

Field Trips

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**Northwestern Colorado
Tuesday, September 11 -
Wednesday, September 12
7:00 AM - 2:00 PM**

David Suddjian
Email: dsuddjian@gmail.com
Phone: 831-713-8659
Trail Difficulty: Moderate
Maximum Participants: 10

*Directions: Meeting location
off I-70 on west slope to be
announced before the trip.*

*This overnight trip will explore
northwestern counties
including Routt, Moffat, and
more, seeking Fall migrants
and two target birds: Greater
Sage-Grouse and Sharp-tailed
Grouse. Overnight at Craig.
More details to be provided
by leader. Participants are
responsible for food
and lodging.*

**Bluff Lake Nature Center
Thursday, September 13
7:00 AM - 2:00 PM**

Rebecca Laroche
RebeccaLLaroche@gmail.com
Phone: 626-318-4435
Trail Difficulty: Moderate
Maximum Participants: 10

*Directions: From I-70 East, go
south on Havana Street and
left onto E 29th Dr., which then
joins Martin Luther King Jr Blvd.
Continue on Martin Luther King
Jr Blvd to Bluff Lake Nature
Center on left side.*

*Bluff Lake offers a great range
of habitat, attracting a variety of
raptors and songbirds. Portable
toilets are on site. Paths are
easy walking trails. We'll be
walking 1-1.5 miles. Scopes are
optional.*

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August program review

By Patrick O'Driscoll

In shorebird migration, timing is everything.

Blink and you might miss that Black-bellied Plover at the refuge. Stay home on a May weekend and risk not seeing the rare Hudsonian Godwit out at the reservoir. Tell yourself “next year” for a September trip to the southeast corner of the state – and maybe you miss the biggest staging of Long-billed Curlews for the flight south that anyone alive can remember.



So, when the national coordinator of the [U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan](#) says August is the month “when things really get started for shorebirds in Colorado,” you might want to put down whatever you’re doing and pay attention.

[Brad Andres](#) is that guy, and the timing couldn’t have been better for his talk on Aug. 6 at DFO’s first monthly program meeting of the fall migration season. “It’s the shorebirds’ peak,” Andres told his audience of several dozen DFO members and guests. “You really have the next month and a half to get out and see some decent shorebirds to the east of us.” He would know, with his own global life list at 2,368 bird species.

From there, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s Colorado-based shorebird guru launched into a rapid-fire presentation of species data, shorebird lore, feats of migration, population threats, troubling conservation trends, and plenty of slides. Here are some highlights:

- **Species:** Shorebirds are diverse globally, with 240 species in 16 different families, from stilts and oystercatchers to sandpipers and plovers. The Americas get more than a fair share: 82 species, and 52 of them in the U.S. and Canada. “Shorebirds use the entire hemisphere – all of the Americas and beyond,” Andres said. Forty-two of those species are on the Colorado list, with 25 active migrants through the state and a dozen breeding here. Andres’ numbers showed Baird’s Sandpiper and Killdeer each accounts for about one-third of the breeders. Shorebird numbers worldwide are relatively small, however, and some species trace unstable, downward trend lines on Andres’ fever charts. He noted that of 74 distinct shorebird populations in North America, only 11 percent number 1 million birds or more, and about one-third count 25,000 birds or fewer.
- **Shorebird lore:** Andres gave a familiar nod to [B95](#), the famed Red Knot dubbed “Moonbird” for having migrated more than 396,000 miles in 22 years of life (equal to flying to the moon and halfway back) between the Canadian Arctic and Tierra del Fuego (with a spring-break

stop at the Delaware Bay). Unexpected, though, was his introduction of the [Snowy Sheathbill](#), a chunky, heavy-billed shorebird that looks not like a willow stilt or avocet but like a fat, clumsy pigeon. The sheathbill's scavenger diet includes penguin chicks, seal placentas and fresh . . . umm, did he just say "feces"? "Take THAT home and share with your grandkids!" Andres wisecracked to audience laughter.

- **Migration feats:** With 71 percent of shorebirds breeding at high latitudes near and in the Arctic, "they are one of the most highly migratory groups of animals on the planet," Andres noted. Among the longest, the Red Knot's 9,000-mile sandpiper journey each way is major-league. But for epic overwater exploits, Andres gave big props to the [Bristle-thighed Curlew](#), which makes long hop-scotches from northern Alaska to Hawaii and then to Tahiti and other Polynesian atolls for the winter. Champion nonstop honors, however, go to the [Bar-tailed Godwit](#)'s winter escape from western Alaska south to New Zealand. A slide Andres flashed on the screen told the astonishing tale: "7,270 miles – 8 days – 38 mph" . . . yes, without stopping.

- **Population threats:** With climate change, sea level rise and development both coastal and inland, ecosystem stress is apparent across the globe. "Open grasslands, the most modified system globally, have gotten hammered" by development, Andres said. This dilemma is his opening to work in his specialty: a flyway approach to shorebird conservation. He said what's needed everywhere to gain support for this work (both from political partners and financial donors) are action and infrastructure improvement based on solid biology and increased public awareness. Especially important, he added, is communicating the connection and linkage of the birds' plight with human well-being – the reality that we and the shorebirds are in this together when grasslands disappear and coastal habitat is inundated as temperatures rise.



Brad Andres

- **Conservation trends:** Andres works with an alphabet soup of shorebird partnerships and initiatives not only in the Americas but in Asia, Africa and Europe – everywhere these remarkable birds fly. One alliance, the [Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network](#), advocates for conservation in 16 countries at 104 sites from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. Another effort is the [Pacific Americas Shorebird Conservation Strategy](#), an 80-page blueprint co-edited by Andres for 21 target species of plovers, oystercatchers, curlews, godwits – and one reverse-migrating South American bird, the Rufous-chested Dotterel, that goes north for the Southern Hemisphere winter. In most cases, they work to curb habitat loss to human disturbance and development.

Near the end of his 1-1/2-hour presentation, Andres delved into the uncomfortable reality of shorebird hunting for "bush meat" in parts of the Caribbean and the Guianas of northeastern South America (Guyana, French Guiana, Suriname). Whether for food, supplemental income or small-town markets, both legal and illegal "harvests" are not well understood but no doubt put negative pressure on bird populations. Andres expressed hope that hunting may be waning in some countries as older people abandon the practice and tighter controls and enforcement arise where hunting was once wide open and unrestricted by season, bag limit or protected species.

He noted a probable "harvest effect" there on Lesser Yellowlegs and said the entire topic is "challenging." But Andres added that "when you walk into 500 years of history," negotiation, not force and pressure, will guide the way toward sustainability, if not an immediate end to the practice.