



May/Summer 2015
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aikorns
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

A MORNING AT BLUESTEM

By Tanja Britton

The waning, pale moon could still be seen in the western sky and no cloud obscured the uninterrupted view of Pikes Peak and the Front Range, visible along its entire length from this eastern vantage point as I ambulated on the trail around Big Johnson Reservoir just outside of Security-Widefield.

As soon as I opened my car door I was greeted by one of my favorite bird songs, the melodious scale of Western Meadowlarks. They were the predominant bird species in the grassland on this April morning, spaced at regular intervals, calling from the top of fence posts, reminding me of the marvelous ability of avian throats.

Horned Larks frequently flitted across the prairie and scratched the dry soil and I rejoiced in their beautiful facial markings. Killdeer announced their presence by their shrieking calls. There was a convention of American Robins among some trees in the corner of a field and I unintentionally disturbed two Red-tailed Hawks who took off from their perches. A lone Common Raven circled overhead before I lost sight of it.

This Open Space is also home to many Black-tailed Prairie Dogs whose constant vocalizations blended with the birdsong. Doubtless they were warning their brethren of my presence as they darted back to the entrances to their burrows and I assured them



PHOTO: TANJA BRITTON

I meant no harm. Rabbits also abounded and one jackrabbit fled in a hurry. I was even rewarded with the sighting of a small herd of pronghorn in the distance, a rare treat because of loss of habitat from the encroaching housing subdivisions.

The highlight of my day, however, came in the shape of two lumps on an earthen mound about thirty feet from me. My heart jumped with joy when, through my



PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As we come to the end of our program year, I am amazed at the community involvement we have had this year.

Not only did we conduct another successful Christmas Bird Count but we had several other outreach opportunities in the community. We are a founding member and active participant of the Pikes Peak Birding & Nature Festival. We provided volunteers for the Great Backyard Bird Count at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument in February. We will be participating in the Outdoor Skills Day at Mueller State Park in late May.

Several board members were speakers at diverse groups ranging from gardening groups to elementary school children to patrons of the Pikes Peak Library to service clubs. Members from Aiken Audubon helped clear tumbleweeds at Chico

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Coming programs

MAY 20

The Cape May Raptor Banding Project

Paul Napier

NO PROGRAMS OVER THE SUMMER

SEPTEMBER 16

Snap, Crackle, and Hop—Colorado Grasshoppers

Eric Eaton

Newsletter articles

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

Deadline for the September/October 2015 issue of *Aikorns* is Wednesday, August 19.

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

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MAY 20/ PAUL NAPIER CAPE MAY RAPTOR BANDING

Join us for Paul Napier's presentation on "The Cape May Raptor Banding Project," which will cover a brief history, some impressive Project statistics, how the Project contributes to science projects, and portraits and facts about the raptors banded. There will be lots of great close-up photographs.

Paul Napier has been banding raptors since 1988. He started out as a birdwatcher, then discovered raptors and never recovered. He has traveled extensively in the U.S. and abroad in order to learn more about the many exciting birds of prey that share our environment. Paul has been President of the Cape May Raptor Banding Project since the early 2000s.



PAUL NAPIER

Aiken Audubon programs are free and open to the public. They are held at the Colorado Parks and 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.

Bluestem... continued from front page

binoculars, I identified two Burrowing Owls, staring right back at me with their intensely yellow eyes. Even though I had been aware that these owls take up residence in prairie dog burrows, heretofore they had eluded me. I will never forget this special encounter.

The variety of the prairie, so close to our front steps, never ceases to amaze me, and I hope we continue to promote Open Spaces to preserve habitat, wildlife and flora without which the quality of our lives would be much reduced. ☘



PHOTO: TANJA BRITTON



PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

HOW TO FEED A HUMMINGBIRD

Hummingbirds have arrived for the summer, and the easiest way to see them is to hang out a feeder. While 90% of their diet is protein from insects and other tiny creatures, sugar water is always appreciated. Simply mix 1 part granulated sugar with 4 parts water, heat to dissolve (or boil to sterilize for a longer life), cool, and serve. No red dye is needed (it may be harmful), and avoid alternate sweeteners. Finally, be sure to keep your feeders clean! That black mold that grows the tiny birds. As a rule, change the sugar solution and thorough

in the sugar water is lethal to clean the feeder at least every three days. If you wouldn't drink out of it yourself, don't offer it to them. The birds will thank you. ☘

Aiken Audubon Board Members

PRESIDENT

Christine Bucher
(719) 596-2916
baccab@aol.com

VICE PRESIDENT

Frank Dodge
(719) 549-0651

SECRETARY

Risë Foster-Bruder
(719) 282-7877

TREASURER

Gary Conover
(719) 635-2505
gary1gc@yahoo.com

PROGRAM CHAIR

Deborah Barnes-Shankster
(303) 947-0566
kfoopoo@yahoo.com

CONSERVATION CHAIR

Jackie Heyda
(719) 487-8485

PUBLICITY CHAIR

Christine Bucher
(719) 596-2916
baccab@aol.com

EDUCATION CHAIR

Position Open

FIELD TRIPS

Mel Goff
melgoff@comcast.net

KIOWA CREEK LIAISONS

Jeannie & Ron Mitchell
vancerus@earthlink.net

AIKORNS EDITOR/WEB

Leslie Holzmann
(719) 964-3197
aikenaudubon@gmail.com

HOSPITALITY

Kathy Minch
(281) 435-6850
kathydaboo@gmail.com

CHRISTMAS COUNT

Tyler Stuart
(719) 661-9308
tylerhstuart@gmail.com

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. Remember 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.

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.

THURSDAY, MAY 14, 6:30 AM OR 7:30 AM CHICO BASIN RANCH

Chico Basin Ranch will be the site of the annual migration field trip led by John Drummond. Don't miss this opportunity to see what great species are passing through or arriving to stay the summer. Plan to bring all the essentials: water, sun screen, bug repellent, binoculars, snacks, and a good attitude.

Meet at the Hanover Fire Station at 7:30am, or the Woodmen Park & Ride at 6:30am SHARP!! Chico Basin Ranch charges \$10 per person (group rate), unless you have an annual pass.

This trip is limited to 16 participants, and sign-up is with John through email only: jxdrummo@aol.com.

SATURDAY, MAY 9 & 16, 7 - 11:30 AM FOUNTAIN CREEK / BEAR CREEK SPRING BIRD COUNTS

Birding enthusiasts of all ages and abilities are invited to participate in a citizen science project counting species and populations in Fountain Creek (May 9) and Bear Creek (May 16) Parks. A \$5 donation for bird seed is requested. Reservations are required. Call Fountain Creek at 520-6745 and Bear Creek at 520-6388, or email Stephen.Getty@ColoradoCollege.edu.

SUNDAY, MAY 17, 7:30 AM - NOON AIKEN CANYON PRESERVE

Join us for a four mile, moderately strenuous, hike at the Nature Conservancy's Aiken Canyon Preserve. The preserve is named after ornithologist Charles Aiken, just as our Audubon chapter is. Aiken Canyon is one of the last high-quality examples of the southern Front Range foothills ecosystem. The preserve is composed of a mosaic of habitat types, including shrublands, tallgrass prairie meadows, pinyon juniper woodlands and mixed coniferous woodlands.

The hike will take about 3 and 1/2 hours. Come prepared—we recommend bringing water, a wide brimmed hat and good hiking boots. We can have lunch at the Field Station after the hike.

Take 115 south from S. Academy Blvd. for 11.5 miles to Turkey Canyon Ranch Road (located 0.1 mile south of milepost 32). Turn right (west) and drive 200 yards to the preserve parking area.

To sign-up contact Gary Conover, garylgc@yahoo.com or 635-2505 for more information.

More trips online!

For the latest information on field trips and events:

www.AikenAudubon.com

SATURDAY, JUNE 6, 8:30 AM LAKE MANITOU

Join leader Jeff Jones for a walk around beautiful Lake Manitou in Teller County, just north of Woodland Park. Last year this trip saw almost 60 species.

The trip is limited to 20 participants. The cost is \$6.00 per car (\$3.00 if you have a National Parks Pass.) Meet at the south parking area. Bring water, sunscreen, a hat, and snacks. To sign-up, contact Jeff Jones at jjones@jonesTC.com

SUNDAY, JUNE 14, 8 - 11 AM KIOWA CREEK SANCTUARY

This is our first trip back after the devastating fires of 2013. Come see how nature is reclaiming the burned areas. We hear that birds are in abundance. What will you see? If folks are interested, an eastern El Paso County extension is available after the hike. (Lunch or snack as needed, but we'll be eating on the go.)

Meet at the front gate (10165 Hodgen Road in Black Forest). The trip is led by Aaron Shipe. For questions and to sign up, contact Jeannie Mitchell, vancerus@earthlink.net.

MONDAY, JUNE 29, 7 AM - 3:30 PM BLOOMS, BUTTERFLIES, AND BIRDS

Join Eric and Heidi Eaton in exploring the biological diversity of Emerald Valley, a montane forest and meadow off Old Stage Road. Slipper orchids and other native plants will be top priority, followed by butterflies, then birds such as possible Band-tailed Pigeon, flycatchers, kinglets, vireos and hummingbirds. Consider bringing a camera. The hike is several miles uphill.

Meet at Cheyenne Mountain High School east parking lot to carpool. High clearance vehicles are recommended. Bring the usual things (including the ability to ford small streams).

Reservations are required. Group size is limited to 12 people as parking is limited at the site.

Contact Heidi Eaton at hcgenter@gmail.com for more information and to let her know you are coming.

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



GREATER SAGE-GROUSE GET NEEDED PROTECTION

NATION'S FIRST GREATER SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION BANK

CHEYENNE, WY—Senior officials from the U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service joined Wyoming Governor Matt Mead today in announcing the launch of the nation's first conservation bank for greater sage-grouse. The bank will manage a vast expanse of central Wyoming for sage-grouse, mule deer and other wildlife, allowing energy development and other economic activities to proceed on lands elsewhere in the state. The project ranks as the largest conservation bank in the country.

In 2010, the Service determined that the greater sage-grouse warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), but was precluded by higher priorities. Since then, a remarkable, broad-based coalition of stakeholders has come together across the bird's 165 million-acre, 11-state range to address threats in an effort to prevent a listing. Market-based mitigation tools like conservation banks, and the financial incentives they provide, help conserve the habitat required for abundant, well-distributed



PHOTO: JEANNIE MITCHELL

sage-grouse populations.

Most of the Sweetwater River Conservancy Conservation Bank is classified as core sage-grouse habitat by the State of Wyoming, a designation applied to areas of the highest sage-grouse populations. In addition to sage-grouse, the Conservancy will manage the property for the benefit of other wildlife and to improve water quality and flows on the property. The Wyoming Stock Growers Agricultural Land Trust has been selected to hold and administer the conservation easements in perpetuity. ☞

RESTORING ONE OF THE LAST FREE-FLOWING RIVERS IN COLORADO

By Jackie Heyda

The April/May 2015 Nature Conservancy magazine has an article in the Nature section about Colorado. The Nature Conservancy is working on "restoring one of the last free-flowing rivers in Colorado". This river is the Yampa River which flows west of Steamboat Springs before flowing into a broad, 15 mile long floodplain known as Morgan Bottom.

"The Nature Conservancy is working with partners to improve conditions for both the river and ranchers. Future projects include reestablishing native riparian trees and shrubs, realigning the stream channel and creating fish friendly structures that allow irrigators to receive water more reliably".

Terri Schulz, Colorado director of landscape science and management is hoping that this river restoration will serve as a model for other large river systems.

For more information, go to <http://www.nature.org/Colorado>

WIND FARM PROJECT MOVING FORWARD

WINDMILLS NEXT to the Paint Mines? It appears so. The El Paso County Board of Commissioners recently approved a request from NextEra Energy Resources to erect a number of windmills near Calhan.

As you might expect, the project is highly controversial. Proponents point out the improved infrastructure that will result with no tax dollars spent. The wind farm will be built with local labor, creating many jobs. And Xcel Energy, the owner of the electricity produced, points out this is a renewable energy source.

On the other hand, there is concern about having lines up on poles near an airport. How close will the turbines be to homes? How about the view from the Paint Mines? And of course, what will be the toll on resident and migrating birds?

If you're interested in learning more, the following sources have articles from a variety of viewpoints:

“Wind Farm Coming to Calhan,” The New Falcon Herald: newfalconherald.com/DisplayPrintArticle.php?ArticleID=8867

“Wind Farm Project Moving Forward,” *The New Falcon Herald*: wind-watch.org/news/2015/03/07/wind-farm-project-moving-forward/

“Proposed wind farm project draws ire of some El Paso County residents,” *The Gazette*: gazette.com/proposed-wind-farm-project-draws-ire-of-some-el-paso-county-residents/article/1545591#7XuQa181UiKBm9z1.99

Three-County Community Coalition Open Energy Forum (local residents' concerns): three-county.org/

KIOWA CREEK SANCTUARY UPDATE—

BRINGING BACK CATTLE, BENEFITTING BIRDS

by Christine Bucher

KIOWA CREEK SANCTUARY (KCS) was deeded to National Audubon Society by “Ms. Janet” and is administered by Audubon Rockies, the regional office of the National Audubon Society. Aiken Audubon Society, as the local chapter closest to the property, works with Audubon Rockies to make KCS available for field trips as well as for flora and fauna surveys. The mission of Audubon Rockies is to be a strong, unified voice for an ethic of conservation in the Rocky Mountains, focusing on bird, other wildlife and their habitats, for the benefit of present and future generations.

The KCS is part of the Black Forest, a very critical, rare and threatened ecosystem. As a steward of KCS and all the wildlife that depends on it, Audubon is dedicated to conserving and improving the habitat



encompassed within the sanctuary.

To that end, Audubon Rockies and Corner Post Meats have partnered with the mutual goal of improving the habitat for birds and

other wildlife using domestic livestock grazing practices as a tool. Corner Post Meats is a Colorado, locally-owned and operated small ranching operation which is dedicated to raising pasture-raised meats.

Through proper livestock management, the habitat will be improved which will benefit birds and wildlife dependent on this unique and critical piece of property. When “Ms. Janet” owned the land, she leased grazing rights to the property and is fully aware of the current arrangement, as Audubon Rockies consulted with her.

Ranching and farming on similar “sanctuary” or “protected” lands has a precedent in Colorado. Chico Basin Ranch, Brett Gray Ranch and Zapata Ranch are all examples of active livestock management properties with a focus on conservation and preservation.

To arrange for field trips on the property, contact Jeannie and Ron Mitchell who are the Aiken Audubon liaisons to KCS. For more specific information contact Alison Lyon-Holloran, Executive Director at (970) 416-6931. ❧

MONEY MATTERS

by Christine Bucher

AIKEN AUDUBON Society, while a chapter of National Audubon Society, is also its own 501(c)3 entity. As such, donations made to Aiken Audubon are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

Aiken Audubon has been more fortunate than other chapters around the state in its financial position. Unlike other chapters, we don't have to “charge” a membership fee. For the last several years we have created and successfully sold our own calendar featuring photographs of members of our chapter. An annual stipend, based on the number of national members as determined by National Audubon and assigned to our chapter, helps keep our fundraising needs to a minimum. And, your board manages the funds raised in a fiscally responsible manner.

Why make a gift? Because you can help make a difference in the local birding community. Over the past several years, we have been able to support the RMBO bird-banding station at Chico Basin Ranch, provide support to children's programs at the El Paso County Nature Centers and help bird research conducted by Dr. Brian Linkhart, Susan Craig and a few other individuals. We are a sponsor of the 2nd Edition of the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas and supported the expansion at the Fountain Creek Nature Center with a sponsorship of new birding displays. We are a sponsor for the inaugural Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival. As part of the Colorado Audubon Council, we help fund the only environmental lobbyist working at the state capital, focused on environmental issues. Finally, each speaker for our programs is offered a stipend, although many decline to accept. And, occasionally

we schedule a program which requires a larger fee.

There are a few other expenses that need to be paid. Although we have a largely digital newsletter subscription list, a small number of hard copies are printed for distribution at locations in the community. Postcards are mailed to new members as assigned to Aiken Audubon by National Audubon, inviting them to visit our website and attend our meetings. There are some expenses associated with the snacks provided at meetings. And, as always, there are other unexpected expenses which arise from time to time.

Donations can be made via check or cash. Consider making a donation at the end of the year for tax benefits or as a gift in memory or in honor of a loved one. You will receive an official tax receipt for your records.

Finally, if you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact either Christine (President) or Gary (Treasurer). Their contact information can be found in the column on page 2. ❧



AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

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

President Christine Bucher

(719) 596-2916
AikenAudubon@gmail.com

www.AikenAudubon.com

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

President's Message, continued from front page

Basin Ranch. Our programs, field trips, newsletter, website and Facebook page touch many in our community.

I am grateful, and thankful to, everyone who has helped to make this program year successful—thank you to board members, field trip leaders and all those others who have helped in a variety of ways. It is my hope that Aiken Audubon will continue to grow in the community as the “go to” resource for birding in the local area.

Wishing you all wonderful birding spring and summer!

Christine A. Bucher,
Aiken Audubon President



**Look for the
Aiken Audubon Society
Facebook page!**

facebook.com/pages/Aiken-Audubon-Society

Flores' Funnies



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