



September/October 2017  
Volume 14 / Issue 1

**aikorns**  
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

# REMEMBERING BEN SORENSEN

March 30, 1931 – April 23, 2017

by Tyler Stuart

Aiken Audubon Society will miss Ben Sorensen's warm smile, infectious happiness, and dedication to the local birding community. Ben moved to Colorado Springs in 1957 as a member of the 59th Ordinance Company in the U.S. Army. In 1960, he celebrated his marriage to Sally Ann (Carlson) Sorensen and completion of his Bachelor of Science in Business degree.

Ben's interest in birds began with Sally at a small park in Oakland, California. Sally remembers the park as "nothing magnificent," but nonetheless memorable for educating them about birds and for her time spent there with Ben. Contemporaneously, Ben began sharing his love of nature and conservation as a volunteer with numerous organizations in Colorado. In addition to serving as President and Treasurer of Aiken Audubon Society, at which time the Sorensens hosted board meetings at their house.

Ben dedicated countless hours to compiling results of the Colorado Springs Christmas Bird Count between the 1970s and 2011. He was active with the Saturday Knights hiking club and the Sierra Club, and contributed to the 1998 Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas. Ben also volunteered for over 15 years as an interpreter for the Denver Museum of Nature and Science.

Ben Sorensen's passion for birds and educating others lives on within Aiken Audubon Society, and shines through in these memories from Aiken members and friends:

I have a vivid memory of watching Ben while he was birding. Long, long ago, we were birding with an Aiken Audubon Society group at Big Johnson Reservoir. I was scoping the reservoir from the dam. Ben and Sally were scouring for shorebirds with a scope along the muddy north shore of the reservoir.

As I watched through my scope, Ben would stealthily (in wide open space) move forward ten steps, set up the scope again, and pan the shoreline ahead for shorebirds. After a few minutes, satisfied he had seen each shorebird closely enough, he carefully folded his tripod and artfully moved another ten steps forward. He set up his scope, and once again repeated his careful search.

He rarely alarmed the birds, and they rarely flew, but rather scurried on ahead of him. From my perch on the dam, the birds were mere specks to me,

...continued on page 3

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Change is inevitable and Aiken Audubon is definitely going through some changes. The most impactful change is that we will no longer be meeting at the Colorado Parks and Wildlife classroom. Apparently, there is a new policy and they no longer allow outside groups to use their classroom.

I learned of this change in June; since then the board has been looking for another venue. For now we will meet at the Bear Den inside El Paso County's Bear Creek Nature Center. The address and a link to a map may be found on page 2 and on the Aiken website (AikenAudubon.com).

...continued on back page

### Coming programs

SEPTEMBER 20

**Conservation Status of the  
Greater Sand-Grouse**

Alison Holloran

OCTOBER 18

**Images of Colorado's Fauna**  
Radeaux

NOVEMBER 8 (SECOND WEDNESDAY)  
**To be announced**

DECEMBER 16

**Audubon Christmas Bird Count  
(no program)**

### 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!

Note: The deadline for the November/December 2017 issue of the *Aikorns* is Wednesday, October 18.

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

### Inside this issue

Coming Programs .....	2
Field Trips & Events .....	3
Conservation Corner .....	4
Smelly Rodents .....	5
Buy a Hat! .....	5
Flores' Funnies .....	back page

## SEPTEMBER 20 / ALISON HOLLORAN CONSERVATION STATUS OF GREATER SAGE-GROUSE



What is the current “state of affairs” regarding Greater Sage-Grouse conservation across the west? After bringing us up to speed on the natural history of this iconic western bird, Alison will discuss current management actions and policy that affects not only the Greater Sage-Grouse, but the sagebrush ecosystem as a whole. Facts are good. Now learn what you can do to help.

Alison Holloran graduated with a BS in Wildlife Management from the University of West Virginia, then obtained her MS in Zoology and Physiology from the University of Wyoming. In between, she served two years with the Peace Corps as a Wildlands Promoter in Honduras.

Alison’s master’s research investigated the potential effects of gas and oil development on Greater Sage-Grouse on the Pinedale Mesa. She worked for the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit developing and executing a research plan examining the potential effects of natural gas development on sage-grouse populations. Alison has been with Audubon for 16 years and currently serves as the Executive Director of Audubon Rockies, a regional office of the National Audubon Society.

## OCTOBER 18 / RADEAUX IMAGES OF COLORADO'S FAUNA

Aiken Audubon is delighted to present a program by Radeaux, a birder, artist, butterfly expert, and proprietor of the John Deaux Art Gallery in Pueblo. Radeaux recently completed the huge body of artwork for The Second Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas and was the artist for the 2006 Migratory Bird Day painting. The painter began birding more than 40 years ago. “The first bird I noticed as a child (I can’t remember how old) was a male Western Tanager outside our kitchen window,” he said. “My dad had a Peterson field guide, and I looked it up. I really got hooked on birding during a trip to the Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge when I was a teenager.”

Radeaux presents a program of imagery that spans a 40 year career of painting Colorado’s fauna. The program shows the development of his unique style and contains anecdotes about Colorado ornithology and natural history. Elements of the history of animal imagery from the dawn of man to 19th century quilt patterns of birds are part of this program.



## PLEASE NOTE OUR NEW LOCATION!

Aiken Audubon programs are free and open to the public. They are currently held at Bear Creek Nature Center, located at 245 Bear Creek Road in Colorado Springs, 80906. Coffee and socializing is at 6:30 pm and programs begin at 7 pm.

### 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 PM 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, which many Aiken birders subscribe to. If there is any doubt, please do not hesitate to contact any Aiken board members via telephone. Always, your safety is first so use your own judgement when coming to a meeting.

### Aiken Audubon Board Members

#### PRESIDENT

Risë Foster-Bruder  
(719) 282-7877  
Riserefb@comcast.net

#### VICE PRESIDENT

Position Open

#### SECRETARY

Debbie Barnes-Shankster  
(303) 947-0566  
kfoopooh@yahoo.com

#### TREASURER

Bonnie Morgan  
AikenAudubon@gmail.com

#### PROGRAM CHAIR

Diane Luck  
AikenAudubon@gmail.com

#### CONSERVATION CHAIR

Linda Hodges  
(719) 425-1903  
hikerhodges@gmail.com

#### PUBLICITY CHAIR

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

#### EDUCATION CHAIR

position open

#### FIELD TRIPS

Mel Goff (acting)  
melgoff@comcast.net

#### AIKORNS EDITOR/WEB

Leslie Holzmänn  
(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](mailto:AikenAudubon@gmail.com).

---

### **SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 7 AM ~ 3:30 PM (DATE CHANGE) BURNT MILL ROAD**

Gary Conover will lead this enjoyable trip south of Pueblo. We'll bird along Burnt Mill Road and down the St. Charles River looking for Cassin's Kingbird, Blue Grosbeak, Black Phoebe, Greater Roadrunner, Lewis's Woodpecker and other fall specialties.

Bring your lunch and a full tank of gas. The trip will include a few short walks along roadways. Return time is approximate.

Meet at the Broadmoor Town Center near Starbucks and Affordable Dentures. Contact Gary Conover at [garylge@yahoo.com](mailto:garylge@yahoo.com) or 632-2505 with any questions and to sign up. Beginners welcome.



---

### **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 6:30 AM / 7:30 AM CHICO BASIN RANCH**



Who's migrating this fall? We're bound to see a long list of species—both the regulars and likely some surprises—on this field trip to Chico Basin Ranch, led by John Drummond. We'll bird until we drop (usually mid-afternoon); bring a lunch.

Meet to carpool at the Tejon Park & Ride at 6:30 am or at the Hanover fire station at 7:30 am. There is a limit of 15 participants, and the trip will fill quickly. There is a \$10 fee to bird at the ranch (\$15 each, in groups of fewer than 5 persons). Contact John with any questions and to sign up: [jxdrummo@aol.com](mailto:jxdrummo@aol.com).

---

### **SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 7 – 10:30 AM FOUNTAIN CREEK REGIONAL PARK FALL BIRD COUNT**

Beginning and experienced birders are welcome to come count the bird species and numbers in the park. This is sponsored by Fountain Creek Nature Center, so direct questions and reservations to them at (719) 520-6745. There is a suggested donation of \$5/person.

## More trips online!

For the latest information on field trips and events:

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

---

### **FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27, 7:50 AM – 11 AM FOUNTAIN CREEK REGIONAL PARK**

Join trip leader Diana Beatty as we walk the trails near the nature center to see what we can see. Trip is limited to 12 participants. Contact Diana at [otowi33.33@gmail.com](mailto:otowi33.33@gmail.com) with any questions and to sign up. hats

---

#### **Ben Sorensen... continued from front page**

but I am sure they identified dozens of birds.

They continued in this fashion until they reached the northwest corner of the reservoir. I was impressed by his patience and the calm response of his quarry. And I learned a new, effective technique for watching shorebirds.

*David Elwonger*

Ben was a gracious compiler for the Colorado Springs Christmas Bird Count. I can remember the first year I participated, back in 1981, and failed to find Western Meadowlarks in Bear Creek Park. I was chastised by a local participant for not seeing the birds, but not by Ben. I looked for Western Meadowlarks ever since and usually did find them for the CBC. Ben worked tirelessly, along with his wife, Sally, to compile the results of the CS CBC. They should be thanked for the years of service they provided.

*Ken Pals*

I have known Ben and Sally for years, since the 1970s. I was on the Aiken [Audubon Society] board with Ben, who was always very pleasant and tremendously conscientious. He was the Treasurer then; he gave accurate and thorough reports. I have been doing the Christmas [Bird] Count since then as well, and always enjoyed being a part of it with Ben.

*Charlie Campbell*

To Zen Ben,

While employed at Penrose Hospital, I would frequently walk the neighborhood during my lunch time. One day, to my surprise, I spotted you on your hands and knees in your front yard. You were totally engrossed in the placing of black, oval pebbles in your Zen sidewalk. I did not want to disturb the moment by saying "hello" because I could sense your serenity, concentration, and passion of the moment. It reminded me of the way in which you birded. For my next cycle, I imagine myself as a swift, enjoying the thermals over the Colorado National Monument. Ben, I hope to share a few updrafts with you. Soar in peace.

*Diane Luck*



# GREATER SAGE-GROUSE CONSERVATION

PHOTO: JEANNIE MITCHELL

Much to the consternation of conservationists, Interior Secretary Zinke will be opening up more public land in the west for development. The department is also introducing a captive-breeding Greater Sage-Grouse program.

Per the Denver Post, the Trump administration's recommendations include "redrawing boundaries of protected habitat, increasing flexibility for land managers making decisions, clarifying standards for granting exceptions, streamlining permissions to use land and changing leasing policy for oil and gas operators. States could use captive-breeding and grouse population targets, rather than healthy habitat, as a basis for managing development."

Colorado governor Hickenlooper, Wyoming governor Mead, and all the Colorado Audubon chapters objected to the proposed changes, arguing that the current land-use plans, adopted in 2015, provided the best hope for protection of the grouse.

Here is National Audubon's press release on the subject:

PINEDALE, Wyo. (August 7, 2017) — "You don't need a PhD to understand that no living thing can survive without food and shelter. In other words, habitat protection and restoration is key for any species' success, especially the Greater Sage-Grouse," said Brian Rutledge, Audubon's conservation policy and strategy advisor, in response to the Department of the Interior's recommendation to amend the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) sage-grouse conservation plans.

"As Interior's own report acknowledges, Western states remain committed to retaining the 2015 conservation plans. Western states' fish and game experts agree that a focus on bird numbers alone and discredited methods to meet them like captive breeding would be doomed to fail, putting the sage-grouse at risk of further decline. The existing conservation plans provide the best chance for the sage-grouse, Western economies and 350 other species of wildlife like Sagebrush Sparrows and Burrowing Owls.

"Returning to old methodologies of preferring one use of public lands over all others will lead us all to failure. Audubon continues to stand with our partners, industry, ranchers, elected officials and communities across the West, who have worked together for years to protect America's sagebrush landscape. We expect Interior will begin an inclusive and public process in which our voices will be heard."

During this 60-day review period, Audubon members have submitted more than 23,000 comments to the Department of the Interior, urging Secretary Ryan Zinke to uphold and strengthen the existing land-use plans that benefit the Greater Sage-Grouse and more than 350 other species of plants, birds and wildlife.

To learn more about the unprecedented efforts to protect the Greater Sage-Grouse and the places it calls home, please visit [www.audubon.org/sage-grouse](http://www.audubon.org/sage-grouse).

For more information on the conservation status of the Greater Sage-Grouse, be sure to attend our September program, presented by Alison Holloran.



## CENTENNIAL EXTENSION/ SONDERMANN PARK

Work is expected to begin on the Fillmore end this fall, with demolition and cleanup. It appears that work near Sondermann Park is slated for early 2019-2020. Get your birding in now while you can!

## STRATTON OPEN SPACE TREE REMOVAL

Thanks to a suggestion by Steve Getty, and follow-up by City Council President Richard Skorman, the Stratton Springs Path will be left in its natural state. A dramatic amount of tree removal led Aiken and others to question the scope of the project. Outside USFS rangers helped convince the city to leave some of the land untouched, to provide habitat and forage for birds and other wildlife.

## 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. Interested? Please contact Linda Hodges at (719) 635-5551 or [hikerhodges@gmail.com](mailto:hikerhodges@gmail.com).

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

# BENEFICIAL SMELLY AQUATIC RODENTS

Story & photos by Leslie Holzmann

They can swim both forward and backward. They can hold their breath for 20 minutes. They're noticeably smelly. There's a cute song about them, but they're not very popular.

What am I talking about? Muskrats!

Muskrats are often considered pests. They burrow into the banks of streams and ponds, causing erosion and leaks. They carry diseases that can hurt us, such as tularemia, leptospirosis, giardiasis, or even rabies. Add in their rat-like appearance, with a hairless tail and typical rodent face, and it's no surprise that muskrats don't have many fans.



I, however, like them. Why? I generally like small, furry creatures. We don't have a pond or stream to maintain. I don't get close enough to pick up any nasty diseases. And muskrats play an important role in the wetlands where they live.

Like many rodents, muskrats breed prolifically, and they're quite common as a result. Mated pairs are monogamous and produce several litters per year with up to fourteen babies per litter, although four to eight is more normal. The naked and blind infants hang out with mom for a while (while dad takes a vacation), although they're weaned after the first month. A new litter may be born in a different chamber in the den before the previous one has left home. At some point, the species' aggressive territoriality kicks in. Much depends on the current food supply—good neighbors will turn nasty when food becomes less available, and youngsters attempting to move back in after leaving home may be attacked and killed.



It's easy to tell if there's one or more muskrats in an area. Their distinctive tracks will be left on the mud. Collapsing banks are hard to miss. Even harder to miss is the shelter they build. It looks like a cross between a beaver lodge and a packrat nest, reaching up to eight feet across and five feet in height—large enough to hold the whole family.

With all this negative press, is there anything beneficial about muskrats? Like their rodent cousins, muskrats are dinner for an assortment of predators, especially mink. The warm homes they leave behind are reused by many other species, including snakes,



## BUY A HAT!

Aiken Audubon does not charge dues. There is no fee for our field trips (except entrance fees charged by a destination). All our programs are free. On the other hand, we often pay our speakers. We support bird-related research, bird-related displays at our local nature centers, the Pikes Peak Birding & Nature Festival, and educational opportunities such as the bird banding station at Chico Basin Ranch.

Where does this money come from? Donations from people like you. And fundraisers. In the past we sold calendars featuring the work of our Aiken photographers. Now we are selling hats. Where else can you get a lovely baseball cap embroidered with our very own Aiken's Western Screech Owl, "Wes"? Hats are available in eight colors—black, burgundy, light stone, navy, red, royal blue, stone, and white.

The cost is only \$20. All profits benefit Aiken Audubon. They are available at all meetings or you can order from Kathy Minch at [kathyda-boo@gmail.com](mailto:kathyda-boo@gmail.com).

turtles, frogs, and raccoons. And their dining habits help to maintain the water quality of their ponds.



While muskrats are omnivorous (eating fish, snails, mussels, crustaceans, and insects), they prefer their veggies, chowing down on cattails, sedges, and other water plants. The harvesting of this vegetation creates open areas where less competitive plant species can grow, and allows water to keep moving through the pond. "When muskrats clear out areas of emergent vegetation, they provide nesting sites for water fowl and wetland birds such as Canadian [sic] Geese, Mallards, cranes, heron[s], and many other species."\*

I knew there is a reason I like muskrats. They benefit the birds!

http://bioweb.uwlax.edu/bio203/2010/harried\_brit/interactions.htm



## AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

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

President Risë Foster-Bruder

**(719) 282-7877**

**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

I realize this new location is a bit far for some attendees, but it is closer for others. If you have a more centralized location which might suit our needs—i.e. large enough for 50+ people, with an up-to-date IT system (projector, etc.), and the ability to reserve it months in advance—please let myself or another board member know and we will look into it.

We are also in need of some new board members. Mel Goff has decided three years as Field Trip Coordinator is enough. He is still organizing trips but would like someone else to take over the position. The Education Chair position is still vacant, and we have been getting more and more inquiries for bird-themed talks, walks, programs, etc. If you have any questions about or interest in either of these positions, let me know.

I would also like to thank everyone who helped with the 2017 Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival and the TOPS BioBlitzes. There is one more BioBlitz on September 15-16 at the Ute Valley Open Space. We will bird the park and lead a public bird walk Saturday morning. If you are interested in staffing the Aiken table or helping with the birding, again, please let me know.

We have another year of interesting programs planned so I hope to see you at the next meeting.

**Risë Foster-Bruder**  
President, Aiken Audubon Society

### Flores' Funnies



Artist Rick Flores, a Nature Center volunteer, enjoys sharing his views of happenings at our local Nature Centers.



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

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