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aikorns
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

GONE TO THE BIRDS

Story and photos by Tanja Britton

DREAMS CAN STILL COME TRUE. MY DREAMS ARE carried on feathered wings or, more specifically, on the plumes of Sandhill Cranes. One of the greatest natural phenomena I have been fortunate enough to witness is the migration of these amazing birds through the San Luis Valley of Southern Colorado.

The journey starts in New Mexico, in and around Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, where they winter. On their way to their breeding grounds in the greater Yellowstone area, some 20,000 cranes spend about 2 months, from February until April each year, in the vicinity of the Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge. In the fall, when reversing the direction of their travel they, once again, use the San Luis Valley as a layover during their return to New Mexico.



On a recent March day in 2014, I was fortunate enough to discover the field where some of the birds roosted during the night. When I arrived early in the morning, the voluminous and very unique throaty voices of what I estimated as several thousand cranes greeted me, appearing to be welcoming the morning. This avian concert went on for a few hours. Then, following some innate impulse, birds numbering from one to several dozen took off, one group after the other, their wings scintillating in the early morning sun which had arisen behind the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in the East, as they dispersed into many different directions. Their morning exodus lasted almost an hour, until the field before me was empty. I hopped into the car and followed some of them, so I could watch their behavior during the remainder of the day.

They distributed throughout the valley, to public and private lands, in search of food, to gain weight and to strengthen them for the continuation of their voyage north. The cranes foraged for corn and grain on fields, or fed in shallow lakes or streams. I admired their gait, on long, thin legs, appearing very elegant and measured. Every

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

ANTICIPATION

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, I ALWAYS anticipated seeing the first robin of spring. I still do. I greeted my first robin at the birdbath a few weeks ago, then watched as it also investigated the suet feeder. Now, having lived in Colorado for a number of years, I anticipate the arrival of the first hummingbird of the season. I hear the buzzzz of the first Broad-tailed and I rush to hang out the feeder.

This year, while contemplating the increasing presence of Eurasian Collared Doves and how they seem to be “taking over,” I anticipated the first sighting of a Mourning Dove. It brought a smile when I saw the first pair in early April. They seem so much gentler than their slightly larger cousins.

I anticipate the opportunity to visit new and old birding spots, hoping to see a rarity but just as happy to see everyday friends. I anticipate field

...continued on page 2

Coming programs

MAY 21

Birds of Borneo

John Drummond

NO SUMMER PROGRAMS.

See you September 17!

Newsletter articles

Articles, announcements, or other items of special interest to Aiken Audubon members are welcomed for consideration. We'd love to hear from you!

Deadline for the September/October 2014 issue of *Aikorns* is Wednesday, August 20.

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

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MAY 21 / JOHN DRUMMOND BIRDS OF BORNEO



Borneo is the world's third largest island, conjuring up images of orangutans, gibbons, broadbills, and pittas in deepest rain forest. Come join John Drummond as he presents a trip the northern part of Borneo—the Malaysian province of Sabah.

Two lowland rainforest locations gave him the opportunity to see and photograph broadbills and barbets, hornbills and trogons, bee-eaters and bristle-heads, kingfishers and storks, as well as primates and elephants. We'll explore Mount Kinabalu, over 4000 meters high, which rises out of the lowland forests. It's an area of high endemism. Special birds to be seen at this National Park include cuckoos, trogons, whistlers, stubtails, fruit-hunters, flowerpeckers, laughingthrushes, and wren-babblers.



As you can see, we've included two of John's photos to spark your interest. You may have noticed that they're not labeled. You'll just have to come Wednesday night to learn which birds they are! Most of us will probably never travel to Borneo, but experiencing John's presentation is definitely the next best thing! ☘

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.

President's Message, continued from front page

trips with like-minded companions, but I also take joy in helping newcomers to this hobby we call birding.

What are you anticipating this year when it comes to birds and birding? Looking for old favorites or waiting for a trip to take you somewhere exotic? Whatever your plans I wish each and every one of you a wonderful time of anticipation and I wait with anticipation for you to share your stories.

Happy Birding!

Christine A. Bucher,
Aiken Audubon President

FOUNTAIN CREEK NATURE CENTER GRAND RE-OPENING

The new, enlarged nature center at Fountain Creek County Park will re-open May 17 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony scheduled for 1:30 pm. Everyone is invited to attend the celebration!

In addition to the new classroom space, three new exhibits have been installed. In support of local, bird-related education, Aiken Audubon donated \$10,000 toward the exhibit on area birds.

There will be a couple of streaming videos to watch, and docents will be on hand to answer questions.

Come early, bird the park, then join the crowd. We'll see you there! ☘

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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.

SATURDAY, MAY 10, 7 – 11 AM FOUNTAIN CREEK SPRING BIRD COUNT

Birding enthusiasts of all ages and abilities are invited to participate in a citizen science project counting species and numbers in Fountain Creek Regional Park during the height of spring migration. \$5 per person donation, reservations requested: 520-6745. Sponsored by El Paso County Parks.

SATURDAY, MAY 17, 7 – 11 AM BEAR CREEK SPRING BIRD COUNT

Birding enthusiasts of all ages and abilities are invited to participate in a citizen science project counting species and numbers in Bear Creek County Park. A \$5 donation for bird seed is requested, reservations: 520-6387. Sponsored by El Paso County Parks.

SUNDAY, JUNE 1, 9 AM – 3 PM BUGWATCHING

Insects, plants, flowers and birds collide on this interesting day of fun and education. We'll start by "bugging" Stratton Open Space, have lunch at Sacred Grounds nearby (or bring your own), and then head for North Cheyenne Canyon for the afternoon—covering several nice habitats, and getting more shade during the hotter part of the day. Meet at Stratton Open Space: take 21st Street south (it turns into Cresta Road) then go right on LaVeta Way to the trailhead parking lot.

Trip limited to 15 participants. Contact Eric at BugEric24@yahoo.com with questions and/or to sign up.

JUNE 2, 7:30 AM – NOON TURKEY CREEK RANCH WOODPECKERS & WARBLERS

Join Mel and Jeanne Goff for a morning of casual birding at TCR. We will be looking for Lewis's Woodpeckers among the five or more woodpecker species often seen. We will also be on the lookout for resident and migrant warblers, Wild Turkeys, vireos, catbirds, and many more.

TCR is 10 miles south of the main gate to Fort Carson on CO Hwy. 115. Follow the entrance road to the stables, turn right and park. Contact Mel and Jeanne Goff at melgoff@comcast.net to sign up.

SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 8AM MANITOU LAKE

Enjoy the high country while looking for some of the over 150 bird species that have been sighted at Manitou Lake. Bring a snack or lunch and enjoy it at the picnic tables by the water. For those interested, we'll stop at FR 339 (Trout Creek Riparian Area) on the way back (no fee). Breeding Vesper Sparrows are possible! Scopes helpful.

Meet at Manitou Lake, about seven miles north of Woodland Park on Hwy. 67. Entry fee is \$6 per vehicle (senior discount available). A National Parks Pass will get you in for half price. Please RSVP to Jeff Jones: JJones@JonesTC.com.

SUNDAY, JULY 13, 8 AM – 2 PM BIRDS, BLOOMS, AND BUTTERFLIES WALK: LOVELL GULCH, TELLER COUNTY

We will focus mainly on butterflies and flowers. We will also see the usual montane bird species and possibly Williamson's Sapsucker and Olive-sided Flycatcher. This is a great opportunity to "botanize" with Jeff Jones, who is a certified expert in Colorado Native Plants, and "butterfly" with Dave Elwonger, who has led butterfly walks for the International Lepidopterist's Society and New Mexico State Parks at Sugarite Canyon State Park.



Expect a moderate 3 mile walk on an established trail (Lovell Gulch Trail), except to go off-trail to look for orchids. There will be about 300 feet elevation gain/loss but the pace will be slow with frequent stops. Bring sunscreen, water, a snack and raingear for a possible summer shower.

Bring your camera to take some flower and butterfly pictures. If you have them, 7 or 8X close focusing (6-8 ft.) binoculars will afford amazingly good views of most species of butterflies. I (Dave) have two pairs of butterfly watching bins to loan, if necessary. I will bring a butterfly net to allow close looks at a few species that are hard to ID with bins (catch and release). We certainly will not need to catch most of the butterflies we will see.

Meet at 8 am at the "Red Rocks" Safeway on West Colorado Ave. to carpool, or at 8:30 am in NW corner of the Woodland Park Walmart parking lot, west of the Goodwill recycling trailer. Trip limited to 12 participants, so don't delay! Contact David Elwonger (davidelwonger@msn.com) with any questions and/or to sign up. ☘

More trips online!

For the latest information on field trips and events:

www.AikenAudubon.com

RECLAMATION, FRACKING, AND COLORADO'S GROWING ENERGY SECTOR

by Jackie Heyda

ON SUNDAY, APRIL 20, THE DENVER POST'S RAN A SUPPLEMENT focused on "Energy & Environment—Power Source: Special issue on how energy is powering Colorado." The supplement was sponsored by Coloradans for Responsible Energy Development.

One item of interest discussed fracking, and how the land is reclaimed after drilling. Reclamation can help balance the environment and our energy needs. Reclamation on government land has different regulations and requirements than it does on private land. The Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service Management, U.S. Forest Service and the Colorado Oil and Gas Commission have set strict standards. The standards for private land are less strict than these government organizations. However, since many reclamation projects on private lands often occur alongside agricultural

activity, private individuals often maintain strict or even stricter standards.

After drilling occurs, the land is monitored and decisions are made on how to return the land to a stable, self-sustaining vegetation community. The goal is that the soil be restored to its original condition. Since Colorado has many mountains, the original contour of the land must be restored to pre-drilling state. Re-vegetation is based on the intended use of the land—wildlife or cattle. There is also the problem of drought conditions and weed invasions. Sometimes amendments are used for these poor soil conditions.

This article also mentions that Colorado has taken the lead in the U.S. when it comes to oil and gas regulations. Environmentalists, regulators and industry are working together to reap the benefits of energy production.

Additional information in this supplement includes fracking's water use, Colorado's energy boom and mineral rights in the state. These articles are informative, giving hope that the companies involved are doing their best for the environment and conservation of the land. ☞

BE A CITIZEN SCIENTIST—

JOIN PROJECT NESTWATCH!

ITHACA, N.Y.—Got Barn Swallows plastering mud in the eaves? Perhaps a chubby dove is piling sticks in the window box or a pair of American Robins is scoping out the red maple for a nest site. Keeping an eye on nearby nests can make this spring a season of discovery for yourself and for scientists hoping to better understand nesting birds. Make this the season to join NestWatch, a citizen-science project from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

NestWatchers have been tracking trends in the nesting success of hundreds of species of birds across the country for nearly 50 years. Participating is easy: map any cup nest or birdhouse location on the NestWatch website at NestWatch.org. Report the species of nesting bird and the timing for how many eggs are laid, how many eggs hatch, and how many young leave the nest. Surprises may be in store as the lives of these feathered families unfold.

During the 2013 NestWatch season, participant Gerald Clark monitored a bluebird nest and noticed one egg was much larger than the others. At hatching time—twin bluebirds emerged!

"It's the first report of twinning in Eastern Bluebirds," says NestWatch project leader Robyn Bailey. "The finding was so notable that it was written up and published in a scientific journal. We learn new things all the time, even about a species as well studied as the Eastern Bluebird."

Researchers are also asking NestWatchers to be on the look-out for nesting Eurasian Collared-Doves. The species was introduced to the Bahamas in the 1970s, entered Florida in the 1980s, and then rapidly colonized most of North America, especially areas converted to agriculture and urban uses. More than 30 years later, scientists still know very little about their breeding habits in North America.



"We don't know how often these doves nest in a single season and how successful they are," says Bailey. "We're interested in any possible effects on native species, especially other kinds of doves, so we're asking anyone who finds a Eurasian Collared-Dove nest to report it to NestWatch."

Monitor one nest or twenty—NestWatch can be a wonderful learning experience for the whole family. Sign up and learn more about how to find and observe nests at NestWatch.org. ☞

CHIRP, CHIRP

Story and photos by Leslie Holzmann

Chirp, chirp! Chirp, chirp, chirp! We had stopped to stretch our legs at a roadside rest near Ogden, Utah, so of course I pulled out my binoculars to look for birds. Walking the short path to a scenic overlook, I kept hearing this loud chirping, but I couldn't find any birds I could ascribe it to. There were the usual American Robins,



American Crows, and Black-billed Magpies—but none of those chirp.

There were also these adorable little ground squirrels. They would boldly emerge from their tunnels, obviously hoping for handouts, and... wait—were they chirping at me? They were! Guess I wasn't going to find an exotic bird, but I did get some cute photos.

This isn't the first time I've been fooled by imitation bird noises. Other squirrels, especially chipmunks, make sounds that could easily be mistaken for a bird. For example, Chickarees (aka Red Mountain Squirrels, *left*), high-altitude tree squirrels, utter a trill that had me thoroughly confused the first time I heard it. Even our ubiquitous Fox Squirrels can chirp like birds.



Prairie Dogs earn their name by barking, not chirping, but birders unfamiliar with them could be taken in. Bats not only chirp, they fly, making them doubly likely to deceive us.

I once made a strenuous cross-country climb up a high mountain pass to search for the chirping birds I heard. I hauled myself up boulders, waded through willow carrs, and crept under stunted conifers only to discover that the rocks were full of piping pikas, not birds. Oops. Oh well, pikas are interesting too.



This pseudo-bird mimicry can be very frustrating. One of my nemesis birds (a bird I've been fruitlessly searching for over the last ten years) is a Grasshopper Sparrow. I've gone to Grasshopper Sparrow habitat. I've studied Grasshopper Sparrow recordings—at times they really do sound like grasshoppers. I'm pretty sure I'll recognize one if I ever see one. So far, however, whenever I've heard a grasshopper-like noise and carefully followed it to its source, I've found a grasshopper, not a sparrow. (Maybe I should start listening insects.) Of course, crickets chirp as well.



If you ask someone what frogs say, they'll most likely answer that frogs croak, or say, "Ribbitt, ribbitt." That may be true of most frogs, but certainly not all of them. I did a lot of research before our trip to Puerto Rico. Mostly I studied my new field guide, but I also learned about the 16 species of coquí

Continued on [back page](#)

Birds, continued from front page

once in a while they performed their impressive courtship dance, a ritual which includes ducking, hopping, flapping their wings, and torquing their long necks. Also, as if to rid themselves of overabundant energy, units of birds took off throughout the day and circled overhead, for no reason apparent to me. But even cranes don't seem to eat or move constantly and I discovered that they appeared to take a siesta in the middle of the day, some standing on one leg and hiding their heads under their wings, others sitting down to rest.

After a day spent eating, dancing, circling and resting, the diverse groups reconvened at their roosting site. In some ways, this was an even grander spectacle than their dispersion in the morning. Standing on the ground, I beheld wave upon undulating wave of cranes, approaching from all directions. Initially, they didn't seem any larger than specks of ash in the sky, then appeared not unlike swarms of grasshoppers. As they came closer, they gradually took shape but long before my eyes could discern their long, stretched out bodies, their hauntingly beautiful calls had given them away. As they flew overhead, I could also distinguish the soft rustling of their feathers. The sky poured forth a seemingly never-ending supply of cranes. The Sangre de Cristos and San Juan Mountains, still snow-capped at this time of year, provided a most spectacular backdrop to their arrival.



As I reflect on my day spent among the cranes, many questions about them remain. Maybe the mysteries surrounding them are also part of their appeal? Considering my short life span, it inspires me that this majestic species has existed for at least 2.5 million years, based on fossil records. What resilient creatures they are. How intricate their habitats and migratory routes, and how interconnected with our human lives. We, who are inspired by the amazing presence of the Sandhill Cranes, should attempt everything in our power to ensure that they will continue to have a place on our wonderful earth in perpetuity. ☘



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

Chirp. Chirp continued from page 5

frogs, who spend the night repeating their name, “ko-kee”, ko-kee’.

“Hah,” I thought. “You won’t fool me!”

Sure enough, coquí frogs were everywhere. They were terribly hard to actually see, being only an inch long and very skittish, but their small size was more than compensated for by the racket they made every night. (The illustration on the previous page is of a different species of tree frog, from the Pacific Northwest, that was much easier to find and photograph.)

Unfortunately, I had learned about the coquí, but not the other tree frogs, and (you guessed it)—tree frogs can sound an awful lot like birds.

So can geckos. Unique among lizards, they are able to make chirping sounds, which they use to communicate with one another. These chirps could easily be mistaken for some exotic tropical species of bird. Since most of us don’t regularly visit the topics, we’re all the more likely to be misled. I guess the moral of this story is, “All that chirps is not feathered.”

Actually, I don’t mind discovering that my “bird” is some other kind of animal. While I enjoy birds, I like other species just as much and take a similar delight in seeing them. It’s all good! ☘

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