



## Citizen Science

Are you interested in birds? Do you enjoy counting them, listing them, or watching them cavort around your backyard birdfeeder?

Would you like that interest to benefit more than your natural curiosity and enjoyment?

Several articles in this issue of Aikorns have a common theme—how you, as a birder, can make a significant contribution to science. You don't need to be an expert birder. It doesn't matter how old—or young—you are. You don't need to don a white lab coat or even leave the house. In fact, you can do science in your bathrobe!

Project FeederWatch, sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (CLO), is one way you can collect data used to better understand birds. You can count birds at your own feeders—from the privacy of your own home. To learn more, see the article on page 3.

Audubon's Christmas Bird Count requires getting dressed, preferably in something snug and possibly waterproof. Join one of Aiken Audubon's teams as we hoist our binoculars and cruise around the city, occasionally getting out of our cars to explore a park or natural area. Read all about it on page 2.

Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are sites that are recognized as critical bird habitat. They are protected and monitored to benefit species that are particularly vulnerable. Colorado is home to 54 IBAs; El Paso county currently has two: Fountain Creek Regional Park and Aiken Canyon. The article on page 4 lists 16 suggestions for ways you can support these and other IBAs.

Collecting data for Colorado's new Breeding Bird Atlas is a massive undertaking that wouldn't be possible without the many volunteers who help. Yes, you can discover the secrets of amorous birds! While all is quiet at this time of year, spring brings frenzied activity, and more volunteers are always needed. Contact John Drummond at [jxdrummo@aol.com](mailto:jxdrummo@aol.com) for more information, and to sign up.

Continued on page 5

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A little more than a year ago there was a fire at Aiken Audubon's Redwing Sanctuary. Because of the fire and the announcement that the furniture business next to our property was going out of business, I walked the northern section of the property in late September. Except for the black, charred branches of the Russian Olives, there was little evidence that a fire had even occurred. Grasses filled the large open area and the seemingly dead Russian Olives had bright, new green growth. Overall, the property had fared well.

Over time, nature rejuvenates itself. But, Aiken Audubon is not like nature; it can not rejuvenate itself. It always needs people to volunteer and

coordinate activities. This message is another appeal to our members to help rejuvenate Aiken Audubon in the coming months. We have many board positions open and our current officers are due to change in May 2009. Please take a few minutes and decide to become an officer for Aiken Audubon. If you need information or have any questions, please call me or any other current officer to see what their job entails. You won't be sorry.

*Risë*

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

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### COMING PROGRAMS

#### November 19

"White-tailed Ptarmigan"  
presented by Joyce Gellhorn

#### December 20

Christmas Bird Count

#### January 21

"Raptor ID"  
presented by Steve Vaughan

#### February 18

"Flammulated Owl Research"  
presented by Brian Linkhart

## Newsletter Articles

Items and announcements of special interest to Aiken Audubon members are welcomed for consideration. We'd love to hear from you!

Deadline for the January/February 2009 issue of Aikorns is Wednesday, December 17.

Contact the editor, Leslie Holzmann, at:  
[AikenAudubon@Gmail.com](mailto:AikenAudubon@Gmail.com)  
719.495.8889

## November 19 • Joyce Gellhorn & Calvin Whitehall White-tailed Ptarmigan

PHOTO © CALVIN WHITEHALL



White-tailed ptarmigan, camouflaged to blend into their surroundings, are the only birds capable of survival in harsh, alpine environments throughout the year. The program follows ptarmigan and shows their unique adaptations including their diet, courtship displays, nesting, and rearing their young. One of the few birds to molt three times per year, ptarmigan change from winter white to mottled summer plumage. Because this species lives exclusively in cold regions, it may serve as a barometer to the health of our planet.

Joyce Gellhorn, a mountain ecologist, travels wherever there are mountains to explore. She has taught biology, botany, ecology, and natural history classes to high school and college students as well as outdoor seminars for adults. Presently she teaches alpine ecology at the University of Colorado's Mountain Research Station, the Gore Range Natural Science School, and the Boulder County Nature Association.

Calvin Whitehall specializes in photographing wildflowers, ptarmigan, and abstracts in nature. He has displayed his work at numerous locations around Colorado

## Saturday, December 20 Christmas Bird Count

Come count some birds! This will be the 58th year that Aiken, as either a chapter or as an affiliate (Aiken Ornithological Society) of National Audubon Society, will have taken part in this annual event. Our count is one of some 2,000+ count areas that will be surveyed from dawn to dusk this year throughout Central and North America.

Each count circle has a diameter of 15 miles. Our circle is centered at the entrance to Cedar Springs Clinical Associates, at 2135 Southgate Rd. Roughly, the area extends from Pulpit Rock on the north to Fort Carson on the south, and Ruxton Ave. on the west, eastward to Marksheffel Rd.

Sally and I are coordinating the count again this year, and will be compiling the results for entering into National Audubon's Christmas Count data base.

We need your help! Experience is not a requirement, only your willingness to participate. You may take part in the field counting for the full day or just in the morning or afternoon. Those of you who would like to count birds at your feeders on this day can also make an important contribution. In either case, call us at the phone number listed below.

Sightings of unusual birds are also important. If you see any birds that are not commonly seen during the week leading up to December 20, please contact us so we can pass this information along to the appropriate area count leader.

The results of all the Christmas Bird Counts across the country will be published by the National Audubon Society in a special issue of American Birds. Those field counters who pay a \$5 count fee will receive this special issue.

Kent Borges and Stephanie DeCenzo will again host an after-the-count pot luck gathering at their home at 975 Terrace Circle. If you like, bring a food dish to share and join us no later than 5 pm. We'll enjoy comparing notes on the day's count.

• BEN & SALLY SORENSEN  
719.635.1716

**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; 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.**

### AIKEN AUDUBON BOARD MEMBERS

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Everyone is welcome on Aiken field trips, regardless of experience level or membership in Audubon. Contact trip leader for details and to let them know you are coming. New trip information is available online at [www.aikenaudubon.com](http://www.aikenaudubon.com).

Saturday, November 22, 9:30 am

## Kettle Creek Lakes

Join us on this short and flat walk around the Kettle Creek “Lakes.” Located directly adjacent to the Air Force Academy property, three ponds attract wintering waterfowl and sparrows, plus an assortment of other seasonal birds.

To get there, head for the south gate of the academy, but turn right at the informational center before you cross over onto air force property. The road will dead-end in a parking lot.

Contact trip leader Rise Foster-Bruder at 719.282.7877.

**Pueblo’s Arkansas Valley Audubon Society has several trips scheduled. We are welcome to join them. Check their website for current information: [www.socobirds.org](http://www.socobirds.org). Then, please contact trip leaders for details, and to let them know you are coming.**

Sunday, November 2,  
early morning until 6 pm

## Bent’s Old Fort, Las Animas, & Rocky Ford

Join leader John Drummond, Aiken chapter member, for a morning of birding at Bent’s Old Fort, beginning at 8 am. There is no charge for this trip unless you wish to take the tour of the Fort. Bring lunch, snacks and plenty of water; also insect repellent.

After lunch we will meet Stan Oswald in Rocky Ford to see some of his favorite birding spots, returning to Pueblo between 5 - 6 pm.

NOTE: DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME ENDS ON THIS DATE.

Be sure to contact Donna Emmons, 676-5666 or 369-9704 (cell), for carpooling details and to make a RESERVATION. To carpool from Colorado Springs, contact John Drummond, [jxdrummo@aol.com](mailto:jxdrummo@aol.com)

Saturday, November 8, 8 am – noon

## Pueblo Reservoir

In years past, this trip has turned up rarities like Red-throated and Pacific Loons, Red-necked Grebe, Barrow’s Goldeneye, Black Brant, Little Gull and Lesser and Greater Black-back Gulls.

Meet leader, Brandon Percival, at 8 am in the parking lot below the dam, just before you reach the pay station into the State Park. This lot is on the left (West) side of Juniper Drive. We will carpool to sites on the West and North ends of the lake first, ending the morning at the South Shore Marina and SE corner of the reservoir.

Email Brandon at [bkpercival@yahoo.com](mailto:bkpercival@yahoo.com). To enter the State Park, you will need an annual pass or daily fee (\$6.00). A Habitat Stamp may be required for a possible visit to the State Wildlife Area.

November 8, 2008 - April 3, 2009

## Project “FeederWatch” Benefits Birds and People

Winter doldrums getting you down? More than 100 studies have shown that getting closer to nature reduces stress and promotes a feeling of well-being in children and adults. So, filling feeders and counting the birds that visit may be just what the doctor ordered! For more than 20 years, that’s what participants in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Project FeederWatch have been doing—benefitting themselves and the birds.

“It is a great winter time activity for the whole family,” says Alaska FeederWatcher Nancy Darnell. “If you have children, they will come to love watching the birds. All of this is fun and a chance to contribute to scientific studies, too!”

The 2008-09 season of Project FeederWatch gets underway November 8 and runs through April 3. Participants count the numbers and kinds of birds at their feeders each week and send the information to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Participants submitted more than 115,000 checklists during the 2007-08 FeederWatch season, documenting unusual bird sightings, winter movements, and shifting ranges—a treasure-trove of information that scientists use to monitor the health of the birds and of the environment.

“Being a FeederWatcher is easy and fun, and at the same time helps generate the world’s largest database on feeder-bird populations,” says project leader David Bonter.

“Scientists learn something new from the data each year, too, whether it’s about the movements of common backyard birds or unusual sightings of rarely-seen species. Highlights of the most recent season include the largest southward movement of Red-breasted Nuthatches in the history of the project—part of an expected influx of northern birds that fly farther south when their food supplies run short. Other northern species showing up in record numbers included Common Repolls and Pine Siskins. Among the rare birds reported was a Streak-backed Oriole in Loveland, Colorado—the state’s first report of this Mexican native.

Project FeederWatch welcomes participants of all ages and skill levels, from scout troops and retirees to classrooms and nature center visitors. To learn more and to sign up, visit [www.feederwatch.org](http://www.feederwatch.org) or call the Lab toll-free at (800) 843-2473. In return for the \$15 fee (\$12 for Lab members) participants receive the FeederWatcher’s Handbook, an identification poster of the most common feeder birds in their area, a calendar, complete instructions, and the FeederWatch annual report, Winter Bird Highlights.

• FROM THE CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY



PHOTO © LESLIE HOLZMANN



PHOTO © LESLIE HOLZMANN

## Keeping Common Birds Common: Protect Local Habitat

Last year, Audubon released “Common Birds in Decline: A State of the Birds Report,” detailing alarming changes in bird populations in recent years. This is 2nd in a series on how we, as birders, can be involved in reversing this trend.

One extremely valuable way we can support bird populations is by joining Aiken Audubon and other groups to protect and restore habitats close to home. Audubon’s Important Bird Area (IBA) program offers opportunities to save critical bird habitat, from small land parcels to broad ecosystems.

The IBA criteria are divided into four categories based on vulnerability and/or responsibility. By definition, Important Bird Areas are sites that support:

- Species of conservation concern (e.g. threatened and endangered species)
- Range-restricted species (species vulnerable because they are not widely distributed)
- Species that are vulnerable because their populations are concentrated in one general habitat type or biome
- Species, or groups of similar species (such as waterfowl or shorebirds), that are vulnerable because they occur at high densities due to their congregatory behavior



Fountain Creek Regional Park

### Colorado’s IBA Program

Beginning in 1999, a total of 54 IBAs have been accepted by the Audubon Colorado IBA committee. These sites consist of over 1,200,000 acres of protected land and water throughout the state. Some of the more common sites are nationally recognized tourist destinations, such as Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado National Monument, Mesa Verde National Park and the Pawnee National Grasslands. Two IBAs are in El Paso County: Aiken Canyon and Fountain Creek Regional Park.

All of the IBA’s in Colorado are monitored closely with the help of state parks, conservation organizations, fellow Auduboners, volunteers, avid birders and the general public with an interest in conserving these precious areas.

### A To-Do List for Conservationists

- Nominate a site or organize volunteers to fill out nomination forms for sites in your area (contact your state IBA coordinator to find the status of nominations in your state).
- Organize or participate in a bird survey at an IBA or potential IBA for a WatchList species. (Contact your state IBA coordinator for information).
- Adopt an IBA and help to develop a conservation plan for the site in partnership with IBA staff and local stakeholders.
- Volunteer for a project to restore habitat or eradicate invasive species at an IBA.
- Advocate for land acquisition funds for an IBA where land acquisition is underway.
- Recruit and organize volunteers to help an IBA managed by a refuge, State Park, or land trust.
- Advocate for changes in laws and policies that would benefit birds of concern at IBAs.



PHOTO © LESLIE HOLZMANN

### Aiken Canyon

- Participate in a Christmas Bird Count in or near an IBA.
- Develop a birding field trip program to IBAs in your area.
- Develop a slide show or children’s education program to teach people about an IBA and the amazing bird stories connected with it.
- Write articles and letters about IBAs in newsletters, magazines, newspapers, and other outlets to teach the public about the important bird habitats in their area.
- Follow the Audubon At Home guidelines for a healthy yard, and encourage habitat management that is beneficial to the birds of concern at that IBA.
- Help provide financial support to an IBA program (some Audubon chapters have donated Birdathon proceeds to IBA programs for example).
- Identify the most essential areas for birds.
- Monitor those sites for changes to birds and habitat.
- Conserve these areas for long-term protection of biodiversity.

• **FROM THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY**

Learn more about how you can help birds by supporting IBAs at [www.audubon.org/bird/iba](http://www.audubon.org/bird/iba).

## New bird species found in Gabon

Scientists at the Smithsonian have discovered a new species of bird in Gabon, Africa, that was, until now, unknown to the science.

The newly found Olive-backed Forest Robin (*Stiphrornis pyrrholaemus*) was named by the scientists for its distinctive olive back and rump. Adult birds measure 4.5 inches in length and average 18 grams in weight. Males exhibit a fiery orange throat and breast, yellow belly, olive back and black feathers on the head. Females (see photo) are similar, but less vibrant. Both sexes have a distinctive white dot on their face in front of each eye.



To ensure that the specimens Schmidt collected were a new species, geneticists at the Smithsonian's National Zoo compared the DNA of the new specimens to that of the four known forest robin species. The results clearly showed that these birds were in fact a separate and distinct species.

There is some knowledge about the species' habitat choice since all of the birds seen and heard in the wild were found in dense forest undergrowth. Other facts such as specific diet, mating and nesting habits, and the species' complete habitat range are all things that still need research.



### The Cow Bird. The Cowslip.

Growing in mires, in gold attired,  
The Cowslip has been much admired,  
Altho' its proper name, we're told,  
Is really the Marsh Marigold:  
The Cow Bird picture, I suspect,  
Is absolutely incorrect,  
We make such errors now and then,  
A sort of cow slip of the pen.

From "How to Tell the Birds from the Flowers: A Manual of Flornithology for Beginners," by Robert Williams Wood, ©1907.

*aikorns*

## Aiken Audubon Society Membership/Subscription

Sign Up For:

<input type="checkbox"/> One Year	\$10.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Two Years	\$18.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Donation	<input type="text"/>
Total _____	

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

### Mail Check To:

Aiken Audubon Society  
6660 Delmonico Dr. D-195,  
Colorado Springs, CO 80919

## CITIZEN SCIENCE

(Continued from front page)



PHOTO © LESLIE HOLZMANN

In addition, the CLO lists a number of interesting projects on their website at [www.birds.cornell.edu/LabPrograms/CitSci/index.html](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/LabPrograms/CitSci/index.html). One that piqued my interest was the House Finch Disease Survey. The CLO asks, "Will House Finch eye disease cause an epidemic in the West as it has elsewhere? We need help from citizen scientists in all regions to find out more about how the disease is affecting House Finches across the continent." Come on, this one is easy.

We all have House Finches at our feeders.

The obvious question is, does all this effort really make any difference? The CLO sums up the impact we are making:

Results from citizen-science projects are already being applied to bird conservation efforts, including the North American Bird Conservation Plan. Citizen science also has led to the purchase of land that hosts breeding populations of several declining species. Just as important, citizen scientists become better educated about birds and conservation, making them more effective stewards within their own communities.

Let's put our skills and enthusiasm to work for the birds. Let's become citizen scientists.

• BY LESLIE HOLZMANN

Q: What is a "hmuh"? A: It's the top knot that quails have.



## Aiken Audubon Society

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CHECK YOUR MAILING  
LABEL TO SEE IF YOUR  
SUBSCRIPTION IS EXPIRING!

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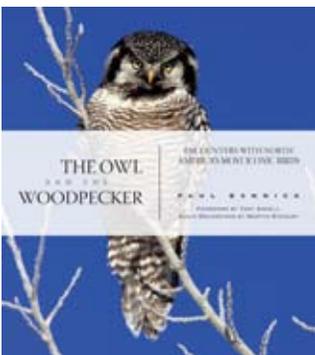
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YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE A MEMBER TO PARTICIPATE IN AIKEN'S ACTIVITIES

### BOOK REVIEW

The Owl and the Woodpecker, by Paul Bannick

## Put it on *Your* Wish List!



I have another bird book on my wish list, and this after assuring my family I already had enough books. It wasn't until I looked at the website ([www.paulbannick.com/gallery.htm](http://www.paulbannick.com/gallery.htm)) that I started to covet this particular volume. The photography is unbelievable. Paul Bannick must have spent months sitting in a blind, to come up with images like this.

Since the book only appeared in stores in October, we'll have to resort to the publisher's description. But if the photos in the book are anywhere near as good as the ones on the website, this is a winner. Here's what the publisher has to say about *The Owl and the Woodpecker*, by Paul Bannick:

Spanning the continent from the arctic tundra to the pine forests of the southeast, Seattle-based nature photographer, Paul Bannick captures all 41 North American species of two iconic birds that hold a prized spot in the hearts of birdwatchers and nature lovers across the country. *The Owl and the Woodpecker* features stunning photography, captured through thousands of

hours in the field observing owl and woodpecker behavioral patterns in their natural habitats.

Bannick explores the diversity of these two families of birds, and the ways in which they define and enrich the ecosystems they inhabit. Woodpeckers change and improve their landscape, carving cavities where other animals nest and drilling wells of sap for others feed upon. Owls, among the creatures that benefit from the woodpeckers' activities, are a high-order predator, whose very presence attests to the health of an ecosystem.

From familiar birds like the Northern Flicker and Great-Horned Owl to rarer species like the Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Red-Cockaded Woodpecker and Northern Spotted Owl, Bannick provides a close look at each bird within the habitat it helps define. Complete with a field guide to North American owl and woodpecker species, Bannick's photo journey is both comprehensive and visually rewarding.

I hope my family is reading this. Hint hint.

• BY LESLIE HOLZMANN

If you have read a bird-related book that you particularly enjoyed, please share it with us. Write a short review and send it to the Aikorns editor at [AikenAudubon@gmail.com](mailto:AikenAudubon@gmail.com).