



They're ba-a-ack...

Swainson's Hawks



It's time for the changing of the guard. Rough-legged Hawks are on their way to the northern edge of the continent to breed and raise their young in the 24-hour summer sunshine. At the same time, Swainson's Hawks are on their way back from Argentina in search of an endless summer.

Swainson's Hawks were the first hawks I learned to identify as a fledgling birder. The dark-dark-light pattern of perched birds was easy to remember—dark head and chest, white belly. Plus, the russet cowl is distinctive. Smaller than other Colorado Buteos, their tiny feet allow them to perch on wires whereas other Buteos prefer trees and telephone poles. A friend described their white face as their "searchlight" and the mnemonic stuck. And finally, no other American hawk has pale coverts with dark flight feathers. A soaring bird is instantly recognizable.

I get tired after a few hours in an airplane; these small hawks fly all the way here from southeastern South America. Their summer range extends from California east to the Mississippi River, and from Canada to Mexico.

While smaller than the common Red-tailed Hawk, Swainson's Hawks have longer wings—an adaptation that helps them stay aloft for such distances. When I photographed a Swainson's Hawk

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Your Aiken Audubon Society has had an eventful "season." We have successfully partnered with local conservation groups and have been able to financially support at least three research projects.

We hosted our first silent auction art show and the committee of Christine Bucher, Debbie Barnes and Frank Dodge did an exceptional job.

Jeannie Mitchell (and family) took off running when they received the keys to the new Audubon Kiowa Creek Sanctuary property. They have donated bird seed, furniture, manual labor and many hours of wildlife watching/photography. I know the state Audubon office is very happy to have such dedicated folks watching over the property.

Your board has worked diligently to have interesting and educational meeting presentations and field trips and to make sure we stay in the good graces of the Colorado Secretary of State.

Leslie Holzmann and her husband Pete have spent many hours preparing and printing the newsletter and keeping the website up to date.

We are fortunate to have highly skilled, knowledgeable birders who have generously given their time to lead many of our field trips.

I would like to say THANK YOU to everyone who volunteered and supported Aiken Audubon. There are too many names to list in such a small space but please know your time and efforts are greatly appreciated. The organization could not succeed without you.

I hope everyone enjoys their summer. In August I'm off to Namibia and Botswana. When my son teaches me how to create a Powerpoint presentation, I'm sure I will be on the docket for a program.

Happy Birding,

Risë

• RISË FOSTER-BRUDER
PRESIDENT, AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

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COMING PROGRAMS

May 18

Shrikes: Mr. Mousebreath
presented by Susan Craig

Summer

No programs.

Check the website for trips, events, and other news, and see you at our next program September 21!

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 Sept./Oct. 2011 issue of Aikorns is Wednesday, August 17.

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

UPCOMING AIKEN PROGRAMS

May 18 • Susan Craig Loggerhead Shrikes: Adventures with Mr. Mousebreath

Susan Craig will present a program about her shrike banding adventures in Colorado and Texas. As a volunteer with the State and with USFWS, she was delighted to receive some funding from the Aiken Audubon Society for her research with Loggerhead Shrikes.

PHOTO: COURTESY SUSAN CRAIG



In the program, Susan will talk about how she became interested in studying shrikes and how she eventually developed a very successful shrike trap, which she makes in her basement. She's developed safe handling methods for these birds, and has encouraged and educated shrike banders across the country. She will highlight the importance of safety for the birds, the live mouse lure, and the bander too.

Over the course of 18 years' work with eastern Colorado's shrikes, Susan has published several papers regarding longevity, nesting density, reproductive success, special behaviors and migration. You'll hear about shrike diet, the significance of recaptures, and theories on migratory routes and timing of migration.

Currently, Susan works with Loggerhead Shrike breeding in eastern Colorado. She's interested in subspecies, breeding success and survival rate in the evolving environment of the arid, short-grass southwestern high plains.

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.



May 14 is Migratory Bird Day

HELP WANTED

Articles Wanted!

Can you put two or more words together? Do you know anything about birding? Then you might qualify as an Aikorns Author!

No ideas? We have plenty.

- Perhaps you're birding someplace interesting this year, or you'd like to share about a past trip.
- Have you read a birding book lately? How about a review of one the new field guides?
- Describe how your nemesis bird stumped your efforts to find it.
- Tell us about your favorite feeder, or how you beat the squirrels.
- Teach us about a bird-finding technique that gets results.
- Delight us with a funny birding-related story.
- How did you learn to bird by ear?
- Know any helpful ID hints? Or can you create a quiz to test our skills?

Articles need to be no longer than 500 words. Editorial help is available, so don't worry about getting it perfect. Contact the editor at AikenAudubon@gmail.com for more information.

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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.

Wednesday, May 4 AND Sunday, May 15

Both days: 7am – noon-ish

Kiowa Creek Sanctuary

Join us for the first of a number of trips to this Audubon property in northern Black Forest. The Sanctuary is a new area for us, so it'll be great to see what surprises are in store! We'll definitely find forest birds: Downy & Hairy Woodpeckers, Northern Flicker, Pygmy & White-breasted Nuthatches, Mountain Chickadee, and Steller's Jay, for starters. Also, we'll see who's nesting in the Sanctuary: Western Bluebirds, Red-winged Blackbirds and who knows what else?

After lunch, if there is interest, we'll drive over to Tamlin Road (Falcon) for a completely different habitat—open prairie.

Bring lunch and/or snack. Scopes are helpful for the ponds, and a two-way radio is nice for Tamlin Road. Kiowa Creek Sanctuary is at 10165 Hodgen Road. Meet at the sanctuary gate on the south side of the road. (Please use caution when turning in and out of the gate, as Hodgen is very hilly and cars aren't visible until they're nearly on top of you!) Abysmal weather cancels the trip.

Additional trips are planned for June 1, July 6, August 3, and September 7.

Contact Jeannie Mitchell at vancerus@earthlink.net or (h) 719.494.1977, (c) 719.233.1956 if you have any questions, and to RSVP.

Saturday, May 21, 8 am – noon

Sonderman Park

Allan Burns will be leading this trip to Sonderman Park, especially to look for migrants. The presence of water during a dry year should bring in a variety of warblers. Past sightings have included Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Lazuli Buntings.

Meet at the entrance parking lot at Beidelman Nature Center.

Contact Allan Burns at 719.632.2081 with any questions.

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

Monday, May 23, 1:30 – 3:30 pm

Colorado College's Skin Collection

Brian Linkhart is providing this rare opportunity to view the college museum's collection of bird skins, some of which date back to the time of Charles Aiken. There are approximately 300 birds in the collection.

Meet at the Monument Valley Park parking area just off of Glen Avenue: Exit I-25 at Uintah heading east and turn right at Glen Avenue. Follow Glen until you see a parking lot on the right, just before the bridge over Monument Creek.

Contact Risë Foster-Bruder at 719.282.7877 for more information and to let her know you are coming.

Monday, June 6, 8 – 10am

Turkey Creek Ranch

We'll be looking for Lewis's Woodpeckers, Wild Turkeys, and any late migrants. Previous trips last fall turned up a variety of other birds along with the Lewis's Woodpeckers (*right*). This is an easy trip for those who dislike strenuous hiking—we sit at the picnic tables and the birds come to us!



PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

Bring water, sunscreen, and snacks. Scopes are optional.

Turkey Creek Ranch is located south of Colorado Springs on C-115. The entrance is on the east side of the highway directly across from the entrance to Aiken Canyon.

Directions: Take I-25 South to the South Academy exit #135. Go west on S. Academy Blvd approximately one mile. Turn south on CO-115. The entrance is 10 miles south of the Main Gate to Fort Carson. Be sure to obey all TCR speed limits and respect all off limits area signs. TCR will be closed to the general public on that day, so please plan to stay with our group.

Meet at the picnic area on right as you enter the stable area.

Bad weather cancels the trip.

Please RSVP to leaders Mel & Jeanne Goff at melgoff@comcast.net or 719.591.1155 with any questions, and to let them know you are coming.

Monday, June 27, 7 am – 4 pm

Emerald Valley

Join El Paso County naturalist Ken Pals in exploring the biological diversity of this montane meadow off Old Stage Road. Slipper orchids and other native plants will be top priority, followed by butterflies, then birds such as Band-tailed Pigeon, flycatchers, vireos and hummingbirds. Consider bringing a camera.

We'll rendezvous at Cheyenne Mountain High School east parking lot and carpool to Emerald Valley. Be prepared to drive or offer to ride. High clearance vehicles are recommended. Passengers should contribute \$5 to drivers for gas. Bring the usual things (including the ability to ford small streams).

Reservations are required. Group size is limited to 15 people as parking is limited at the site. Contact Ken Pals, mtnpals@q.com or 719.471.0687, for more information and to let him know you are coming.

More trips on page 5

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, May 14, 7 – 11 am

Fountain Creek Spring 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 during the height of the spring migration.

Reservations required, 719.520.6745. Fee: \$5 donation for birdseed.

Saturday, May 14, 7 – 9:30 am

Family Ed-venture: “Breakfast with the Birds”

Wake your family up early for a great morning at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo. We will start our morning taking the Skyride to the very top for a continental breakfast and then begin a bird watching ed-venture with the help of our African Rift Valley Keeper, Jenyva. So grab your binoculars and a water bottle for this amazing opportunity to become an “early bird” expert. Cost is \$30 per Zoo member family, \$45 per non-member family. Additional family members are \$10 each. No strollers please.

Go to the zoo website to register: <http://www.cmzoo.org/exploreLearn/families/family.asp>

Saturday, May 21, 7 – 11 am

Bear Creek Spring Bird Count

Bird enthusiasts of all ages and abilities are invited to participate in a citizen science project counting species and populations in Bear Creek Park.

Reservations required, 719.520.6387. Fee: \$5 donation for birdseed.

August 19 – September 18

Birding for Beginners – 202

Thursday Classes: (meet at Bear Creek Nature Center)
August 18, September 1 & 15, 6:30 – 8:30 pm

Saturday Field Trips: (at various locations)
August 20, September 3 & 17, 8:00 am – noon

This series of classes and field trips with Ken Pals goes beyond the basics of birding and focuses on species that are more difficult to identify, including hawks, shorebirds, flycatchers and warblers.

Reservations required, call Bear Creek Nature Center at 719.520.6387.
Fee: \$50/nature center member, \$60/nonmember.

CONSERVATION CORNER

Birding for Science

As birders, we love to get out, watch birds, and keep meticulous records of our sightings. Well, this is exactly the kind of information ornithologists need! There are a number of ways we can contribute to science as we pursue our birding passion.

eBird

As mentioned in the AFA announcement below, eBird is a great way to keep track of your sightings and make a significant contribution to science at the same time. National Audubon partnered with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to develop this online database. As their website (<http://ebird.org>) explains,

eBird has revolutionized the way that the birding community reports and accesses information about birds ... [by] amassing one of the largest and fastest growing biodiversity data resources in existence.

Air Force Academy’s Natural Resources Program

The Academy *Spirit* recently ran this announcement:

Whether you are a casual birder or a dedicated naturalist, the Natural Resources program could use your help to monitor birds at the Academy. Through the web-based eBird database (www.eBird.org), volunteers can report and share their real-time observations of bird abundance and distribution, while easily creating a personal online life list. If you are interested in helping, please visit the eBird website and call Natural Resources at 719.333.3308.

Pinello Ranch

Pinello Ranch (mentioned in the last issue of Aikorns) would also like help compiling a bird list for their property. They intend to apply for Important Bird Area status, and a comprehensive list is the first step. You can learn how to get involved on the Conservation page of the Aiken website (www.aikenaudubon.com).

Kiowa Creek Sanctuary

Another birding site that’s creating a species list is our own Kiowa Creek Sanctuary, Audubon’s new property on the northeast side of Black Forest. Check Aiken’s current fieldtrip listings for a chance to contribute your skills.

Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas

Now in its fifth and final year, the atlas relies on dedicated birders to survey each selected block and report accurate data.

Bird Counts

Both Fountain Creek and Bear Creek Nature Centers are holding their annual spring bird counts (see details above). These annual events keep track of which birds are visiting the parks, and how populations change over time. In this day of reduced park budgets, these count results are one more reason to fund these parks.

Similar events include the parks’ fall and winter counts, Project Feederwatch, the Great Backyard Bird Count, and of course Audubon’s long-running Christmas Bird Count. Stay informed at Aiken Audubon website’s “Events” page.

While we all enjoy listing for ourselves, it’s even better to share that information with those whose research can have a positive impact on conservation policy.

in California's central valley last March, I became curious. Why wasn't this bird in Argentina? It turns out that some birds only migrate as far as southern Mexico, Florida, and yes, California. (Apparently they also used to spend their winters in eastern Washington and Oregon, but not any more.)



By the time the birds return to their summer hangouts, you'd think they'd be exhausted. Maybe so, but that doesn't stop them from immediately getting about the business of breeding. Swainson's Hawks form permanent pair bonds, which are believed to endure as long as both birds live. Young birds and those who have lost their mates will choose a new partner as soon as they arrive on their

breeding grounds. They then spend the next week constructing a nest in any tree they can find in this mostly tree-less habitat. One to four eggs are laid, and soon the parents are busy stuffing small rodents, rabbits, and snakes lizards into their hungry brood. A lot of energy goes into raising their young, and they only have one family a year.

By September the kids have fledged and formed a gang with other juveniles the same age. It's time for everyone to head south again.

Sadly, like so many other species, Swainson's Hawk populations are declining, and have been for the last hundred or so years. Before 1900, the species was described as abundant, but by 1910 to 1920 it had become rare over much of its range. What happened?

For one thing, farmers and ranchers routinely shot Swainson's Hawks, even though it feeds on grasshoppers and other insects when not nesting. This practice finally stopped around 1930, as more enlightened views prevailed.

Additionally, ground squirrels are an important high protein food source for nesting birds and their young on the Great Plains, but their numbers have recently declined.

Insecticides are another hazard. According to National Audubon's website, "Pesticide use on alfalfa and sunflower fields in Argentina resulted in the death of some six thousand birds in 1995 and 1996. The alfalfa and sunflower fields were sprayed with organophosphate insecticides to kill grasshopper infestations. Hawks died immediately if they were sprayed while foraging in the fields or within several days after consuming the chemical-ridden grasshoppers."

The most prevalent cause of the decline, however, is destruction of habitat. For a species easily upset by the presence of humans near its nests, urbanization eliminates large areas that once were appropriate for nesting. As one result, the population that used to live along the southern California coast has been completely wiped out.



aikorns

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One major limiting factor, especially on the plains, is the lack of suitable nest trees. Small-scale farmers often planted trees and large shrubs as both shelter belts and around their homes. The hawks use these plantings for and nest sites. As small farms are being incorporated into large agribusiness spreads, these trees are abandoned. Their loss is a potential threat to reproductive success.

Happily, the birds have adapted to foraging in fields planted with low-growing crops such as wheat and hay, although areas with taller crops and orchards are avoided. In fact, they've learned to follow tractors, pouncing on the insects and small rodents that are disturbed by tilling. Like other species, their eventual survival may depend more on their ability to accommodate to humans than the other way around.

• ARTICLE AND PHOTOS
 BY LESLIE HOLZMANN

FIELD TRIPS (CONTINUED)

Thursday, June 30, 5:30 – 11:30 pm

Flammulated Owls

You've heard the fascinating presentations. Now join Dr Brian Linkhart, world expert and researcher of Flammulated Owls, for a behind-the-scenes tour of his research and to see Flammulated owls in the field!

Expect steep terrain with uneven footing (no trails) in the Manitou Experimental Forest, and remember it will be dark.

Advance reservations and pre-payment are required.
 Fee: \$25.00/ nature center member, \$30.00/nonmember. Maximum of 12—
 call Ken Pals at Bear Creek Nature Center, 719.520.6387, to reserve your spot.



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

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

President Risë Foster-Bruder
719.282.7877

www.aikenaudubon.com

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

THE BACK PAGE

Cool Birding

Summer birding can be a challenge. The weather is too hot to be enjoyable, especially when one is hauling binos, field guide, water, scope with tripod, notebook, lunch, and possibly a camera. The birds are busy raising families. Plus, the sun is coming up at an hour when even birders would prefer to catch a few extra zzz's. The early birds can have their worms.

Of course, most of us won't let a few inconveniences like that stop us from birding. But wait—you don't have to suffer in the heat. There are a few things we can do to make our excursions more bearable.

God invented mountains so both birds and birders can have a nice, cool place to go in the summer. Juncos, Wilson's Warblers, White-crowned Sparrows, even American Robins head for the hills when the weather heats up. There are also true mountain residents: Williamson's and Red-naped Sapsuckers, Rosy-finches, Red Crossbills,

American Dippers, Fox Sparrows and the elusive ptarmigans, to name a few.



If you can't be cool outside, consider birding from inside. Many nature centers have large picture windows with feeders placed right outside. You might not add any species to your life list, but the arrangement is perfect for photography. The building acts as a blind, plus the birds are used to people.

How about birding from your car? National Wildlife Refuges often have auto routes

that allow you to creep along in low gear, scanning for ducks, herons and other refuge visitors from your rolled down windows. If you turn the A/C on and direct the flow of cool air at your feet, you can stay pretty comfortable while you hang your scope out the window. Because the birds only see the car silhouette, and not yours, they ignore your presence.

Finally, there's one sure-fire way to keep that scorching sun from beating down on you. Go birding at night. Owls aren't the only nocturnal birds you might find—how about nighthawks and poorwills? Mockingbirds, the American Woodcock, and some herons are also active at night. Remember your flashlight, and be a bit careful. Birds aren't the only animals out in the dark.

There's not much we can do about summer's early sunrises or the fact that the birds are breeding instead of migrating, but at least we can cope with the heat. Grab your gear and go find some birds, and don't forget the bug spray. Oh, didn't I mention mosquitoes?

• LESLIE HOLZMANN