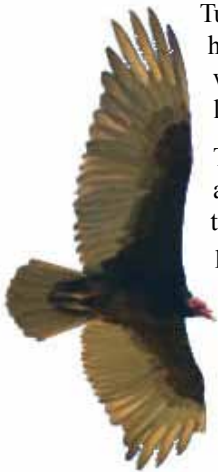




Turkey Vultures

Frequently portrayed as sinister black birds hunched over a dying cow or feasting on road kill, Turkey Vultures have a frightening reputation. But are they really as evil (or disgusting) as the image suggests? Get to know them a bit better, and you might be surprised at how interesting these huge birds can be. You might even find them endearing.

Lots of folks call them buzzards, but a true buzzard is actually a Buteo, in the same family as our common Red-tailed Hawks. Buzzards are only found in Europe and Asia. The familiar black birds with the ugly red heads we see dining on decaying dead animals are in a different family altogether, with the Latin name Cathartidae.



Turkey Vultures are named after turkeys because they both sport reddish, featherless heads and necks. In the vultures' case, this makes it easier for them to stay clean while gorging on a bloody carcass. (Male turkeys use their bare skin to impress the ladies, a totally different purpose.)

Turkey Vultures find decomposing animals appetizing. In fact, it's the smell that attracts them in the first place. Since carrion doesn't begin to smell until it starts to rot, the animal must have been dead for a bit before the birds begin to notice its presence. On the other hand, if the animal has putrefied, the vulture will look elsewhere for a meal. Just like us, vultures prefer their meat aged but not overly disgusting.

I should point out that Turkey Vultures are really pacifists. They do not kill their prey, preferring to find it already dead. And in eating dead animals, they perform a valuable public service. I'm glad they clean up the flattened squirrels and possums we drivers leave behind us.

Continued on page 5

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Some years ago National Audubon was promised eventual ownership of the Timmerman Ranch—a 1,500 acre piece of property off Hodgen Road in northern Black Forest. The Colorado State Audubon office has notified us that the owner has decided to leave Colorado, so the property has come to Audubon sooner than expected.

Since Aiken Audubon is the closest chapter to the property, it makes sense that we take the lead in preparing this land for whenever it is opened to the public. I see our members actively being involved in compiling a bird list for the property, leading hikes and doing whatever else we can do to assist the state office.

I don't know the exact plans for this project. As soon as the state office lets me know how they want to proceed—and how we can help—I will

let everyone know. Please consider donating some of your time when we have the opportunity to bird this wonderful new property.

Two other items of business:

Please welcome our new Field Trip Chair Jeannie Mitchell. I'm confident most of you know her, so make her new role a pleasure and consider leading a field trip when she calls. And, mark your calendar for the 2010 Christmas Bird Count. Ours is happening on Saturday, December 18. There is more information on page 2.

Keep on birding,

Risë

• RISË FOSTER-BRUDER
PRESIDENT, AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

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COMING PROGRAMS

November 17

"Vulture Conservation in South Africa"
presented by Jenyva Turner

December 18

No December program. See you at the Christmas Bird Count!

January 19

"Raptor ID"
presented by Steve Vaughan

February 16

"Flammulated Owls"
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 Jan./Feb. 2011 issue of Aikorns is Wednesday, December 15.

Contact the editor, Leslie Holzmänn, at: AikenAudubon@gmail.com, or call 719.964.3197

November 17 • Jenyva Turner

Vulture Conservation in South Africa



When most people think of the word “vulture,” not-so-flattering images come to mind. Vultures have been portrayed negatively over the years; however, as vulture populations continue to disappear around the world, we need to better understand and appreciate their vital role in our world as obligate scavengers in order to conserve them.

Come learn about Colorado’s own native vulture species, the turkey vulture, as well as vulture species around the world and what is being done to help protect them.

Jenyva Turner grew up in the Montana countryside, which is where she first developed her love for birds and all nature. She is currently a zoo keeper in the African Rift Valley exhibit at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo and manages the Zoo’s Cape Vulture Quarters for Conservation program.

“My first special memory of vultures was while I was growing up in Montana and just getting into bird watching. One morning, I got to witness a flock of turkey vultures at their roost, sunning themselves with their 6-foot long wings outstretched. I was in awe! Most of my very favorite moments in nature have involved a vulture in some way. I feel blessed to be able to work with vultures every day and I feel a deep connection to them. This is why I am so passionate about saving them.”

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 6:30 pm and programs begin at 7 pm. 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.

December 18 • Everyone!

Christmas Bird Count

The Colorado Springs Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 18. This will be the 60th consecutive year that Aiken Audubon Society will have taken part in the National Audubon Society’s CBC. Our count is one of over 2,000 count areas that will be surveyed from dawn to dusk this year throughout Central and North America. Some of the Caribbean Islands, Hawaii, and several Pacific Islands are also included in the count. Each count area is a circle with a diameter of 15 miles (an area of about 177 square miles).

Our count 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 the northern half of Fort Carson on the south; and Ruxton Ave. on the west to Marksheffel Road on the east. The count circle is divided into 17 areas, each with a count leader.

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.

Unusual birds seen prior to the count day are also important. If you see any birds during the week leading up to December 18 that are not commonly seen, 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 fee will receive this special issue.

• BEN AND SALLY SORENSEN
719.635.1716

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AIKEN AUDUBON FIELD TRIPS

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. Don't forget to pack your binoculars, scope (if you have one), field guide, water, snack or lunch, hat, rain gear, sun screen, bug spray, camera(?), and some gas money for the drivers.

Note: In cases of extreme weather, trips may be cancelled. If this might be a possibility, please contact the trip leader an hour before the scheduled meeting time.

To receive e-mailed reminders of upcoming field trips, send your name and e-mail address to AikenAudubon@gmail.com.

Friday, November 26, 9 – 11 am

Turkeys!

Join us the day after Thanksgiving for a walk in Bear Creek Canyon. We will stroll up the (closed to traffic) High Drive in search of winter residents. It is a steady uphill grade, so we can work off some of those turkey and dressing calories.

Meet by 9 am at the Bear Creek Nature Center parking lot for the short drive to the trail head.

Contact Gary Conover, 635-2505, for more information and to let him know you are coming.

UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

November 13, 2010 – April, 2011

Project FeederWatch

This is a wonderful chance for the entire family to get involved in a significant Citizen Science project. It's as easy as:

1. Put up a feeder
2. Count the birds that visit
3. Report your data to scientists

One backyard at a time, participants in Project FeederWatch are doing their part to unravel nature's mysteries—simply by sharing information about the birds that visit their feeders from November to April. The 24th season of Project FeederWatch begins November 13, although new participants can join at any time.

Participants count the numbers and different species of birds at their feeders and enter their information on the FeederWatch website.

By collecting information from all these feeders in all these backyards, scientists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology are able to track patterns in bird populations and movement from year to year, all across North America.

To learn more about joining Project FeederWatch and to sign up, visit www.FeederWatch.org or call the Cornell Lab toll-free at 866.989.2473. In return for the \$15 fee (\$12 for Cornell Lab members) participants receive the FeederWatcher's Handbook, an identification poster of the most common feeder birds, a calendar, complete instructions, and Winter Bird Highlights, an annual summary of FeederWatch findings.

For the latest information on
field trips and events:
www.AikenAudubon.com

FUN

A Birder's Wish List

The gift-giving season is upon us, and everyone is scratching their heads, trying to figure out the perfect gift for that special birder. I thought I'd make it a little easier for you and spell out exactly what I would like to receive this year.

1. Life birds. Seeing all the usual suspects is all fine and good; I appreciate the familiar ducks and finches very much. But—nothing stirs the blood like a first sight of a new species. Even if you aren't a lister, new birds are exciting. I'd like several of these, please.

2. A weather front that blows through right about the middle of May. All those migrating passerines will be happy to sit still for a bit, after all that buffeting. I don't want them so exhausted that their lives are in peril. I'd just like them tired enough to hang around while I learn their names and take their mug shots.

3. Plenty of rainfall. Not only do we need the water, but ample precipitation leads to luxuriant plant growth, which feeds a population explosion of small rodents. And that, in turn, brings in the hawks and owls. I really like hawks and owls.

4. Good news about an endangered species. The Puerto Rican Parrot has been on the endangered species list since 1967. There are only about 300 Whooping Cranes left in the world, including those in captivity. On the other hand, the numbers of Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, and Brown Pelicans are growing. I'd like to hear about more birds recovering from critically low populations to once again thrive in their respective environments.

5. A hospitable birding friend in another state. While there are a few Colorado species that still elude me, I've seen most of the locals. I've been to all the nearby hotspots more time than I can count. Yes, I could go on my own, but motel rooms are expensive. I would enjoy your company and your expertise, too. Please invite me to visit you. You are welcome come birding here and stay with me as well.

6. A rare bird alert for my neighborhood. So often all the rare bird sightings are in other parts of the state—or even further afield. I'd like that Roseate Spoonbill to turn up in my neighbor's pond. (I'd settle for one in my own yard, but I'd prefer to avoid the hordes of birders that might trample my prized perennials.)

7. A bumper crop of berries. I put out seed feeders and suet, and they attract finches, nuthatches, chickadees and the like. Sometimes, however, I enjoy watching bluebirds, thrushes and waxwings. Lots of berries will invite lots of berry-eating birds.

8. Birding trips. I'm a birder; I like to go birding. I especially like to go birding with a few special people... people I like hanging around with in general... people like... you! Will you keep me company, even if you don't find birds quite as fascinating as I do?

Well, that's my list. What's on *your* wish list this year?!

• LESLIE HOLZMANN

Sharp-shinned Hawks vs. Cooper's Hawks

We've all been befuddled by these look-alike Accipiters. Is it a Sharpie or a Cooper's?

Maybe this chart will help. Don Freiday has kindly given permission to reprint his "Sixteen ways to tell Sharp-shinned Hawks from Cooper's Hawks."

Don is Director of Birding Programs for the Cape May Bird Observatory. He has worked in the field of nature interpretation and wildlife biology for over 20 years, taught wildlife ecology at Rutgers University, and led birding tours throughout the United States.

Be sure to visit Cape May's blog: cmboviewfromthecape.blogspot.com for more helpful ID tips.

And if identifying other raptors have you pulling your hair out, don't miss Steve Vaughan's annual Raptor ID program on January 19.

**CHART © COPYRIGHT 2010
DON FREIDAY AND
NEW JERSEY AUDUBON'S
CAPE MAY BIRD OBSERVATORY.
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON
[HTTP://CMBOVIEWFROMTHECAPE.
BLOGSPOT.COM](http://cmboviewfromthecape.blogspot.com). USED
WITH PERMISSION.**

	Sharp-shinned Hawk	Cooper's Hawk
1	Small head projects only slightly ahead of wing	Large head projects prominently
2	Wings jut forward at wrist, head lost in valley	Wings straighter; "just back from Dr. Cooper"
3	Square or notched tail with narrow gray tip (occasionally round)	Rounded tail with broad white tip (unless worn)
4	Trailing edge of wing less straight, bulge at secondaries	Trailing edge straighter
5	Tail appears shorter	Tail appears longer
6	Snappy, rapid wing beat, hinge at body and wrist	Stiff, slow wing beat; hinge at body
7	Tight circles when soaring, frequent little adjustments	Wide circles when soaring, fewer adjustments
8	Unsteady in wind	Steadier in wind
9	Juvenile: Thick, noodle-y breast streaks cause breast/belly to look dirty, less pale back spotting on average	Juvenile often hooded appearance; fine dark streaks, belly whitish; more black spots on average; golden nape
10	Adult: no cap	Adult: capped appearance
11	White under-tail coverts reduced or not visible	White under-tail coverts sometimes prominent
12	Small feet, thin legs	Big feet, thick legs
13	Tail slightly cocked up when gliding	Tail straight out when gliding (kestrel straight too)
14	Usually does not perch on posts	Will perch on flat top of posts
15	Rarely hunts open habitats like dunes and fields	Will hunt open habitats
16	Overall cold tones on juvenile	Overall warm tones on juvenile



TURKEY VULTURES, CONT'D FROM FRONT PAGE

Vultures are pretty lacking when it comes to social graces. For one, they lack a syrinx (the organ most birds use to make their various sounds). As a result, Turkey Vulture conversation is limited to grunting and hissing.

They also have a thing about throwing up. Turkey Vulture chicks are pretty helpless when they hatch, and the parents take turns regurgitating food for them. Apparently, they find this habit-forming. When threatened, both adults and young will barf on their pursuer. Predictably, this is a pretty effective deterrent. Not many predators will bother a vulture.

Then there's the issue of temperature control. Like some other birds (cormorants immediately come to mind), Turkey Vultures will hang out in the sunshine with their wings outstretched, catching some rays. Their wings make effective solar heat collectors.



The problem (at least from our point of view) comes when they get too hot. Since birds don't have sweat glands, they need another way to cool off. Vultures (and their relatives the storks) have come up with a real winner. They defecate on their own legs. Yes, really. The moisture in their droppings evaporates, cooling them off. As an added bonus, the white uric acid accumulates on their skin, and we all know to wear white in a hot climate.

Finally, the strong acids in the droppings act as a disinfectant, handy for a bird that eats rotting flesh.

Yes, Turkey Vultures clearly need an image makeover. But as they gather together in preparation for their migration southward, I'm feeling a bit sad. I'm inspired by watching a bird with a six-foot wingspan as it effortlessly soars overhead. In many parts of the US, vultures stay all year, but here in Colorado, with our cold winters, they are gone from mid-fall until the beginning of April. I'll miss them.

• ARTICLE AND
PHOTOS BY
LESLIE HOLZMANN



IN MEMORIAM

Martha Louise Curry,

November 9, 1929 — August 15, 2010

Longtime Aiken member Martha Curry passed away August 15, 2010. Her memorial service was held at Bear Creek Nature Center on August 21. The love of her life was bird watching, which she pursued in extensive travel with her husband Ed throughout all 50 states, Mexico, Canada, and 50 other countries on four continents around the world.



aikorns

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A Few More Blogs

In the last issue of *Aikorns* we listed a few blogs authored by Aiken members and asked readers share about any birding blogs they write. Here are three more sites that may interest you, all connected with the ABA:

The ABA Blog

To some, birding is sport...to others, a pastime...to all, FUN! This is a blog of the American Birding Association where stories will be told and adventures will unfold. Your participation in this blog is highly encouraged!

- <http://blog.aba.org>

PEEPS

This blog features rare bird sightings and stories from around the ABA Area. It's written by Bill Maynard.

- <http://birding.typepad.com/peeps>

The Eyrrie

Blog for young birders managed by Saraiya Ruano. Recent posts have included book reviews, interviews, quizzes and interesting articles about birding around the world. I bet even not-so-young readers will enjoy reading *The Eyrrie*.

- <http://birding.typepad.com/youngbirders>

Do you write a birding blog? We'd like to know about it! Send your url and a short blurb to AikenAudubon@gmail.com



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

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President Risë Foster-Bruder
719.282.7877

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

THE BACK PAGE

Fossil of giant, bony-toothed bird from Chile sets new record for wingspan

DEERFIELD, IL—A newly discovered skeleton of an ancient seabird from northern Chile provides evidence that giant birds were soaring the skies there 5-10 million years ago. The wing bones of the animal exceed those of all other birds in length; its wingspan would have been at least 17 feet. This is the largest safely established wingspan for a bird. Other, larger estimates for fossil birds have been based on much less secure evidence.

The new bird belongs to a group known as pelagornithids, informally referred to as bony-toothed birds. They are characterized by their long, slender beaks that bear many spiny, tooth-like projections. Such 'teeth'

likely would have been used to capture slippery prey in the open ocean, such as fish and squid.

"Bird watching in Chile would be thrilling if birds with more than five meter wingspans and huge pseudoteeth were still alive," said Dr. Gerald Mayr of the Forschungsinstitut Senckenberg in Germany, lead author on the study.

Fossils of bony-toothed birds are found on all continents, but such remains are usually fragmentary. This is because most birds have fragile bones that often do not survive the fossilization process. Only a single partial skeleton of a bony-toothed bird was known prior to discovery of the new



Chilean specimen, and it is badly crushed. The new specimen, which is 70% complete and uncrushed, provides important new information about the size and anatomy of these strange birds. It is the largest bony-toothed bird discovered so far. It also represents a new species named after its country of origin: *Pelagornis chilensis*.

"Although these animals would have looked like creatures from Jurassic Park, they are true birds, and their last representatives may have coexisted with the earliest humans in North Africa," said Mayr.

• ANNOUNCED BY THE SOCIETY OF VERTEBRATE PALEONTOLOGY, MAY, 2010

