



# Hotspots: Where Birds Hang Out

Binoculars in hand, ID book in one pocket, notebook and pen in another, resolutions to be a responsible, ethical birder firmly in place—you are ready to go birding. But, where will you go?

While birds may be found virtually anywhere, they are not evenly distributed across the landscape. When birders discover a place with lots of birds (both in numbers and variety of species) that location is called, in birder-speech, a “hotspot.”

Just as people tend to congregate in places with housing and markets or restaurants, birds have their own favorite hangouts, and for the same reasons. Birds need water, food, and shelter. Any site providing all three is bound to have great birding.

In arid Colorado, the biggest attraction for both resident and migrant species is water. The draw for waders and shorebirds is obvious, but even desert birds need a drink. Every bird benefits from clean plumage, for both insulation and parasite control. The drier an area, the more concentrated the birds will be at the neighborhood oasis. Examples of local watering holes include Big Johnson Reservoir, Fountain Creek, Ramah SWA (see article on page 5) and Lake Pueblo.

Along with water, birds need food. To a large extent, the kind of food available in a particular habitat determines which birds will be found there. Many local ponds have plenty of water, but little in the way of plants and bugs. Therefore,

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This morning while I was volunteering at the Bear Creek Nature Center, I had the chance to read the January/February 2007 copy of the local *Outdoors* magazine. The Outdoor Family Fun article, written by Anita Louise, was an entertaining account of how she tried to get her children to participate in the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC.) The GBBC, hosted by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, occurs for four days every February. Participants are asked to watch the birds for as long as possible (15 minutes or more) each day and then report their sightings.

What struck me about this article is that Aiken Audubon was not mentioned. The author had contacted the Wild Birds Unlimited Store and was told about Dark-eyed Juncos and why they are not considered Robins and possible other birds she and her children might see over the weekend. At the end of the article she listed some suggestions on how to get ready for the next GBBC (that would have been this year's count.) She listed the Wild Bird Center, National Audubon, Cornell Lab, and two email addresses as starting points. I wondered why Aiken Audubon was not listed; aren't we in the business of bird watching, too?

So, how do we get the word out about Aiken Audubon? First, I want to thank everyone who attends our monthly general meetings; especially with the cold and snowy weather this year. I believe some of our best advertisement is positive word of mouth. Whenever possible, I invite people to attend the next meeting. We've had very good programs and I believe the remaining selection will be just as good. Each of us needs to bring one person to a general meeting or field trip. We need to get the word out about Aiken Audubon and what we do. Tell friends about the Aiken Audubon website; tell them the meetings are free and full of information about birds and birding. I know we compete with many other organizations for the public's time, but I believe in Aiken Audubon. If we all encourage one friend to participate, hopefully next year I'll see Aiken Audubon listed at the end of an article.

Keep on birding,

*Risë*

• RISE FOSTER-BRUDER  
PRESIDENT, AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

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## DATES TO REMEMBER

### March 21

Program: Bluebird Project

### April 18

Program: Galapagos Islands

### May 16

Program: Meet the Authors

### June - August

No meetings; check website for fieldtrips!

## Newsletter Articles

Items and announcements of special interest to Aiken Audubon members are welcomed for publication in this newsletter.

Deadline for the May/June 2007 issue is April 18.

Contact the editor, Leslie Holzmann  
leslie@icta.net, 719.495.8889

## March 21 • Kevin Corwin The Colorado Bluebird Project

As cavity nesters, bluebird numbers declined with the introduction of House Sparrows and Starlings, competing species, in the late 1800s. Clearing of farmland and removal of dead trees from remaining forested areas exacerbated the problem.

In the 1920s, a nationwide campaign was started to build bluebird nest boxes and put them on metal poles, fence posts, and trees in suitable habitats. These man-made boxes replace hard-to-find natural cavities in old trees. Happily, they have been readily accepted by the birds.

All these conservation efforts have been very successful in the east. Populations of Eastern Bluebirds are growing rapidly. Mountain Bluebirds are also responding to the increase in nesting sites. Unfortunately, Western Bluebirds aren't doing as well. Their population is still declining, especially in California.

The Colorado Bluebird Project operates under the guidance of the Audubon Society of Greater



PHOTO: DAVID MENKE, U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Mountain Bluebird

Denver and the direction of Kevin Corwin. Come learn what these volunteers are doing to increase bluebird numbers throughout the state. Find out how *you* can get involved.

## April 18 • Chris Blakeslee An Amateur Naturalist's Wanderings in the Galápagos Islands

In August of 2004, the Blakeslees joined a group spending eight days visiting and exploring six of the larger of the Galapagos Islands, 600 miles off the west coast of South America. The group tiptoed amongst hordes of Marine Iguanas,



PHOTO © 2004 CHRIS A. BLAKESLEE

walked in the footsteps of Darwin, snorkeled with Green Sea Turtles and Galápagos Sea Lions, and photographed the famed Flightless Cormorants. Without a doubt, this was a trip of a lifetime.

Chris Blakeslee is a retired Jeffco elementary school teacher. He worked with 6th graders during most of his career and was the first Resident Teacher at Jefferson County's Windy Peak Outdoor Lab School. In 1982, he was selected National Environmental Conservation Teacher of the Year.

He holds a Masters Degree in Biology from Western State College, and is currently serving on the Board of the Denver Field Ornithologists. In his free time he is doing biological, geological, and historical research at Windy Peak Outdoor Lab School.

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Aiken Audubon meetings are held at the Colorado State Division of Wildlife building located at 4255 Sinton Road. Coffee and socializing is at 6:30pm and programs begin at 7:00pm. Please use the back entrance. **Note:** Sinton Road runs parallel to I-25 on the east side, between Garden of the Gods Road and Fillmore Street.

## FIELD TRIPS

Everyone is welcome on Aiken field trips, regardless of experience level or membership in Audubon. Please contact trip leader for more information and to let them know you are coming. *Current field trip information is available online at [www.aikenaudubonsociety.org](http://www.aikenaudubonsociety.org).*

Saturday, March 24

## Colorado City & Rye

This joint excursion with Pueblo's Arkansas Audubon chapter will be led by Dave Silverman. Be in the Sears Southgate parking lot at 8 a.m. to carpool. Expect to meet up with the southern group at Colorado City.

### MORE INFORMATION:

Leon Bright 719.561.1108 or Donna Emmon 719.676.5666

Saturday, April 14

## Eastern El Paso County

Look for residents and migrants in the short grass prairies east of town. Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the southeast corner of the Safeway parking lot in Falcon to carpool for this half-day trip.

### TRIP LEADER

Cici Lee 719.495.3802

Saturday, April 28

## Fountain Creek Nature Center

Spend a spring morning exploring Fountain Creek's diversity of habitats, from ponds to brush to cottonwoods full of singing birds. "Warbler Alley" should be at its prime, with the trees not fully leafed out, and birds beginning to head north. At this time of year, something interesting is bound to show up. Meet at Sears Southgate at 7:30 am to carpool.

### TRIP LEADER

Allan Burns 719.632.2081

## UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

April 19 - May 19

## Beginning Birding Class

Fountain Creek Nature Center (FCNC) is again offering a Beginning Birding class, taught by Ken Pals. Even if you are not a beginner, this is a great way to hone your skills and meet other birders.

Classroom time focuses on learning field marks, vocalizations and behaviors of Colorado birds. This year's class includes a special emphasis on identifying warblers. Field trips to area hotspots reinforce what was learned in class. Call right away to reserve your place!

Class dates are April 19, May 3, and May 17, from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. Field trip dates are April 21, May 5, and May 19, from 8:00 a.m. – noon. Reservations are needed. The class fee is \$50. Call FCNC at 719.520.6745 to sign up.

**Birding tip:** Don't wear white when you are out birding. Bright white is one way birds signal "danger" to other birds, and they will hide from you or fly away.

## TRIP REPORT

## Pueblo Raptors

**FEBRUARY 3, 2007:** The weather was beautifully bright and sunny, but a cold wind howled all day. A dozen or so intrepid birders joined leader Gary Conover in exploring Clear Springs Ranch and the rolling plains along Hanover Road, east of I-25, before arriving at Lake Pueblo State Park.

The wind made birding somewhat difficult. Many raptors that normally would have been perched in plain view were hunkered down in the brown grass, where they were hard to spot. Smaller birds were buried deep in thickets. However, several Bald Eagles showed up to thrill visitors to Lake Pueblo's Eagle Days, and numerous gulls and ducks were on the small area of open water near the dam and marinas.

Bird list: Common Raven, American Crow, Canada Goose, Ring-billed Gull, Black-billed Magpie, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-winged Blackbird, European Starling, Mountain Bluebird, Northern Flicker, Rock Pigeon, Northern Harrier, Killdeer, Turkey Vulture\* (?), American Kestrel, Dark-eyed Junco, Horned Lark, Ferruginous Hawk, Blue Jay, Bald Eagle, Thayer's Gull, American Coot, Mallard, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Common Merganser, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Ring-necked Duck, American Wigeon, Pied-bill Grebe, Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, Redhead, American Pipit, Bufflehead, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, and White-crowned Sparrow.

\* While realizing Turkey Vultures are not normally found here this time of year, one thought was that this bird had moved northward into the eastern plains to feed on the carcasses of cattle killed by the blizzards.



The release of a Ferruginous Hawk (shown above) and a Red-tailed Hawk, rehabilitated by the Pueblo Raptor Center, was one highlight of the day.

PHOTO © RISE FOSTER-BRUDER

## If the March Winds Blow: More Energy Conservation Tips

As I write this, the first crocus has appeared and a tree is full of the sparkly chatter of a flock of one of my favorite birds, the tiny bushtit.

And, there's a bit of wind blowing too. Since I want to keep it from whistling through my house, I'm double-checking to see that any cracks and crannies that would let in icy cold air (in winter) and prickly hot air (in summer) have been properly plugged. None of us should pay to air-condition the vast outdoors or heat the great wide world.

The usual tiny air leaks in a home are equivalent to leaving a three-foot-square window wide open all the time, something none of us would consciously want to do when the weather outside wasn't just the right temperature.

You can check the usual suspect leaks with a stick of incense.\* For a bit of fun I tried an incense called "Energizer." Incense smoke will waver or blow in a different direction than the usual "up" if there's a leak. Here's where I checked and what to do, as easy as 1 to 7.

**1** I didn't find leaks around any doorframes that lead to the outside or windowpanes where they met the walls, but it's also good to check wherever an outside wall meets a floor, ceiling, another wall, or skylight. Using the incense technique, I found that the smoke blew sideways where my kitchen floor met a wall, whereas a few inches away inside the kitchen the smoke rose straight up.

Be sure to get the right kind of caulk to fix any wall-to-wall or frame problems—the caulk will tell you if it's for exterior, interior, windows, etc. Any leak less than a half-inch wide can be caulked. For gaps more than a half-inch wide use foam sealant or foam caulking. Some foams expand or can be sprayed in to fill hard to reach places, but don't use them on where walls meet doors or window frames, or you might get too tight a fit. More easy information about how to caulk and install weather-stripping is available at [www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/consumered/heg157.htm](http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/consumered/heg157.htm).

**2** You can also inexpensively weather-strip exterior doors, windows, and attic doors where they close, to insure their closures are airtight. Weather-stripping, like caulk, is available at your local hardware store.

**3** I noticed that one of my electrical outlets on an outside wall was not insulated. There are rubber gaskets you can buy inexpensively that fit in wall outlets and switch plates and stop their leaks. It's simple; just unscrew and place inside. You can also caulk around outlets and switch plates.

**4** Be sure to check your fireplace flue to make sure it's actually closed when not in use. This costs you nothing and you get big gains from closing a rather large hole. You can also use heat-resistant, noncombustible caulk to seal around the flue. And it's possible to caulk around the chimney, kitchen (and bathroom) exhaust fan, range hood, or dryer vent using heat-resistant, non-combustible caulk or foam.

**5** If you have light fixtures that are recessed into the ceiling, make sure they are airtight "Insulated Ceiling" or "IC" fixtures and then seal around them with heat-resistant caulk. Cover any ceiling vents you don't need to use in winter (such as air conditioner vents) by placing decorative fabric or air blockers in them. Much less drafty.

\* If you don't want to try incense: On a cold, windy day, close all outside doors and windows. Turn on exhaust fans and the dryer to depressurize the home, or temporarily seal a large fan in an open window to exhaust air. Use your hand or lightweight paper to test for airflow around windows, doors, attic hatches, utility entrances, foundation and other areas, including all walls. If you feel air moving inside, you have a leak.

**6** Caulk around where pipes or cable lines go through outside walls or ceilings.

**7** Plug up any obvious holes, as in your attic, where leaks commonly occur. Cover with plastic, staple, and caulk around edges.

Everybody knows about caulking and weather-stripping, but how many of us do it? Pick one energy challenge during the month of March, and you'll have better luck than the Irish. Pick one a week, and before the end of the month you'll have earned a St. Patrick's Day party. And if you've already done all this, just do a quick check to make sure your caulk and weather-stripping are still intact. May you all have this Irish blessing on any March energy savings:

May the road rise to meet you,  
And may the wind be  
always at your back.

Conserve, Preserve, Enjoy!

• SANDRA MCNEW  
CONSERVATION CHAIR

Much of this information was taken from the book *You Can Prevent Global Warming (and save money!)*, by Jeffrey Langholz and Kelly Turner.

## Want up-to-the-minute conservation news?

Want to do something for the birds? Since environmental issues usually come up quickly and call for a rapid response, we find it's not always helpful to put specifics in a bi-monthly newsletter. There's too long a lag time! So, if you'd like a more timely guide to bird conservation issues, please subscribe to our e-conservation tree: Send a message to Sandra McNew, Conservation Chair, at [sandramcnew@aol.com](mailto:sandramcnew@aol.com). Put "e-conservation tree" in the subject line, and we'll get conservation information to you quickly enough to do the most good for the birds and the environment. Thanks.

• SANDRA MCNEW  
CONSERVATION CHAIR

## Spring Oasis— Ramah State Wildlife Area (SWA)

Located on the dry plains of eastern El Paso County, Ramah's small reservoir and green vegetation must appear a welcome respite for migrating birds of all types. In the spring, numerous waders will crowd the shallows while ducks and grebes feed in the deeper water. A pair of Great Horned Owls has once again returned to their nest in a tall cottonwood. Along the entry road, a marshy area of bushes and tall grass offers up surprises—you might even encounter (as we did) a writhing mass of garter snakes emerging from their communal hibernation den! The diversity of habitats has much to do with the large number of species to be found.

The best time to visit Ramah SWA is spring to early summer. The only source of water in the reservoir is rain and snow melt. Depending on the year's precipitation, the water level drops more or less quickly as the weather warms, and it eventually becomes a dry lake bed full of prickly weeds. In the fall the area is open to duck hunting. It's rather nerve-wracking, not to mention dangerous, to be sneaking up on a shorebird, hoping to identify it, while someone else is shooting at a duck right next to you! If you do attempt a fall trip, be sure to check with the Colorado Division of Wildlife for hunting season dates.

Since Ramah is a SWA, each adult 18 to 65 must possess a valid Habitat Stamp. These may be purchased for \$10.25 by calling the Division of Wildlife at (800) 244 5613, by going online at <http://wildlife.state.co.us/ShopDOW/AppsAndLicenses/HabitatStamp/> or by visiting any place where hunting licenses are sold. Proceeds benefit wildlife by preserving habitat across Colorado.

• **LESLIE HOLZMANN**

Directions: Ramah SWA is located along Hwy. 24, 5 miles northeast of Calhan and just past mile marker 345. Look for a brown SWA sign indicating a left turn onto the access road.

PHOTO © LESLIE HOLZMANN



Currently dry and snow-covered, Ramah SWA can become a migrant trap in the spring.

## Saraiya Ruano: ABA Young Birder of the Year Seeks Bird-a-thon Pledges

Saraiya, a 16-year-old junior at Coronado High School, honor student, and active Aiken Audubon member, will be participating in the Great Texas Birding Classic on April 21.

As part of an American Birding Association/Leica Tropicbirds team for 2007, she will be competing against birders from throughout North America. The objective of this competition is to find and record as many bird species as possible within a 24-hour period, with a goal of raising funds on a pledge per species basis. Funds raised through these pledges will be used to develop and support the ABA's education program. This program provides scholarships for young birders to attend birding camps and events, supports the ABA's young birder newsletter, subsidizes student memberships, goes toward development of new programs, and allows for educational outreach.

Pledges and contributions may be made to the ABA Education Program online at [www.americanbirding.org](http://www.americanbirding.org) or by calling 710.578.9703 x237. Be sure to indicate that your donation is in Saraiya's name.

### HOTSPOTS (CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE)

few birds hang around for long. Likewise, manicured and sprayed landscapes, monoculture lawns, and "fruitless" trees likewise have little to offer a hungry bird. On the other hand, the greater the diversity of native plants in an area, the more birds will be found there. This is one reason Aiken Canyon and Chico Basin are hotspots.

Shelter is the third hotspot requirement. Birds exposed to predators and weather extremes won't survive very long. A large body of open water protects sleeping waterfowl from land-based predators such as coyotes. As birders quickly discover, little brown birds quickly disappear in dense thickets and tall grasses. Try spotting a yellow warbler among the green and yellow leaves of a tall cottonwood! The same cover that protects the birds challenges the birders. Isn't that part of the fun? Ramah SWA, Fountain Creek Nature Center, and Aiken Canyon are among the local hotspots that provide plenty of shelter for the birds.

One of the best ways to learn about local hotspots is to join Aiken Audubon on a field trip. Three great opportunities are described in this newsletter. Check online at [www.aikenaudubonsociety.org](http://www.aikenaudubonsociety.org) for any additions. Not only will there be birds, there will be experienced birders to help you find and identify them. You don't need to be a member to go on a trip, and beginners are welcome.

• **LESLIE HOLZMANN**

The bluebird carries the sky on his back.

—Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*, April 3, 1852



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YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE A MEMBER TO PARTICIPATE IN AIKEN'S ACTIVITIES

## Western Bluebird

Kramer E. Bookman, Copyright 2007



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### Aiken Audubon Society Membership/Subscription

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