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**aikorns**  
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

# SPLITTING THE RED-TAILED HAWK?

By Leslie Holzmann

If you've been birding for any length of time, you know that species come and species go. The birds don't change, but our perception of which variations are actually different species is constantly undergoing review. We have lumpers, who combine disparate species into one, and splitters, who separate subspecies into two or more different species. Add in the (relatively) new ability to examine DNA, and you have a recipe for constant change.

Currently, it seems the splitters are prevailing. Just in the past few years we've acquired a new Red Crossbill by splitting off the Cassia Crossbill from the rest of the pack (2017), and many of us have gained an "armchair lifer" from the 2016 division of the Western Scrub-Jay into California and Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays.

Now I hear that Harlan's Hawk is being considered for elevation to species status, splitting off from the Red-tailed Hawk. Most of the AOS proposals for 2019<sup>1</sup> are concerned with reordering the phylogenetic order of various species, punctuation nuances (eliminating apostrophes, for example), or refer to birds most of us never see anyway. (The only other species currently being considered for division is the White-winged Scoter—our North American bird would be separated from its relatives in the eastern hemisphere.)

Harlan's Hawks, while fairly rare, are seen on a regular basis, at least here in Colorado. Splitting them would give most of us birders another check mark on our life lists. Of course we approve.

They are typically dark, as you can see from my photo, although there are light morphed Harlan's, and Red-tailed Hawks can be dark. The variations in *Buteo* plumage can make identification very tricky!



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

During this year's Great Backyard Bird Count, I was thinking to myself that February might not be the best month for birding in Colorado. The morning was cloudy, windy, and cold—the kind of day that might seem better spent sitting in front of a fireplace than tromping through the snow hoping to spot a Dark-eyed Junco or a Mountain Chickadee. But the enthusiasm of the Catamount Institute's YES (Young Environmental Stewards) club members made me happy that I had decided to brave the elements.

Seeing a student's excitement after spotting a Common Raven, a Black-billed Magpie, or a woodpecker hole in a snag made me realize how

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### Coming programs

MARCH 20

Colorful Colorado... Beetles

Eric Eaton

APRIL 17

Birding Senegal & The Gambia

Bill Eden

MAY 15

Birds of the Ancient World

Kelsey Mazur

NO PROGRAMS OVER THE SUMMER

See you September 18!

### 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 May/Summer 2019 issue of the *Aikorns* is Wednesday, April 17.

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

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## MARCH 20 / ERIC EATON COLORFUL COLORADO... BEETLES

Beetles account for roughly one quarter of all animal diversity, and Colorado boasts spectacular examples from ladybugs to weevils, even fireflies. Come and delight in the insect eye candy, and be amazed by the bizarre lifestyles of these six-legged creatures. You will be relieved to learn that bark beetles can be good for the forest, and shocked to find that there are some beetles you probably shouldn't touch. Biodiversity doesn't get any better than this!

Eric R. Eaton is one of our most entertaining and educational speakers. You know him as "Bug Eric" on the internet and social media. He is lead author of the *Kaufman Field Guide to Insects of North America* and co-author of the second edition of *Insects Did It First*. The latter will be available for sale and signing after the presentation.

PHOTO: ERIC EATON



*Phaenops gentilis*

## APRIL 17 / BILL EDEN BIRDING SENEGAL & THE GAMBIA

PHOTO: STEVE GARVIE FROM DUNFERMLINE, FIFE, SCOTLAND  
(CC BY-SA 2.0 (HTTPS://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY-SA/2.0))



*Northern Carmine Bee-Eater*

In November, 2016, Bill Eden traveled with five other participants and a guide to explore the bird life of the western Africa countries of Senegal and The Gambia. The field guide *Birds of Senegal and The Gambia*, by Borrow and Demey, lists 680 bird species found in these two countries.

Although Senegal and The Gambia may not have the avian notoriety of Kenya, they are excellent places to see birds. The trip took Bill and his companions along both sides of the Gambia River. They saw such birds as the African Pygmy Kingfisher, Northern Carmine Bee-eater, Abyssinian Ground Roller, Giant

Kingfisher, and the "must see" Egyptian Plover.

Bill grew up in New York State with parents who enjoyed nature. In 1975 he moved to Colorado to pursue a Masters Degree at CSU, while continuing to pursue his interest in birds and birding.

In 2006, Bill participated in Hugh and Urling Kingery's beginning birding class, then became a student in the ASGD's year-long Master Birder Program. He then spent nine years on the Master Birding Program's steering committee. Bill has also worked with Meredith McBurney at the Chatfield bird banding station for eight years.

Bill has enjoyed many birding trips throughout the United States as well as birding in over 20 countries such as Malaysian Borneo, Madagascar, Brazil, Honduras, Iceland, Uganda and Tanzania (some with his wife, Joan). He incorporates an interest in wildlife photography by photographing birds, mammals and other animals, and also enjoys gardening and attracting birds to his yard, where he has so far recorded 56 species.

**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.**

### Aiken Audubon Board Members

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Anna Joy Lehmicke  
President@AikenAudubon.com

#### VICE-PRESIDENT

Clark Jones  
VicePres@AikenAudubon.com

#### SECRETARY

[Position Open]  
Secretary@AikenAudubon.com

#### TREASURER

Linda Hodges  
(719) 425-1903  
Treasurer@AikenAudubon.com

#### PROGRAM CHAIR

Diane Luck  
Program@AikenAudubon.com

#### CONSERVATION CHAIR

Linda Hodges  
(719) 425-1903  
Conservation@AikenAudubon.com

#### PUBLICITY CHAIR

Julie Frost  
303-912-8055  
Publicity@AikenAudubon.com

#### EDUCATION CHAIR

Julie Frost  
303-912-8055  
Education@AikenAudubon.com

#### FIELD TRIPS

Diana Beatty  
FieldTrips@AikenAudubon.com

#### HOSPITALITY

Kathy Minch  
(281) 435-6850  
Hospitality@AikenAudubon.com

#### CHRISTMAS COUNT

Tyler Stuart  
(719) 661-9308  
CBC@AikenAudubon.com

#### AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

330 E Costilla St., Box 79  
Colorado Springs, CO 80919

#### INFO@AIKENAUDUBON.COM

#### AIKENAUDUBON.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).

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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 White-tailed 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. Snowshoes can be rented at REI, or in Idaho Springs at one of the ski shops. Arrange with Debbie ahead of time if you plan to rent in Idaho Springs.

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

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### **SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 6 AM - 5PM PUEBLO NATURE CENTER & RESERVOIR**

David Tønnessen will lead this trip to Pueblo Nature Center and Pueblo Reservoir. And anywhere David goes, rare birds seem to pop up too!

Meet at the 6520 S Academy Safeway to carpool. Drivers with state parks passes desired, or be prepared for a chip-in to buy a day pass. Limited to 9 participants. This is a full-day trip, with planned departure from Pueblo between 3 and 5 pm. Contact David at [davidtonnessenx@gmail.com](mailto:davidtonnessenx@gmail.com) with any questions and to reserve your spot.

## More trips online!

For the latest information on field trips and events:

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

**FRIDAY - SUNDAY,  
MAY 17 - 19**



**REGISTRATION OPEN!**

[PikesPeakBirdingAndNatureFestival.com](http://PikesPeakBirdingAndNatureFestival.com)

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### **FRIDAY JUNE 7, 2018, 8 AM - 1 PM BIRDS, BUTTERFLIES AND BLOOMS LOVELL GULCH NATURE WALK**

David Elwonger will again lead this nature walk in Lovell Gulch, in Pike National Forest. We will share our knowledge as we discover butterflies (usually 30+ species), flowers (with three species of orchid possible), and the local breeding birds (usually about 30 species).

Possibilities include: Red-naped and Williamson's Sapsuckers, Hairy Woodpecker; Northern Flicker; MacGillivray's and Audubon's Warblers; Olive-sided, Hammond's and Cordilleran Flycatchers; Western Wood-Pewee; Steller's Jay; Clark's Nutcracker; Warbling and Plumbeous Vireos; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Black-headed and Evening Grosbeaks; Mountain Chickadee; three species of nuthatch; Townsend's Solitaire; Hermit Thrush; Western Tanager; Dark-eyed Junco (Gray-headed), House Wren, and maybe some surprises).

One year, we found a Black Bear in a tree, who posed for the photographers. (I will try to arrange a reprise of his appearance this year, but this likely was a once in a lifetime appearance for him!)

We will mostly walk on trails into Lovell Gulch and back, about a three mile round trip with about 500' elevation gain and a few short steep sections. We may need to bushwhack a short distance to find the orchids (which are not along the trails).

To carpool to the Lovell Gulch trailhead, meet at the northwest corner of the Woodland Park Walmart parking lot. Bring drinking water, a snack, rain gear, sweater for early morning chill, and wear sturdy walking shoes.

Limit: 10 participants. Contact David with questions and to register at [davidelwonger@msn.com](mailto:davidelwonger@msn.com).

**Would you like to lead a field trip? No experience necessary, just enthusiasm and a friendly attitude. Contact Diana Beatty, [FieldTrips@AikenAudubon.com](mailto:FieldTrips@AikenAudubon.com), for more information on volunteering to lead a trip for Aiken Audubon.**

## BIRD-SAFE BUILDINGS ACT

WASHINGTON, D.C.—On January 30, the cost-neutral, bipartisan Bird-Safe Buildings Act was introduced in the House. The bill requires that each public (federal) building constructed, acquired, or significantly altered by the General Services Administration (GSA) incorporate bird-safe building materials and design features, to the maximum extent possible. Rep. Quigley (IL) first introduced this bill in 2010 in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress.

“Almost one-third of all bird species in the U.S. hold endangerment status, which gives us the responsibility to protect birds from preventable deaths,” said Rep. Quigley. “By using materials that conceal indoor lighting to the outside, we can dramatically reduce the frequency of birds colliding with glass buildings. With birding activities supporting 620,000 jobs and bringing in \$6.2 billion in state tax revenues, this is both an environmental and economic issue with a relatively simple, cost-neutral, and humanitarian fix.”

Each year, up to one billion birds die from building collisions. The Bird-Safe Buildings Act would require that new or significantly-altered buildings include bird-safe materials in their construction. This bill will permanently limit bird deaths for little to no cost. Ultimately, it will protect endangered birds from dying preventable deaths by eliminating indoor light display to the outside.

“Many birds are confounded by human architecture and die needless deaths as a result,” said Rep. Griffith. “The Federal Government can help alleviate such unfortunate occurrences by incorporating bird-safe features into public buildings.”

The legislation is also endorsed by the Animal Welfare Institute, American Bird Conservancy, National Audubon Society, Bird Safe Glass Foundation, FX Fowle Architects, the Lincoln Park Zoo, the Humane Society of the United States, the Humane Society Legislative Fund, and U.S. Green Building Council.

“Hundreds of millions of birds die every year after colliding with glass exteriors. Through smart, practical guidelines, this legislation will make many federal buildings bird-friendly and set an example that can impact all our communities.”

“The legislation would help address one of the greatest human-caused threats to birds” said Dr. Christine Sheppard, Director of American Bird Conservancy (ABC)’s Glass Collisions Program. “Although this legislation is limited to federal buildings, it’s a very good start that could lead to more widespread applications of bird-friendly designs and use of bird-smart glass solutions.”

## LIGHTS OUT CAMPAIGN

Related to the Bird-Safe Buildings Act, the Lights Out campaign is a grass-roots effort focused on buildings whose first 30 feet (minimum) are glass. Buildings adjacent to a park or green space are particularly dangerous. Across the nation, those concerned with bird strike mortalities are reaching out to building owners, urging them to turn off their lights between dusk and dawn during spring and fall migration.

Local birder and bird bander Jenyva Turner plans to conduct a baseline survey this spring, with Aiken Audubon’s help. Volunteers will count dead birds in the wee hours of the morning to determine the extent of the problem, as well as which buildings are the most problematic. Once a baseline is established, we will present any issues to building owners, likely asking them to darken their buildings from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. to allot for cleaning crews.

If you’re an early riser and would like to participate, please contact Conservation Chair Linda Hodges at (719) 635-5551 or Conservation@AikenAudubon.com in the next couple of months.

## LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

The Senate overwhelmingly passed the public lands package that includes permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) on February 12th. Colorado Senator Michael Bennet has been a strong proponent of this legislation, which continues to have strong bi-partisan support. Funded by offshore oil and gas leases, LWCF expired on September 30, 2018, and has been losing \$2.5 million a day ever since (over \$357 million to date).

## ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

There is still time to stop drilling. Although the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for ANWR’s coastal plain has been completed, Audubon is asking you to redouble your efforts to vehemently oppose the administration’s plans.

The fight continues on two fronts—thwarting the process to open the Refuge to oil development and the goal of having a lease sale this year, and supporting longer-term Congressional efforts to restore protections to the Refuge by advancing legislation before drilling starts.

What can you do? Let the powers that be know that you oppose all oil and gas development in the Refuge, and that their draft EIS is inadequate, as it does not fully account for the impacts to the wildlife and people that depend on the Refuge. Personal comments as to why the Refuge matters to you are especially helpful. The deadline has been extended to March 13, so please act now!

🔗 *Link to comment directly to the BLM:*  
<https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/comments/commentSubmission.do?commentPeriodId=74027>

🔗 *Link to Audubon’s “Fast Action” letter:*  
<https://act.audubon.org/onlineactions/jhAgYIERqUyEWxgC-iPZFA2>



## HUNGRY CLOUDS

By Tyler Stuart

At times I look out,  
 distantly, across the harvested winter wheat and see  
 heat waves rising, dancing,  
 only to realize the waves are winged.  
 Longspurs flush in masses,  
 rolling along the subtle contours of the land like the tumbleweeds that so often do.  
 But no wind today to carry the ‘weeds—  
 just hungry clouds of eastern Colorado’s winter wonder.  
 A passing merlin, who goes nowhere leisurely,  
 veers and dives, sending the longspurs billowing upward and away.  
 Gradually, the winged-dust settles, content once again to forage in peace.  
 As the light of each day gradually overwhelms the night,  
 meadowlarks burst from every field and fence post.  
 Their songs float along the harsh winds of March,  
 or confront each gust as if willing it to cease.  
 And with every new song lifting from the prairie, the  
 minutes inch eagerly toward spring. ☘

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

many small wonders we as adults sometimes ignore or take for granted. Spending time in nature with kids is a great way to see things with fresh eyes and find the beauty in places that we may overlook. So next time you need to be reminded of the joy and mystery that nature holds, grab your kid, your grandkid, or borrow a friend’s kid and go for a walk in the woods.

Happy birding.

*Anna Joy Lehmicke*  
 President, Aiken Audubon Society

# LITTLE BROWN JOBS

by Leslie Holzmann

Would you like your bedroom to be infested with spiders? I can’t count the nights I’ve spent wide awake in bed, staring at a suspicious black blob on the ceiling (I’m quite nearsighted without my glasses). Is that a spider? Should I turn on the light? It might move if I take my eyes off it to find my glasses. What if it *is* a spider? Is it going to fall on me in the middle of the night?

You can tell I don’t appreciate spiders in my bedroom. It’s a good thing, then, that I’m not a House Wren.

House Wrens are small brown songbirds. They eat insects and spiders. Following the bugs, their population expands northward in summer, when they can be found in most of the U.S. and parts of Canada. Then, as the seasons turn, these northern birds head south, wintering in the southern states and central Mexico. However, House Wrens can also be found all the way to the southern tip of South America. That makes them the most widely distributed bird in the Western Hemisphere.



House Wrens make up for their small size with a big voice. I’m always amazed that so much volume can emanate from such a tiny throat! I most often see these wrens hopping among the lower branches of a large bush or small tree, where they hide among the twigs. It’s difficult to spot a quiet brown bird sitting in a brown shrub. Once it opens its mouth,



Look for the  
 Aiken Audubon Society  
 Facebook page!

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

### Splitting Hawks.. continued from front page

William S. (Bill) Clark, of the Global Raptor Impact Network<sup>2</sup>, has created a PowerPoint listing ways in which Harlan's Hawks differ from Red-tailed Hawks:

- Frequency of color morphs;
- Adult plumage by color morph, especially in tail pattern and color;
- Harlan's adult and juvenile plumages are almost alike; whereas those of Red-tails differ.
- Extent of bare area on the tarsus.
- Some behaviors.

He then gets even more technical, offering wing measurements, and getting specific about the frequency of specific color morphs and other carefully researched details. In addition, he includes a zillion photos. Clark makes a strong case for splitting the two. If a DNA analysis is done, it will be interesting to see what else we can learn.

Harlan's and Red-tailed Hawks have been both split and lumped in the past. It's nice to believe that this time we'll reach a decisive conclusion, then carry on knowing that our understanding is accurate. However, science is rarely so neat and tidy, and I wouldn't be surprised to again see the matter on the list of proposals in the years ahead. In the meantime, I'm hoping for yet another armchair lifer!

1. <http://blog.aba.org/2018/12/2019-aos-classification-committee-proposals-part-1.html>

2. <http://www.globalraptors.org/grin/indexAlt.asp>

### 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.

### 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 [Conservation@AikenAudubon.com](mailto:Conservation@AikenAudubon.com).

### House Wrens... continued from page 5

however, there's no question that a House Wren is nearby. For the most part, they only sing during the breeding season, which is now. And it's not just the males making the racket—the females also sing.

Our local wrens typically nest in abandoned woodpecker holes, although they'll also move into nest boxes, tin cans, under eaves, or any place else affording shelter and protection from predators. If nothing satisfactory can be found, these belligerent birds will choose an already-claimed spot and simply evict the current tenants. Not nice!



They don't like competition. Once they're settled in their cavity, they'll fill up adjoining cavities with more twigs, barricading the hole to any potential neighbors. In addition, they'll peck holes in the eggs of any intruders.

Once the babies arrive, hairless and helpless, it takes both parents to keep them fed. It takes several weeks for the young to fledge, and the nest accumulates parasites—blood-sucking mites and insects that can harm, or even kill, the nestlings. This is where those spiders come in.

The adult wrens will carry spider cocoons into the nest cavity. The spiders eventually hatch. Being voracious predators, the spiders eat the parasites, and everyone lives happily ever after—until the wrens eat the spiders. ☹

## 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](http://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. ☹