



# Pygmy Nuthatches

Pygmy Nuthatches—they’re adorable, with their short stumpy tails, tiny bodies and toddler-round tummies. They are constantly active, hopping from branch to branch. You can spend hours watching them fly down to the feeder to grab a seed, then bolt back into safety before “hacking” (“nut hack” has become “nuthatch”) the sunflower shell open against a branch. Sure seems like a lot of work, especially compared to the finches who just sit there shelling and swallowing seeds as fast as they can.

Like so many other animals—dolphins and penguins come immediately to mind—Pygmy Nuthatches are dark on top and light underneath. This pattern helps disguise them from potential predators. Seen from above, their dark gray color blends with the ground (or tree trunks), while their white undersides are hard to spot against a brightly lit sky.



We’re lucky to live where Pygmy Nuthatches abound. They’re only found in western forests, from southern British Columbia to southern Mexico. We also have White-breasted and occasionally Red-breasted Nuthatches in our yard, but the pygmies are by far my favorites. They keep us entertained year-round, traveling down the tree trunks head first looking for insects hiding in the rough ponderosa bark or hanging upside down picking seeds and bugs out of pine cones.

Not only are they cute, these little birds are sociable too. When the weather is cold, they huddle together for warmth in tree cavities or other sheltered spots. Sometimes these huddles get pretty crowded, with over 150 birds in one tree!

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## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

“And then there were eight.” Those who were with me during the Fountain Creek Winter Bird Count may remember that phrase when we counted a flock of Canada Geese flying towards us. At first viewing, two people clearly saw and counted nine birds. Seconds later, the rest of us counted only eight. How did that elusive, yet fairly large goose disappear?

Getting an accurate number of individual birds flying during a bird count is a subjective, sometimes frustrating activity—especially if more than one participant counts out loud. Some try to literally count every individual bird and with a small flock this counting style is definitely “doable.” But, if you are watching European Starlings or Red-winged Blackbirds, whose flock numbers can swell into the 100s; it’s nearly impossible to count every individual bird.

As an alternative, many counters group birds spatially to determine their numbers by adding

how many “groups of ten” they see. While not as accurate, it’s a quick and easy method of estimating how many individuals you have in a fairly large, fast moving flock. Hopefully more than one person is counting, so you get a consensus of the group before recording a number.

Eight Canada Geese are not a large flock. The ninth bird was a visual “mirage” created by close flying, overlapping-winged geese. Once the flock flew closer—and eventually overhead—everyone agreed there were only eight birds. But it made for an interesting beginning to the bird count and caused every group member to re-evaluate their counting method.

Happy Birding,

*Risë*

• RISË FOSTER-BRUDER  
PRESIDENT, AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

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## COMING PROGRAMS

**March 16**  
“New River Bird Festival”  
presented by Debbie Barnes

**April 20**  
“Birds ... of the Long Expedition”  
presented by Ken Pals

**May 18**  
“Shrikes”  
presented by Susan Craig

**Summer**  
No programs.  
Check the website for trips.  
See you September 21!

## 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 May/Summer 2011 issue of Aikorns is Wednesday, April 20.

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

March 16 • Debbie Barnes

# New River Birding & Nature Festival

PHOTO: DEBBIE BARNES

Have you ever attended a birding festival? Have you been overwhelmed by the crowds and hard-to-keep-up-with guides? Have you ever had “Warbler Neck”? If you’re looking for something different, the New River Birding and Nature Festival is the festival for you.



Cerulean Warbler

You can attend for one day, half a week or a full week. Located in and around New River Gorge in West Virginia, the timing is set to take advantage of prime warbler migration, with over 100 species seen. While enjoying the best guide-to-guest ratio among U.S. bird festivals, you will travel along the ridge lines so you can look out on the warblers. This is so much better than always tilting your head back, straining to see a tiny bird ceaselessly flitting among the leaves. Warbler Neck! Not so much on this festival.

It is not just a Birding Festival; there are butterflies, moths, salamanders, millipedes, flowers and plants too. All the meals are included, and it is delicious! The people are fun and friendly and the evening programs are entertaining and informative.

If you can’t travel to West Virginia, take an armchair tour on March 16!

April 20 • Ken Pals

# Birds & More of the Long Expedition

Beginning in 1819, Major Stephen Long led a party of naturalists, topographers, artists and others on a two-year expedition to discover some of the secrets of what Zebulon Pike called the Great American Desert—that vast land stretching from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. Join Ken Pals as he unfolds a story of anticipation, apprehension, discovery and loss. It was a time when a naturalist was the highest paid member of the trip and when many new species of plants and animals including birds were recorded for science.



Ken Pals is a retired El Paso County Nature Center Supervisor, now serving as a part-time Interpretive Specialist with Bear Creek and Fountain Creek Nature Centers. His interests includes all things outdoors, especially birding, botany, mycology, gardening, and mountain climbing.

**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.**

## We’re On Display!

Aiken Audubon is being featured in the glass case at the Briargate branch library during the month of March. Books, photographs, binoculars, and even a few stuffed birds are on display, all intended to catch the attention of a future birder.

Come admire our efforts, talk up birding with an unsuspecting library patron, and invite them to the next Aiken meeting!

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## AIKEN AUDUBON FIELD TRIPS

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](mailto:AikenAudubon@gmail.com).

### Saturday March 5, 2011, 9 am to 1:30 pm Hawks & Eagles!

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



Join us for the annual Audubon trip to Pueblo Reservoir in search of our national bird, the Bald Eagle. We will explore back roads in search of Golden Eagles, Ferruginous, Red Tailed and Rough-Legged Hawks, Merlin, Kestrel and Prairie Falcons on the

way to Pueblo. Please bring a sack lunch and a full tank of gas. We will be outside for short periods with a few short walks if the weather is bearable. This is a great trip for beginners!

Meet at Broadmoor Towne Center (Nevada and Lake Avenue) east of Starbucks. Plan to return by mid afternoon.

Please call Gary Conover, 719.635.2505, for more information. Reservations not required.

### Tuesday, March 22, 8:30 – mid afternoon Fountain Creek Regional Park & Big Johnson Reservoir

Ken is a retired Fountain Creek Nature Center supervisor/naturalist with 45 years of birding experience. He'll be leading this combined DFO/Aiken trip. Return time depends on weather and birds.

Might we still find the Pine Warbler? We'll see plenty of waterfowl, resident land birds, and possibly a few shorebirds while we explore the best birding locations in a park that lists over 290 species.

Bring water, snack, lunch and binoculars. Scopes are extremely helpful for birding at Big Johnson Reservoir.

Meet at Fountain Creek Nature Center, 320 Pepper Grass Lane, Fountain. A \$5 donation of birdseed for the nature center is welcomed.

RSVP is appreciated. Contact Ken at 719.471.0687

### Saturday, April 9, 8:30am – mid-afternoon Pueblo's Valco Ponds, Pueblo Reservoir, & Pueblo West

Brandon Percival is leading this trip to a diversity of habitats. Expect to walk about three miles on level ground in the morning (be prepared for muddy trails). We'll be looking for birds at the ponds and trees. We'll hope to see Bewick's Wren and Black Phoebe, among many other birds. After Valco Ponds, we'll scope Pueblo Reservoir looking for whatever birds might be around. We'll end in Pueblo West, where we'll look for Scaled Quail and Curve-billed Thrasher. There should see a good number of species on this trip!

Meet at Valco Ponds parking lot along Hwy 96 west of Pueblo. State park entry is now \$7 (exact change needed) or have an annual pass. Bring lunch.

Questions? Contact Brandon Percival at [bkpercival@yahoo.com](mailto:bkpercival@yahoo.com).

For the latest information on  
field trips and events:  
[www.AikenAudubon.com](http://www.AikenAudubon.com)

## UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

### Raptor ID Classes

March 5: Eagles and others

March 19: Falcons

April 2: Accipiters "Forest Hawks"

You can still catch the last two of Cheyenne Mountain State Park's Raptor ID program. These informative classes, taught by our own Debbie Barnes, are held on selected Saturdays from 12:25 to 2 pm at the state park Visitor Center.

Call 719.576.2016 to make reservations for the programs that interest you.

Thursday, April 7, 9 – 10:30 am

### Hooray for Herons

Children ages 3-6, with an adult, will enjoy puppet shows, nature stories, crafts, hands-on activities, and discovery time on the trail. This is a Fountain Creek Nature Center "Nature Adventure."

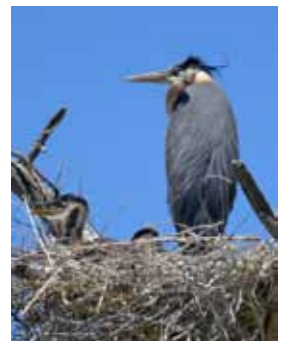
Reservations required: 520-6745. Fee: \$4 for each participant including adults and siblings.

Saturday, April 9,  
10 am - Noon

### Return of the Herons

Each spring, Great Blue Herons return to nesting sites along Fountain Creek. After an indoor presentation that includes a heron craft for kids, we'll travel to a local rookery to observe nesting activities.

Reservations required, 520-6745. Fee: \$4/ FCNC member, \$5/non-FCNC member.



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Help Wanted!

# Conservation Chairperson

Passionate about bird conservation issues? Can you make a few phone calls or use a computer to encourage others to get involved in environmentally significant activities? The position of Conservation Chairperson has been vacant for a couple of years now. Maybe you're the one to fill it!

Duties include:

- Acting as liaison between Aiken Audubon and the others that want our involvement in conservation-related issues. This includes the Colorado Audubon office, along with a variety of like-minded organizations.
- Conveying information from the state office and other groups to Aiken members who are interested in receiving reports. An e-mail tree is an easy way to let concerned birders know when to contact government officials about pending legislation.
- Providing content for the Conservation page of the Aikorns, published five times per year. Additional news could be added to the website as issues arise. These articles may be as simple as a summary of Audubon action on various "green" issues, or you may be more creative and write something of interest on this topic.
- Other potential activities might include writing letters to the newspaper, or attending and reporting back on other organizations' conservation-related events. You might have even more ideas.

The person we're looking for should be able to keep us informed and involved without creating unnecessary division over controversial issues.

This is an appointed Board position; the Board meets approximately five times per year, at 6:15pm on the first Wednesday of the month.

Does this sound like you, or anyone you know? We'd love to talk to you! Please contact the Aiken board at [AikenAudubon@gmail.com](mailto:AikenAudubon@gmail.com). Individual contact information is in the right-hand column on page 2.

Audubon Colorado

# Issues & Action

We tend to associate our local Audubon chapter with exciting field trips, informative programs, and friendly people, but Audubon also plays an important role in fostering bird-friendly legislation.

Audubon Colorado has a lobbyist, Jen Boulton, who works with the Colorado state legislature. Aiken contributes financial support for this position, so be sure to review her reports online at <http://co.audubon.org/issues.html>. You can also sign up to have the legislative updates emailed directly to you.

Take advantage of these reports to write your representatives, an excellent way to make your voice count. Most people complain about governmental decisions, but only a few take the time to send their opinion to someone who can actually vote on an issue. Our elected officials know this, and pay attention to letters they receive. The Colorado Audubon website has information on how to contact those who represent us.

We all enjoy heading out to watch the birds. Let's take the time and effort to ensure that a diversity of species is here to be appreciated!

# Bird Pinello Ranch!

The Pinello Ranch, covering over 200 acres located just north of Venetucci Farm in Widefield, has long kept local birders' mouths watering for an opportunity to explore this secret world. Chock full of over half a dozen ponds, and with riparian habitat bordering Fountain Creek, this is truly a wildlife oasis.

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



The ranch is being slowly brought back to life by the Pikes Peak Community Foundation (PPCF), who own and operate Venetucci Farm. Hay meadows are being restored, a historic apple orchard is being replanted and a dozen or so cows are grazing. The ranch also provides the same type of outstanding wildlife habitat as Fountain Creek Regional Park a few miles downstream, which has documented 290 bird species and obtained Important Birding Area status from Audubon of Colorado.

The long term goal is to make Pinello Ranch self-sustaining. To do so will mean that both agricultural and wildlife aspects are managed together. The first step in this process will be surveying the bird population, adding a listing to the Colorado Division of Wildlife's Colorado Birding Trail and applying for IBA status.

Volunteers are being sought for bird surveys, tours and help with the IBA process. If interested please contact David Rudin, [drudin@ppcf.org](mailto:drudin@ppcf.org).

• DAVID RUDIN, EDUCATION COORDINATOR AT VENETUCCI FARM

**PYGMY NUTHATCHES, CONT'D FROM FRONT PAGE**

Pygmy Nuthatches are devoted family birds. When nesting, other males (usually relatives) assist the father in gathering food for his mate and offspring while mom sits on the nest. If danger threatens, these companions even help with defense. At all times, they stick together like birds of a... exactly!



Pygmies are easy birds to entice into your yard. Pine forests are ideal habitat—these are birds who definitely prefer conifers, especially ponderosas. They enthusiastically accept offerings of black-oil sunflower seeds and suet blocks; even more popular is an ice-free water dish. Being cavity nesters, they will use artificial nest boxes, especially if no natural hollows are available. Just make sure the boxes are sized appropriately. Carpeting the interior

with loose woodchips will help them feel at home.

It's impressive that such small birds are able to handle the cold winters here. They don't have a lot of body mass for the amount of surface area exposed to the weather. It turns out that this is one of only a few species able to intentionally become hypothermic. Just like we do at home, these birds can "turn down the thermostat," regulating their body temperature to save energy. Add that neat trick to their habit of roosting together, and it's clear why they do just fine in the ice and snow.



While birders in most of the country must travel here to see Pygmy Nuthatches, a very similar species lives in the Gulf states—the Brown-headed Nuthatch. Maybe it's time for an Aiken fieldtrip to the Southeast?

• **LESLIE HOLZMANN**

**FYI**

## Feeder Tip



**W**e all like to feed the birds. Not only do feeders bring birds into our yards where we can more easily enjoy them, providing food during extreme weather can make a life or death difference.

However, one thing you should not feed the birds is bread. Not only does it mold easily, but sugary pastries (such as stale donuts) and white bread

are as bad for the birds as they are for people. Birds that fill up on the empty calories in such offerings will turn up their beaks at more nutritious foods. A healthy diet is critical at this time of year, when birds need all their strength to survive harsh winter weather.

## *aikorns*

# Aiken Audubon Society Membership/Subscription

### Sign Up For:

- One Year \$10.00
- Two Years \$18.00
- Donation
- New Total \_\_\_\_\_
- Renewal

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

### Mail Check To:

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

**EVENTS, CONT'D**

## Birding for Beginners 101 Course

### Thursday Classes:

April 14, May 5 & 19, 6:30 – 8:30 pm

### Saturday Field Trips:

April 16 & May 7 & 21, 7 – 11 am

This series is designed for beginning bird watchers to learn the basics of birding and to develop and improve skills in identifying birds by sight and sound.

Reservations required, 520-6387. Fee: \$50/  
FCNC member, \$60/non-FCNC member.

### Saturday, April 16, 7 – 11am

## Bird Photography

Join aspiring bird photographers Debbie Barnes and Leslie Holzmann for some tips on getting the shots you want. After a brief overview, we'll put our skills to work photographing the birds coming to the feeders at Audubon's new Kiowa Creek Ranch.

Bring your photo gear and a snack. Meet at the ranch, 10165 Hodgen Road in Black Forest (the gate is on the south side of the road).

Questions? Email Debbie at [kfoopooh@yahoo.com](mailto:kfoopooh@yahoo.com), or Leslie at 964-3197 or [AikenAudubon@gmail.com](mailto:AikenAudubon@gmail.com).

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN





**Aiken Audubon Society**  
6660 Delmonico Dr. D-195  
Colorado Springs, CO 80919

CHECK YOUR MAILING  
LABEL TO SEE IF YOUR  
SUBSCRIPTION IS EXPIRING!

**President Risë Foster-Bruder**  
719.282.7877

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

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

#### THE BACK PAGE

**Don't Miss It!**

## Aiken Audubon Art Show & Silent Auction

April 29, 6:00 to 8:00 pm

Aiken Audubon will be holding an art show and silent auction to benefit its educational programs.

Titled "All Things Nature," this inaugural event will be held at the Wild Bird Center, 1722 E. Woodman Road.

"All Things Nature" will focus on North American birds, wildlife and landscapes.

Attendees will have the opportunity to view and bid on various pieces of artwork, with all the proceeds benefiting Aiken Audubon. Payment by cash or check only.

The event is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served, including select wines.

We are seeking artists who are willing to donate one or two pieces of "ready to hang" artwork. All mediums are welcome—photography, paintings, fiber arts and sculpture. Each donor will receive a thank you letter for tax-receipt purposes. If for some reason the artwork does not sell at the auction, the artwork will be returned to the donor.

We are also seeking corporate sponsors to support this event.

If you would like to donate a piece of artwork, would like to become a sponsor of the event, or have any questions, please contact Christine Bucher at 719.596.2916 or via email at [baccab@aol.com](mailto:baccab@aol.com).

We look forward to seeing you there!

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

