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aikorns
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

GRAY JAYS

By Leslie Holzmann

WE HAD BEEN CAMPING AT TURQUOISE LAKE, near Leadville, Colorado, high in the Rockies. As it was lunchtime, we spread out a tablecloth, set out a bowl of chicken salad (with chicken, grapes, celery, and pecans), and went to find the plates and forks. But as I returned to set the table, the salad seemed to be missing something... the pecans were gone! Seems we'd been victims of the camp robber!



PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

“Camp Robber” is an apt nickname for the Gray Jay. Familiar residents of campgrounds throughout the coniferous forests across Canada and southward along the Rockies, these small jays aren't the least bit shy. The birds have a tendency to not only accept handouts, but to brazenly help themselves to anything on your plate that looks edible.

There is a reason these birds are so intent on grabbing lots of food. Unlike most northern birds, they don't migrate.

All summer, the jays collect lots and lots of food—pine nuts, acorns, insects, berries, and even baby birds or dead animals—while it's plentiful. Some they eat right away while the rest they store for the long, snowy, northern winter ahead. To keep this cache safe, the jays hide each morsel in a different place, under tree bark, stuffed into crevices, or any nook or cranny that will still be accessible in deep snows. As added insurance, the food is coated with sticky saliva that glues it into place. Yum, yum.

Amazingly, the jays remember where they put each tidbit, unlike other winter hoarders such as squirrels (who end up planting entire oak forests with their forgotten acorns).

This strategy of storing food for the winter rather than heading south really pays off. While migratory songbirds have a 40 to 50% mortality rate, over 80%

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PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

“CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT?” “YOU GO OUT and count birds?” “How do you do that?”

Are these some of the questions you get along with the blank stares when you tell your non-birder friends and family about the Christmas bird count? I do. For some it may seem a strange or an unlikely pursuit on a cold day in December, but for others this is a chance to share a day of birding and discovery with like-minded people.

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is one of a number of “Citizen Science Projects” that occur throughout the year. Along with the Great ...continued on page 05

Coming programs

NOVEMBER 21

The Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival
Presented by Debbie Barnes

DECEMBER

No program. See you on the Christmas Bird Count.

JANUARY 16

Raptor ID
Presented by Debbie Barnes

FEBRUARY 20

Flammulated Owl Update
Presented by Brian Linkhart

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 Jan./Feb. 2013 issue of *Aikorns* is Wednesday, December 19.

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

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NOVEMBER 21 / DEBBIE BARNES

THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY BIRDING FESTIVAL



Green Jay photo by Leslie Holzmann

TAKE A BREAK FROM YOUR THANKSGIVING baking and take a virtual field trip to the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival.

Begun in 1994, the Festival is one of the oldest in North America! This is an area full of endemics, plus surprises from over the border. Imagine bright colorful birds from Mexico, like Green Jays and Altamira Orioles, or exotic hawks such as Hook-billed Kites, White-tailed Hawks, Crested Caracaras, and Alpomado Falcons!

Debbie is an enthusiastic birder and photographer. She is an active volunteer for citizen science projects including bird banding, Christmas Bird Counts, and Colorado's second Breeding Bird Atlas, for which she completed 18 blocks. In addition, Debbie monitors breeding birds and raptors at Cheyenne Mountain State Park. She currently serves on the Aiken board as Program Chair.

DECEMBER 15

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

SAVE THE DATE AND REGISTER NOW! AIKEN AUDUBON'S DECEMBER event is participation in the Audubon's Society's 113th annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC).

The Colorado Springs CBC is one of over 2,200 count areas that will be surveyed from pre-dawn to dusk throughout North, Central and South America and several Pacific Islands. All counts take place between December 14 and January 5. The Audubon CBC is the longest running Citizen Science survey on the world, providing critical data on population trends of birds. Tens of thousands of participants know that CBCs are also a lot of fun.

Each count area is a circle with a diameter of 15 miles (an area of about 177 square miles). The Colorado Springs CBC circle is centered at 2135 Southgate Road. It is divided into about 20 smaller areas, each with a count leader and team(s). Advanced-to-beginning birders are invited to participate. All eyes and ears are needed.

If you cannot bird on count day (Saturday, December 15), we are still interested in rare, unusual or out of season bird sightings for the three days before and after the count as well as feeder counts on the day of the event. Last year we counted 17,142 individual birds representing 90 species. Best birds included Long-tailed Duck, Band-tailed Pigeon, and Ross's Goose. Who knows what great birds we'll find this year?

A post count tally and dinner will occur on the evening of the 15th. Details of the dinner will be passed along to participants after registration.

Other nearby CBCs include Black Forest, Fountain, Penrose, Florence, Pueblo and Pueblo Reservoir. To find out about the dates and contact information for these counts, go to <http://birds.audubon.org/get-involved-christmas-bird-count>.

Sign up for this free event by contacting Ken Pals at mtnpals@gmail.com or by phone at (719) 471-0687 (email is preferred).

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.

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CHRISTMAS COUNT

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FORECAST: PARTLY SUNNY, MOSTLY BIRDY

MORE PROJECT FEEDERWATCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED TO TRACK WINTER BIRDS

Ithaca, NY—The 26th season of Project FeederWatch begins November 10, and participants are needed more than ever. By watching their feeders from November through April and submitting their observations to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, bird watchers make it possible for scientists to keep track of changing bird populations across the continent. New or returning participants can sign up anytime at www.FeederWatch.org.

After unusual winter weather in some parts of the country last season, many participants found themselves asking, “Where are the birds?”

“Warmer temperatures and lack of snow cover means birds can find more natural food so they may visit feeders less,” explains FeederWatch leader David Bonter. “But even if participants are not seeing many birds, that’s still valuable information we need to detect population changes on a broad scale.”

The AccuWeather long-range forecasting service is predicting some big storms in the Northeast this winter, so FeederWatchers in the region may see more birds at their feeders than they did last winter. Forecasts also call for another year of below-normal snowfall for the Midwest, above-normal snowfall and below-normal temperatures for the central and southern Rockies, and a wet winter with above-normal precipitation for the Gulf Coast and Southeast.

“We’ll have to see if those predictions pan out and how they might affect feeder-bird numbers,” Bonter says. “The one number we definitely want to see increase is the number of people taking part in FeederWatch. It’s easy to do, and the information is incredibly valuable in helping us better understand what’s going on in the environment and in the lives of the birds we enjoy so much.”

To learn more about joining Project FeederWatch and to sign up, visit www.FeederWatch.org or call the Cornell Lab toll-free at (866) 989-2473. In return for the \$15 fee (\$12 for Cornell Lab members), participants receive the FeederWatcher Handbook and Instructions with tips on how to successfully attract birds to your feeders, an identification poster of the most common feeder birds, and a calendar. Participants also receive Winter Bird Highlights, an annual summary of FeederWatch findings, as well as the Cornell Lab’s quarterly newsletter, Living Bird News.

Project FeederWatch is a joint research and education project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada.

More trips online!

For the latest information on field trips and events:

www.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. 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.

BIRDS AND ICE PHOTOGRAPHY FIELD TRIP

DECEMBER 29 AND JANUARY 12, 8 AM – NOON

Winter birding can be pretty exciting, and these two trips should provide excellent opportunities for photographers as well. We’ll travel to Lake George and into Eleven Mile Canyon looking for Bald Eagles, but Golden Eagles are also possible! Other bird species might include waterfowl and American Dippers hunting along the ice edges. This will be a chance to photograph these stunning birds in winter conditions. Non-photographers are welcome to attend this field trip but be aware it will be slow-paced while we spend time photographing birds.

Be prepared for snow and ice; bring food and water as needed. We will not be hiking very far from vehicles but you may want to venture down to the water’s edge to spend some time with American Dippers, so you will want waterproof and insulated clothing to protect your legs and backside! Photographers bring tripods for scenic opportunities; digiscopers are welcome, and bring long lenses if you have them.

Meet at Red Rocks Safeway, and come prepared to share gas costs. There is also a \$5 per car fee to enter Eleven Mile Canyon.

For more information and to RSVP, contact Debbie Barnes at kfoopoo@yahoo.com or (c) 303.947.0566.

RAPTOR ID FIELD TRIP

JANUARY 19 OR 20, 8 AM – 1 PM OR 2 PM

This is a one day field trip with an option of two dates to accommodate schedules. Exercise your skills in Raptor ID after Aiken Audubon’s annual Raptor ID program. We will drive out to Eastern El Paso County looking for Raptors. We will spend time with scopes so everyone has a chance to practice identifying the birds.

Be prepared for snow and cold; bring food and water as needed. Bring your long lenses if you have them or attempt some digiscoping with small “point-and-shoots” or your phones. Remember to share costs with your driver. Meet at Fountain Creek Nature Center to car pool.

For more information and to RSVP, contact Debbie Barnes at kfoopoo@yahoo.com or (c) 303.947.0566.

THE VITAL CLEANUP OF ABANDONED MINES

by Jackie Heyda

THE PENNSYLVANIA MINE NEAR MONTEZUMA, Colorado discharges an acidic orange stream of toxic metals into Peru Creek and the Snake River. The creek and river flow into Denver Water's Dillon Reservoir.

Mining authorities have dug through a mountainside and reopened the shaft of the abandoned mine trying to find options for dealing with one of the west's worst environmental problems. The poisoning has gone on for more than 60 years. There are many toxic chemicals being discharged into Peru Creek – cadmium, copper, manganese, lead and zinc. Federal authorities estimate there are as many as 500,000 abandoned mines across the west. State officials say the risk of lawsuits prevents cleanup of this mine and the other abandoned mines. The abandoned mines have impaired 1,300 miles of Colorado streams and the headwater of 40 percent of Western rivers.



Congressional leaders have refused to address the problem of legal liability at the abandoned mines. The EPA's current interpretation of the Clean Water Act says that state governments could be held liable for costs of full-scale cleanups. Full-scale cleanups can cause enormous financial liability. This has prevented partial cleanups that could improve water downstream.

Local leaders in Ouray, Summit, Gunnison, Clear Creek and other counties are getting involved. Commissioners are pressing for federal action to address the worsening

NEW! THE SANGRE DE CRISTO CONSERVATION AREA

By Jackie Heyda

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced the establishment of the Sangre de Cristo Conservation Area as the nation's 558th unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Noted conservationist Louis Bacon donated a nearly 7,000 acre conservation easement in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Bacon is a longtime advocate and proponent of landscape and wildlife conservation. He has donated nearly 77,000 acres of his 81,400 acre Tinchera Ranch. He is also donating a perpetual conservation easement on the 90,000 acre Blanca Ranch. The Blanca Ranch easement donation should be finalized later this year.

Bacon, Salazar and Service Director Dan Ashe and Dan Pike of Colorado Open Lands signed a memorandum of agreement to complement an existing Colorado Open Lands easement agreement already in place on the property. Colorado Open Lands will jointly monitor and support the conservation efforts with the Service. This is one of the first cooperative arrangements with the federal government, a private land trust and a private landowner.

of watersheds. Andy Karsian, legislative coordinator for Colorado Counties Inc., said that water supply is a huge issue and they are going to track it to the last drop.

Stewart Udall is working with the Senate and the EPA to enable groups to pursue voluntary cleanups.

For more information, see the articles at <http://summitcountyvoice.com/2012/05/26/colorado-pennsylvania-mine-cleanup-moves-ahead/> and http://www.denverpost.com/environment/ci_21499958/risk-suits-preventing-vital-cleanup-abandoned-mines-colorado.

THE AIKEN CANYON PRESERVE

by Jackie Heyda

THE AIKEN CANYON PRESERVE IS NAMED after ornithologist Charles Aiken. Aiken, a U.S. surveyor, taxidermist and collector, who surveyed the region in the 1870s.

The preserve is located about 16 miles south of Colorado Springs. In 1991, The Nature Conservancy signed a 99-year conservation lease. The Conservancy manages 1,080 acres of state land and has acquired another 541 acres bringing the entire preserve to 1,621 acres. There is a well-maintained 4-mile loop hiking trail and an additional ¾ mile trail that makes its way through the canyon. Interpretive signs highlight important features along the trail. The preserve is composed of shrublands, tallgrass prairie meadows, pinyon juniper woodlands and mixed coniferous woodlands.

Aiken Canyon yields some excellent birds.





PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

of the jays survive from year to year.

So, how do they spend their winters? With their food supply secure, they could sit around and relax with a good book and a cup of tea, but instead, they go into high gear, building a nest and raising a family! Imagine

sitting on a clutch of eggs or trying to keep newly hatched chicks warm while the mercury plummets to 30 below zero.

There has to be an upside to nesting in the snow, and sure enough, there is: nesting this early means they don't have to compete for nesting sites with all those migratory birds. The young jays are fledged before those fair-weather birds return from the tropics.

To begin with, all the babies huddle for warmth, and it's one big, happy family. But once the weather warms, sibling rivalry gets serious. It finally comes to blows. The strongest young jay will oust its brothers and sisters from their parents' territory. If these losers are lucky, they'll find another place to call their own. Most of the time, however, they die. Being homeless is bad news for people or birds.

Meanwhile, the winning youngster will hang around home for a year or two, waiting its chance at a vacancy in a near-by territory. In the meantime, he (or she) will earn his keep by helping with the chores, including nest-building, feeding mom while she's incubating, feeding his new brothers and sisters, and helping defend the place from intruders.

If you live in (or visit) Colorado, one of the best places to see Gray Jays is Rocky Mountain National Park. In particular, check out the parking area at Rainbow Curve. You'll find them perched on the "Do not feed the animals" sign, angling for handouts. Just remember, if you feed them something like corn chips or pizza (both of which I saw happen during my visit last month), you could be condemning them to starvation come winter. Most human "foods" aren't sturdy enough to still be edible months after being stuffed into a crack in a branch for storage!

If you'd like to learn more, I recommend "Gray Jay Research in Algonquin Park (Ontario)," the source of much of my information: <http://www.sbaa.ca/projects.asp?cn=495>

Backyard Bird Count held over President's Day weekend in February, the Christmas Bird Count is an opportunity for each of us to help contribute information about birds in our local area during the winter.

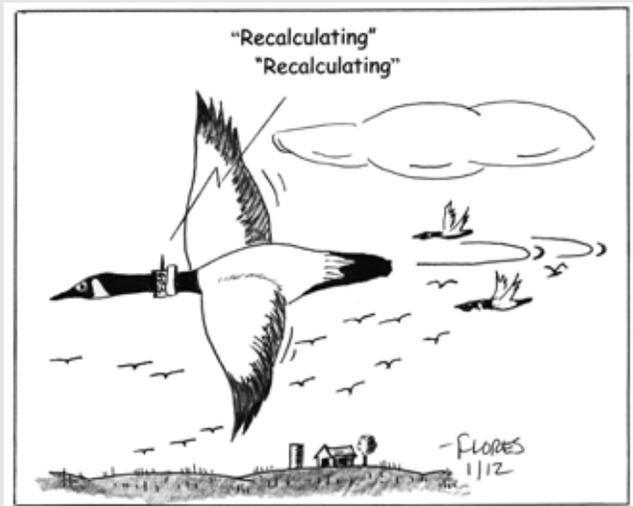
I haven't participated in a Christmas Bird Count before, but I am looking forward to doing so this year. I encourage everyone to sign up. If you attended our meeting in September, you got a preview from Ken Pals of some of the birds that might be in our area during December and the importance of positive identification. He will present Part 2 at the November meeting.

You don't have to be an expert birder. You just need a willingness to participate, be able to describe what you saw and then join the party in the evening as we tally the counts! You will find details about this year's event elsewhere in this newsletter. Just mark your calendar for Saturday, December 15! I will be there with my binoculars polished and my field guide in hand!

HAPPY BIRDING!

Christine Bucher,
Aiken Audubon President

Flores' Funnies



Artist Rick Flores, a Nature Center volunteer, enjoys sharing his views of happenings at Fountain Creek and Bear Creek Nature Centers.



Look for the
Aiken Audubon Society
Facebook page!

facebook.com/pages/Aiken-Audubon-Society



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You do not have to be a member to participate in Aiken's activities.

AUDUBON COLORADO INVITES YOU...

ALL INTERESTED AUDUBON MEMBERS ARE invited to attend the November 17 meeting of the Audubon Colorado Council. The meeting will be held at the Earth Force building (135 Park Avenue West, Denver, CO 80205) from 10 am to 4 pm, with lunch provided by Audubon Rockies.

The new Audubon Colorado Council results from the reorganization of National Audubon into regions, rather than individual states; Colorado and Wyoming have been merged into one region: Audubon Rockies. The Audubon Colorado Council will serve as a unified voice for the Colorado chapters and members and will communicate directly with the Audubon Rockies staff to advise them on Colorado issues and policies.

The goal of this meeting is to establish a framework of activities and communications with all the state's chapters and Audubon staff. It promises to be an exciting opportunity to re-energize collaboration among the Colorado Audubon chapters and members, and to brainstorm new ideas for more effective communication among the chapters and with our regional and national organization.

To attend please RSVP to Stephanie DeMattee at sdemattee@audubon.org or (303) 415-0130.

THANK YOU, AIKEN AUDUBON!

AIKEN AUDUBON HAS DONATED \$10,000 to the new Fountain Creek Nature Center. Our contribution will go to the educational contents of the new wing. By expanding the educational and interpretive exhibits, the nature center will have room to support the growing number of individuals, families, and school children who want to discover more about our environment.



PHOTO: PATRICIA ST. LOUIS
FOUNTAIN VALLEY NEWS