

Field Trips

Continued from page 5

the Quincy Ave exit, turn right on Quincy Ave, then take left on West Tufts Ave.

If traveling north on 470, you will turn right onto W. Quincy after the exit, then take left on West Tufts Ave.

Home Depot sign can be seen from the highway. Meet at the Home Depot at C-470 and Hwy 285 at 7:15 a.m. to arrange carpools.

We will leave Home Depot parking lot at 7:30 a.m. Restrooms are available inside Home Depot.

We will first travel to Turkey Creek Park. Expected species: warblers, flycatchers, woodpeckers, possible American Dipper, Gray Catbird.

We will then travel to Mount Lindo Memorial Park. Gates for this park open at 9 a.m.

Bring water, snacks, appropriate clothing, bug spray. **Register online or contact leader.**

Parker Regional Park

Sunday, May 14

8:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Kerrie Lagon & Patti Galli
(Email: Kerriegonebirding@outlook.com Phone: 720-891-8771)

Trail Difficulty: Easy

Maximum Participants: 12

Directions: From Main St intersection in Parker, go south on Parker Rd (CO 83) for 1.2 miles.

Turn right on Indianpipe Ln and right into McCabe Meadows parking lot in Salisbury Park (Parker Regional Park).

We bird along the Cherry Creek Trail.

Bring binoculars, snack, water, sunscreen.

Possible birds include Bull-ock's Oriole, Violet-green Swallow, Western Kingbird, and sum-

Continued on next page

Last Month's Program: Fox Squirrel

Tim Johnson

From above, in the cool evening twilight of Monday, March 27, a few pair of Sciuran rodent eyes must have watched knowledgeable DFO members enter the DMNS to hear David Leatherman's presentation "Fox Squirrel: Cutest Devil on the Block."

David, with degrees from Marietta College in Ohio and Duke University, spent 31 years in the Colorado State Forest Service from 1974 to 2005. He has done what naturalists routinely deify but few accomplish: spend inordinate amounts of time observing in detail a small environment, while trying to make sense of what they find.

He has made about 1,700 visits to Grandview Cemetery in Ft. Collins, many involving encounters with our local fox squirrel subspecies *Sciurus niger rufiventer*. His talk included a number of personal observations, questions they posed, and abundant photographs.

Warning: this summary bears little resemblance to Dave's live presentation, which was hilarious as well as informative. One could wish there were a naturalist's equivalent of "Saturday Night Live." I picture Dave with Alec Baldwin in squirrel costume.

Dave began with some facts about fox squirrels, the most urban of Colorado's four squirrels (the other Colorado squirrels are Red or Pine, Rock, and Abert's). An eastern species, the fox squirrels' westernmost native extensions into Kansas and Colorado follow river corridors populated with cottonwoods. In Colorado it is likely native to the Platte and Republican River drainages but has been introduced elsewhere and is spreading to higher elevations.

Weighing on average 1–2 lb., its lifespan is 8–12 years in the wild. Usual population density is about 1 per acre, but can go about 5 times higher under optimal circumstances. Two litters of 2–3 young per year is the norm (but Dave thinks it can go higher). This allows a population to be sustainable even with 40% mortality/year.

They prefer to nest in holes dug out by woodpeckers: Northern Flicker, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers in low-elevation Colorado. They will evict these birds from nest holes, but also construct "drays" of interwoven cut branches with leaves, pasted together with grass or equivalent.

Dave documented that squirrels are extremely particular about the pasting material. It may be lined with bark strips, cut and torn off from bottom to top.

One of Dave's naturalist passions is food habits. Dave thinks of fox squirrels as fastidious, highly motivated, and intelligent foragers that actively pick and choose in an abundant urban environment.

Squirrels identify acceptable food mostly by smell, which is especially useful when retrieving cached food (they appear not to have well-developed spatial memory).

Backup food, present most of the year, are tree buds, which they will high-grade by clipping off small branches, eating the best buds, and tossing the remainder. Dave thinks (and documented) that by doing this, squirrels may deliberately shape trees to favor dray sites, since this pruning behavior may stimulate crown growth.

Continued on page 7

LAST MONTH'S PROGRAM, continued from page 6

In addition to solid tree food, including wound callus and phloem, they like “sapsicles” (frozen drips of sap), aphids, fungi, roadkill, and of course, birdseed. They are good at extracting insects from plant galls, and seeds from pods. Unusual foods include “sooty mold” that grows on the sugary secretion of scale insects and darkens trees; bird eggs and young birds; and even their own baby squirrels in hard times.

Dave has evidence that squirrels may monitor bird nests, to get maximum nutritional benefit by harvesting a nestling just before fledging. Squirrels themselves are preyed upon by Red-tailed Hawks, Great Horned Owls, red foxes (Dave showed a picture sequence of a fox avoiding a squirrel’s razor-like claws), and Toyotas.

Now for the fun stuff! Dave showed an action-packed photo sequence illustrating how a dead squirrel decays over the course of 2-1/2 months; a squirrel cooling off by sprawling on a headstone in Grandview Cemetery; and suggested some squirrel-related online entertainment.

Try a Google search for “squirrel underwear” and “squirrel feeders.” I would suggest, in addition, “squirrel antics” and “squirrel girl.” My own favorite factoid, probably from Ripley’s Believe It or Not, is that the word “squirrel” is so difficult to pronounce for non-English speakers that it has been used to identify spies.



Fox squirrel carrying grass for “dray” construction in tree in Grandview Cemetery, Ft. Collins. *Dave Leatherman*

Field Trips

Continued from page 6

mer visitors. **Register online or contact leader.**

Cherry Creek SP Wetlands Loop (Arapahoe County) Sunday, May 14

8:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Karen von Saltza (Email: kvonsaltza@yahoo.com Phone: 303-941-4881)

Trail Difficulty: Easy

Directions: Meet at the Prairie Loop lot in Cherry Creek SP.

From either park entrance, follow Lake View Rd to the Prairie Loop that is located at the south rim of the reservoir.

State Parks pass or day pass required.

This is a half day of walking that passes through most of the important habitats found in the park over a distance of about 3 miles.

Trails could be slippery or muddy, so dress accordingly. Bring water and snacks; lunch is optional.

Beginning birders are welcome. **Register online or contact leader.**

Deer Creek Canyon Friday, May 19

4:00 AM - 10:00 AM

David Suddjian (Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com Phone: 831-713-8659)

Trail Difficulty: Moderate

Maximum Participants: 8

Directions: Meet for car-pooling at the intersection of South Wadsworth and Deer Creek Road.

Park on the north side of Deer Creek Road which is just south of C-470.

A short morning outing with an early start for possible pygmy-owl (no promises) and the dawn chorus. We should hear Overbirds.

Continued on page 8