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**aikorns**  
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

# BIRDING IN THE MARGINS

by Leslie Holzmann

**T**HE SOUTHERN TIP OF AFRICA IS HOME TO MORE than a thousand bird species, far more than the US and Canada. I had my ticket and my passport. My camera and binos were packed, along with a pocket guide to the more common species. I was excited and ready to go. There was just one minor issue.

This wasn't a birding trip.

I was traveling with a team of 14 non-birders with the goal of loving on some 400 AIDS orphans and their caretakers. We would be busy from dawn to bedtime—playing games, performing puppet shows, teaching health and hygiene to the older kids, and giving out lots of hugs.

In the midst of this packed schedule, how could I manage to see any birds at all? It wasn't easy, but I did come home with almost 50 new species on my life list. Along the way, I learned some helpful lessons about being the only birder on a non-birding trip.

## **KEEP EXPECTATIONS LOW.**

Going into this adventure, I knew I would be frustrated if I expected an African version of an Aiken field trip. Most likely, I'd be birding from a moving vehicle, not easy even when you're familiar with the bird life of a region. I left home hoping for twelve new birds—anything more than that would be gravy.

## **KEEP THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING.**

This was a bit harder. While everyone knew I wanted to see birds, I didn't want my birding to interfere with the main purpose of our trip. While we were with the children, I concentrated on the people around me. It helped that my official role was trip photographer, so if a bird did happen to land nearby I could snap a picture for later ID. Still, I know I missed lots of sightings. I could hear the birds singing in the huge

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Swainson's Sparrow

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

### **A FEW OF MY FAVORITE THINGS... UM, BIRDS**

All of us treasure our favorite birds and favorite bird-related moments. Here are a few my favorites.

Pygmy Nuthatches, especially in a group at a suet feeder or bird bath. I enjoy the funny little squeaky noises they make when talking to each other. I think of them as the "little clowns" of the pine forest.

White swans on the wing. This is a memory from prior to becoming a serious birder and learning their proper names. My mother and I were on a walk around an urban pond in Maryland in the fall when suddenly a rush of wings whistled overhead and a small flock of about a dozen swans

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### **Coming Programs**

#### **JANUARY 15**

##### **Raptor ID**

Presented by Debbie Barnes-Shankster

#### **FEBRUARY 19**

##### **Flammulated Owl Research Update**

Presented by Brian Linkhart

#### **MARCH 12 (2<sup>ND</sup> WEDNESDAY)**

##### **Volunteering Your Obsession**

Presented by Erik DeFonso

#### **APRIL 16**

##### **Beyond Birds: The Rewards of Bugwatching**

Presented by Eric Eaton

### **Newsletter Articles**

Articles, announcements, or other items of special interest to Aiken Audubon members are welcomed for consideration. We'd love to hear from you!

Deadline for the March/April 2014 issue of *Aikorns* is Wednesday, February 19.

Contact the editor, Leslie Holzmann, at aikenaudubon@gmail.com, or call (719) 964-3197.

### **Inside this issue**

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## JANUARY 15 / DEBBIE BARNES-SHANKSTER RAPTOR ID

**W**ANT TO FIGURE OUT WHICH hawk that is in your backyard? How about the hawk along the highway? Colorado has 18 non-rare species of diurnal raptors.

Debbie Barnes-Shankster will be presenting an information-packed program explaining how to identify Colorado's eagles, hawks, falcons, and kites. Debbie has been studying the identification of these birds for ten years and has developed a program to help separate the various species. Here is your chance to learn the tips that will greatly improve your skills. Don't miss this outstanding program.

Then, you can put your new skills into practice by signing up for the Raptor ID field trips in January and June, and the Eagle Day trip in February.

Debbie has been birding and photographing birds for over ten years. She is currently a member of the board, program chair, and a field trip leader for Aiken. In addition, she volunteers for Colorado State Parks. She teaches raptor identification classes at Cheyenne Mountain State Park, has spoken at meetings of the Colorado State Parks Raptor Monitors, and taught a birding class at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument.

PHOTO: DEBBIE BARNES-SHANKSTER



## FEBRUARY 19 / BRIAN LINKHART FLAMMULATED OWL RESEARCH: NEW FINDINGS

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



*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.

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

**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 pm.

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.

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## Aiken Audubon Field Trips & Events

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. No dogs are allowed on Aiken trips.

**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 and notices of last-minute cancellations, send your name and e-mail address to [AikenAudubon@gmail.com](mailto:AikenAudubon@gmail.com).

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### SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29, 7:30 AM - NOON BIRDS & ICE PHOTO FIELD TRIP

PHOTO: DEBBIE BARNES-SHANKSTER

Winter birding can be pretty exciting, with excellent opportunities for photographers. Debbie Barnes-Shankster will lead this trip to Lake George and into Eleven Mile Canyon looking for waterfowl, both eagle species, and American Dippers. Non-photographers are welcome, but note that the trip will be slow-paced while we spend time photographing birds.



Be prepared for snow, arctic temperatures and severe wind chill: wear warm, waterproof layers and bring hand warmers for your pockets. Photographers will want long lenses if possible; tripods may be helpful. Digiscopers are welcome.

Contact Debbie at [kfoopoo@yahoo.com](mailto:kfoopoo@yahoo.com) or (303) 947-0566 with questions and to sign up.

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### SATURDAY, JANUARY 11, 8:30 - 11 AM FCNC 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. Sponsored by Fountain Creek Nature Center, \$5 fee (for birdseed). Reservations required: (719) 520-6745.

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### SATURDAY, JANUARY 11, NOON UNTIL DARK GULLS AND MORE!

Pueblo State Park's South Marina is full of gulls, and trip leader Brandon Percival will focus on seeing as many gull species as possible. We'll try to determine the ages of Ring-billed, Herring, and California Gulls, which are the most regular species. We'll also try to pick out Lesser Black-backed, Thayer's Gulls, and hopefully some of the rarer species too: Mew, Glaucous, Greater Black-backed, Iceland, Glaucous-winged, etc.



PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

Most of the time will be spent looking at the gulls around the marina, though if there are other birds around, we might go to other parts of the lake from 1 to 2:30. We'll want to be back at the South Marina for the big gull time from 2:30 until dark.

Bring snacks, drinks, warm clothes. Meet at the South Marina parking lot inside the state park (a Colorado State Park pass or day pass is required). Trip attendees from the Springs may want to arrange a carpool. Contact Brandon Percival at [bkpercival@yahoo.com](mailto:bkpercival@yahoo.com) with questions and to sign up.

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### JANUARY 18 OR 19, 8 AM - 2 PM RAPTOR ID FIELD TRIP

This is a one day trip with two dates to choose from. Practice your skills in Raptor ID after Aiken Audubon's annual Raptor ID program. We'll drive out to Eastern El Paso County, where everyone will have a chance to practice ID-ing raptors with scopes. Bring your long lenses if you have them.

Meet at Fountain Creek Nature Center to car pool. For more information and to RSVP, contact Debbie Barnes-Shankster at [kfoopoo@yahoo.com](mailto:kfoopoo@yahoo.com) or (303) 947-0566.



PHOTO: DEBBIE BARNES-SHANKSTER

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### SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM 18<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL EAGLE DAY FESTIVAL AT LAKE PUEBLO STATE PARK

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. At the Reservoir, we will take some time to enjoy activities at the Division of Parks & Wildlife and Arkansas Valley Audubon Society's Eagle Day Celebration. Prior years featured Air Force Academy falcons, rehab bird releases and a visit to the Pueblo Raptor Center.



PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

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 Sears Southgate (Broadmoor Towne Center, Nevada and Lake Avenue) near the Starbucks. Plan to return by mid afternoon. Please call Gary Conover, (719) 635-2505 for more information. Reservations not required.

*More trips online!*

For the latest information on field trips and events:

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

# NEWS & NOTES

by Jackie Heyda

**T**HE DENVER POST HAD A GUEST COMMENTARY IN the Sunday, December 2, op-ed section of the paper. The article “Endangered-species fixes possible” was co-authored by Gale Norton (previous secretary of the interior, Colorado attorney general and co-founder of the Conservation Leadership Council) and Susan Combs (Texas comptroller of public accounts).

They are concerned that not enough is being done now for endangered species. The article was written after federal officials proposed “threatened” status for the Greater Sage-grouse in Nevada and California. The federal government may adopt protections for the entire sage grouse population by 2015.

The authors think it is important to have more scientific studies done before a bird is placed on the endangered list. There often isn’t time to adequately study birds in the time required by statute. Many studied birds have been found not to be threatened. Common sense solutions do exist by investing in scientific study to protect species and continue local economic growth.

Local involvement is an important factor. In Colorado, the Colorado Habitat Exchange creates incentives for buyers and sellers to protect local species before they are listed as endangered. “The exchange works by making buyers and sellers part of the conservation solution. Credits and assurances motivate these stakeholders to protect native habitats so species do not reach threatened or endangered status”.

A pilot program on military bases has been recommended to allow the military to promote private habitat management. Private landowners would be rewarded for conservation efforts and base training would continue.

Bob Steller, a member of the Aiken Audubon Conservation Committee, sent the following information:

**The Douglas Land Conservancy** (DouglasLandConservancy.org) is a non-partisan, non-profit land trust dedicated to the protection and conservation of the natural character, habitat, and open space of the central front range region of Colorado, including Douglas County and surrounding areas. Ranchers’ lands are under a conservation easement so the land cannot be developed. The land owner gets a tax break.

**The Palmer Land Trust** (PalmerLandTrust.org) is a non-profit organization working to preserve important open lands in southeastern Colorado. Their mission is to guarantee that open lands remain a part of southeastern Colorado’s heritage. The Palmer Land Trust works in 10 counties: El Paso, Teller, Pueblo, Park, Crowley, Otero, Las Animas, Huerfano, Custer and Fremont. Almost a quarter of the land in this area is in public ownership. Approximately 400,000 acres of the land in these areas are protected through conservation measures with the Palmer Land Trust having protected approximately 75,000 of these acres.

Hopefully these projects will continue to promote conservation and habitat. There is more information on both websites. ☘



**Look for the  
Aiken Audubon Society  
Facebook page!**  
[facebook.com/pages/Aiken-Audubon-Society](https://facebook.com/pages/Aiken-Audubon-Society)

## ¿HABLA ESPAÑOL?

Did you know that the National Audubon website is also available en Español? You can find Audubon en Español at [espanol.audubon.org](http://espanol.audubon.org).

Audubon en Español can help us engage Spanish speakers in our community. The new Spanish-language web portal is part of Audubon's larger Diversity Outreach Plan. ☘



PHOTO: JIM GREY

### **NEW RULE WILL AUTHORIZE 30-YEAR PERMITS FOR KILLING AMERICA'S NATIONAL BIRD**

## **INTERIOR DEPT. GREENLIGHTS EAGLE SLAUGHTER AT WIND FARMS**

NEW YORK, NY, DECEMBER 5, 2013—In a stunningly bad move for eagles, the U.S. Department of the Interior has finalized a new rule that would make it possible to grant wind energy companies 30-year permits to kill Bald and Golden eagles. Audubon's CEO released the following statement:

“Instead of balancing the need for conservation and renewable energy, Interior wrote the wind industry a blank check,” said Audubon President and CEO David Yarnold. “It’s outrageous that the government is sanctioning the killing of America’s symbol, the Bald Eagle. Audubon will continue to look for reasonable, thoughtful partners to wean America off fossil fuels because that should be everyone’s highest priority. We have no choice but to challenge this decision, and all options are on the table.” ☘

**Birding in the Margins**, cont'd. from front page.

jacaranda nearby, but with the poor lighting (most of the time it was either heavily overcast or raining), lack of a spotting scope, and a dozen children clamoring for my attention (“Shoot me, shoot me!”), all I can tell you is that they were some species of Sunbird. Their silhouettes gave that much away.

### **DON'T BE ANNOYING.**

Think about it. Fifteen people traveling together, eating together, working together, staying at the same guest house—for almost two weeks. Now throw in an avid birder with a personal agenda who never stops talking about, pointing to, or hunting for birds. Homicide might be justified.

Yes, I wore a big smile every time I ID'd a new bird, but this wasn't the place for my lifer dance. I think I did an adequate job of keeping my thrills to myself, although you'd have to ask my teammates for their opinions on that. I was subjected to a fair amount of good-natured teasing, but by the end of the trip everyone was excitedly pointing out birds to me!



*Having a photo was essential to ID-ing this as a Striped Kingfisher.*

### **FIND YOUR OWN TIME.**

Happily, the guest house where we stayed had a lovely garden. Breakfast was at seven every morning, but it was actually light by about six. That quiet hour of extra daylight became my birding time. At the end of the trip we spent an afternoon at some touristy shops selling Swazi handicrafts (which were exquisite, I might add). While everyone else was hunting down bargains and choosing gifts for those back home, I was out in the bushes, hunting for yet one more lifer.

### **USE A CAMERA.**

With so many new birds to learn, a camera was essential. Trying to hunt through the guide for every sighting was futile. By taking photos (even bad ones), I was able to ID birds later. For example, it was only after I got home that I realized I'd seen three different species of Weavers.

Also, many of my initial ID's turned out to be wrong. I was carrying only a small pocket guide, an incomplete listing of the most common species. Once I had access to the (big and heavy) comprehensive Birds of Southern Africa, I was able to compare similar species and correct my mistakes.



*This Village Weaver was hanging out with some Spectacled Weavers, but I didn't notice until I got home and started editing my photos.*

### **EXPRESS YOUR DESIRES.**

It's perfectly fine to let your travel companions know that you enjoy birding and would appreciate a chance to pursue your interest. After all, the rest of the time you're probably going along with what everyone else wants to do. Some tactful negotiating can usually achieve some sort of compromise.

Traveling with non-birders can't possibly compare to going on a tour expressly designed for seeing birds—and I'd love to do that someday. On the other hand, most birding trips don't bring smiles to the faces of orphans! ☘

## **Flores' Funnies**



*Artist Rick Flores, a Nature Center volunteer, enjoys sharing his views of happenings at Fountain Creek and Bear Creek Nature Centers.*

### **President's Message**, continued from front page

flew overhead. Their beauty and wildness brought tears to my eyes.

The varied and complicated song of the Northern Mockingbird. Again, this memory is from Maryland. During the spring when it was warm enough to sleep with the windows open, a Northern Mockingbird would warble and sing in the early morning hours. I marveled at the wide range of noises it made and how happy it sounded.

Bald Eagles. Symbol of our nation, they are haughty and proud. And when seen in their nesting tree at Fountain Valley School against a Colorado-blue sky during the recent Christmas Bird Count, they are incredibly beautiful and awe-inspiring.

This is one of the reasons I love being a member of our local Audubon chapter: the ability to share our love of birds and our joy when spotting either the local favorite or the far-ranging wanderer. I look forward to sharing more “favorite things” with all of you in 2014. Happy New Year and Happy Birding!

**Christine A. Bucher,**  
Aiken Audubon President



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President Christine Bucher

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You do not have to be a member to participate in Aiken's activities.

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## **A FLURRY OF OWLS!**

*CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY, DECEMBER 10, 2013—We're experiencing what could be the largest-ever influx of Arctic Snowy Owls into the Northeast and the Great Lakes states. And more may be on the way. The killing of some owls at New York City airports has resulted in an outcry against the practice, which was deemed necessary to protect passengers after instances when owls were sucked into plane engines. Now that the Port Authority has announced it will move toward non-lethal trap and release methods, the logical question to ask is, "What next?"*



PHOTO: DEBBIE BARNES-SHANKSTER

Dr. Kevin McGowan, a biologist at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology says:

We applaud the move by the Port Authority to pursue non-lethal methods of removing Snowy Owls from JFK and La Guardia airports. This is essential to reduce risk to people, and it also preserves the lives of these magnificent raptors.

The sudden influx of these birds, called an 'irruption,' may be the first wave. More Snowy Owls are poised to head south looking for food and will be attracted to wide open expanses, such as airports, because they resemble

their native tundra. Now that we know this is happening, airports can prepare for it by connecting with local wildlife removal experts, as the Port Authority has done. In most cases, we'll be talking about a few birds per airport.

More than likely these Snowy Owls are moving south from the Arctic because of a shortage of their favorite food up north—lemmings, or because of a bumper crop of young. We can expect them to stick around through early spring before they head back to the Arctic again.

This year's Snowy Owl irruption is the largest we've seen in decades in the Northeast and this is an awesome opportunity for people to see these birds. A really great way to find out where they are in your area is to check out the live maps at eBird, which tracks reports of the Snowy Owls, at [www.eBird.org](http://www.eBird.org). Snowy Owls are one of the most impressive animals on the planet. You don't have to be a bird watcher to appreciate how cool they are! ☘