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**aikorns**  
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

# SPRING CLEANING IS FOR THE (BLUE-) BIRDS

By Leslie Holzmänn

The bluebirds are coming! If you have bluebird nest boxes on your property, it's high time you cleaned them out. It's critical that they get cleaned before the birds arrive and move in, in early March. That means now!

I used to feel guilty about removing all those laboriously gathered twigs and dried grasses. The birds had worked so hard, it didn't seem fair to just dump it all out. Then I learned about the number and variety of parasites that accumulate in a nest, and realized that I was really doing the birds a huge favor. Who wants to move into a bug-infested home, especially when you're about to have babies?

First of all, there are the mites. Mites are really teeny-tiny spiders. I definitely did not want spiders crawling on my hands, up my arms, inside my... you get the idea.

Feather mites, the most common nest box species, aren't likely to kill the birds, but they can certainly make life miserable. (The good news is that they don't bother people.) But other kinds of mites feed on skin and blood, and a heavy infestation can kill the nestlings.

Then there are blowflies. Talk about disgusting! The adult flies come and lay eggs in the nest. When these hatch, the larvae sneak up and attach themselves to the baby birds—and suck their blood. Enough larvae will severely weaken or kill the young birds.

Blackflies also feed on blood, cutting their way through the skin. They can kill the young birds through blood loss, infection, or even shock. They're harder to control, as they can fly right in the door. Thankfully, they're relatively rare in Colorado.



LESLIE HOLZMANN



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

### IT'S SPRING!

Usually, Colorado's seasons have little to do with the calendar. The vernal equinox may occur in March, but we still expect snow, and it's way too early to plant those tender flowers and veggies. Happily, we're birders, and to the birds, March means spring!

Some birds are flying north, especially those with long trips ahead of them. Others are already building—or even sitting on—nests. It's almost too late to be cleaning out last year's bluebird boxes, as they're early nesters. Owls, hawks, and other

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### Coming programs

MARCH 16

Piping Plovers & Least Terns in Colorado

Duane Nelson

APRIL 20

Nesting Barn & Great Horned Owls

Scott Rashid

MAY 18

Using eBird (includes a live demo)

Mel Goff

SUMMER

No programs; see you September 21

### 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!

The deadline for the May/Summer 2016 issue of the *Aikorns* is Wednesday, April 20.

✦ Contact the editor, Leslie Holzmänn, at [aikenaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:aikenaudubon@gmail.com), or call (719) 964-3197.

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## MARCH 16 / DUANE NELSON PIPING PLOVERS & LEAST TERNS IN COLORADO

Biologist Duane Nelson has worked for over 25 years in the study, management, and conservation of Least Terns and Piping Plovers in Colorado. In 2002, Duane began working as a contractor with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at John Martin Dam and Reservoir. Previously, he worked for the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO).

As a contractor with the Corps, Duane works clearing invasive plants in order for both species, Piping Plovers and Least Terns, to successfully breed. Duane's diligent research and conservation efforts offer a significant contribution to the future preservation of Colorado's threatened Piping Plovers and Least Terns.

Duane has personally led hundreds, even thousands, of interested birders to view and admire these birds. As one qualified observer said, "It is fair to say that without his dedicated efforts we would not have breeding Piping Plovers and Least Terns anywhere in Colorado."



PHOTO: WIKICOMMONS

## APRIL 20 / SCOTT RASHID A LOOK INTO THE LIVES OF NESTING BARN OWLS AND GREAT HORNED OWLS

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



Join author, artist, and researcher Scott Rashid as he presents his research on two of Colorado's most interesting and beneficial owls—the Barn Owl and the Great Horned Owl. As director of the Colorado Avian Research and Rehabilitation Institute (CARRI), Scott will discuss camera work being done with nesting Barn Owls. Having cameras on active nests enables members of CARRI to monitor these owls in real time. Come hear what they're discovering about egg laying intervals, growth of the young owls, and the enormous numbers of small rodents that the male owls deliver to their waiting families.

Scott will also talk about the life of the Great Horned Owl, including the amazingly varied diet of this large owl, as well as its nesting and egg laying habits. You'll enjoy Scott's stories about owls he has rehabilitated—he has been working with Great Horned Owls for more than 20 years through monitoring nests, rehabilitating injured birds, raising orphaned owls, and banding both adults and nestlings.

Finally, he will discuss ongoing research by members of CARRI, including projects on American Kestrels, Long-eared Owls, and Northern Goshawks. This is one program you won't want to miss!

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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.

## ***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](mailto:AikenAudubon@gmail.com).

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### **SATURDAY, MARCH 19, 10 AM – NOON BUILDING FOR THE BIRDS**

Meet a few common backyard birds through a PowerPoint presentation, find out their nesting habits, then build a nesting box for them. Materials provided. For ages 8 and up with an adult. Must be able to handle nails, hammers, etc. This program is sponsored by Fountain Creek Nature Center and is listed here for your convenience.

Limited to 24 pre-paid participants. Cost is \$7 per FCNC member, \$8 per non-member, plus a \$5 materials fee. Reservations required, 520-6745.

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### **SATURDAY, APRIL 30, TIME TBA CHICO BASIN RANCH**

With migration in full force, spring is one of the best times to visit this birding hotspot. We can expect to see some unusual birds and maybe even a rarity or two. The banding station should also be open. You can be sure this trip will fill quickly. Details are still being arranged, and will be posted on our website when finalized.

There is a \$10 fee to bird the ranch.

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### **SUNDAY, MAY 1, TIME TBA FOUNTAIN VALLEY SCHOOL**

Sign up for this rare opportunity to bird this private property next to Big Johnson Reservoir. A pair of Bald Eagles has nested here in the past, and we're hoping they'll do so again. Details are still being arranged, and will be posted on our website.

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#### **SAVE THE DATES:**

Sunday, May 15: **Clear Spring Ranch**

Wednesday, May 18: Repeat trip to **Chico Basin Ranch**

Saturday, June 4: **Manitou Lake**

Also in the works: **Ramah SWA** and **Kettle Creek Lakes**.

#### ***More trips online!***

For the latest information on field trips and events:

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

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### **SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 6:30 AM – NOON AIKEN CANYON PRESERVE**

Yes it's early, but so is the sun this time of year. This will be a four mile, moderately strenuous hike at the Nature Conservancy's Aiken Canyon Preserve. Aiken Canyon is one of the last high quality examples of the southern Front Range foothills ecosystem—a mosaic of shrublands, tallgrass prairie meadows, pinyon juniper woodlands and mixed coniferous woodlands.

Past trips have resulted in many species, including Ash-throated Flycatcher, Juniper Titmouse, Clark's Nutcracker, and Northern Pygmy Owl.

Come prepared with 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. Carpools can be arranged if there's interest. Trip limited to 12 participants. For more information and to sign-up, contact Leslie Holzmann at 964-3197 or [Leslie@Mountain-Plover.com](mailto:Leslie@Mountain-Plover.com).

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## **AVOIDING WINDOW COLLISIONS**

*By Leslie Holzmann*

Window collisions kill millions of birds every year. High rise office buildings account for some of this carnage, but ordinary homes pose the most severe threat. Picture windows give us breathtaking views, but we don't want to kill the birds we love. What can we do?



Keeping birds from hitting our windows isn't easy. Those raptor-shaped decals only work if they're spaced very close together. The birds don't see them as predators; it's the light-blocking film that tells them they can't fly there.

Surprisingly, one helpful practice is to keep feeders and bird baths close to the windows. That way, when a bird takes off and flies into the glass, it won't have built up much speed. Yes, it will hit the window, but not very hard. However, not every yard is arranged in a way to make this possible.

Also, the birds may not hit the glass close to the feeder, but they can still run into other windows. So how do we tell the birds there's an invisible barrier? We make it visible!

The American Bird Conservancy website ([abcbirds.org/program/glass-collisions/](http://abcbirds.org/program/glass-collisions/)) explains the problem and helps you discern which windows pose the greatest hazard. They also list a wide array of practices and products (including sources) that help prevent birds from crashing into our windows.

Birds have enough counts against them without me adding more. Just as I keep our cat indoors and put protective guards around my nest boxes, I feel it's my responsibility to help the birds avoid window collisions. This information will help me get started. ☼



## 3660 ACRES IN COS TO BE SPRAYED FOR TUSSOCK MOTH

by Linda Hodges

This June, prepare for an onslaught of aerial spraying. In a concentrated effort to rid the area of the Douglas-fir tussock moths and western spruce budworms, which are devastating the local Douglas fir and spruce populations, the city, state and other entities will be spraying acreage along the foothills. Areas to be treated include Cheyenne Mountain State Park, the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Bear Creek Canon Park, North Cheyenne Canon, Seven Falls, and Blodgett Peak Open Space. Other areas, such as Jones Park, may potentially be treated.

Fortunately, the biological insecticide that will be used, *Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki* (Btk), is said to target the moth larvae, and should not prove harmful to birds, aquatic life or humans. The Purdue University extension claims that Btk is also not threatening to birds that might eat the infected (likely dead) caterpillars. Furthermore, entomologist and expert birder Dave Leatherman, who has been involved with the use of Btk, feels confident that there shouldn't be any avian issues. The city plans to spray so as not to induce any runoff into streams or waterways.

Three neighborhood meetings will take place this spring, with a larger public meeting occurring most likely in April.

## COLORADO SHORTGRASS BIRD RESEARCH NEEDS VOLUNTEERS

by Linda Hodges

Interested in rope-dragging, data recording and possibly trapping? If so, you may be a candidate for shortgrass bird research. A project of UC Denver, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, and the USDA Agricultural Research Service, it will take place at the Central Plains Experimental Range in Weld County, about 10 minutes north of Nunn off Highway 85.

According to the website, participants should see such species as Lark Bunting, Horned Lark, and McCown's Longspur. "Other likely possibilities include Common Nighthawk, Grasshopper Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, and Cassin's Sparrow. If you volunteer often enough, you will likely see Burrowing Owls (including chicks.)"

Still interested? If so, visit the project's FaceBook page at: [www.facebook.com/cper-birds/](http://www.facebook.com/cper-birds/), then contact Amber Carver at: [amber.carver@ucdenver.edu](mailto:amber.carver@ucdenver.edu). Include your full name, address and availability. Let her know your physical fitness level, since rope-dragging covers approximately 5-8 miles. (Half-day rope-draggers are accepted as well.) Please note that possible hazards have not been mentioned here, in an effort to induce your participation.

## COS URBAN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PLAN IN THE WORKS

by Linda Hodges

Colorado Parks and Wildlife is in the early stages of developing an urban wildlife management plan for Colorado Springs. A stakeholders' meeting will be held on February 17, which I plan to attend. Eventually, there will also be opportunities for public involvement. Please contact me at [hikerhodges@gmail.com](mailto:hikerhodges@gmail.com) if there are issues you'd like to see addressed.

## U.S. COURT UPHOLDS AIRPORTS' RIGHT TO LEGALLY KILL SNOWY OWLS AND OTHER BIRDS

JANUARY 29, 2016—In an update on the right-to kill case involving the extermination of three Snowy Owls, the Port Authority



of New York and New Jersey has been given the stamp of approval to kill birds in "emergency cases" on their property. According to the court, "migratory

birds that congregate near airports pose a well-known threat to human safety." The Port Authority owns numerous properties, including JFK, LaGuardia and Newark airports. Only Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, and endangered or threatened species are exempt. Apparently, Snowy Owls often mistake tarmacs for the tundra.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON National Audubon issues and actions, go to the Audubon Action Center, [audubonaction@audubon.org](mailto:audubonaction@audubon.org).

## JOIN THE CONSERVATION ACTION TEAM

Are you interested in learning about regional conservation issues? Might you be willing to send off an email to a legislator to protect a property or a species that you care about? Aiken Audubon is looking to put together a list of folks who could be contacted for issues of import. No commitment required. If this sparks an interest, please contact Linda Hodges at (719) 635.5551 or [hikerhodges@gmail.com](mailto:hikerhodges@gmail.com).

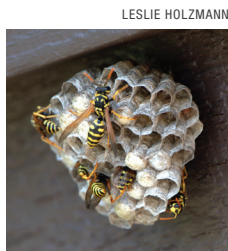
Ants and wasps are two more intruders that sometimes take shelter in a nest box, and can drive the parents away from their offspring. Ants can be deterred by spreading a sticky barrier such as Tanglefoot or petroleum jelly around the base of the post or tree supporting the nest box. Wasp nests should be knocked down the moment you notice them.

You'd think the birds would just eat all these nasty bugs, but apparently these parasites are too good at hiding. For instance, blowflies only come out at night, when the bug patrol is sound asleep. Sneaky.

Another reason to let the birds build a new, clean nest is the lack of plumbing in most birdhouses. The babies can't fly, yet they're munching down an endless supply of birdy baby food. And they don't wear diapers. Instead, they produce a compact bundle called a fecal pellet. The parents start out removing these pellets as they appear, flying them out the nest (and perhaps dropping them on an unsuspecting cat). But after week after week of this chore, they get a bit tired. Maybe that's one way to encourage the babies to leave the nest!

Cleaning is simple. Open the box. Using gloves (after reading this list, who wouldn't?), put your hand in a large plastic bag, then invert the bag over the nest. You can toss it in the trash or move it some distance away, then leave it for the good bugs that eat the bad bugs. Finally, sponge down the inside of the box with a solution of 10% bleach, 90% water.

There are many benefits to hosting nesting birds—they eat mosquitoes and other insects, they fill the air with bird song, and you can watch the whole incredible process of reproduction right at home. But if we're going to invite them in, it's our responsibility to make sure the neighborhood is safe. Cleaning out the nest boxes is a good start. ☼



LESLIE HOLZMANN

## NEW GUNNISON SAGE-GROUSE VIEWING PROTOCOL

There is a new viewing protocol for the only public viewable Gunnison Sage-grouse lek—the Waunita lek.

Two very significant changes for 2016 are:

1. Gunnison County now prohibits parking along the side of the county road (CR 887) adjacent to the watchable wildlife site. The county sheriff's office has agreed to patrol the site and enforce the no parking policy

2. To minimize human disturbance to the grouse, the public viewing site will be CLOSED on April 4, 5, 18, 23, 26, 27, and May 5, 6, 10, 11.

For further information and the sunrise table, visit the Sisk-a-dee website ([www.siskadee.org](http://www.siskadee.org)) or contact Colorado Parks and Wildlife at (970) 641-7060.



**DON'T MISS IT!**

## THE PIKES PEAK BIRDING & NATURE FESTIVAL

Mark your calendars for May 20 – 22 for the second annual Pikes Peak Birding & Nature Festival. The fun includes seminars, workshops, and of course plenty of field trips. Bird the Brett Gray Ranch. Look for Flammulated Owls with Brian Linkhart. Join a tour behind the scenes at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo.

This year's keynote speaker will be Paul Bannick, an international award-winning wildlife photographer specializing in the natural history of North America. (You may remember the excellent presentation he gave at one of our meetings a few years ago.)

Registration opens soon. Go to <http://pikespeakbirdingandnaturefestival.org/> for more information.

### Editor's Message, continued from front page

predators also produce their young early in the season, perhaps so they can take advantage of all those bite-sized rodents and bunnies—a perfect beak-full for growing nestlings.

Even birds that nest later in the season are donning their flirting duds. Ducks were first, but by now House Finches glow in bright crimson, Goldfinches burst out in sunshine yellow, and even those monochrome shore birds put on a bit of makeup.

Then there are the songs—every male is puffing his chest and singing siren songs to potential mates, or warning other males to keep out—this patch of land is taken.

This is the best time of year to get out and look for birds. They're so much easier to find when they're brightly colored, establishing territories, advertising their presence. Birds in breeding plumage are easier to identify, too. It's also the best time of year to invite a novice to bird with you. It's spring—grab a friend and go birding!

*Leslie Holzmann,*  
Aikorns Editor



Look for the  
Aiken Audubon Society  
Facebook page!

[facebook.com/pages/Aiken-Audubon-Society](https://facebook.com/pages/Aiken-Audubon-Society)



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

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## AIKEN'S WEATHER CANCELLATION POLICY

Sometimes inclement weather may cause us to cancel an Aiken meeting. If this happens, a decision will be made by 1 p.m. on the meeting date. Notification will be placed on our website, on our Facebook page and sent out through our email notification list. In addition, a message will be posted on the CoBirds Listserv, to which many of our members subscribe. If there is any doubt, please do not hesitate to contact any of Aiken board members via telephone. Always, your safety is first so use your own judgement when coming to a meeting.

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## WE NEED YOU!



The Aiken board has openings for Program Chair and Education Chair. Descriptions and contact information are on the Aiken website—[aikenaudubon.com/about-aiken-audubon-2/volunteer-with-aiken/](http://aikenaudubon.com/about-aiken-audubon-2/volunteer-with-aiken/). In addition, we need more **field trip leaders!** We're waiting to hear from **YOU**.

### Flores' Funnies



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