

Mr. George Sparks, President and CEO  
Denver Museum of Nature and Science  
2001 Colorado Boulevard  
Denver, Colorado 80205

Dear Mr. Sparks:

We, the Board of Directors and membership of the Denver Field Ornithologists, respectfully request that the Denver Museum of Nature and Science create and staff a new position of Curator of Ornithology as expeditiously as possible. The Museum has some fourteen other curators in a wide variety of important scientific fields, but has a significant deficit in not having a Curator of Ornithology. The Museum has not had an ornithologist on the staff since May of 1998, when Dr. Charles Preston, then the Curator of Zoology left the employ of the Museum to take a position elsewhere.

As Dr. John Demboski states in his article in the June/July 2008 D.M.N.S. Newsletter, the ornithology "collection serves as an irreplaceable geographic and chronological record of avian diversity because it is one of the largest in the Great Plains and Rock Mountain region." This collection is presently well curated and in great shape. Also, the collection continues to expand through salvage and donation activities of the Museum's membership and the community at large. The collection is actively used for visitation, data inquiries, loans, and volunteer activities.

However, without a Curator of Ornithology and the associated specimen-based research that such a person would carry out on an ongoing basis, the collection can not move forward to a new, higher level of excellence. By hiring someone who will utilize and expand the collection in conjunction with his/her own work and by bringing in external support for the collection this larger goal can be achieved.

There are many additional reasons why the Museum and the state of Colorado need this person and the leadership he/she would offer to the lay and scientific communities in our state.

- Colorado ranks in the top half dozen states in North America in avian species diversity.
- There is need for statewide leadership in ornithology from the region's premier scientific museum and esteemed member of the American Association of Museums.
- There is need for participation in and support of important ongoing research projects such as the current five year Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II project (Dr. John Demboski, the Curator of Vertebrate Zoology, is currently filling this role).
- Birdwatching and bird feeding constitute the top outdoor activity and fastest growing hobby in the United States second only to gardening.
- Denver Field Ornithologists ranks as one of the top birding organizations in the country by offering quality fieldtrips some fifty weeks a year, and the Colorado Field Ornithologists are a very active, well run organization making significant contributions to Colorado ornithology. These and other organizations would benefit greatly in furthering the knowledge of Colorado ornithology from an expanded partnership with the Museum and a new curator.
- Climate change is occurring in Colorado -- and on planet Earth -- and is here to stay for the foreseeable future. It is affecting bird populations (as well as plant and other animal populations) and behaviors and much work needs to be conducted to help us understand the changes it will bring about.
- There is need for additional ongoing ornithological research on Colorado's threatened and endangered species such as the Gunnison sage-grouse and the mountain plover, which may have a larger population in Colorado than in any other state. Over and above endangered and threatened bird species, the National Audubon Society has identified numerous common Colorado bird species which are in decline such as the northern bobwhite (population down by 82% range wide), evening grosbeak (population down by 78%), northern pintail (population down by 77%), loggerhead shrike (population down by 71%), lark sparrow (population down by 63%), rufous hummingbird (population down by 58%), horned lark (population down by 56%), along with too many others.

These are a few of our ideas for possible research projects in which a curator might be involved, but by no means do we wish to limit the scope of this person's research priorities.

A large collection such as the Museum's, without a curator and an associated research program, by its very nature becomes less active. To bring a new vibrancy to the collection requires a Curator of Ornithology and Colorado needs the Museum's leadership which this person would represent.

Thank you very much for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Mary Cay Burger - President  
of the Denver Field Ornithologists

Charles Thornton-Kolbe - Vice President  
of the Denver Field Ornithologists

Copies of the same letter also sent to:

Dr. Kirk Johnson, Vice President of Research  
and Collections, and Chief Curator

Dr. John Demboski, Curator of Vertebrate Zoology