



Duck! Birding Around Hunters

It was a brisk fall day. A friend and I were hidden among the cattails, binoculars in hand, field guide open between us. We were both new at birding. The wide assortment of ducks bobbing out on the reservoir, nondescript in their eclipse plumage, was giving us fits. That’s why we had come—to learn how to identify fall ducks.

Scanning the opposite shoreline, I was ticking off mallards, shovelers, gadwalls... and gasp! What was that man doing with a gun!!!? He had it pointed straight at us!



We hastily decided that this was neither the time nor place to be learning our waterfowl. Backing out of the vegetation, we turned and hurried for the car. It wasn’t until later, when we were in the car heading home, that we realized what we should have known all along. It was hunting

season. Reflecting back, it’s unlikely the hunters even realized we were there, outfitted as we were in khaki and olive drab, skulking in the thick riparian foliage.

Usually, hunters and birders get along splendidly. To a large extent, we’re after the same things—good bird habitat and healthy bird populations. Hunters, largely through hunting license fees, are a primary source of funding for conservation efforts (see my post on duck stamps). Hunting organizations (such as Ducks Unlimited) work hand in hand with environmental groups (such as Audubon Colorado) to their mutual benefit.

However, no one hoping to add an American Bittern or Sora to their life list wants to be accidentally targeted by an excited duck hunter. While hunters are extremely safety conscious, we need to be responsible for our own well-being.

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PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

It’s September and that means Aiken Audubon starts meeting again. I hope you attend our first meeting, when the AFA Falconers will be presenting some of the AFA falcons. This is a rare opportunity to see the only “performing” collegiate mascot(s) up close and meet the young men and women who care for and train them.

Your Aiken Audubon board has again planned an informative, and hopefully interesting, slate of presentations for the general meetings. If you ever have a specific program in mind, please contact Debbie Barnes so she can arrange something.

We also offer field trips, and anyone is welcome to come along. Jeannie Mitchell has regularly scheduled trips to the Kiowa Creek Sanctuary among many others so please check our website, www.aikenaudubon.com for dates and time.

Leslie Holzmann is always looking for articles for the Aikorns newsletter. If you’ve been on an interesting birding trip or attended a birding festival, feel free to write a review and let the rest of us know what’s available.

If anyone has birded SE Arizona following the recent devastating fires there (Chiricahua and Huachuca Mountains specifically) I believe any updates/news about the area would be much appreciated.

I hope to see you at an upcoming meeting,

Risë

• RISE FOSTER-BRUDER
PRESIDENT, AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

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COMING PROGRAMS

September 21

“Falcons!”
AFA Falconers

October 19

“Labeling Larids”
Bill Schmoker

November 16

“Birds of Colombia”
John Drummond

December 17

Christmas Bird Count
No program

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 Nov./Dec. 2011 issue of Aikorns is Wednesday, October 17.

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

UPCOMING AIKEN PROGRAMS

September 21 • Air Force Falconers AFA Falconry

You've seen them at the football games, and perhaps at Eagle Days at Lake Pueblo State Park (where this photo was taken). Now meet them in person as we welcome some of the Air Force Academy falcons and their cadet handlers for our September Aiken program.

Learn how the Air Force Academy falconry program works—how the birds are obtained, how they are trained, and what it takes to be one of the select few allowed to care for and train such impressive predators. Some of the birds are from Africa, others are North American natives of the boreal forest.

A brief presentation will be followed by an open question and answer session. Come and satisfy your curiosity in this small-group setting! There will be plenty of time for photos as well.

We recommend this program for children. Perhaps a close-up encounter with a falcon will inspire a lifetime passion for birds.



PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

October 19 • Bill Schmoker Labeling Larids

Do all gulls look the same to you? Do your brain cells shut down when confronted with 25 North American species that come in almost 200 different plumages? Are you horrified by hybrids and terrified by terns?

If, like many birders, you find identifying gulls and other larids more than challenging, then be sure to come to our October program. Educator extraordinaire Bill Schmoker will sort it all out.

Bill is a dynamic speaker who manages to keep a classroom of junior high science students enthralled day after day. He's also a skilled photographer, as this gull photo attests. Be sure to take a look at BRDPICS (<http://brdpics.blogspot.com>), his nature and birding blog. There are many excellent photographs, as well as fascinating tales of his birding adventures.



PHOTO: BILL SCHMOKER

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.

DUCK: CONT'D FROM FRONT PAGE



PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

At the least, birders should know when the hunting season starts and ends. Here in Colorado, that information is readily available on Colorado Division of Wildlife's website (<http://wildlife.state.co.us/Hunting/Waterfowl/Pages/WaterfowlHome.aspx>). Since states differ, be sure to check the dates for where you will be birding.

Of course, the safest thing is to simply bird elsewhere during the hunting season. While national wildlife refuges and state wildlife areas are often hotspots, there are other alternatives. City, county,

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Christmas Count

position open



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. No dogs are allowed on Aiken trips.

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.

Wednesday, September 7, 7 am – noon

Kiowa Creek Sanctuary

Join us as we see who's migrating through the sanctuary, Audubon's property in northern Black Forest. This is our first fall with access to the property so it'll be great to see what surprises are in store! We'll definitely find forest birds: Downy & Hairy Woodpeckers, Northern Flicker, Pygmy & White-breasted Nuthatches, Mountain Chickadee, and Steller's Jay, for starters, but the property's species list grows weekly.

Bring lunch and/or snack. Scopes are helpful for the ponds. Kiowa Creek Sanctuary is at 10165 Hodgen Road. Meet at the sanctuary gate on the south side of the road. Abysmal weather cancels the trip.

Contact Jeannie Mitchell at vancerus@earthlink.net or (h) 719.494.1977, (c) 719.233.1956 if you have any questions, and to RSVP.

Saturday, September 17, 7 am – noon-ish

Aiken Canyon

This walk covers three distinct plant communities: Pinyon pine, one-seeded juniper/Scribner needlegrass woodland, Gambel oak-mountain mahogany shrubland, and native tallgrass prairie. As a result, over 100 species of birds have been seen on the property.

You will encounter rocky areas with low brush and cactus—and maybe even a rattlesnake—so please wear a pair of sturdy leather boots. Bring a snack; we may not be back by lunch time. Meet at Broadmoor Town Center to carpool, or at Aiken Canyon at 7:45 am..

Contact Risë Foster-Bruder at 719.282.7877 with questions and/or to let her know you are coming.

Wednesday, September 28, 9:30 – 11 am

Kiowa Creek Sanctuary Nature Walk

Want to go birding, but would like a slower pace? This leisurely nature walk is just the thing. We'll stop to enjoy the birds, flowers, and other natural inhabitants of the sanctuary property.

While all levels of expertise are welcome, this is an excellent trip for beginning birders to learn from those more experienced.

Contact Jeannie Mitchell at vancerus@earthlink.net or (h) 719.494.1977, (c) 719.233.1956 if you have any questions, and to RSVP.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, September 10, 7 – 10:30 am

Fountain Creek Fall 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 the spring migration.

Reservations required, 719.520.6745. Fee: \$5 donation for birdseed.

Saturday, September 10, 1 – 3:30 pm

Interpretive Volunteer Orientation

Interpretive Volunteers play a key role in providing visitor services at Bear Creek and Fountain Creek Nature Centers. Come to this orientation to learn more about being a visitor information receptionist and see if the nature centers are the right fit for your volunteer time. Volunteers must be 18 or older and complete an application.

Call Paula at 719.520.6387 for an application. Reservations required.

September 10, 7:30 – 10:30 am

Beginning Birding Class

Please join local birder Charlie Campbell at Pinello Ranch for a field outing identifying birds and enjoying the spectacle of fall migration. We have been monitoring migratory patterns and volunteers have identified 73 species in a single day this past spring.

Highlights will include tips on identifying different species, learning about behavior and habitat needs as well as learning some bird songs.

Bring binoculars and bird identification books (Some accommodations are possible with advance notice). The walking will be moderate but plan on trail hiking.

Pre-registration is required as group size will be limited to 15.

Cost: \$7/person donation to Pinello Ranch. Payable day of event, cash or check. Exact change please. Contact David Rudin, 719.648.9324, drudin@ppcf.org, with questions or to register.

Fridays, September 16, 23, 30,
and October 7, 8 am – noon

Interpretive Volunteer Program Leader Training

Enjoy the look of excitement and innocence in children's faces as you help them experience the fascinating outdoor world. Learn all about being a volunteer environmental education program leader at Bear Creek and Fountain Creek Nature.

Centers during these four training sessions. Volunteering also offers opportunities to meet new friends and help people enjoy their parks and nature centers while pursuing your own interests in our natural, cultural and outdoor recreation resources.

Contact Paula at 719.520.6387 for an application. Reservations required.

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

Birds in the 'Burbs

In 1991, I returned from Florida and moved into a house in the suburbs here in Colorado Springs. The house is located east of the downtown area, about a mile northeast of Citadel Mall in a then 20-year-old neighborhood. I soon put up some bird feeders, and have been monitoring the bird traffic ever since.

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

Ubiquitous house finches consume most of my black oil sunflower seed, but I also use thistle seed for goldfinches, plus a mix of soft food for robins, grackles and jays. An upside-down feeder with home-made suet attracts flickers, bushtits, chickadees, nuthatches and downy woodpeckers. The suet and a wire mesh nut feeder are out all year long. These two feeders are mounted at the top of a 10' metal pole with a gallon milk jug baffle, which keeps the squirrels at bay. In the winter, I feed millet to ground feeders such as juncos, which – along with robins - also love the suet recipe.



I prefer to manage the feeders by use of varying sizes of excluding wire, which keeps out wasteful “diggers” like grackles and jays. The suet is situated so that starlings cannot access it. Areas under my feeders are surrounded by fencing wire (2" x 4") which prevents attacks by cats.

Over the years, I've watched changes in species and their populations. The feeders certainly have an influence, but other dynamics have been in play as well. For example, weather still plays a crucial factor; a flock of 20-some bushtits came regularly to my suet several times a day for years, but they all disappeared after a severe cold spell last winter, apparently killed by the cold.

Twenty years ago, there were few crows in the neighborhood, but now there's a nesting pair in every block. Crows have played havoc with nesting robins and grackles; this year there are fewer grackles than ever before. Twenty years ago, there were scrub jays in the neighborhood, but now they're scarce.

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



Blue jays were scarce 20 years ago, but now breed commonly in the area. Three years ago, a towhee nested for the first time somewhere nearby, somehow surviving the neighborhood dogs and cats. About 5 years ago, a pair of cowbirds took up summer residence, usually parasitizing the towhee nest. Three years ago, a pair of house wrens nested for the first time in a nearby drainage ditch. This year, the wrens investigated a couple of chickadee nest boxes in my yard, but ultimately nested elsewhere.

Mourning doves are common, and I've seen white-winged doves a few times. For several years now, Eurasian collared doves have

been frequent visitors to the fenced area under the feeders. I've also had a few “rarities”; a varied thrush, red crossbills, and a Harris sparrow made brief stopovers during past winters.

As birding enthusiasts, many of us enjoy feeding birds. Not only do we enjoy watching our birds, but we have an opportunity to learn behavior and to monitor population and species changes as years go by. Simply keeping a diary of arrival and departure dates for migratory species like grackles and juncos is very rewarding. We can make notes to record sighting the first baby robin or house finch, or when the nuthatches bring a first brood to the suet feeder.

If you don't already do so, I encourage you to start a notebook of backyard bird sightings. These records can then be loaded into various computer sites such as eBird or the Cornell website. Making notes and keeping track of changes charts the course of our bird populations over time, which will become valuable data for future generations of suburban birders and ornithologists everywhere.

• SUSAN CRAIG

BACKYARD TIPS

Create a Bird-Friendly Yard

The first step in creating your backyard bird habitat is adding bird feeders. Start with the basics by putting black-oil sunflower in a tubular feeder. This is an effective combination for attracting a large number of birds to your yard.

Next, attract more species by adding additional types of feeders and food. Some good options are Nyjer® in a tube feeder, and mixtures of black-oil sunflower, sunflower hearts, and whole peanuts in hopper and platform feeders. Provide alternative foods such as suet, fruits, mealworms, and nectar. These foods may attract species of birds not found at traditional offerings.

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



Another step is to add a water feature and bird house to your landscape. Bird baths provide wild birds with a fresh, clean water source to drink and bathe in. Bird houses, which are also known as nest boxes, are typically constructed of wood and specifically designed to attract different kinds of species.

Wren House

It is especially important to keep the birds safe. Reduce window collisions by moving bird feeders to within three feet of windows. Remove hiding places to keep birds safe from outdoor cats. Keep your bird feeders clean by cleaning them with a solution of 10% bleach (one-part bleach to nine-parts water) once a month.

Finally, use native plants to provide wild birds with food, shelter, and nest sites. Creating a bird-friendly habitat for birds is fun for the whole family and it will fill your yard with the sights and sounds of beautiful birds and other wildlife.

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state, and national parks typically don't allow hunting no matter what time of year it is. The Nature Conservancy and Audubon are among organizations with their own bird-friendly sanctuaries. Private property (be sure to get permission from the owner) is another option.

If you really want to go birding among the shotguns and decoys, skip the army surplus birding camouflage. Instead, wear the brightest clothing you own. Hunters wear day-glo orange hats and vests for a reason (although could someone please explain why that vest is worn over head-to-foot camo?).

White is another no-no. Not only does it frighten many bird species, but it also appears on various ducks and geese, as well as the tail end of an elk or deer.



PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

The last thing you want is to look like the animal being hunted!

One frequently emphasized hunting lesson is to know what's behind your target. Let's make it as easy as possible for them to follow that rule!

• LESLIE HOLZMANN

TRIP REPORT

Little Flames

On June 30, 2011, a night of intermittent thunderstorms, dark-eyed Flammulated Owls less than six inches long watched us trespass on their territory in the Manitou Experimental Forest. Led by expert Dr. Brian Linkhart, who has studied them for 30 years, and Ken Pals of El Paso County Parks, we observed the Flams' silent flights around nest cavities and listened to their soft calls.



PHOTO: RISE FOSTER-BRUDER

We were able to "peep" into a nest of three owlets thanks to a telescoping mini-camera and remote viewing screen. After some prowling through trees, we watched Brian net a female and gently record some of her physical hallmarks: weight,

incubation patch size, wing feather lengths, and amounts of organic compounds in her wing feathers called porphyrin that glow red under a black light and are used to age the bird. All of this under the light of small headlamps. To everyone's relief, the freed female flew off to the safety of her nest.

In his years of rigorous study, aided by college student interns, Brian has gained a deep understanding of the owls' behaviors, habitat and energetic requirements. He is beginning to piece together their likely migration patterns and their role as indicators of climate and environmental change. They are classified as "sensitive" on the endangered species spectrum and Brian's studies may be what help the Little Flames survive.

• LIZ LEWIS

aikorns

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FLORES' FUNNIES



Nature center volunteer and artist Rick Flores enjoys sharing his views of happenings at Fountain Creek and Bear Creek Nature Centers.



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President Risë Foster-Bruder
 719.282.7877

www.aikenaudubon.com

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

THE BACK PAGE

**John James Audubon:
 American Artist & Naturalist**

This is the title of a special exhibit at the Longmont Museum & Cultural Center in Longmont, Colorado.

This exhibit features over forty original works of art by John James Audubon. Some are well known, such as the iconic Bald Eagle and Great Blue Heron prints. Others are not as famous, but quite charming. I found the House Wrens depicted nesting in a hat (*right*), and the Robins (parent birds feeding fully fledged youngsters), particularly whimsical.

One of the more interesting items was the fully colored print of Baltimore Orioles next to an uncolored engraving of the same print; a sort of “before” and “after” of the print. And, the Snowy Owl print was displayed next to Audubon’s taxidermied owl providing you with a true comparison of an actual life-sized bird with the life-sized depiction on the print.

This exhibit runs through September 18 so time is running out to see this fabulous display. The drive is definitely worth it!

If you go...

The Longmont Museum is open Monday through Saturday, 9 am to 5 pm and Sundays, 1 pm to 5 pm. Admission is \$7 for adults, \$5 for students and seniors, and children under twelve are free.

• CHRISTINE BUCHER



Audubon prints such as this are on display in Longmont through September 18!