



Bird Profiles:

Broad-tailed Hummingbirds

Is that a hummingbird nest? I had to look carefully to find the tiny cup nestled among the ponderosa branches. Sure enough—a female Broad-tailed Hummingbird stared pointedly back at me, as she dutifully sat on what I could only assume were a couple of pea-sized eggs.

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



What really impressed me was the way the secretive bird had camouflaged her home. Lichens grew on the tree branches, and covered the outer surface of the nest. It looked like just one more bump on the bark, although with a diminutive bird sitting on top.

Broad-tailed Hummingbirds are fascinating little creatures. They are known as pugnacious visitors at sugar-water feeders throughout the interior western U.S. However, sugar in various forms makes up only a tiny fraction of their diet. Insects and other tiny arthropods provide the fats and proteins that nectar lacks. While the birds are sipping nectar

from your garden, they're also on bug patrol. In fact, they can nip those insects right out of the air, and enjoy dinner on the wing.

In El Paso county, we typically hang our feeders out just after tax day, hoping to attract the earliest migrants as they make their way northward. Where have these bird been all winter? Since they eat bugs, hummingbirds must go where the bugs are. In this case, that means Mexico and Guatemala. I find it truly astonishing that something so small can fly so far. Yet they do it every year... a round trip to their nesting grounds in the Great Basin and south-central Rockies, then back again.

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As we come to the end of another Aiken Audubon "season," I would like to thank everyone for their hard work and many hours of dedication. From board meetings to arranging, leading and participating in field trips, from newsletter editing and printing and website maintenance to program coordination and getting everything together for our general meetings, numerous individuals have generously donated their time so Aiken Audubon can be successful.

The Board works diligently to have educational and enlightening guest speakers monthly from

September through May. And there are many "behind the scenes" volunteers, many of whom you may not know. The Aiken Audubon Society is very fortunate to have these willing and dedicated volunteers. We couldn't do it without them.

Enjoy your summer, get out and bird and I hope to see you at September's program.

Keep on birding,

Risë

• RISË FOSTER-BRUDER
PRESIDENT, AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

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COMING PROGRAMS

May 19
"Hummingbirds"
presented by Steve Vaughan

**No summer programs—
see you
September 15**

Newsletter Articles

Items and announcements of special interest to Aiken Audubon members are welcomed for consideration. We'd love to hear from you!

Deadline for the Sept./Oct. 2010 issue of Aikorns is Wednesday, August 18.

Contact the editor, Leslie Holzmann, at: AikenAudubon@Gmail.com, or call 719.964.3197

UPCOMING AIKEN PROGRAM

May 19 • Steve Vaughn Hummingbirds of North America

PHOTO: STEVE VAUGHAN



Green-breasted Mango

Steve Vaughn will be presenting a program on North American Hummingbirds. He has traveled throughout the United States photographing and observing these fascinating birds. Join us as Steve shares his insights and images from these travels.

Steve holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Zoology from Colorado State University. He has been a professional nature photographer since 1985. His photography credits include such prestigious magazines as Audubon, Birders World and Sierra. His photographs have appeared in calendars published by the Audubon Society, Sierra Club and Arizona Highways. He has been teaching nature photography at Pikes Peak Community College since 1998. In addition, he has led photography workshops to Cape May (New Jersey), Garden of the Gods, Rocky Mountain National Park, Southeast Arizona, Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (New Mexico) and Costa Rica.

Aiken Audubon programs are free and open to the public. They are held at the Colorado State Division of 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.

BROADTAILED HUMMINGBIRDS (CONT'D.)

Hummingbird Feeding

Fill your feeders with one part plain, white granulated sugar mixed with four parts water, and heated enough to dissolve the sugar. Leave out the red food coloring. It won't make your offering any more attractive, and it may actually harm the birds. Replace the sugar solution often, especially if your feeder is in the hot sunlight, and thoroughly clean the feeder between refills.

Once they're arrived, it's time to build that tiny nest I saw. While the males may compete for a breeding territory, the female does all the construction work. Weaving small twigs, rootlets and other plant materials into a small cup, she lines the inside with plant down (such as fuzzy seeds), and decorates the outside with lichens, bits of moss, and plant fibers. Spider webs are used to attach the nest securely to a branch. Broad-tails may nest in the same tree year after year, even building a new nest on top of an old one.

Two small white eggs are laid, and incubated for 14 to 17 days. At first the young rely on their mother for care; by three weeks of age they are able to leave the nest and fend for themselves.

Of course, it's our pleasure to help them a bit, by hanging out feeders. And just in case you're concerned, it's all right to leave those feeders up until after all the birds have migrated southward, usually the middle of October. You won't delay their departure, and you might provide just the added boost those late stragglers need.

I find a great deal of enjoyment in playing hostess to such bright and brazen birds. Who knows, you might even induce them to nest in your yard.

• LESLIE HOLZMANN



May 8 is Migratory Bird Day

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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. Don't forget 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.

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, send your name and e-mail address to AikenAudubon@gmail.com.

Saturday, May 15, 8 am
Sondermann Park

Over the years, a good number of rarities have been recorded during spring migration in this Westside city park, including many warbler species. We'll be looking for breeders (Black-chinned Hummingbird, Lazuli Bunting, etc.) and any migrants/vagrants we can find. Meet at Beidleman Nature Center, 740 W. Caramillo St.

Contact Allan Burns, 719.632.2081, for more information and to let him know you are coming.



Saturday, June 5, 7 – 10 am
Garden of the Gods

Garden of the Gods is often overlooked as a birding destination, yet it can yield some great birds in a beautiful setting. See the article on page 5, then join Melissa Walker for this field trip. Meet at the main parking lot at the north end of the park for a two mile loop hike. Many more details are on the Aiken website.

Contact Melissa Walker, melissa@mj-walker.com or 719.473.8352 for more information and to let her know you are coming.

Saturday, June 12, time tbd
Trout Creek (Teller County)

Jeff Jones is leading this joint field trip with the Colorado Native Plant Society. We'll be exploring the area around Trout Creek and the Manitou Experimental Forest. The focus will be on native plant communities, and how they interact with the birds who nest there.

Carpool meets at the Red Rocks Safeway (3275 W Colorado Ave.).

Leslie Holzmann is coordinating the trip for Aiken Audubon. Contact her at Leslie@Mountain-Plover.com or 719.964.3197 for more information and to let her know you are coming.

Monday, June 28, 7 am – 3 pm

Emerald Valley

Join El Paso County naturalist Ken Pals in exploring the biological diversity of this montane meadow off Old Stage Road. Slipper orchids and other native plants will be top priority, followed by butterflies, then birds such as Band-tailed Pigeon, flycatchers, vireos and hummingbirds. Consider bringing a camera.



We'll rendezvous at Cheyenne Mountain High School east parking lot and carpool to Emerald Valley. Be prepared to drive or offer to ride. High clearance vehicles are recommended. Passengers should contribute \$5 to drivers for gas. Bring the usual things (including the ability to ford small streams). Reservations are required. Group size is limited to 15 people as parking is limited at the site.

Contact Ken Pals, mtnpals@q.com or 719.471.0687, for more information and to let him know you are coming.

**For the latest information on
 field trips and events:
www.AikenAudubon.com**

UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

August 19 – September 18

Birding for Beginners – 202

Thursday Classes: (meet at Bear Creek Nature Center)
 August 19, September 2 & 16, 6:30 – 8:30 pm

Saturday Field Trips: (at various locations)
 August 21, Sept. 4 & 18, 8:00 am – Noon

This series of classes and field trips with Ken Pals goes beyond the basics of birding and focuses on species that are more difficult to identify, including hawks, shorebirds, flycatchers and warblers.

Reservations required, call Bear Creek Nature Center at 719.520.6387.
 Fee: \$50/nature center member, \$60/nonmember.

Saturday, May 8, 7 – 11 am

Fountain Creek Spring Bird Count

Beginning-to-advanced birders are invited to observe and record the numbers of bird species and populations found in Fountain Creek Regional Park during the height of spring migration.

Reservations required, \$5 donation "for the birds." Contact the Fountain Creek Nature Center at 719.520.6745

Saturday, May 15, 7 – 11 am

Bear Creek Spring Bird Count

Bird enthusiasts of all ages and abilities are invited to participate in a citizen science project counting species and populations in Bear Creek Park.

Reservations required, \$5 donation "for the birds." Contact the Bear Creek Nature Center at 719.520.6387.

Secretary Salazar Releases New “State of the Birds” Report

Climate change threatens to further imperil hundreds of species of migratory birds, already under stress from habitat loss, invasive species and other environmental threats, a new report by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar concludes.

The State of the Birds: 2010 Report on Climate Change, follows a comprehensive report released a year ago showing that that nearly a third of the nation’s 800 bird species are endangered, threatened or in significant decline.

The report, a collaboration of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and experts from the nation’s leading conservation organizations, shows that climate changes will have an increasingly disruptive effect on bird species in all habitats, with oceanic and Hawaiian birds in greatest peril.

Key findings from the report include:

- Oceanic birds are among the most vulnerable species because they don’t raise many young each year; they face challenges from a rapidly changing marine ecosystem; and they nest on islands that may be flooded as sea levels rise. All 67 oceanic bird species, such as petrels and albatrosses, are among the most vulnerable birds on Earth to climate change.
- Hawaiian birds such as endangered species Puaiohi and ‘Akiapōlā’au already face multiple threats and are increasingly challenged by mosquito-borne diseases and invasive species as climate change alters their native habitats.
- Birds in coastal, arctic/alpine, and grassland habitats, as well as those on Caribbean and

other Pacific Islands show intermediate levels of vulnerability; most birds in aridlands, wetlands, and forests show relatively low vulnerability to climate change.

- For bird species that are already of conservation concern such as the golden-cheeked warbler, whooping crane, and spectacled eider, the added vulnerability to climate change may hasten declines or prevent recovery.
- The report identified common bird species such as the American oystercatcher, common nighthawk, and northern pintail that are likely to become species of conservation concern as a result of climate change.

“The dangers to these birds reflect risks to everything we value: our health, our finances, our quality of life and the stability of our natural world,” said Audubon’s Glenn Olson. “But if we can help the birds weather a changing climate, we can help ourselves.”

• NATIONAL AUDUBON

More information at www.stateofthebirds.org

BIRDING TIPS

Brown Ducks

“They’re all females! Where did the males go?”

My friend and I were newbie birders—I’d started keeping a Life List only two months earlier. August found us at the local nature center ponds. As usual, the water was covered with ducks and other waterfowl. But the more we stared through our binoculars, the more confused we got. All the ducks were brown! What had happened to the familiar green heads of the mallards? We figured that some of the “females” must be immature males, but where were the adults?

Of course, we know better now. The males were still there—they had just turned brown, and were sporting their “eclipse” plumage. When you’re not trying to impress the ladies, there’s no reason to be flashy; it’s much safer

to blend in with your surroundings. The male ducks were just doing what the females do all year—hiding from predators.

Recently, I was back at the same familiar pond, staring at all the mottled tan ducks and trying to identify them. It was darn difficult. As a beginner, I focused on learning ducks because it was easy. For the most part, the males of each species look pretty different from one another, and they just sit there in plain view, bobbing on the water. (At the nature center, the birds are accustomed to people, so it’s possible to get fairly close without disturbing them.) I figured that I’d save the harder females for another day, when I had more experience.

Well, that day has come. This year, I’m committed to learning female ducks, and males in their eclipse plumages. There are differences, they’re just more subtle. Size helps... teals are small, mallards are larger. Plus, some species sit lower in the water than others.

Markings help too—you just have to look more closely. Mallards still have some orange on their bills, it just isn’t as bright, and the bills of many species don’t change at all. Gadwalls still sport little white patches on their sides, while Green-winged Teals have green patches. Some species of ducks only seem to fade



PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

This Mallard really is a female.

a bit, instead of completely changing their appearance.

I also try to look at the silhouette. Shovelers have their huge bills, while mergansers have windblown hairdos.

Some ducks are here all year, while others only show up in season. Even those species who merely pass through migrate at slightly different times. Before a birding trip, I like to ask around and find out what other birders have seen lately.

As with any identification project, it takes adding all these characteristics together to come up with a name. Hopefully, with enough practice it will become automatic—I’ll look at a duck and my brain will instantly recognize it in the same way I recognize my husband... not from a collection of attributes, but from prolonged familiarity.

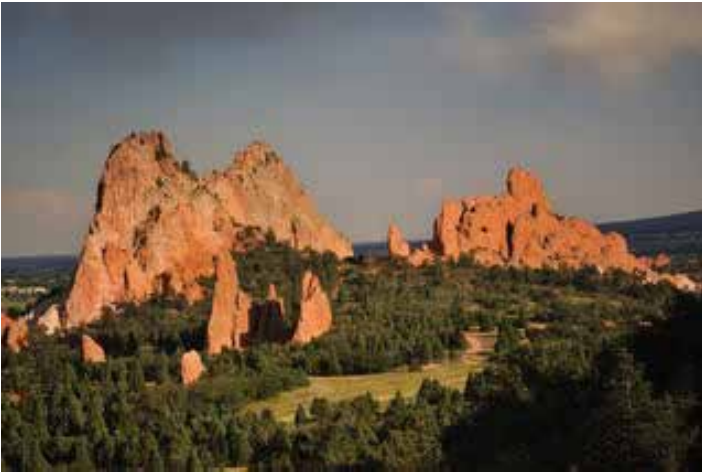
Then, I promise, I’ll start learning to identify ducks in flight.

• LESLIE HOLZMANN

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



Female Wood Ducks are easy to ID



Birding the Garden

April 27 was a perfect Colorado day for a morning bird walk in Garden of the Gods Park. The week's rain showers had left the air fresh, the sky cobalt blue and Pikes Peak glistening white under a new blanket of snow. My friends and I decided to begin our birding at the east Rock Ledge Ranch entrance of the park so that we could walk through a variety of habitats from the Ranch to the towering rocks in the heart of the park.

As we neared the Ranch pond, we saw our first migrant, a Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's) flitting among the willow branches. We then watched as a female American Robin, its beak packed with insects, furtively made its way to its nest in a tall White Fir tree. In contrast, a male Red-winged Blackbird broadcast its presence with its piercing call and showy red wing patches.

The tranquility of the pond was broken by two male Mallard Ducks fighting over one female. The two drakes fought in the middle of the pond, biting each other's heads as they whirled in circles, loudly splashing the water. Meanwhile, the female climbed out of the pond and disappeared into the willows, and eventually, one of the drakes gave up the fight and flew away.

Other birds sighted at or near the pond included an American Crow, House Finch, Band-tailed Pigeon, Black-capped Chickadee, Black-billed Magpie, Spotted Towhee, Downy Woodpecker and a Flycatcher species.

Leaving the pond with its cattails and willows, we hiked through a forest of scrub oak and then over the white Niobrara Limestone rock formation that is covered with piñon pines and one-seed juniper trees. Here we were treated to a pair of American Kestrels, Northern Flickers, Scrub Jay and a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

Hiking north toward the red rocks, we skirted the edge of an old reservoir that still supports cottonwood trees along its former shore. An Orange-crowned Warbler was chased away by Black-capped Chickadees when the Warbler foraged too close to the Chickadees' nesting cavity. The old cottonwood habitat also attracted a Yellow Warbler, Broad-tailed Hummingbird and the park's ubiquitous Scrub Jays. A Red-tailed Hawk flew over the valley and perched near the top of South Gateway Rock while a Turkey Vulture soared in the distance.

aikorns

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Approaching the Garden's red rock cliffs, we could see and hear the White-throated Swifts, wheeling and twittering high overhead. Flying with the Swifts were Violet-green Swallows, their iridescent green feathers glinting in the sun. I had hoped that we'd see the Prairie Falcons that nest every year on the eastern face of North Gateway Rock; we were not disappointed. The adult Prairie Falcons were actively hunting for their favorite food – White-throated Swifts – and calling to their fledgling that was perched on White Rock.

To add to the drama of the Prairie Falcon activity, we heard the cascading notes of a Canyon Wren. Then, we also heard two Canada Geese honking as they flew in from the north. The geese circled near North Gateway Rock and then landed on a round-topped pinnacle of sandstone! I have worked and/or birded in Garden of the Gods Park for seventeen years and, until this moment, had never seen a Canada Goose anywhere near the Park's rocky cliffs. It was an unexpected ending to our morning of birding in one of the most beautiful city parks in the world.

• MELISSA WALKER

Don't miss the Aiken field trip planned for June 5! See page 3 for details.

Garden of the Gods Park celebrated its 100th Anniversary as a City Park in 2009. The Department of the Interior designated the Park as a National Natural Landmark in 1971.



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YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE A MEMBER TO PARTICIPATE IN AIKEN'S ACTIVITIES

THE BACK PAGE

NestWatch investigates nesting trends

Citizen scientists play a vital role

Ithaca, NY—Collecting information about nesting birds in North America is what the NestWatch project at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology is all about—and the new season is just getting underway. Participants submit data about which kinds of birds are nesting, the number of eggs laid, dates eggs were laid, and the numbers of chicks hatched and fledged.

“Collecting this information across the continent over long periods of time is one of the best ways we have to detect widespread changes in bird breeding biology,” says Laura Burkholder, the project leader for NestWatch. “Gathering this information takes on new urgency in light of the State of the Birds 2010 Climate Change Report just released by the Department of the Interior earlier this month.” [See article on page 4.]

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



Double-crested Cormorants nesting at Lake Pueblo State Park.

“Nesting birds are vulnerable to climate change. Data show some species, like the Tree Swallow, are laying their eggs more than a week earlier than they did just a few decades ago,” says Burkholder. “That could spell big trouble if hatch dates get out of sync with the availability of food.”

Based on NestWatch data from 1997 to 2009, the first Eastern Bluebird eggs are being laid sooner. More long-term data are needed to clarify the impacts of environmental change and human land use on breeding birds.

In addition to its scientific value, NestWatch is fun, free, and open to all. Participation is a great way to connect with nature.

The NestWatch project was developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in collaboration with the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and is funded by the National Science Foundation.

All NestWatch materials and instructions are available online at www.nestwatch.org, including directions on how to find nests, how to build and put up nest boxes, and how to monitor nests without disturbing the birds.