



# Starlings Not Welcome Here



**B**irders in the U.S. are supposed to hate European Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*), and there are plenty of reasons to do so.

The species originated in Europe, North Africa, and western-to-central Asia. While mostly abundant there as well, the species has been red-listed in England after populations plummeted by more than 80% over the last 40 years<sup>[1]</sup>. Other northern European countries have witnessed a similar decline<sup>[2]</sup>. We can only wish that would happen here.

North American populations have exploded since their introduction in the early 1890s. According to the USDA, starlings cost our country \$1.5 million in damage to agricultural crops, the consumption of feed intended for livestock, and in property damage. In one winter, a million starlings can down 27,500 tons of livestock feed, not to mention what is ruined by their accumulated droppings—and latest estimates put the US population at over 200 million birds.

Because they congregate in large flocks of up to 100,000 individuals, starlings are a particular hazard near airports. They can be sucked into jet engines, causing extensive damage. In 2002, a 737 jet had to make an emergency landing at SeaTac airport after hitting a flock of “only” 100 starlings.

Those large flocks have to land somewhere. When they do, their constant racket can be deafening. Starlings cause extensive damage to trees, buildings, and other structures. The droppings from so many birds can actually kill trees, while the weight of the birds can break off branches. Plus, those droppings are highly acidic, which corrodes metal.

Starlings are a direct threat as well, carrying a number of diseases that affect livestock. Twenty-five of these diseases affect humans. For example, *Histoplasmosis* is a respiratory disease caused by a fungus that lives

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## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

It’s all relative.

On a recent field trip, some of us were discussing which bird species we expected and I mentioned the Townsend’s Solitaire. Another participant heard me and said he thought he had seen one fly over and that the silhouette always reminded him of a Spitfire. (For non-military readers - the British, Super Marine Spitfire was a fighter airplane used primarily during WWII). Being an army wife I chuckled at his comparison and made a mental note that I would have to mention this to my two Air Force sons and see what they had to say.

I wonder how many other birders correlate a Townsend’s Solitaire to a WWII fighter? Not too

many birds resemble an M1 Abrams Tank or a Bradley Armored Fighting Vehicle so I use sound to categorize birds. The “squeaky toy” call of the Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher comes to mind as an example. But maybe if I had been an Air Force wife I would have used airplane silhouettes. I’ve always described an A-10 as a flying cigar so does that make it a Chimney Swift?

It’s all relative. How does your brain work?

Happy New Year,

*Risë*

• RISË FOSTER-BRUDER  
PRESIDENT, AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

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## COMING PROGRAMS

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“Raptor ID”  
presented by Steve Vaughan

### February 16

“Flammulated Owls”  
presented by Brian Linkhart

### March 16

“New River Bird Festival”  
presented by Debbie Barnes

### April 20

“The Long Expedition”  
presented by Ken Pals

## 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 March/April 2011 issue of Aikorns is Wednesday, February 16.

Contact the editor, Leslie Holzmann, at: AikenAudubon@Gmail.com, or call 719.964.3197

January 19 • Steve Vaughan  
**Raptor ID**

Colorado has 23 species of diurnal raptors. Stephen Vaughan will presenting an information-packed program explaining how to identify Colorado's eagles, hawks and falcons. Steve has been studying the identification of these birds for more than 30 years and has developed a simplified method for separating the various species. Here is your chance to learn the tips that will greatly improve your skills. Don't miss this outstanding program. [You can put your new skills into practice by signing up for the Hawks to Eagles field trip in February. —Ed.]

Steve 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. He has been teaching nature photography at Pikes Peak Community College since 1998. In addition, he has led photography workshops 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.



PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

American Kestrel

February 16 • Brian Linkhart  
**Flammulated Owls**

The Flammulated Owl is as small as a fist and reticent enough to disappear into the shadows of western forests. Considered the country's leading expert on Flammulated Owls, Dr. Brian D. Linkhart has been studying the demography and habitat requirements of this small raptor on the Manitou Experimental Forest since 1981. His aim is the development of conservation plans for forest ecosystems containing this and other sensitive species. With this extended period of study Brian has been able to uncover some fascinating secrets about this species. Don't miss this outstanding program.

Dr. Brian D. Linkhart is an Assistant Professor of Biology at Colorado College, where he teaches courses in ornithology, ecology and field biology.



PHOTO: DEBBIE BARNES

**Death by Chocolate!**

According to tradition, our February meeting includes a potluck dessert: Death by Chocolate. Bring something yummy (and preferably chocolate!) to share, and come at 6:30—early enough to sample all the goodies before the program begins at 7:00.

**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.**



**Talk about Big Bird!**

Elephant birds (*Aepyornis* sp.) were the largest birds that ever lived, reaching ten feet tall and weighing about 1,000 pounds. They used to live in Madagascar, but have been extinct for several hundred years.

AIKEN AUDUBON BOARD MEMBERS

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719.282.7877

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baccab@aol.com

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Michael E. Whedon  
719.243.2083  
MEWhedon@gmail.com

**Field Trips**

Jeannie Mitchell  
719.494.1977  
vancerus@earthlink.net

**Aikorns Editor/Web**

Leslie Holzmamm  
719.964.3197  
AikenAudubon@gmail.com

**Hospitality**

Arlene Sampson  
719.574.6134

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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](mailto:AikenAudubon@gmail.com).

### February 5, 2011, 8:30 am to 4 pm 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Eagle Day Festival at Lake Pueblo State Park

Caravan south to Pueblo Reservoir and join the activities of Eagle Day, presented by the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the Arkansas Valley Audubon Society. Schedule in the past has included: US Air Force Academy Falcons Flight Demonstration, Raptor Release (West Fishing Area, North Side of Lake Pueblo State Park if possible and available) and Pueblo Raptor Center Live Birds by Diana Miller. And yes we will scan the area for Bald Eagles, often present at Lake Pueblo this time of year. Bring a sack lunch (food also available at the reservoir), full tanks of gas and plan to be outside for short periods. You can stay all day or go home anytime.

Meet at Broadmoor Towne Center (Nevada and Lake Avenue) east of Starbucks.

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

### Saturday March 5, 2011 9 am to 1:30 pm Hawks & Eagles!

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



Join us for the annual Audubon trip to Pueblo Reservoir in search of our national bird, the Bald Eagle. We will explore back roads in search of Golden Eagles, Ferruginous, Red Tailed and Rough-Legged Hawks, Merlin, Kestrel and Prairie Falcons on

the way to Pueblo. Please bring a sack lunch and a full tank of gas. We will be outside for short periods with a few short walks if the weather is bearable. This is a great trip for beginners!

Meet at Broadmoor Towne Center (Nevada and Lake Avenue) east of Starbucks. Plan to return by mid afternoon.

Please call Gary Conover, 635-2505, for more information. Reservations not required.

For the latest information on  
field trips and events:  
[www.AikenAudubon.com](http://www.AikenAudubon.com)

## UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

### Saturday, January 8, 8:30 – 11 am Fountain Creek Winter Bird Count

Beginning to advanced birders are invited to observe and record the numbers of bird species and populations found in Fountain Creek Regional Park.

Reservations required, 719.520.6745. \$5.00 donation for birdseed.

### Thursday, January 13, 10 – 11:15 am 2's & 3's Outdoors—B is for Birds

Share in the joy of your 2 or 3 year-old child's discovery as he or she enjoys a story and an exploration hike outdoors.

Reservations required, 719.520.6745. \$3.00 for each participant including adults and siblings.

### Saturday, January 22, 8:30 am – Noon Hawk Identification Field Trip

Wonder what that large bird was soaring high above or perched on a utility pole? Maybe an eagle or a hawk or a falcon, but how can you tell? Join a naturalist-birder on a field trip through El Paso County to see and identify winter resident raptors. Bring binoculars if you have them.

Reservations required, 719.520.6745. \$5.00/FCNC member, \$6.00/nonmember.

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



### Saturday, January 29, 10 am – Noon Groundhog... Oops! Prairie Dog Day

Groundhogs may predict the duration of winter, but the West's groundhog, the prairie dog, foretells the future of a wildlife community on the plains. During this celebration we'll view a slide show, make a craft and then drive to a nearby dog town to see if we can find a shadow and make other discoveries.

Reservations required, 719.520.6745. \$4.00/FCNC member, \$5.00/nonmember.

## Saturday, January 29, 9 – 11:30 am Nature Center Naturalist Docent Volunteer Orientation

Naturalist docents play a key role in providing visitor services at Bear Creek and Fountain Creek Nature Centers. Come to this orientation to learn more about being a visitor information receptionist and see if the nature centers are the right fit for your volunteer time. Volunteers must be 18 or older and complete an application.

Call Paula at 520-6387 for an application. Reservations required.

PHOTO: PETE HOLZMANN



## March 17 - 20, 2011, Kearney, Nebraska 41st Annual Rivers & Wildlife Celebration

Gather with wildlife enthusiasts from around the world to celebrate the annual migration of 500,000 sandhill cranes and millions of waterfowl through the heart of the Central Flyway. The Nebraska Bird Partnership is proud to co-host the nation's longest running wildlife festival with Audubon Nebraska.

Check the web often for updates, because the agenda is still shaping up. Here are a few highlights of what we have planned for the 2011 Celebration:

- Photography workshop with Michael Forsberg
- Friday night keynote address by Rick Wright, "Oops My Mistake: Ten Big Birding Boobos and How I Survived Them"
- Saturday night keynote address by Dr. Richard Beilfuss, President of the International Crane Foundation
- An expanded "Wild Experience Room", with live animal shows returning from Raptor Recovery Nebraska and Dan Fogell with Nebraska snakes
- A variety of field trips to choose from to see cranes, waterfowl, prairie chickens, and other birds and wildlife

Any other questions about the Celebration? Email us at [kpoague@audubon.org](mailto:kpoague@audubon.org) or call 402-797-2301.

REGISTRATION WILL OPEN IN JANUARY 2011

## Call for Mini-Grant Applicants Funds help organizers create fun neighborhood events

ITHACA, NY—The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "Celebrate Urban Birds" project is now accepting applications for another round of mini-grants. Grants average \$250 to \$500 and are used to fund neighborhood events that promote an appreciation for birds and nature.

Neighborhood events or projects feature activities involving birds, community service, art, greening, and science. Participants collect simple information about common birds and report to the Cornell Lab. Celebrate Urban Birds mini-grants could be used to support a bird-activity day at a local museum, after school program, library, or community center, or fund art and gardening activities at your club, business, school, senior center, or neighborhood.

To apply for a mini-grant, visit [www.CelebrateUrbanBirds.org](http://www.CelebrateUrbanBirds.org). Organizations working with under-served communities are strongly encouraged to apply. No experience with birds is required. Deadline to apply is February 15, 2011

Celebrate Urban Birds is a free, year-round citizen science project in which participants watch birds in their neighborhoods and report what they see. This information helps scientists better understand how birds survive in cities and make use of green spaces, including parks and gardens.

Contact: Karen Purcell, Project Leader,  
at 607.254.2455 or [urbanbirds@cornell.edu](mailto:urbanbirds@cornell.edu)

## Audubon/Sierra Club 2011 Legislative Forum

**Date: Saturday, February 12, 2011**

**Time: 8:30 am to 1:30 pm**

**Place: First Plymouth Church,  
3501 S. Colorado Boulevard, Denver**

The Audubon Society of Greater Denver and the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Sierra Club invite you to attend the 2011 Legislative Forum to learn about the hot environmental topics of the 2011 legislative session. This is always an entertaining and educational event!

After the continental breakfast at 8:30 am, Audubon Colorado Lobbyist Jen Boulton and the Sierra Club's legislative liaison will review the session's environmental bills and we'll discuss several of the key issues with invited experts. Invited Colorado legislators will talk about the effect to balance the State budget, its impacts on our State's environmental programs, what's happening with State Parks, and possible threats to GOCO. A pot-luck lunch will be provided. A final agenda will be available in early February.

The cost of the Forum is \$12 in advance (by February 10) and \$15 at the door. To register, call Rhonda in the ASGD office at 303.973.9530. If you are interested in volunteering at the Forum, call that number or send an email to: [rshank@denveraudubon.org](mailto:rshank@denveraudubon.org).

## Get Published!

We need 50 to 500 word articles for possible inclusion the Aikorns! No ideas? We have plenty. Contact the editor at [AikenAudubon@gmail.com](mailto:AikenAudubon@gmail.com)

### STARLINGS, CON'T. FROM FRONT PAGE

on starling droppings. Anyone entering a building where starlings roost would do well to take precautions.

In addition to the harm done to human, starlings compete directly with a number of native birds.

By stealing both food and nesting cavities from natives such as bluebirds, woodpeckers, Wood Ducks, and especially Purple Martins, they have caused a significant drop in the numbers of those species. In all, starlings might be one of the worst pests ever to invade our continent.

With such a dismal reputation, it might be surprising to learn that starlings have at least one good point. According to an article in the Christian Science Monitor:

Biologist Bud Anderson, with the Falcon Research Group, agrees that the starling invasion has been a disaster for many native species. But he says starlings are not all bad, ecologically speaking. He's studying peregrine falcons' comeback in Washington state since the phaseout of the pesticide DDT. "We're looking at 30 pairs of peregrines and in virtually all those nests we see starlings as one of the main prey items," he says. "Starlings are helping bring back peregrines."

That's wonderful—Peregrine Falcons are welcome to all the starlings they can find. Still, most ecologists, farmers, and federal agencies recommend continuing attempts to kill these destructive aliens. That's why it came as a shock to find a website devoted to the rescue and rehabilitation of orphaned starling (and House Sparrow) babies. We don't protect mosquito larvae, we don't plant noxious weeds, and we shouldn't try to save birds that don't belong here, even if they are cute little babies.

In fact, if you maintain bluebird or other nest boxes, it is up to you to prevent starlings or House Sparrows from raising a family there. Do the responsible thing, and oust these invasive pests!

• LESLIE HOLZMANN



*aikorns*

## Aiken Audubon Society Membership/Subscription

### Sign Up For:

One Year \$10.00

Two Years \$18.00

Donation

New Total \_\_\_\_\_

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

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### Mail Check To:

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

### FYI

## Gimme Shelter

Wild birds are amazingly hardy creatures, but even the sturdiest Mountain Chickadee appreciates a snug spot out of the wind. Nest boxes are common, but there are better choices for winter shelter. Roost boxes are like upside down nest boxes. Because heat rises, the access hole at the bottom rather than near the top. Dowels give the birds a place to sit, and many birds can fit into one medium-sized box.

Just as with nest boxes, precautions need to be made against predators. If the box is on a pole, a baffle will keep raccoons from midnight raids. An extra-thick doorway and metal predator guard will keep squirrels from gnawing their way inside.

Most birds find shelter in thickets and evergreens. Willows, brooms, and other dense shrubs block the wind and snow. Junipers and *Pyracantha* (aka Firethorn) offer the additional advantage of having leaves (or needles) year-round. Thorns are a bonus. The birds can easily avoid them, but potential predators get impaled and leave to find an easier meal.



Birds can survive the winter on their own, and have been doing so for thousands of years. But with increasing urbanization, our efforts may make the difference in whether or not a bird survives until spring.

• LESLIE HOLZMANN

[1] <http://www.bto.org/birdtrends2006/wcrstarl.htm>

[2] Snow, D. W. & Perrins, C. M. (1998). *The Birds of the Western Palearctic Concise Edition*. OUP ISBN 0-19-854099-X.



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

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**President Risë Foster-Bruder**  
 719.282.7877

[www.aikenaudubon.com](http://www.aikenaudubon.com)

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

**THE BACK PAGE**

## Why I ♥ Birding Colorado

I love birding Colorado. It's true, we're not La Cape May, Monterey, or Rio Grande Valley, but 493 species of birds have been sighted here. Only six states have more.

Having a lot of birds to see is certainly a good reason to bird in Colorado, but it's not the only one. Here are nine more reasons Colorado is a great place to bird:

- Habitats run the gauntlet from high altitude sage and mesquite to riparian cottonwoods, from the Arikaree River valley (where it flows into northwest Kansas (and then Nebraska) at 3,315 feet elevation) to 14,433 ft, Mt. Elbert. We have short-grass prairies, pine forests, cholla cactus and cattail-filled marshes.
- Water is scarce throughout most of the state. This means that any waterfowl in the area will be concentrated into a limited number of lakes, ponds, and wetlands, where birders can more easily find them.

- Many birds that winter in the tropics and summer in the Arctic pass through Colorado coming and/or going, so we get to see them.



- Colorado is beautiful. Whether you're in the mountains or on the plains, the views are so incredible you (almost!) don't care if you see any birds.
- Our shrubs and trees lose their leaves early in the fall and grow them back late in the spring. It's much easier to spot a bird in the bush when the branches are bare.

- At least half the state is more vertical than horizontal. Most of the good birding spots aren't immediately accessible from the car windows. Combine those two facts, and it's quickly clear why birding involves getting a good workout while looking for those elusive sapsuckers and crossbills.
- Our summers aren't too hot (most of the time). Freezing winter days are interspersed with periods of relative warmth. The sun shines most of the time. Humidity is low. Both the birds and the birders enjoy being outside year round.
- A lot of lost birds show up here. Most birders call those "accidentals." I call them "tourists." Here is sampling of the bird species that have inadvertently visited Colorado: Eurasian Wigeon, Harlequin Duck, Pacific Loon, Brown Pelican, Wood Stork, Iceland Gull, Scarlet Tanager, Brambling... you get the idea.
- The birders here are really nice, but I guess that's true all over!

• **LESLIE HOLZMANN**