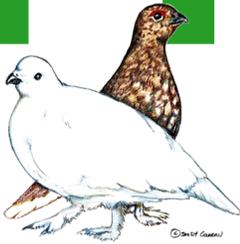


# PTARMIGAN



Northern Colorado Bird Alliance

(formerly Fort Collins Audubon Society)

P.O. Box 271968·Fort Collins,CO·80527-1968·[www.nocobirdalliance.org](http://www.nocobirdalliance.org)

Promoting the appreciation, conservation, and restoration of ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife through education, participation, stewardship, and advocacy.

March 2026

Volume 58, Issue 3

Northern Colorado Bird Alliance Hosts

Dr. Anna Chalfoun presenting: "Revealing the Depths of Our Sagebrush Seas"

Thursday, March 19

Social time with Refreshments: 7 p.m.; Announcements: 7:20; Presentation: 7:30

Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree Dr.

This program will be online via Zoom. Enter the following at 7 p.m. to join the meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87938088938>

Many describe the sagebrush steppe as "drive-through country," a "barren wasteland," or the "sagebrush sea." These labels belie the complexity and fascinating ecology of our North American sagebrush habitats. This talk will challenge such misconceptions and guide us on an immersive journey through the sagebrush sea, while showcasing some of the behaviors and natural history of lesser known and appreciated species of birds and a charismatic "mini mammal." The presentation also will highlight the impacts of ongoing human-induced habitat changes in the sagebrush steppe and describe a case study demonstrating how rigorous and longer term scientific investigation can illuminate practical strategies for addressing species' declines amidst modern land use pressures.

Dr. Anna Chalfoun is a research ecologist with the U.S. Geological Survey and serves as the Assistant Unit



Sagebrush by Nolan Bunting.

Leader for Wildlife at the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. She is an associate professor at the University of Wyoming and a Fellow and Council Member of the American Ornithological Society and a recipient of the prestigious Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers.

Chalfoun lab's research program works to understand wildlife-habitat relationships, and particularly why animals choose the habitats that they do in a changing world. Projects span diverse taxa including birds, small mammals and amphibians, and habitat types, with a focus on sagebrush steppe. Most projects are developed in collaboration with state and federal partners to address real-world conservation challenges.

Join us on March 19 for this informative program that is free and open to the public.

Northern Colorado Bird Alliance welcomes new National Audubon Society members by sending one complimentary copy of our newsletter. Join us at our monthly programs on the second Thursday of the month to find out more about Northern Colorado Bird Alliance. National dues do not cover the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter, so if you'd like to keep receiving it, please support your local chapter and subscribe. See details on the last page of the newsletter or on our website at [www.nocobirdalliance.org](http://www.nocobirdalliance.org).

This month, I want to report on the “status” of our chapter and some of the things we are doing. If what follows seems a little like bragging, don't be annoyed; take pride in what we all are doing together. You are the Northern Colorado Bird Alliance!

In 2025, we hosted a variety of outstanding guest speakers at our monthly programs who informed and entertained hundreds of attendees. Together, we learned about Cooper's Hawks, the importance of eagles in Native American culture, how birds perceive colors, how to reduce bird collisions with windows, and much more. You can find recordings of some of those talks on our YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@nocobirdalliance>).

We offered more than 25 field trips throughout the year that were attended by more than 300 people. Nearly all our field trips had attendance limits (out of necessity) and were “sold out.” This included field trips specifically designed to diversify our membership and make birding more accessible to people with disabilities. We also offered our first-ever conservation walk, which combined birding with learning about a salient conservation issue.

Our educational programs in Northern Colorado reached hundreds of non-members, including about 200 children. We awarded one grant that created resources for teaching students about raptors, and another grant that helped establish a summer bird camp at Lory State

Park. We also wrapped up a big project wherein our chapter trained more than 400 Audubon Society leaders across the country on ways to get health benefits from birding.

Northern Colorado Bird Alliance is strong and getting stronger. Our membership numbers have held steady at about 1,300 since we expanded in 2022. Nearly 1,500 people follow us on Facebook, and 1,000 on Instagram, which obviously includes plenty of non-members. Our members volunteered more than 1,500 hours of their time last year! We finished 2025 “in the black” for at least the tenth year in a row, even though we didn't raise membership dues once in that period, and we have enough money in savings to weather any unexpected expenses that might come our way. We could even take on some bigger conservation projects in the community – your ideas would be welcomed!



## CHAPTER CONTACTS

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Visit us on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/NoCoBirdAlliance>

# 2026 Birdathon

*Save the date*

*NCBA Birdathon Fundraiser*

*Coming in May for*

*Spring Migration*

*Teams will count species over 1 day  
between May 1 - 10.*

*Mark your calendar and start  
planning your  
team now.  
More details to  
follow on our  
website.*



From Pilchuck Audubon Society.



## Water: Our Most Precious Natural Resource

Water is the most precious of natural resources for most life on earth, including human life. And yet, for a century or more, states in the American West have recklessly treated water as if it is an infinite resource. To this day, we continue to encourage development and population growth in arid regions, we ignore ominous ecological warning signs, and we fight over whether changes to the climate that are exacerbating drought conditions are human caused.

On February 14, the seven states in the Colorado River Basin announced that they had failed to meet a deadline set by the federal government to negotiate a new water compact. The states all agree that future demand for water from the river will exceed reliable supplies, but they don't agree on what to do about it. So now, the federal government will attempt to impose its own plan on the states.

Communities up and down the Front Range depend on water from the Colorado River, which is pumped across the Continental Divide and stored in reservoirs like Horsetooth Reservoir and Carter Lake. Fort Collins Utilities gets about 50 percent of its water from the Colorado River, East Larimer County Water District about



Big Thompson River from Dreamstime.

70 percent, and Fort Collins-Loveland Water District about 90 percent. The fight over the Colorado River is an existential fight for our communities.

As if these long-term problems aren't bad enough, we

are also facing the possibility of short-term water shortages. As of mid-February, winter snowpack in the Colorado mountains is the lowest it has been in at least 40 years. If we don't get a lot of snow in late winter, water levels in the Cache la Poudre, the Big Thompson, and other area rivers could be reduced this spring and wildlife (including birds) could be negatively affected. If water scarcity becomes severe,



Colorado River inside Rocky Mountain National Park from Good Free Photos.

rationing may become necessary (in the form of prohibitions on lawn-watering, for example).

None of us can solve these problems as individuals, but collectively we can make a difference by using water as efficiently as possible. Do you have an old toilet in your home? According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the average family can reduce water consumption by almost 13,000 gallons per year by replacing an

old, inefficient toilet with one that bears the *WaterSense* label. Do you have an irrigation system in your yard? The EPA says as much as half of the water used for residential irrigation nationally may be wasted, due to leaks and overwatering. Systems that are leaking should be repaired or replaced. Better yet, you might consider replacing turf grass with drought-tolerant native plants that require little watering or installing a fully xeric garden.

Most water utilities offer advice on water conservation. Some also offer rebates that lower the up-front cost of replacing a toilet, improving an irrigation system, or installing a xeric landscape. Check with your provider to see what's available. Even if you aren't eligible for a rebate, you'll still save money on your monthly water bills. Members who are customers of Fort Collins Utilities or Loveland Utilities might want to take advantage of free home efficiency assessments that are available through April 2026. Knowledgeable crews from the Larimer County Conservation Corps will visit your home and look for opportunities to save water, energy, and money. To sign up, visit <https://larimercountyconservationcorps.fullslate.com/>. If you are a customer of a different water utility, ask if they offer similar help.

## A Colorado IMBCR Survey Season

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies conducts the second largest breeding bird survey in the United States: the Integrated Monitoring of Bird Conservation Regions (IMBCR) program. Each spring and summer field technicians travel to survey sites across 15 states in the western United States to identify as many birds as they can. I've had the pleasure of being one of the Colorado field technicians for the last two years, and it has been the adventure of a lifetime both times!

The Colorado season begins in early May with two weeks of training at Highline State Park where we learn the IMBCR protocol, practice our



Survey sunrise on a juniper/sagebrush plateau by Joe Webber.

an-hour before sunrise, which means anywhere from 10 minutes to an hour of hiking in the dark just to get to the survey. For surveys that are too far of a hike in the morning, we'll backpack in the afternoon before. The survey is usually a plot of 16 points spread 250 meters apart across a 1 km<sup>2</sup> area. At each point we first record a breakdown of the habitat within 50 meters, according to the composition of overstory, midstory, understory, and ground cover. Then follows six minutes of watching and listening, documenting any and every bird we see or hear, recording the age and sex of the bird (if possible), how we identified it, how far away it was when it was identified,



Female Dusky Grouse by Joe Webber.

navigation, learn our local plant life, and receive a binder full of surveys among other things, all while studying lots and lots of bird songs and calls. After training, the technicians disperse all across the state to spend the next four weeks surveying solo, starting with the lowest elevation surveys and working our way up throughout the summer.

and any other notes before moving on to repeat this at the next point. We try to get as many points as we can within five hours after sunrise, before returning to our vehicle and driving to a campsite near the next day's survey to set out before sunup again.

The crew reconvenes halfway through the season for a few days of additional training focused on mountain habitats and species as we transition to the higher altitudes. It's a wonderful chance to share stories of all our incredible encounters, best views, and difficult terrain. Throughout the 10 weeks, we experience an awesome variety of habitats and all manner of wildlife that inhabits them. The survey technicians visit more than 2,000 locations, in a massive effort to monitor the populations of our avian friends.

A typical day starts between 3:30 and 4:30 a.m.; protocol dictates that we reach our first survey point half-

### Night Herons Do Keep Late Hours! by Lori Pivonka

After a late dinner on a Caribbean island, I looked down from the edge of the deck to the beach. There walked a Yellow-Crowned Night Heron foraging for food! I had seen them roosting in trees during the day, but did not make the connection that they are actually nocturnal feeders — thus the "Night Heron" name.



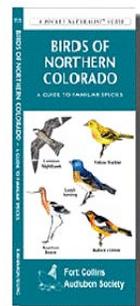
### Pocket Guide to Local Birds

Is available at the following retailers who support our organization with the sales:

Wild Birds Unlimited  
3636 S. College Ave  
Ste. C  
(970) 225-2557

Jax Loveland West  
Outdoor Gear  
2665W. Eisenhower  
(970) 667-7375

Jax Outdoor Gear  
1200 N. College  
(970) 221-0544



## March Field Trips

All field trips are free and open to the public. Anyone at any experience level is welcome. Bring snacks or lunch, water, binoculars, and/or spotting scopes. Changes to dates, meeting times, locations, and trip leaders are occasionally unavoidable. To register for any trip, please see posts at [www.facebook.com/NoCoBirdAlliance](https://www.facebook.com/NoCoBirdAlliance), our Instagram page, or member emails sent out one to two weeks in advance of each trip. When announced, links will also be posted at [lnk.bio/nocobirdalliance](http://lnk.bio/nocobirdalliance). Attendance may be limited. Bobcat Ridge surveys do not require registration. With comments or questions, contact Amy at [fieldtrips@nocobirdalliance.org](mailto:fieldtrips@nocobirdalliance.org) (new email address). Keep an eye on email and/or social media posts for updates or additional field trips.

**March 8, Sunday, Bobcat Ridge Survey.** Leader: Denise Bretting, [dbretting@swloveland.com](mailto:dbretting@swloveland.com) or 970-402-1292. The survey looks at bird populations and helps local scientists better understand bird dynamics. The little more than four-mile hike covers moderate to flat terrain with some steep sections. No registration required and there is no par-



Promoting the appreciation, conservation, and restoration of ecosystems; focusing on birds and other wildlife through education, participation, stewardship, and advocacy.

icipation limit, but please email or text Denise that you plan to attend. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Bobcat Ridge parking lot.

**March 14, Saturday, LGBTQIA+ Community and Allies at Arapaho Bend.** Leader: Kit Gray, [kit@kitgrayillustration.com](mailto:kit@kitgrayillustration.com). Join us at 9 a.m. for a relaxed and social bird outing in southeast Fort Collins. We will keep our eyes and ears open for different types of waterfowl such as Common Goldeneyes, American Wigeons, and Buffleheads. We'll also look for Belted Kingfishers, raptors, Song Sparrows, chickadees, and more. All levels are encouraged. Please bring binoculars

if you have them. Meet at 9 a.m. at the parking lot located off of Harmony Road (at Harmony Transfer Center). We will meet in the NW section of the parking lot near the intersection of paved and dirt trails. This outing will be a slow-paced, 2-hour walk on a relatively flat trail.

Sign up for LGBTQIA+ and Allies walk at Arapaho Bend was sent out in mid-February and may be

full by the time of this newsletter: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C084CADA2CA1FEC70-61846539-saturday>

**March 22, Sunday, East Valley Trail Lory State Park.** Leader: Nolan Bunting, [Nolanbunting-dvm@gmail.com](mailto:Nolanbunting-dvm@gmail.com) or 907-299-4625, and Frank Morgan. Meet up at 8:45 a.m. at the first parking lot to the left as you enter the park from the north. This is a flat and easy hike along the coves and banks of Horsetooth Reservoir. The grass should still be short, but it is a great view of the rocks and trees. The trail is not paved, flat with little elevation change, and the gravel is occasion-

### Northern Colorado Bird Alliance Welcomes New and Renewing Members

Dale Agger  
Andrew Angely  
Scott Baily  
Matthew A. Bilodeau  
Thomas & Anne Butler  
Andrew Don Carlos  
Lee Cheney  
Matthew Dane  
Susan Degutz  
Kenneth Dunnington  
Nancy Eckardt  
Margaret Francia  
Lucinda Furman  
Paul Gibson  
Kathy C. Green  
Melanie Hartman  
Judith Heidel  
Judy Holt  
Dorothy A. Hudson  
Carla Johns

Todd Johns  
Adam Johnson  
Carol Jones  
Nancy B. Jones  
Kristin Joy  
Charles Kopp  
Barbara Krupnik-Goldman  
David M. Landers  
Alora LaVoy  
Ted Manahan  
Barbara Maynard  
Andrew McFadden  
Jessie Meschievitz  
Deana Muller  
Connie Ohlson  
Joyce Owens  
Judd Patterson  
Adam Ploegman  
Joseph Polazzi

Max & Yvonne Salfinger  
Diana Schmidt  
Ann Seymour  
Luke Simmer  
Linda Squires  
Jen Strating  
Amy Sugeno  
Jennifer Szabo  
Sue Taigman  
Biosafety & Security Training  
Thomas Trout  
Pam Turner  
Ryan Twedt  
Peter Weckesser  
Robin S. Welsh  
Katheryn Wible  
Juliette Wilson  
Sandra Winkler  
Stanley Woodcock



Northern Colorado Bird Alliance  
PO Box 271968  
Fort Collins, CO 80527-1968



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## Membership Application

Join Northern Colorado Bird Alliance (the chapter), National Audubon Society (NAS), or both.

- |                          |  |         |  |
|--------------------------|--|---------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | New or renewing chapter member<br>Receive the <i>Ptarmigan</i> by email        | \$ 20   | Name: _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | New or renewing chapter member<br>Receive the <i>Ptarmigan</i> by mail         | \$ 30   | Address: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Lifetime chapter member<br>Receive <i>Ptarmigan</i> by mail or email           | \$750   | City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Additional support for chapter programs  | \$ ____ | Phone: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Additional support for Alex Cringan Fund<br>(natural history education grants) | \$ ____ | Email: _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | New NAS member<br>Receive the NAS <i>Audubon</i> by mail                       | \$ 20   | May we send you chapter email alerts if updates occur for field trips, programs, etc.? Yes or No                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Renewing NAS member<br>Receive the NAS <i>Audubon</i> by mail                  | \$ 35   | May we contact you for volunteer activities such as helping at events or contacting legislators on important issues? Yes or No |
| <b>Total Enclosed:</b>   |  | \$ ____ |  |

Make tax-exempt checks payable to Northern Colorado Bird Alliance and mail this form to Northern Colorado Bird Alliance, P.O. Box 271968, Fort Collins, CO, 80527-1968. Your cancelled check is your receipt. All renewals are due in January. New memberships begun after August 31 extend throughout the following year. Applications can be completed at

[www.nocobirdalliance.org](http://www.nocobirdalliance.org).