



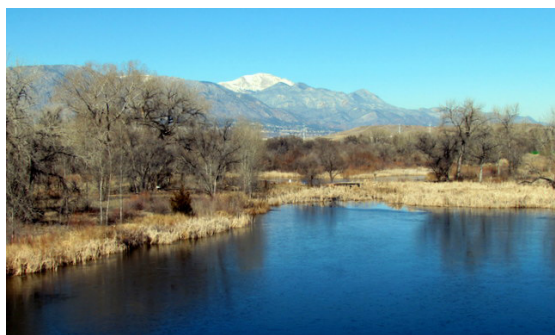
May/Summer 2016  
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**aikorns**  
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

# SPRING RETURNS

Story & Photos by Tanja Briton

The day starts cold, in the high teens. The car's windshield still bears two inches of snow from a storm the day before, as well as a sheet of ice underneath, which finally yields to the combined efforts of scraper, car heater and sunshine. I spend this first day of spring at Fountain Creek Nature Center, one of my favorite natural oases in the Pikes Peak area by virtue of its varied fauna and flora, not to forget lovely views of the foothills and mountains. The abundance of water that forms Fountain Creek's riverine habitat, marshes, several small lakes, and connecting canals acts like a magnet for a variety of creatures.



Blackbirds that greets the visitor as soon as the car door is opened. The cattail marsh at the foot of the nature center is home to legions, but they also partake of the seed buffet at the feeders in front of the building. On this morning, they have to share with House Finches, White-crowned Sparrows, Black-capped Chickadees, and White-breasted Nuthatches.

But the area harbors more than just birds, and increasing temperatures increase the activity of these other denizens. Rabbits rummage in the underbrush, squirrels protest my approach with indignant chattering, and a herd of eight white-tailed deer bounds away from a copse of trees where they had bedded down. Though turtles can often be seen sunning on exposed rocks in the ponds, this day is not yet warm enough, and they remain hidden.

Avian species predominate, and the nature center is among the most popular birding destinations in the region. I either see or hear my feathered friends without cease. If some places are recognized by their prevailing sounds, this particular location is characterized by the gurgling and trilling song of Red-winged

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

### ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

As many of you know by now, I am stepping away from the President's position of Aiken Audubon for numerous reasons. This leaves two years remaining on my three year term. At our May meeting, you, the membership, will vote on who will lead us for the next two years. It has been my pleasure to serve as President the last four years and I hope that you will give whoever is my successor the same regard and support.

I would also ask that you consider a leadership role yourself. Aiken Audubon is strengthened and led by those who are passionate about birding as well as the organization.

...continued on back page

### Coming programs

MAY 18

Using eBird (includes a live demo)

Mel Goff

SUMMER

No programs

SEPTEMBER 21

Wasps

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!

The deadline for the September/October 2016 issue of the *Aikorns* is Wednesday, August 17.

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

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## MAY 18 / MEL GOFF EBIRD—THE REAL-TIME, ONLINE CHECKLIST PROGRAM

### A GLOBAL TOOL FOR BIRDERS AND SCIENCE



# eBird

Launched in 2002 by the Cornell University School of Ornithology, eBird has become the preeminent online checklist database. Users are able to track their bird observations, maintain a variety of life lists, plan for bird outings and vacations, share checklists with others, and track rare bird sightings—all for free! eBird also provides scientists with invaluable information on species abundance and distribution. On top of all that, eBird is fun and easy to use.

An early adopter of the eBird platform, Mel Goff has seen this wonderful tool grow, embracing new technologies that make citizen science a part of any field trip. Mel has been using eBird for over a decade and continually looks for ways to not only report observations, but also prepare for trips to both familiar and far-flung locations.

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.

## THIS SUMMER, VISIT A DRAGONFLY HOTSPOT

by Leslie Holzmnn

MORE THAN 100 SPECIES OF DRAGONFLIES and damselflies (Odonates) have been documented on Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge, one of the most diverse populations of odonates in North America.

Located just outside of Roswell in southeastern New Mexico, the refuge is a hot-spot in another sense as well. I visited in July, when temperatures soared to over 100°.



Odonates weren't the only interesting insects. A gorgeous emerald-green beetle (*Oulema melanopus*) was trying to dig a hole in the silty soil. Tarantula Hawks crawled over the flowers along with some flighty butterflies. Then there were the swarms of nasty biting flies that scorned the triple layer of DEET covering

my exposed arms and legs. They left me covered in burning, itching welts. Insects may be fascinating, but there are some I can live without!

Bitter Lake also has plenty of birds—357 species so far! In winter, the wetlands attract the same Sandhill Cranes and white geese as Bosque del Apache NWR, several hours to the northwest.

It's also home to 59 species of mammals and more than 50 species of reptiles and amphibians. We almost ran over a slow-moving tortoise at the entrance gate!

Colorful wildflowers, like the Silverleaf Nightshade, lined many of the roads even this late in the season. I'm sure many more species bloom earlier, before the weather gets so hot and dry.

The refuge gates are open every day from before dawn to after sunset, allowing access to the trails and auto route, although the visitor center is only open Monday through Saturday. Whether you seek birds, bugs, or blooms, Bitter Lake is well worth a visit!

http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Bitter\_Lake/



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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. 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.

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### **SATURDAY, MAY 14, 7 – 11 AM FOUNTAIN CREEK NATURE CENTER SPRING BIRD COUNT**

Birding enthusiasts of all ages and abilities are invited to participate in a citizen service project counting species and populations in Fountain Creek Park. The count is sponsored by Fountain Creek Nature Center and is listed here for your information. The park requests a \$5 donation for bird seed. Reservations are appreciated: 520-6745.

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### **WEDNESDAY, MAY 18, 6:45 OR 7:30 AM – NOON CHICO BASIN RANCH**

**TRIP FULL:** To join the waiting list, contact Mel Goff at melgoff@comcast.net.

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### **MAY 20 – 22 THE PIKES PEAK BIRDING & NATURE FESTIVAL**

Don't miss 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.)

Go to <http://pikespeakbirdingand-naturefestival.org/> for more information and to register, but hurry! Registration closes soon.



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### **SUNDAY, MAY 22, 7 – 11 AM BEAR CREEK NATURE CENTER SPRING BIRD COUNT**

Birding enthusiasts of all ages and abilities are invited to participate in a citizen service project counting species and populations in Bear Creek Park. The count is sponsored by Bear Creek Nature Center and is listed here for your information. The park requests a \$5 donation for bird seed. Reservations are appreciated: 520-6387.

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### **SUNDAY, MAY 29, 7:30 AM – 11:30 AM CLEAR SPRING RANCH**

Join Gloria Nikolai for this great chance to look for migrants in this beautiful riparian area along the west side of Fountain Creek. The fall field trip here was very popular.

There will be a limit of 12 participants. Meet at the CSR parking lot. Participants can expect to walk up to 4 miles, almost all on level gravel trails.

To register, contact Gloria at glorianikolai@hotmail.com.

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### **SATURDAY, JUNE 4, 8:00 AM – NOON MANITOU LAKE (FEE AREA)**

This very popular trip returns for another year. Jeff Jones will lead a hike around Manitou Lake (fee area) that will highlight birds, plants, and insects. This is always a great field trip and will fill up fast.

Trip maximum is 16. The hike will kick off in the south parking lot at 8:00am. Bring bins, water, snacks, sunscreen, and insect repellent. To register, contact Jeff Jones at jjones@jonestc.com.

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### **SUNDAY, JUNE 5, 6:30 AM – NOON OVENBIRDS & HERMIT THRUSH HIKE, CHEYENNE MOUNTAIN STATE PARK**

Join Debbie Barnes-Shankster for a four-mile hike, round trip, to listen and look for Hermit Thrushes, breeding Ovenbirds, Virginia's Warblers and other park residents and spring migrants. This outing will also give you an appreciation for the many activities available in the closest state park to Colorado Springs. Meet Debbie at the park amphitheater at 6:30 am. A state park pass or day pass is required. To register, contact Debbie Barnes-Shankster at kfoopooh@yahoo.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. Expect 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 turned up Ash-throated Flycatchers, Juniper Titmice, Clark's Nutcrackers, and a Northern Pygmy Owl.

... more field trips listed on **page 5**



# FOUNTAIN CREEK REGIONAL PARK MASTER PLAN TO INCLUDE DOG PARK

An updated master plan process for Fountain Creek Regional Park (FCRP) has been ongoing for a few months now. There have been two public meetings, with the second on Thursday, April 28.

One of the issues that has recently arisen is the possibility of a dog park. Nancy Bernard, Fountain Creek Nature Center supervisor, says there is a huge demand.

Two locations have been proposed for the dog park. One is in Area 6, in the Cottonwood Meadows area. The second is in Area 1 and/or Area 2 (at top of map, right)—both have been mentioned. This spot is immediately east of the northern parking lot/trail-head—where car break-ins occur on occasion—just south of Willow Springs Road. Park staff finds this location desirable because of the readily available (yet limited) parking. Area 6 does not have a road or parking lot, which would present additional challenges and create greater costs. Area 6 is also scheduled to include a Frisbee golf course.

The space that's being considered in Areas 1 and 2 is untouched natural woodland. It provides a roosting area for Great-horned Owls, as well as habitat for numerous species. It is one of the wilder, more natural areas of the park and provides a diverse ecosystem. There is serious concern that a dog park would denude and devalue the space for wildlife.

If you have concerns about any of the planned activities/improvements, please consider contacting Ross Williams, El Paso County Community Services Department Park Planner, at 719-520-6984, or via email at [rosswilliams@elpasoco.com](mailto:rosswilliams@elpasoco.com). Another option would be to contact Nancy Bernard at FCRP, at [nancybernard@elpasoco.com](mailto:nancybernard@elpasoco.com).

## PINELLO RANCH MASTER PLAN AND POTENTIAL IBA

The latest word from David Rudin, Education Coordinator at Pinello Ranch, is that the master-planning process will begin in early May. Colorado Springs Utilities, who leases the property to the Pikes Peak Community Foundation, is reported to be considering other uses for the land, including a solar farm. They are said to be interested in generating a greater revenue stream.

Pinello Ranch provides much the same birding habitat/wildlife corridor as Fountain Creek Regional Park, and is an important migrant trap. To better protect the property from any kind of development, efforts are underway to apply for its designation as an Important Bird Area (IBA). Though this wouldn't provide any formal protection, it's been known to improve land management practices, and might influence CSU in its decision-making.

## CENTENNIAL BLVD. EXTENSION TO INTERSECT SONDERMANN PARK

Many of you have birded in Sondermann Park on the city's west side. Its riparian corridor and open meadows provide wildlife corridors and habitat for numerous migrants as well as year-round species. A Northern Cardinal has been seen there sporadically over the last few years.

You may have seen that the Centennial Blvd. extension is back on the table, which is proposed to run from Fillmore to the Fontanero/I-25 interchange through a section of the park. There is concern as to how this would affect Mesa Creek and the park in general. In or around 2001, the Pikes Peak Chapter of the Sierra Club took a position against the extension, as they felt it would negatively impact Sondermann Park; however, the route has been altered, and they'll be taking another look at it.

We are in the early stages of learning the impact this could have on the birds, but know that the 4-lane road will cut through the NE section of the park, near the bathroom facility. That building, which will be demolished to make room for parking, is only about 100 yards from the creek. We will keep you informed as we learn more, though the process is moving forward very rapidly, and it may be too late to have much impact.

### TO GET INVOLVED:

- Sign-up for project e-newsletters to receive meeting notices and the latest project information. Send an email requesting to be added to the project database to [Gigi@bachmanpr.com](mailto:Gigi@bachmanpr.com)
- Send an email with comments to: [CentennialExtensionInfo@springsgov.com](mailto:CentennialExtensionInfo@springsgov.com) or [Lisa@bachmanpr.com](mailto:Lisa@bachmanpr.com).

Please feel free to contact me, Linda Hodges, at any time regarding these or other conservation issues: [hikerhodges@gmail.com](mailto:hikerhodges@gmail.com).



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

### Spring Returns... continued from front page

Not so waterfowl. Canada Geese, Mallards, and American Coots abound, some never having left during the colder months. Recent arrivals include various other ducks, teals, grebes and mergansers, though a small number overwintered along the Front Range as well. I know this to be true of a few Great Blue Herons that I glimpsed sporadically in winter, though today groups of two and three flying overhead make me wonder if I am witnessing the return of the migrants. One of them lands on the lakeshore and hides among tall cattails, waiting to capture a fish or frog with its spear-like beak.

Additional signs of spring are unmistakable. Amid the tweeting, twittering, chirping, honking sounds, an occasional breeze ruffles last year's desiccated and brown vegetation that, in recent weeks,



is being replaced by a verdant shroud of leafing tree branches. Pairs of geese sequester in search of nesting sites. A Northern Flicker (*above*) enlarges a hole in a tree trunk to serve the same purpose. Robins and squirrels noisily chase one another through the trees, reminiscent of childhood days in the schoolyard when we used to show our affection by teasing our intended sweethearts. One lone Western Meadowlark flutes its enchanting song from the adjoining grassland, trying to attract a mate. A Cooper's Hawk (*left*),



branch in beak, rebuilds last year's nest. When I approach, it takes off to another tree where it perches for at least twenty minutes, surveying the vicinity, seemingly undisturbed by my presence, even though I worry that the proximity of its nest to the busy trail might interfere with successful breeding.

When I finally tear myself away in the early afternoon, I am (ful-)filled with nature's sounds, sights and warmth. Continued snowstorms since the vernal equinox remind us that springtime in the Rockies can be unsettled, but ubiquitous harbingers promise the inexorable march of spring and with it the welcome arrival of more plant and animal life. ☼

### Field Trips.. continued from page 3

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, to carpool, and/or to sign-up, contact Leslie Holzmman at 964-3197 or [Leslie@Mountain-Plover.com](mailto:Leslie@Mountain-Plover.com).



### **MONDAY, JUNE 27, 7 AM – 3 PM (ISH) EMERALD VALLEY—BLOOMS, BUTTERFLIES AND BIRDS**

Join Eric and Heidi Eaton on Aiken's annual search for the elusive Yellow Lady Slipper Orchid, as well as numerous other wildflowers. We will see birds but they are not the top priority for this field trip. Discover many insects as Eric and Heidi point them out throughout the day.

The trip is limited to 12 people. To register, contact Eric Eaton at [bugeric247@gmail.com](mailto:bugeric247@gmail.com).



### **FRIDAY, JULY 8, 7:00 PM – MIDNIGHT (OR SOONER) FLAMMULATED OWL TRIP**

**TRIP FULL:** To join the waiting list, contact Mel Goff at [melgoff@comcast.net](mailto:melgoff@comcast.net).

### **SUMMER 2016 BUGWATCHING**

The Mile High Bug Club cordially invites you to join them for:

**June 4:** Moth night at Cheyenne Mountain State Park

**July 23:** Dragonflies at Chico Basin Ranch with Bill Maynard

**July 27:** National Moth Week at Cheyenne Mountain State Park

**August 6:** Grasshoppers at Chico Basin Ranch with Bill Maynard

Contact Eric Eaton at [bugeric247@gmail.com](mailto:bugeric247@gmail.com).

### *More trips online!*

For the latest information on field trips and events:

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



## AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

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**www.AikenAudubon.com**

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

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

In two years the entire slate of the board officers will be up for re-election, as well as appointment of committee chairmanships. If you are interested in working on a committee, connect with the current chairman. Learn the ropes and maybe take a leadership role in two years' time. If only we adults were as eager to serve as the young lady at our April meeting who asked how old you had to be to serve as President.

Thank you for your support and I wish all of you the very best birding!

With kindest regards,

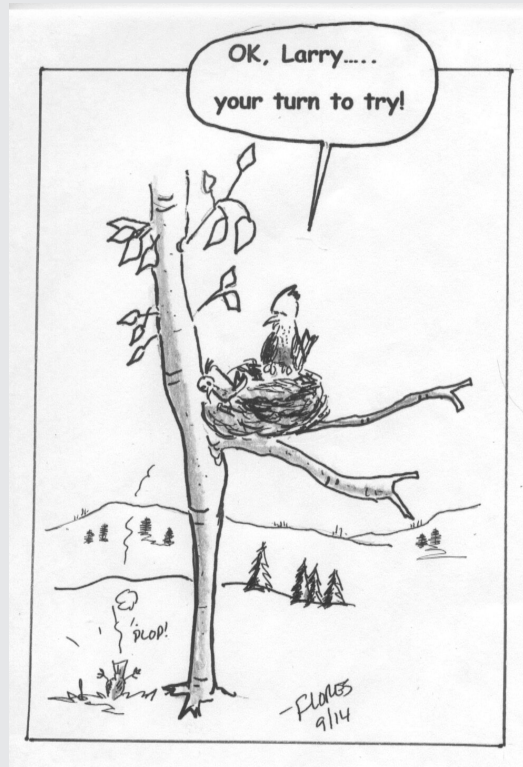
**Christine A. Bucher,**  
Aiken President

## WE NEED YOU!



The Aiken board has current 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.