



Great Backyard Bird Count: Great Opportunity to Connect with Nature

In February, volunteers throughout the U.S. and Canada are invited to “Count for Fun, Count for the Future!”

Millions of novice and accomplished bird watchers can make their fascination with nature add up for science and for the future during the 11th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, led by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. During “Presidents’ Day” weekend, February 15-18, 2008, anyone can count birds from wherever they are and enter their tallies online at www.birdcount.org. These reports create an exciting real-time picture of where the birds are across the continent and contribute valuable information for science and conservation.

“These volunteers are counting not only for fun but for the future,” said Tom Bancroft, Chief Science Officer for Audubon. “It’s fun to see how many different kinds of birds can be seen and counted right in your backyard or neighborhood park. Each tally helps us learn more about how our North American birds are doing, and what that says about the health and the future of our environment.”

“The GBBC is a great way to engage friends, family, and children in observing nature in their own backyard, where they will discover that the outdoors is full of color, behavior, flight, sounds, and mystery,” said Janis Dickinson, Director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Continued on back page

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

I hope everyone had a grand holiday season. Another year brings new challenges, opportunities and hopefully new birds. I want to thank everyone who participated in December’s Christmas Bird Count. Even though it was a bit chilly, the sun was shining and that made it a great day to be out birding. My group had an impressive raptor day, seeing five different species. Thanks to Ben and Sally Sorensen for organizing and compiling another CBC. Check out the final results inside the newsletter.

I had an incidence this CBC I would like to relay. While counting at a backyard feeder, the homeowner “greeted” us from her porch and asked what we were doing. We were parked on the side of a public road but she was concerned and asked if we should be doing this. Initially she did not want us looking in her backyard and questioned if I was telling her the truth about participating in an annual CBC. I rattled off the birds we had seen so far to assure her we really were out counting birds. She eventually believed me and

came down to tell us what she usually sees. Of course all the birds flew away, undermining our efforts, but I felt it was more important to allay her fears about strange people with binos watching her house than tallying another bird.

Later, I learned that the homeowner called a local “bird” business to corroborate my story. For the past three years I have stopped at this backyard. She has a number of feeders so there are usually several species and many birds there. Why did she seem to have a problem with us stopping by this year? I just think we all need to remember and be aware of the non-counting birders in the world who do not find it “normal” to visit stranger’s yards watching and counting birds.

Keep on birding,

Risë

• **RISË FOSTER-BRUDER**
PRESIDENT, AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

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DATES TO REMEMBER

January 23 (note 4th Wed!)
Raptor ID, with Steve Vaughan

February 20
Volunteer Opportunities for
Retirees, with Roger Ratcliff

March 19
West Coast Pelagic Trip,
with Deborah Barnes

April 16
Colorado Sparrows, with
David Leatherman

Newsletter Articles

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

Deadline for the March/April 2008 issue is Wednesday, February 20.

Contact the editor, Leslie Holzmänn:
leslie@icta.net, 719.495.8889

January 22 • Steve Vaughan Raptor ID Revisited



Colorado is home to many different species of birds of prey. Although they may appear quite similar, they are all unique. Join Steve Vaughan as he gives the tips needed to help you identify Colorado's diurnal (active during the daytime) birds of prey.

Stephen holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Zoology from Colorado State University. He has been a professional nature photographer since 1985. Stephen has photography credits from such prestigious magazines as Audubon, Birders World and Sierra. His photographs have appeared in calendars published by Audubon Society, Sierra Club and Arizona Highways. Stephen has been teaching nature photography at Pikes Peak Community College since 1998. He has led photography work shops to Cape May New Jersey, Garden of the Gods, Rocky Mountain National Park, Southeast Arizona, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge New Mexico and Costa Rica.

February 20 • Roger Ratcliff Volunteer Opportunities for Retirees

Earlier this year, Donna Young and Roger Ratcliff volunteered with the Great Baikal Trail (www.greatbaikaltrail.org), a small Siberian non-profit with the mission of promoting tourism as an alternative to industrial development. They do this by building trails in the Lake Baikal region. Lake Baikal holds 20% of the fresh liquid water in the world, is the oldest lake in the world, and is the deepest lake in the world. The travelogue style presentation will cover:

- Their trans-Siberia railway experience
- Siberian cities and villages
- Lake Baikal
- Trail-building work camps
- The pros, cons, and means of a nomadic volunteer life



Donna and Roger retired in 1997 and sold their Denver home. They had a plan: summer vacation in Alaska, trek Nepal, then figure out where to live. A request from Roger's niece to help with an archeological excavation in wilderness Alaska sent Roger and Donna on a different path—a volunteer path that included two years in the Alaska wilderness, two years in China, a summer in arctic Russia, five months in Siberia, and more. They never did make it to Nepal, or figure out where to live.

Aiken Audubon programs are free and open to the public. They 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.

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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.aikenaudubon.com.

Saturday, February 2

Eagle Day at Lake Pueblo

Don't miss the 12th annual Eagle Day Festival at Lake Pueblo State Park Headquarters (2008 state parks pass or \$6.00 entrance fee). Enjoy a fun day filled with activities and many opportunities to view these marvelous birds. Events begin at 8:30 am with "Bird ID Tips and Trick" by John Koshak, DOW, and run until 4:30 pm.



Getting there can be half the fun. Instead of driving down I-25, try the scenic route through the hills east of the interstate. Look for falcons, hawks, and eagles. You never know who will be perched on the next utility pole.

For more information about Eagle Days, check out www.eagleday.org or call (719) 561-5300.

The following trip is hosted by the Arkansas Valley Audubon Society. They graciously welcome you to come along. Contact trip leader(s) for more information and to let them know you are coming.

Sunday, January 13, 8am

Walk with the Bushtits

...at Lathrop State Park, Walsenburg. This trip was snowed out last year, so we'll try again! Meet Cliff Smith and Pearle Sandstrom-Smith at the park Visitor's Center at 8 am. A State Park pass or \$6.00 day pass is required on all vehicles. Either may be purchased at Lathrop.

Contact Cliff Smith and Pearle Sandstrom-Smith, 543-6427 for reservations and carpool information.

"You must not know too much, or be too precise or scientific about birds and trees and flowers and water-craft; a certain free margin, and even vagueness—perhaps ignorance, credulity—helps your enjoyment of these things..."

• BY WALT WHITMAN, SPECIMEN DAYS,
"BIRDS—AND A CAUTION"

TRIP REPORTS

Chico Basin Ranch

OCTOBER 27, 2007: Here is the list of our trip last Saturday to Chico Basin Ranch with fortunately no signs of the 350 acre grass fire the previous week affecting the prime birding spots. Best bird was a late Gray Flycatcher at Rose and both Loggerhead and Northern Shrikes.

Canada Goose, Gadwall, American Widgeon, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Scaled Quail, Pied-billed Grebe, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk (inc black phase), Ferruginous Hawk, American Kestrel, Prairie Falcon (Hannover Road), Virginia Rail, American Coot, Barn Owl, Great Horned Owl, Long-eared Owl (possible), Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Gray Flycatcher, Loggerhead Shrike, Northern Shrike (adult), Blue Jay, Horned Lark, Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren (late), Marsh Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Townsend's Solitaire, Mountain Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, American Pipit, Yellow-rumped Warbler, American Tree Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco (Pink-sided), Oregon and Gray-headed), Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Pine Siskin

On the way home via Big Johnson Reservoir we had a good selection of waterfowl including one Ross's Goose, 40 Snow Geese overflying, one Common Loon, and Bonaparte's Gulls.

• BY JOHN DRUMMOND

Come see the greatest crane migration spectacle in the world!

Don't miss the Audubon Chapter Workshop: "Taking Action for Birds in a Changing Climate" FRIDAY, MARCH 14 at the Rivers and Wildlife Celebration

The 38th Annual Rivers and Wildlife Celebration

March 14-16, 2008 Kearney, Nebraska

- 500,000 Sandhill Cranes
- Robert Bateman, Wildlife Artist

For complete schedule and registration:
www.nebraska.audubon.org
402-797-2301

6th Annual Science Symposium of the Nebraska Partnership for All-Bird Conservation FRIDAY, MARCH 14 at the Rivers and Wildlife Celebration

Nebraska Partnership for All-Bird Conservation

Audubon NEBRASKA

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Start the New Year with Good News!

Clear Springs Ranch Wildlife Area To Be Undisturbed

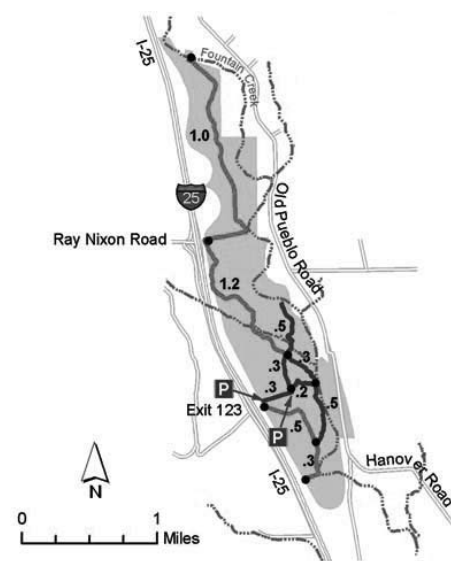
As many of you know, Clear Springs Ranch (aka Hanna Ranch, aka Colorado State Wildlife Area) was slated by Colorado Springs Utilities for immediate use as a sewage treatment facility. The facility would have served Banning Lewis Ranch and other Colorado Springs development in northeast Colorado Springs, whose waste was to be piped to Clear Springs. But now the area is to remain undisturbed until at least 2035!

Aiken Audubon was part of the effort to get Colorado Springs Utilities to come up with more creative solutions. We can be proud that members of Aiken met with Utilities, looked at plans, explored options, and wrote to governing officials advocating more creative and less wasteful (pun intended) options. This solution avoids three years of construction disruption, overbuilding (how strange would it be to have two sewage treatment facilities within a couple of miles of each other, since the City of Fountain is building one not too far away?) and it might allow a long-term bird banding program to continue.

Thanks to all who helped or supported this project! We've chalked one up for the birds!

• BY SANDRA MCNEW

For further information or questions contact Sandra McNew, Master Conservationist and Aiken Conservation Chair, at 719.632.4374, or email sandramcnew@aol.com.



Clear Springs Ranch

Sunday, February 24, 4 pm

Special Audubon Program: Saving Pinon Canyon

Citizens from southeastern Colorado have been working valiantly to resist a proposed tripling in size (to the size of Connecticut) of the Pinon Canyon army maneuver site. This expansion could eliminate much of the Comanche National Grasslands, along with hundreds of thousands of acres of private rangeland. These unique canyonlands shelter thousands-year old Native American sacred sites, along with abundant wildlife and the longest dinosaur trackway in North America. Many ranching families have lived on these lands for more than a century.

Lon Robertson, director of the Pinon Canyon Expansion Opposition Coalition, will update us on what's at stake and what's being done to resist the Army's efforts to appropriate private and public land in southeastern Colorado. Please join us in this important discussion about saving an ecological and cultural treasure. Event cosponsored by Sierra Club Indian Peaks group.

The meeting will take place at the REI store in Boulder, 1600 26th Street, Boulder, CO

Congress Votes to Protect Water Resources

NOVEMBER 2007, WASHINGTON, D.C.: The U.S. Congress voted today to override the president's veto of the Water Resources Development Act, a \$23 billion piece of legislation that authorizes more than \$5.5 billion for key ecosystem restoration projects. The president issued his veto on Nov. 2, citing the bill's cost. This marks the first time Congress has overridden a veto in this Administration and only the 106th time in history.

Audubon has lobbied for passage of WRDA for five years and urged the congressional override because of the bill's funding to key Audubon priorities like the Everglades, the Great Lakes, coastal Louisiana, and the Mississippi River.

"In today's historic veto override, Congress has kept its promise to restore America's Everglades and made an historic national commitment to the protection of more of America's most sensitive and valuable ecosystems, including the Gulf Coast, the Mississippi River, and the Great Lakes," said April Gromnicki, Audubon's Director of Ecosystem Restoration. "If there is a cause that merits a historic vote such as this, it's fitting that the cause be to restore some of our most special places before they are lost forever."

For more information, visit <http://web1.audubon.org/news/pressRelease.php?id=62>

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. 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.

• BY SANDRA MCNEW

The Birds and the Bees

It's almost Valentine's Day, and once again the topic of love is in the air. We often mention "explaining the birds and the bees" as a euphemism for discussing... well... sex. But is this valid? Is there anything similar between the mating habits of people, and birds and bees?

Yes, the end object is often the same—babies! However, the way a species chooses one (or more) mates and then rears young varies not only between birds and bees, but even among bird species within the same family.

So, how do the birds and the bees "do it"?

Bee family structure is completely different from that of humans. The queen bee is the only one who lays eggs. In fact, that's her entire life purpose. She lays 1,500 eggs a day, so she sure doesn't have time for much else.

The rest of the female bees are sterile, kept that way by the queen's pheromones. These bees make honeycomb, tend larvae, tend young drones, tend the queen, clean the hive, gather nectar, gather pollen, gather propolis*, evaporate nectar, cap full cells of honey, defend the hive, starve the drones, lay drone eggs, and move larvae who will develop into a new queen. During the summer they work themselves to death in 20–40 days. (In the winter they live several months.) Could the comparison between bees and humans be a reflection on someone's opinion that women do all the work?



aikorns

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The males, or drones, exist only to mate with the queen. Although they may live one to three months, they only get to mate once. The rigorous physical activity involved in mating literally rips open their abdomens, and they quickly expire. Since they compete heavily for that one chance, it must be worth it, for a drone bee. Let's be glad we aren't like the bees!

How about the birds?

There are as many ways of raising a bird family as there are kinds of birds. They may be monogamous, polygamous, or polyandrous. At least to the casual observer, most birds stick with the same mate for the current breeding season. However, closer study indicates that there also may be some surreptitious fooling around in the bushes.

Penguin parents, as in the majority of bird species, share the onerous chores of incubating the egg(s) and feeding the young. Cowbirds and cuckoos lay their eggs in other species' nests, then leave and never look back. Coots kill their excess offspring, while Barrows Goldeneye females will raise several adopted broods in addition to their own. Obviously, there are many ways birds go about attracting a mate, building a nest (or not), and raising their offspring.

For a frazzled human parent, this complexity could have a silver lining. By the time you explain all about the birds and the bees, your kids may have forgotten their original question.

• BY LESLIE HOLZMANN

* Propolis is a natural resin gathered from trees to be used in hive construction.



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SUBSCRIPTION IS EXPIRING!

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

BACKYARD: CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

People of all ages and experience levels are invited to take part wherever they are—at home, in schoolyards, at local parks or wildlife refuges, even counting birds on a balcony. Observers count the

"I was thrilled to be part of something that would help shed light on the environment and the impact that humans have on this earth. It was a chance to use my hobby for a greater good."

• LAUREN, NORTH CAROLINA

highest number of each species they see during at least 15 minutes on one or more of the count days. Then they enter their tallies on the Great Backyard Bird Count web site www.birdcount.org.

The web site provides helpful hints for identifying birds. Participants can compare

results from their town or region with others, as checklists pour in from throughout the U.S. and Canada. They can also view bird photos taken by participants during the count and send in their own digital images for the online photo gallery and contest.

In 2007, Great Backyard Bird Count participants made history, breaking records for the number of birds reported, and the number of checklists. Participants sent in 81,203 checklists tallying 11,082,387 birds of 613 species.

"Literally, there has never been a more detailed snapshot of a continental bird-distribution profile in history," said John Fitzpatrick, Director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "Imagine scientists 250 years from now being able to compare these data with their own!"

Already, the count results show how the numbers of some birds species have changed in recent years, such as a decline in Northern Pintails and an increase in Hooded Mergansers, consistent with trends from the Christmas Bird Count and Breeding Bird Survey.

"People who take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count see the results of their efforts in the news and in bird conservation work taking place across the country, said Audubon Education VP, Judy Braus. "Whether the counts occur at home, at schools or nature centers, they're more than engaging and educational science activities for young people and adults, they're a way to contribute to the conservation of birds and habitat nationwide."

For more information on how to participate, including identification tips, photos, bird sounds, maps, and information on over 500 bird species, visit www.birdcount.org.