honking geese, I remember Jack Miner. And I think back to my sister, nudging me in the back seat as we approached Miner’s preserve for the geese he loved: “Can you hear it yet?”

Yes, Karen, I could hear it then, and I do today. And I still say: Wow — amazing!

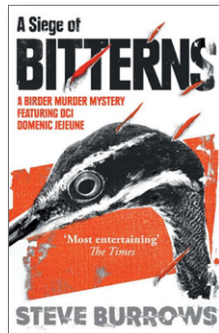
Tom Wilberding of Littleton, a retired home builder, began birding at age 51. He joined DFO after moving to the Denver area in 2004. You can contact him at tom.wilberding@outlook.com.



Cackling Goose trio
Patrick O’Driscoll

BOOK REVIEW

A bird list to die for?



A Siege of Bitterns
A Birder Murder Mystery
Featuring DCI Domenic Jejeune
By Steve Burrows
Point Blank Books
368 pages

Jill Boice

What fun! A murder mystery series for birders labeled, oddly enough, “Birder Murder Mystery.” Whodunit? Why, **Steve Burrows** did. He’s a UK-reared émigré to Canada who has written seven (and counting) avian-themed mysteries, each named with the collective noun for its title species, e.g., *A Siege of Bitterns*. That’s the title of Burrows’ first (published in 2014), which won the Crime Writers of Canada award for Best First Novel.

This book introduces Detective Chief Inspector Domenic Jejeune, a Canadian writer who has just joined the police force in eastern England’s Norfolk County when a controversial environmentalist, Cameron Brae, is found hanged near his beloved marsh. Brae was about to achieve a county list of 400 species. Did a jealous birder kill him to better his own chances for the record? Or did a local developer want him out of the way?

Read on: It’s a well-told mystery. Inspector Jejeune is a birdwatcher himself, and his birding knowledge helps him solve this tangled crime. Burrows weaves lovely descriptions of the joys of birding and the British coastal landscape through the mystery’s plot. Jejeune’s relationships with police Sergeant Maik, older and more experienced, and with Lindy, Domenic’s non-birder girlfriend, add to the story’s depth.

I was introduced to this book by the Birding Book Club of [Environment for the Americas](#), a bird-focused nonprofit that, among other things, coordinates [World Migratory Bird Day](#). The bird club meets about once a month online. I’ve only “attended” twice, but both times the author of that month’s selection spoke to us. Burrows read from the beginning of book five of the Inspector Jejeune series, *A Tiding of Magpies*.

The club’s January selection is **Tim Birkhead**’s new book, *Birds and Us*, and the online meeting is Jan. 26 at 11 a.m. MT. That evening’s meeting will originate from England, which accounts for the morning time here. For more information about the book club, visit <https://www.migratorybirdday.org/bird-book-club>.

What's in a bird's name? If it's "nightjar" or "goatsucker," PLENTY!

Jared Del Rosso

Bird names are more than a collection of words by which we know a species, genus or family. Names carry folklore, belief, and the history of language itself.

I find this easy to observe with nightjars, a favorite bird family of mine that includes poorwills, nighthawks and other twilight fliers. Besides that curious "nightjar" label itself, those species famously have an even stranger alias: Goatsucker. It reveals an ancient, erroneous belief about these gape-mouthed, night-vision wonders — that they suckled domestic goats at night, blinding the goats in the process. This legend and the name itself are more than 2,000 years old. Around 350 BC, **Aristotle** recorded it in his 10-volume *History of Animals*:

The goatsucker . . . flies against the goats and sucks them, whence its name . . . They say that when the udder has been sucked that it gives no more milk, and that the goat becomes blind. This bird is not quick sighted by day, but sees well at night.

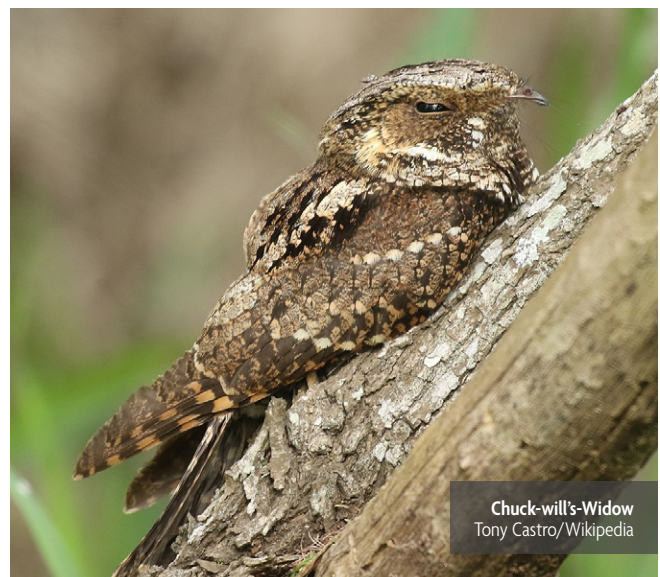
Of course, nightjars don't drink the milk of goats, but there may be a bit of fact in this folklore. Nightjars may get close to domestic animals to eat the flying insects that they attract. The scientific name assigned to the nightjar family and closely related bird "allies" commemorates this word origin: *Caprimulgidae* comes from the Latin words for goats and milking.

The history of "nightjar" is less well known, but to me quite poetic and evocative. The "night" part is obvious, for the birds' twilight and nocturnal activity. The second syllable, "jar," packs more meaning. It pertains to the call of the Eurasian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), a mechanical "churr" far less melodious than North America's various "wills" (Whip-poor-will, Chuck-will's-widow, and Common Poorwill). That led to calling it "nightchurr" and "churnowl." Eventually "churr" became "jar," and the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that word once meant "a harsh inharmonious sound or combination of sounds." It is also a verb, meaning to unsettle, which adds a shade more meaning to "nightjar."

Perhaps we birders will embrace this double meaning and begin to go "nightjarring" like we go "owling." In the same sense, it would simply mean to seek out nightjars at dusk, like **David Suddjian's** popular DFO field trips on summer evenings to hear and see Common Poorwills in his Ken Caryl neighborhood. In another way, it might mean allowing ourselves to be "jarred" by these remarkable birds, the way other beings seem to haunt us when our vision is poor and the darkness deep.

The names of North America's nightjars tell their own stories. The "wills" all seem to go by their two- to four-syllable calls. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *Birds of the World* entry for the Eastern Whip-poor-will (*Antrostomus vociferus*) states it plainly: "Few North American species say their name as clearly . . ." But all translations of birdsong into human languages must be simplifications, a fact long noted in the English treatment of the Whip-poor-will. One can almost feel **John J. Audubon's** skepticism about this translation in his [account of the bird's call](#): "A fancied resemblance which its notes have to the syllables whip-poor-will, has given rise to the common name of the bird."

There are many ways to hear this nightjar's song. In other languages, Whip-poor-wills sing other names. One Spanish name for the Whip-poor-will is *Cuerporruin* (or *Cuerpo ruin*, translating to "contemptible body"), which to my ears matches the bird's song well. The same goes for the French-Canadian name, *Bois-pourri*, which translates into "rotten wood," a feature of the Whip-poor-will's habitat in the rich forests of eastern North America.



Chuck-will's-Widow
Tony Castro/Wikipedia

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Obviously, there are other ways to translate nightjar songs into language, which leads me to wonder how both the Whip-poor-will and the Chuck-will's-widow (*Antristomus carolinensis*), a large nightjar of the Southeast, got their names. As seen and read, both are meant as imperative sentences, with “whip” and “chuck” as verbs commanding action.

In the case of Whip-poor-will, the sentence orders: “Administer a whipping to Will,” who is poor for being impoverished, misfortunate, or both. Another folk name for this species changed the object of punishment to women: “Whip-her-well.” Both names recognize the role punitive whipping had in English and, subsequently, earlier American society, in the North and South alike. For “chucks,” as the southeastern birds are sometimes called, the name is more ambiguous, but it's not hard to imagine a similarly violent meaning. In an 1896 essay on these names, the ethnologist **Albert Samuel Gatschet** claims “chuck” means “choke.”

Such names have implications. I'm researching how whipping figured in folklore surrounding Whip-poor-wills. For now, I'll note only that social and cultural histories of brutality are hidden in plain sight in these two birds' names.

Our Common Poorwill, with its [brief, plaintive call](#), recalls the East's “will.” Perhaps poorwills have fewer and less evocative folk names because they were encountered later by English speakers in the New World. And yet, in *North American Bird Folknames and Names*, **James Kedzie Sayre** finds nearly 40 folk names for our Common Nighthawk. Many suggest confusion about just what sort of creature the nighthawk is, e.g., Booming Swallow and Bull-bat.

Early naturalists also mistook nighthawks for Whip-poor-wills and Chuck-will's-widows. The “wills” sing their names through dawn and dusk, but generally are inactive during the day. By contrast, nighthawks sometimes fly by day, and their twilight flights make them far more visible. The species were often confused because nighthawks could be seen when wills weren't singing and wills could be heard when nighthawks weren't flying.



Ornithologists and birders today know better. Yet we still use an ill-fitting, hand-me-down name for nighthawks, which actually prefer dusk to the night. And, of course, they're not hawks, though some 18th-century accounts [thought differently](#).

For being unusually shaped, beguilingly voiced birds that we encounter in low light, nightjars and nighthawks have been subject to far more intrigue, misunderstanding, and lore than most birds. What we call them reflects this.

For more on this broad topic, consider **Susan Myers's** *The Bird Name Book: A History of English Bird Names*, and **Stephen Moss's** *Mrs. Moreau's Warbler: How Birds Got Their Names*.

Jared Del Rosso, a birder since 2012, is a sociologist who dabbles in nature writing. He is researching Whip-poor-wills' place in US culture. He also contributes to the Center for Humans and Nature's [Stories & Ideas section](#) and blogs about birds at [The Lonesome Whip-poor-will](#).



Top: **Common Nighthawk** (Andy Reago and Chrissy McClarren/Wikipedia)
Bottom: **Common Poorwill** (Connor Long/Wikipedia)

Welcome to new DFO members

Cheryl Ames, Arvada; Carl Bendorf, Longmont; Jeff Cole, Englewood; David and Karen Coupland, Longmont; John Ehrmann and Karen Rutledge, Denver; David and Mariane Erickson, Golden; Marcial Farner, Penrose; Adrienne and Jeff Fustich, Littleton; Joan Grant and Tim Duesing, Colorado Springs; David Hapman and Heidi McWorkman, Boulder; Marlee Hassell and Kathryn Wallisch, Denver; Mary Lawrence, Littleton; George Newman and Theresa Braymer, Arvada; Peggy Pike, Kiowa; Anne Pizzi, Boulder; Denise Rustning, Littleton; Louise Schottstaedt, Castle Pines; Steven Snyder, Arvada; Ryan Stander, Parker; Fred and Jean Starr, Brighton; Diane and Richard Wiest, Denver; and Emil Yappert, Fort Collins

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Nate Bond; Paula Boswell and Donna Herrick; Dale Campau; Charles Chase; Linda and C. Raymond Clark; Mary and Dave Driscoll; Lee and Linda Farrell; Mary Geder; Adelia Honeywood; Sandra Hoyle and Steve Methven; Darcy Juday; Roger Koester; Barbara Nabors and Michael Wilson; Janet Peters; Rick and Meg Reck; Jason Sell, Evan Sell and Patricia Kuzma Sell; Robin Sweeney and David Shafer; Lori Sharp; Paul Slingsby; Janine Turchini; Karen von Saltza; Jan Justice Waddington; Laura and Wayne Wathen; and Scott Yarberry

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Lisa Backman and Jeff Christoffersen; Sondra Bland and Bob Spencer; Paula Boswell and Donna Herrick; Mary Beverly; Dale Campau; Jim Esten; Joan Grant and Tim Duesing; Martha Eubanks; Mary Geder; Kristine Haglund; Sonja and Grace Hahn; Jan and Doug Hodous; Adelia Honeywood; Sandra Hoyle and Steve Methven; Darcy Juday; Mary Keithler; Rex McGehee; Jim Petri and Christie Owens, *In Memory of Richard Mendez*; Jason Sell, Evan Sell and Patricia Kuzma Sell; Jeffrey Selleck; Robin Sweeney and David Shafer; Sue Summers; Julie Thorpe; Sharon and Jerry Tinianow; Karen von Saltza; Laura and Wayne Wathen; Roni and Larry Wilson; and Mary Zick

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Kathleen Bahr; Dale Campau; Mary Geder; Angela Grun; Adelia Honeywood; Sandra Hoyle and Steve Methven; Darcy Juday; Roger Koester; Janet Peters; Karen von Saltza; Cheryl Wilcox; and Roni and Larry Wilson





LAST LOOK, LAST WORD

A City Park tale: Meeting Gandalf's "mom"

Patrick O'Driscoll

Dec. 21, 2022: First day of this winter. Bitter sub-zero cold and snow are due by evening, so I drop by Denver City Park for a midday walkabout with the birds. It's 51 and breezy at 1 p.m., but the thermometer's about to plunge 61 degrees in a few hours. Everyone, including the birds, is taking cover.

Descending the steps from half-frozen Ferril Lake, I hear a sing-song call (human, not bird) over by Duck Lake, also half-iced in. She's standing above the south shoreline: Tiny woman in a long puffy coat, Elmer Fudd hat and a bag of bread crusts on her arm. Mallards stream towards her, but she ignores them. Raising both hands around her mouth to amplify, she calls again and again:

"Gannnnn-dallllfff! . . . GANDALF! . . . GANNNN-DALLFFF!"

Continued on page 21



When she pauses, I approach and introduce myself. “Who’s Gandalf?” I ask. She smiles up at me through a Covid mask: “He’s a [Toulouse Goose!](#)” I puzzle a moment, then reply: “You mean, the big brown-and-white goose with the orange beak, legs and feet?”

“Yes! Gandalf,” she says, nodding. So, we both know him. Among City Park park regulars, who doesn’t? Frequently mistaken on eBird for the much smaller [Greater White-fronted Goose](#) by rookie visitors to the park, the huge bird with the giant white butt has been a permanent Duck Lake fixture for years — certainly since before I saw him my first time birding there in 2014.

On eBird (and on checklists of numerous DFO field trips I’ve led in City Park), it is a “Graylag x Swan Goose (hybrid).” It looks a lot like the commercial Toulouses I find later online. Fifteenth-century French breed, farm-raised for goose liver pate. This one? Probably dumped in Duck Lake by some home goose hobbyist after it outgrew the backyard.

Until last spring, there were two of them, virtually identical. They’d been around so long, City Park regulars called them by various nicknames, like [Tweedledum](#) and [Tweedledee](#). But I’d never heard “Gandalf” before.

When I ask the woman, her answer makes my jaw drop.

“I incubate him and his brother. I hatch them. They were so cute. But they grow too big for my backyard. So thirteen and a half years ago, I bring them here. **Gandalf** and **Randolph**.”

O. M. G.! Am I hearing the unrecorded origin story? Am I’m talking to . . . the Goose Mother herself?

I ask her name. “They call me ‘Treat Lady;’” she says — for that bag of bread on her arm. I stifle the urge to say she shouldn’t feed the geese and ducks, but Treat Lady is already ahead of me.

“The park rangers know me. They say not to feed the ducks. I say, ‘I incubate, I raise this goose.’ I come feed him every night. And see? I give him 100 percent Orowheat whole wheat. Park ranger say, ‘Now **Kim**, you only feed your bird, not the wild ducks, OK?’ ”

She tells me more. Kim is 83, retired, a long-ago Korean immigrant who lives in Aurora but has been coming to Denver City Park for 25 years. She was given four goose eggs by someone who kept a flock out on the eastern Plains. She studied how to incubate them. Two didn’t hatch — but two did! She put a kiddie play pool in the backyard. But as the goslings grew, she knew she couldn’t keep them. She read about their needs: pond, food, companions. She knew a place.

Sometime around 2009, Kim brought Gandalf and Randolph to City Park and set them loose in Duck Lake. She would return to feed them daily, usually in the evening, pushing her 21-year-old Chihuahua, **Leonardo da Vinci**, in a baby stroller. This day, she and Leonardo are early to beat the big cold front.



Continued on page 22

GANDALF cont from page 21

But so far, despite her calling, no Gandalf. “He don’t expect me this time of day,” she says, then raises her voice again: “Come ONNN, GANDY! *Gannnn-DALLFF!*”

Between rounds of calling, she reaches into the stroller for snapshots. Here’s the proud mother, feeding her two geese in the park in summer. And here is Randolph, his Canada Goose mate, and the hybrid gosling they hatched in the park 7 or 8 years ago.

“Somebody stole him,” she says; Randolph disappeared last spring as the park’s overwintering flocks of several thousand Cackling and Canada Geese began to return north. I tell her my theory: I took pictures, probably of Randolph, mating with a Canada Goose *right there* in Duck Lake last March 19. Maybe he followed her north? Or out of the park, anyway?

She’s philosophical: “Gandalf, he’s kind of happy his brother disappeared. Randolph was always picking on him.” Then she laughs: “They were just like Cain and Abel!” Now it dawns on me: No wonder *I never* saw the two of them together. For years, I had to work the angles hard to get a shot of both in the same frame.

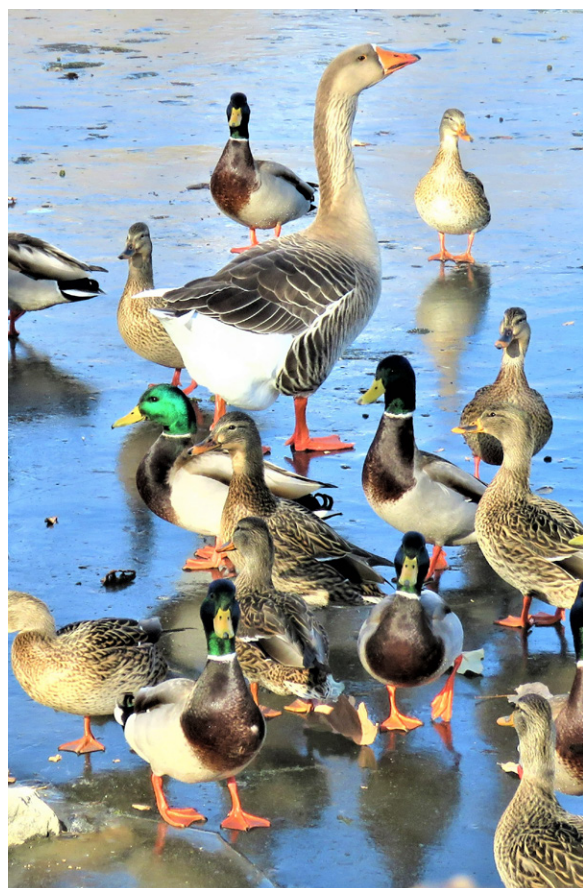
It’s been half an hour now. Kim is about to pack up without seeing, let alone feeding Gandalf. As if on cue, the huge goose suddenly flies out low from behind the island in Duck Lake with a few Canadas. They splash into an opening in the ice, out in the northwest corner. Kim calls again: “*GANNNN-DALLL!* *Gandy!*”

This time, he hears, and understands. Head high, neck extended, Gandalf swims, then waddles across some ice. He *gronks* his low, loud, not-Canada-Goose honk and swims some more, walks some more, straight at Kim, who’s still calling. “He’s probably thinking, ‘Why’s she calling me now? It’s the afternoon. I probably don’t know her,’” she says, getting down gingerly past the lake’s retaining wall to the rocky shore.

Dozens of Mallards swarm on the ice as Gandalf arrives within an arm’s length. “Hi, Gandy!” she says, reaching out with bread crusts. The goose long-necks over the ducks to gobble mouthfuls of early supper. The Mallards scrum for dropped handoffs and bits. The frozen shoreline is alive.

In 10 minutes, it’s over. Gandalf withdraws into the water, a bit of bread still in the corner of his giant bill. The ducks disperse. Kim picks her way back up to the stroller and the dog. They trundle back to the car.

Soon, the Goose Mother of Duck Lake is homeward bound until next time. All she really needs now is a good bumper sticker:
Honk if you love Gandalf!



Page 20, counterclockwise:
Gandalf on ice
Food for Gandalf
Kim calling for Gandalf at Duck Lake in Denver City Park

Page 21, top to bottom:
So long until next time
Kim and her Chihuahua at Duck Lake, waiting for Gandalf

Page 22, top to bottom:
Old snapshot of Randolph with Canada mate and hybrid offspring
Gandalf and his hungry entourage

Page 23:
Gandalf after feeding

Photos by Patrick O’Driscoll



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .

GOOD WINTER BIRDING!