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**aikorns**  
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

# DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR?

By Leslie Holzmnn

I was wandering through the forest in western Washington when I heard a series of high-pitched, whistling bird calls. Peering into the foliage, I finally made out the Cedar Waxwings that were making the sound. Another time, I was in southern Texas. Again, I heard birds singing some very high notes. In this case, they were followed by a series of lower notes and a distinctive two-tone call. I realized that I was surrounded by Ruby-crowned Kinglets.

Since those experiences, I've wondered—just as chickadees can see into the ultraviolet, beyond anything humans can perceive, do birds have hearing ranges that extend beyond ours?

First of all, we need to know what the typical range of human hearing is. Turns out that, although we vary as individuals, most people can hear sounds between 20 and 20,000 Hz. We are more sensitive to the lower end of this range. As we get older, it's normal to experience some hearing loss, particularly at the higher frequencies. That explains why my (mostly older) friends often can't hear the birds I still can.

While they rely heavily on their sense of hearing, birds have a more limited *optimal* range than us primates, between 1,000 and 4,000 Hz, although they can hear pretty much the same frequencies that we can. As one would expect, this varies by species.

As I had noticed, waxwings and kinglets tend to be at the high end, reaching 8,000 Hz or even higher. They're joined by other birds with high-pitched songs such as Brown Creepers, and many sparrows and warblers. The Blackpoll Warbler is a virtuoso, with songs rising to 10,000 Hz. This is still well within the range of a person with normal hearing.

What about animals with the ability to echolocate; how high can they hear? I was amazed to learn that dolphins and bats are able to hear frequencies up to 100,000 Hz! The few birds that use echolocation (some cave-dwelling swiftlets and oilbirds) make sounds that are much lower—rapid chirps and clicks between 2,000 and 8,000 Hz that we too can discern.



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Christmas Bird Count season is upon us. Whether you participate in one, two, or as many counts as possible, it is always a special time of year.

Committing to a day of birding during what can be the coldest time of year might not seem like a sane idea, but it never fails to rekindle my love of birds.

On this year's Colorado Springs count, we were accompanied by a recent east coast transplant out on his first Colorado CBC. Several times, he was surprised that we were seeing what he considered to be strictly eastern birds.

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### Coming programs

#### JANUARY 16

##### A Brood of Backyard Kestrels

Michelle Caldwell

#### FEBRUARY 20

##### Birds and Coffee

Gemara Gifford

Death by Chocolate

#### MARCH 20

##### Colorful Colorado... Beetles

Eric Eaton

#### APRIL 17

##### Birding Senegal & The Gambia

Bill Eden

### 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 submissions to the March/April 2019 issue of the *Aikorns* is Wednesday, February 20.

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

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## JANUARY 16 / MICHELLE CALDWELL A BROOD OF BACKYARD KESTRELS

Michelle and Roger erected a kestrel box in the fall of 2005 per a family member's suggestion. For years, the box served as a perch for owls, hawks, and meadowlarks. In the spring of 2014, coinciding with her retirement from teaching middle school students, a pair of American Kestrels chose the backyard box as their nest site. Here is where Michelle's kestrel adventure began.

Michelle believes there is no place like home for watching birds. A resident of Colorado Springs since 1979, Michelle moved to eastern El Paso County in 2005. Space to wander, no matter the season, gave her a magical glimpse into the rhythm of prairie creatures.

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



## FEBRUARY 20 / GEMARA GIFFORD BIRDS AND COFFEE



Shade coffee growers in Central America may hold the secret to conserving migratory birds and alleviating poverty at the same time. The benefits of shade coffee farms to birds (and likewise, the benefits of birds to coffee farms) has been well documented. Shade coffee provides high-quality habitat for birds, especially in fragmented areas with little forest, and may even serve as matrix habitat for forest-dwelling species. Migratory birds reduce pest damage to coffee crops during an important time of their growth cycle.

Diverse coffee agroecosystems also improve farmer livelihoods and food security, because they are grown with a diversity of fruit, nut, and fiber trees, and are sometimes combined with local crops such as maize, beans, and squash.

Come and find out why "farmer-friendly coffee" is what bird-lovers should be drinking.

Gemara Gifford (pronounced gém-uh-ruh) is the International Program Director of Trees, Water & People, a grassroots nonprofit in Fort Collins, Colorado that empowers indigenous communities in North and Central America to conserve their natural resources and improve their livelihoods. Gemara graduated with her Master's degree from Cornell University in 2016 where she collaborated with Cornell Lab of Ornithology scientists on a community-driven conservation research project in the Guatemalan Highlands, studying rare migratory, endemic, and resident cloud forest birds. Gemara is an expert in leading projects that include community leadership, and conservation in working landscapes. She also has a B.S. degree from Colorado State University and is a Bill and Melinda Gates Scholar. When Gemara isn't hopping from country-to-country or leading private tours with her non-profit, Trees, Water & People, she enjoys painting, writing music, volunteering, and spending time with her husband and two kitties.

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

**If inclement weather cancels an Aiken meeting, decision will be made by 1:00 PM on the meeting date. Notification will be placed on our website, on our Facebook page, and sent out through our email notification list. If there is any doubt, please contact any Aiken board member via telephone. Always, your safety is first, so use your own judgement when coming to a meeting.**

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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](mailto:AikenAudubon@gmail.com).

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### **SATURDAY, JANUARY 5, TIME TBD BLACK FOREST CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**

Gloria Nikolai will be coordinating the Black Forest CBC, and she is looking for birders to help her. Kiowa Creek Ranch is part of the count area, and she has permission to access this typically off-limits property. Participants must be able to hike 5+ miles across uneven terrain. Contact Gloria at [glorianikolai@hotmail.com](mailto:glorianikolai@hotmail.com) with any questions and to sign up.

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### **SATURDAY, JANUARY 12, 8:00 – 11:00 AM FOUNTAIN CREEK NATURE CENTER WINTER BIRD COUNT**

Help record the number of bird species and populations found in Fountain Creek Regional Park. This event is sponsored by the nature center, and is listed here for your convenience.

Suggested donation of \$5/person goes to pay for feeding the birds at the nature center. Please let them know if you plan to participate: (719) 520-6745, [nancybernard@elpasoco.com](mailto:nancybernard@elpasoco.com), or [communityservices.elpasoco.com/nature-centers/](http://communityservices.elpasoco.com/nature-centers/).

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### **SATURDAY, JANUARY 26, 10 – 11:30 AM BEHIND THE SCENES AT DENVER MUSEUM OF NATURE & SCIENCE**

*(Trip full. There is a waiting list.)*

The Denver Museum of Nature and Science has one of the richest ornithology collections in the country, with nearly 60,000 birds from around the world, dating from 1842 to today. Join **Dr. Garth Spellman, Curator of Ornithology**, on a tour through the museum's state of the art labs and collection hall and discover the many ways this incredible biological resource supports research at the museum and around the world.

Cost: The tour is free, but a donation to the ornithology program at DMNS is always appreciated and strongly suggested by Aiken Audubon Society in thanks for the tour. If you would like to combine the tour with a museum visit to see the traveling and permanent exhibitions, then visitors can pay for museum admission.

To register: Contact trip organizer Diana Beatty at [otowi33.33@gmail.com](mailto:otowi33.33@gmail.com) with names of interested participants and carpool/museum admission intentions. Trip is limited to 20 participants

## More trips online!

For the latest information on field trips and events:

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

and new sign-ups will not be accepted after January 12 regardless of number of interested persons so that we can submit a final headcount to the museum for their preparations.

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### **SATURDAY, MARCH 2, 8 AM – LATE AFTERNOON GUANELLA PASS PTARMIGAN**



PHOTO: DEBBIE BARNES-SHANKSTER

Debbie Barnes-Shankster is leading this snowshoe expedition in search of Ptarmigan. It takes sharp eyes to find them in their snowy white winter plumage. Be prepared for a 2-mile trek up the mountain (at high altitude) to where the birds prefer to hang out. At least the trip back is downhill!

Meet at the Monument Park N Ride to carpool. Bring layered clothing, water, and food. Snowshoes can be rented at REI, or in Idaho Springs at one of the ski shops. If you rent in Idaho Springs, plan to depart 30 minutes ahead of everyone else, then arrange to meet the rest of the group at the Georgetown parking lot on the road up Guanella Pass.

Contact Debbie at [kfoopooh@yahoo.com](mailto:kfoopooh@yahoo.com) with questions and to sign up. Trip limited to ten participants.

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## **SAVE THE DATE: MAY 17 – 19:**





## DRAKE LAKE AT STAKE

Drake Lake, also known as Mallard Pond, is a small pond in northeast El Paso County, just south of the intersection of US Hwy 24 and Judge Orr Rd. El Paso County, which manages it, is considering a Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Plan for the 22-acre property. The purpose of the plan is to make recommendations to “improve, restore and enhance the wildlife habitat of the property.”

The 22-acre parcel is comprised of upland, wetland, and open water habitat; its primary uses are open space, bird-watching and wildlife habitat. The lake, which is currently approximately 5 acres, is spring-fed via a perennial stream, which passes through the lake and continues on to Black Squirrel Creek. “Mallard Pond,” as it’s called on eBird, boasts 144 bird species.

A number of repairs and alterations have been recommended. Some, such as repairing the dam breach, increasing the lake’s water table and restoring the cottonwoods, are amenable to Aiken Audubon. Repairing and replacing nest boxes, removing dead shrubbery, and planting cottonwoods are also acceptable.

Allowing fishing, however, is of concern to Aiken Audubon. We feel that the introduction of more people to this small area will negatively affect, rather than enhance, wildlife habitat. The tendency for birds to become entangled in fishing line is also a serious and not uncommon issue.

Our past-president, Risë Foster-Bruder, has conducted bird surveys on the property since 2011, and has requested that Aiken’s board review the plan and ask the county to consider birds and habitat a priority.

The board has therefore made recommendations to the county. We suggested that a portion of the shore be off-limits to fishing, in order to provide areas of undisturbed shoreline vegetation for nesting birds and other wildlife. We requested that receptacles for used monofilament line be placed at the lake to reduce the risk of improper disposal, and asked for periodic clean-ups. And we asked the county to consider removing the proposed loop trail from their plan.

Linda Hodges will serve on the Drake Lake committee. If any of you have any thoughts or concerns regarding the plan, please contact her at [hikerhodges@gmail.com](mailto:hikerhodges@gmail.com).

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



## BIG JOHNSON RESERVOIR: WHERE’S THE WATER?

For those of you who’ve been patiently yet eagerly awaiting the refilling of Big Johnson Reservoir, don’t get your scopes out just yet.

According to Gary Steen, manager of the Fountain Valley Mutual Irrigation Company, which owns the reservoir, the process “is taking longer than expected.”

You may recall that drainage began over two years ago, in the summer of 2016. Silt build-up in the 280-acre lake had diminished the amount of water the company could legally store by half. With 57 shareholders depending on the water for irrigation and well augmentation, it was time to dredge the lake and increase storage.

The company has built a by-pass pipe, and is currently working to repair the outlet gates (through the dam), which was mandated by the state. Once that’s completed, they will dredge for silt, and finally will fill the reservoir with water from Fountain Creek. November is the time of year they’re allowed to take water from the creek, and it’s a short window. Hopefully the project will be on track to refill the reservoir in November of next year. Otherwise, we—and the birds—will have to wait another calendar year.

## UPDATE: THE CHATFIELD STORAGE REALLOCATION PROJECT

Chatfield reservoir has long been a destination for Front Range birders, and for good reason. With an eBird list of 334 species, you may spot anything from a Peregrine Falcon to an American Pipit. It’s also a good place to look for rarities. Just last fall, two different Jaegers (Long-tailed and Parasitic) and a Sabine’s Gull were added.

When the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced plans for increasing the holding capacity of the reservoir, birders were concerned. The decision to raise the water level by 12 feet would affect the riparian natural areas. Would this productive hotspot be ruined?

The resulting Chatfield Storage Reallocation Project (CSRP) is a partnership between federal and state entities and eight water providers in the Denver Metro area and northeast Colorado. According to the project website, there are plans to restore the habitat affected by construction and the higher water levels by planting of over 100,000 plants, trees, and shrubs, stream restoration and stabilization, and extensive erosion and sediment control.

Additionally, about 10% of the added water storage is dedicated to the Environmental Pool, increasing the flow of the South Platte River, enhancing the river’s health, increasing recreational activities and supporting agricultural operations downstream.

The plan will protect visitors and dam operations by removing debris and unhealthy trees from the fluctuation zone while also conserving healthy trees and maintaining important bird and wildlife habitat.

This is encouraging news. While plants take a while to become established, ultimately Chatfield could be an even better birding site than it has been in the past. May it be so!

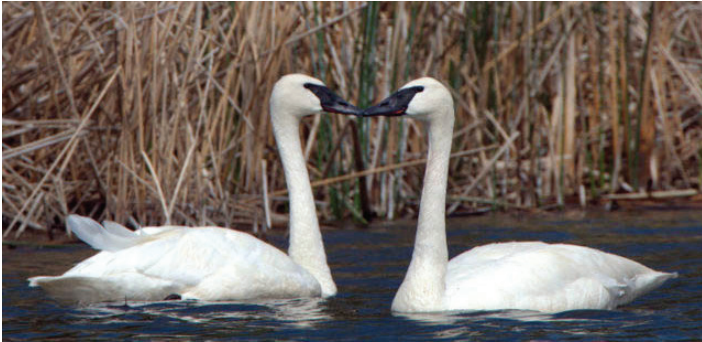
For the most current updates on construction, visit [chatfieldreallocation.org/construction](http://chatfieldreallocation.org/construction)

# NOT-SO-MONOGAMOUS SWANS

Story and photos by Leslie Holzmann

*IT SOUNDS SO ROMANTIC, THE IDEA THAT SWANS MATE FOR LIFE. IF ONE dies, its mate also dies—of a broken heart. How faithful. How tragic. How so not true.*

I hate to burst your bubble, but swans are not the faithful mates we imagine them to be. Instead, the birds are Casanovas, rakes, rogues,

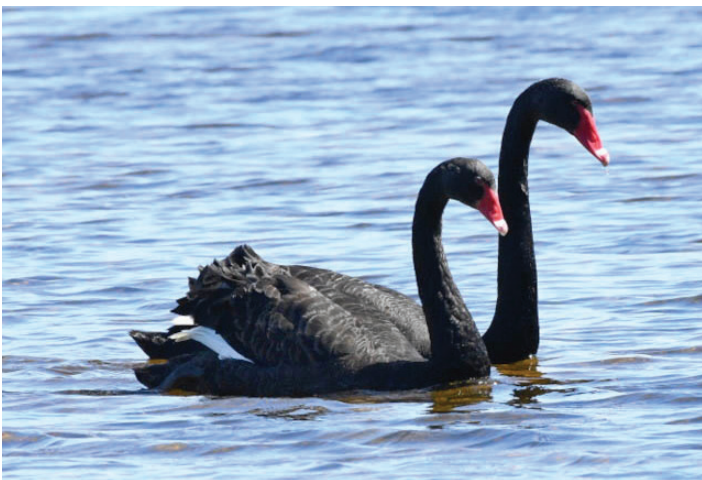


and cheats. In the dark of night, they sneak away from the nest and visit the swan next door. And it's not just the males. In fact, in at least one swan species, the females cheat more than their mates.

This is in spite of the males' significant contribution to parenting, providing food, fighting off potential predators, and even investing more time incubating the eggs than the females do.

We've known for a while that when a swan is widowed, so to speak, it mourns for a bit and then finds a new mate. But we assumed that once paired, it was a case of "until death do us part."

It turns out, we've been fooled by the birds' seemingly faithful behavior. With the advent of DNA testing, the truth comes out. According to a well-publicized study of Black Swans in Australia,



one in six cygnets are hatched out of "wedlock"! That's a whole lot of sneaking going on!

Swans don't just have affairs. They also get divorced. Pairs break up for a number of reasons, but especially when nests fail. Animals

define success by the number of descendants they produce. They can't afford to be sentimental if it means they die childless.

Swans aren't the only species to mislead us. There is a long list of birds we have wrongly assumed to be monogamous, including albatrosses, petrels, geese, Sandhill Cranes, Black Vultures, Ospreys, eagles, pigeons, and some owls and parrots. Yet the more research that's done, the more we realize that looks are deceiving. Even birds that only mate for one season tend to fool around on the side.

As with swans, we can't blame it all on one gender. Males may find it easier to find time for a quick coupling, but in many birds it's the female who wanders. Either she mates with another male, or she leaves an egg or two in someone else's nest. No one is innocent.



According to a 1988 article by ecologists Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye,

Increasingly, ornithologists and behavioral ecologists have come to view monogamy as part of a "mixed" reproductive strategy in which matings may occur outside the primary pair bond, but both members of the pair still contribute substantially only to the care and feeding of the young from their own nest.

That was our understanding 30 years ago. With new tools, we are now realizing how widespread this strategy is. It makes sense. Birds (and other animals) will do whatever it takes to maximize the number of offspring they leave behind. Extra-pair bonding is one way to hedge your reproductive bet. If your mate proves to be less than optimal, perhaps someone else will have better genes.

It's kind of sad. I loved the noble idea of a majestic swan committing to its mate for life. Now it turns out to be just one more example of how we anthropomorphize animal behavior. ☼



**Do You Hear..** continued from front page

What about the other end of the spectrum? Do birds hear lower notes than humans? The lowest sound made by a bird is the Dwarf Cassowary of New Guinea, whose calls have been recorded as low as 23 Hz, still within human hearing range. We don't know if they can hear even lower sounds. Thesis, anyone?



Compare that to the ability of whales, who can hear sounds as low as 7 Hz. (I ran into some disagreement over whether pigeons can hear lower notes than humans.)

I was a bit disappointed to discover that hearing isn't one of a bird's superpowers. Or is it? While their *range* may be more limited than ours, birds are extremely sensitive to *variations* of sound, and excel at sound recognition.

According to an article by Melissa Mayntz:

Birds are especially sensitive to pitch, tone and rhythm changes and use those variations to recognize other individual birds, even in a noisy flock. Birds also use different sounds, songs and calls in different situations, and recognizing the different noises is essential to determine if a call is warning of a predator, advertising a territorial claim or offering to share food.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, birds have perfect pitch, something few people can claim. They're better at hearing very quiet sounds, ones we'd overlook; a hunting owl can hear the pitter-patter of a mouse beneath a layer of snow. They also hear shorter notes. Humans process sounds in bytes about 1/20 of a second long whereas birds discriminate up to 1/200 of a second. This means where we hear one sound only, a bird may hear as many as ten separate notes.<sup>2</sup>

So it turns out that birds' hearing is pretty impressive after all. Are we surprised?

1. <https://www.thespruce.com/birds-five-senses-386441>

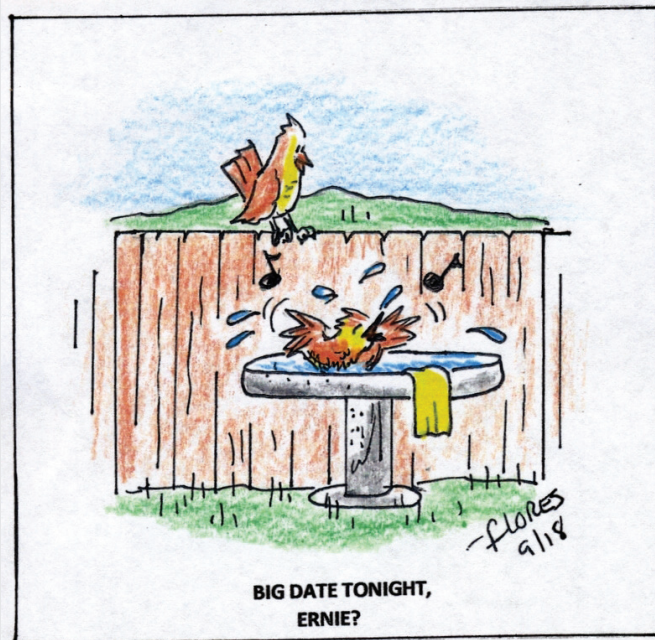
2. <https://www.earthlife.net/birds/hearing.html>

## **SUPPORT AIKEN AUDUBON WITH AMAZONSMILE**

There's an easy way to support Aiken Audubon, and it won't cost you a dime. It's called AmazonSmile. AmazonSmile is the same Amazon you know. Same products, same prices, same service. The difference is that when you shop on AmazonSmile, the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of eligible products to the charitable organization of your choice. Of course, we hope you'll choose Aiken!

It's simple. First, sign up at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com). Then, any time you order anything from AmazonSmile, Aiken Audubon will receive 0.5%. That may not seem like much, but it adds up. ☿

## **Flores' Funnies**



Artist Rick Flores, an El Paso County Nature Center volunteer, enjoys sharing his views of happenings at Bear Creek & Fountain Creek Nature Centers.

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

It made me think of what a unique place the Front Range is, where the ranges of multiple closely related 'eastern' and 'western' birds just barely kiss. Go a little bit east, and you'd be amazed to see a Steller's Jay; a little bit west and you stop seeing Blue Jays. But right here in Colorado Springs, it's not uncommon to see both species in the same tree.

There probably aren't many places where you wouldn't be surprised to see both Western and Eastern Bluebirds in the same patch of junipers, or where you need to carefully check the color of a Northern Flicker's feather shafts.

We may not see as many species on our CBCs as one might see in Florida or Texas, but when we embrace the unique aspects of our local bird life, they can be just as exciting.

Thanks to everyone for participating in Audubon Christmas Bird Counts this year! If you didn't make it out this year, we hope to see you in 2019. Until then, happy birding.

**Anna Joy Lahnicke**  
President, Aiken Audubon Society



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