



March/April 2015  
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**aikorns**  
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

### SEE YOU AT THE FESTIVAL!

In spite of the piles of snow, spring *is* coming. Birds will be migrating, birders will be watching them migrate, and the very first (and hopefully annual) **Pikes Peak Birding and Nature Festival** will happen right in our own backyard.

The festival is planned for May 8, 9, and 10, which includes the International Migratory Bird Day on Saturday and Mother's Day on Sunday. What a great way to celebrate both of these special days!

Families are especially welcome, as many of the festival activities are specifically geared toward children. The field trips are most appropriate for beginning to intermediate birders although, with

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## BEAR RIVER MIGRATORY BIRD REFUGE

Story and photos by *Leslie Holzmann*

**W**ANT SOME GREAT BIRDING IN NORTHERN Utah? I recently discovered a real gem—the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. It's located on the northeast corner of the Great Salt Lake, just northwest of Ogden off I-15/I-84. The day I visited—midweek in early April—I almost had the place to myself. It was just me and plenty of birds! (Don't confuse this place with Bear Lake NWR, in Idaho, which is also well worth a visit.)

A National Wildlife Refuge administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bear River is similar to other refuges I've visited. There's a lovely visitor center with adjacent boardwalk, helpful docents, and a list of recent sightings. The remaining area is a series of wetlands separated by dikes. The 12-mile auto loop, open



dawn to dusk every day of the year (weather permitting), is the best way to see the birds, as you drive in a giant rectangle on top of these dikes.

As a photographer, I moved slowly, stopping often to take pictures. One major frustration was the dearth of pullovers—most of the dikes are too narrow to permit two vehicles to pass one another, and parking is restricted to the wider corners. I was glad there weren't many cars, as the only way to get most of my photos was to stop in the middle of the road. Since no one was hurrying me along, I spent over three hours driving the loop. On a crowded day, you'd have to move much faster to avoid annoying casual visitors.

After so many years of drought, visiting a refuge

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### Coming programs

#### MARCH 18

**Rattlesnakes! They're Not the Bad Guys You Think They Are**

Barry Cooper

#### APRIL 15

**Identifying Larids**

John Drummond

May 20

**Banding Raptors at Cape May**

Paul Napier

### Newsletter articles

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

Deadline for the May/Summer 2015 issue of *Aikorns* is Wednesday, April 15.

➤ Contact the editor, *Leslie Holzmann*, at [aikenaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:aikenaudubon@gmail.com), or call (719) 964-3197.

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## MARCH 18 / BARRY COOPER RATTLESNAKES

**R**ATTLESNAKES, THEY'RE NOT THE BAD guys you think they are! Come learn about the habits and characteristics of rattlesnakes and how they benefit humans.



Barry Cooper is a fourth-generation Colorado native who grew up on a ranch in northern Colorado, eventually earning both a BS in Animal Science and a MS in Agricultural Business from Colorado State University. He loves birding, hiking, fishing, scuba diving and wine collecting. He currently serves on the Board of the Palmer Land Trust and the board of the Wine Festival of Colorado Springs. Barry is the coordinator of the Raptor Monitoring program at Cheyenne Mountain State Park where he also conducts programs on rattlesnakes and bats. He and his wife Pat travel extensively and use their love of birding and wine drinking as an excuse to travel the world.



LESLIE HOLZMANN

## APRIL 15 / JOHN DRUMMOND IDENTIFYING LARIDS

**D**O GULLS LEAVE you glassy-eyed? Despite sitting in the middle of North America, winter in Colorado brings gull species from both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts to spend time along the Front Range's lakes and reservoirs.

This program will be a working session to help you learn a scientific approach to identifying the common and rarer species that have been seen in Colorado, plus ones to look out for in the future.

Bring pencil and paper and a field guide (John recommends *Sibley Birds*, 2nd edition, 2nd printing, or *Gulls of the Americas*, by Howell and Dunn). The photo shows several species of gull; come to John's program and find out how to identify them all.

John Drummond has birded in 27 countries, covering 6 continents. He has been a leader, co-leader or has advanced a number of international trips covering Bolivia, Jamaica, Japan, Australia, and Thailand. His birding plans in the near future include Uganda, Sri Lanka, and other parts of the world.

John has Ph.D. in Inorganic Chemistry from Southampton University, England and has extensive field experience on a number of bird studies and has spoken to a number of Audubon and other ornithological groups.



JOHN DRUMMOND

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Aiken Audubon programs are free and open to the public. They are held at the Colorado Parks and 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.

## 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](mailto:AikenAudubon@gmail.com).

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### **SATURDAY, APRIL 11, 7 – 11 AM PINELLO RANCH**

As part of the Colorado Birding Trail, this 260 acre property has Fountain Creek bordering to the west and Venetucci Farm to the south. Rich riparian habitat with floodplain cottonwoods and willows provides a mosaic of habitats. A series of ponds and cattail marshes also provide excellent habitat.

We will meet at the ranch. From I-25 south of Colorado Springs, exit South Academy Blvd. (exit 135). Go east for 0.5 miles and take the exit for Highway 85 toward Fountain. Turn right (south) on Highway 85 and go 0.7 miles. Look for the ranch sign on your right.

There is a \$9.00 per person fee. This trip is limited to 15 participants.

For more information and to sign up, contact Mel Goff at [melgoff@comcast.net](mailto:melgoff@comcast.net).

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### **SUNDAY, APRIL 19, 7 AM – NOON KETTLE PONDS**

Located near the south entrance to the Air Force Academy, these ponds can be quite productive. Last year was a great year for migrants, including a Black-and-white Warbler.

We will meet at the north end of Airfield Drive, which is a right turn just before the South Gate entrance to the academy.

For more information and to sign up, contact Risë Foster-Bruder at [riserefb@comcast.net](mailto:riserefb@comcast.net).

### **COMING MAY 8 – 10, 2015 REGISTER NOW!**



For more information, visit [PikesPeakBirdingAndNatureFestival.org](http://PikesPeakBirdingAndNatureFestival.org)

## More trips online!

For the latest information on field trips and events:

[www.AikenAudubon.com](http://www.AikenAudubon.com)

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## FOR J.J. AUDUBON LOVERS

THE COLORADO SPRINGS Fine Arts Center, which has the largest collection of John James Audubon prints in Colorado, is planning a major exhibition of his work ("A Naturalist & an Artist") paired with paintings by Denver artist Kevin Sloan, March 7 through May 31. They're planning birding tours and other birding events during the exhibition.



For more info, go to [csfineartscenter.org](http://csfineartscenter.org).

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Aiken Audubon Editor/Members:

In the last issue, there was a LTE about birds killed by wind farms. The author was incorrect when he stated that "billions of birds are killed by wind farms" and that such collisions are leading to a "world without birds."

While wind farms do kill some birds, the numbers have been greatly exaggerated by opponents and by the fossil fuel industry, which stands to gain from discrediting renewable energy. In truth, the far biggest killers of birds are not wind farms, but feral cats and collisions with cell towers, buildings, etc.

A recent study reported in USA Today in Sept. of 2014, estimated bird deaths caused by wind farms to be between 214,000 and 368,000 annually. Compare that with the estimated 6.8 million fatalities from collisions with cell and radio towers, and the 1.4 billion to 3.7 billion deaths from cats.

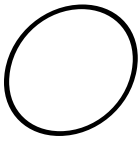
A greater risk to birds is our warming climate, due primarily to the consumption of fossil fuels. The National Audubon society also recently released a report this year which found that hundreds of bird species are at serious risk from climate change and that some species could lose more than 95% of their current ranges.

(<http://www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2014/09/08/climate-change-birds-audubon-society/15299231/>)

Wind farms are an alternative because they do not generate greenhouse gases that warm the climate. They can be sited in ways to minimize bird collisions, and new technologies are being explored to lower strikes. Let's get the facts before opposing a much-needed renewable energy source based in inaccurate information passed around by folks with hidden agendas.

Sincerely,  
Cyndy Kulp  
Colorado Springs

## BROWN'S CANYON NOW A NATIONAL MONUMENT!



ON FEB. 19, 2014, PRESIDENT OBAMA DESIGNATED 21,586 acres of pristine canyons, rivers and backcountry forest in Colorado as the Browns Canyon National Monument.

The area is unique, towering over the Arkansas River, itself a beacon to white water rafters and anglers. The granite walls of the canyon stand like a series of a natural cathedral spires that change hues as the light of day wanes.

Stretched between the communities of Buena Vista and Salida in Chaffee County, Colorado, Browns Canyon elevation ranges from 7,300 feet to 10,000 feet, offering a backdrop for and stunning views of the Arkansas Valley and the Sawatch Range of the Rocky Mountains. The range, formed more than 70 million years ago, is home to some of the highest peaks in the region, towering above 14,000 feet in elevation.

The distinctive environmental features consist of many mountains, canyons with glacial characteristics, giant moraines or ridges of mountain debris, and gulches. Drainages interlace the canyon and drain in to the Arkansas River.

Browns Canyon provides clean water, habitat for wildlife, biological diversity, outdoor recreational opportunities, scenic beauty and grazing and other permitted uses.

http://www.fs.fed.us/visit/browns-canyon-national-monument

## NEWS & NOTES

by Jackie Heyda

### CLIMATE CHANGE WILL COST YOU.

Cass R. Sunstein of *Bloomberg News* has an opinion article in the February 11, 2015 *Denver Post*. Most Americans are worried about climate change and “they want their government to regulate greenhouse gases.” However, there is a question about much they will be willing to pay. Some people may be willing to pay a small amount to reduce the risk—but would they be willing to pay a monthly energy tax and an equivalent gasoline tax? Mr. Sunstein says there is a clear lesson for national political campaigns: “Candidates will have trouble if they decline to acknowledge climate change or say that they don’t want to address it.” These candidates also have to worry about initiatives that could impose costs on American consumers.

http://www.denverpost.com/Opinion/ci\_27507541/Sunstein-Climate-change-efforts-will-cost-you

### NEW OUTLOOK FOR THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE AGENCY?

According to an article in the February 2, 2015 *High Country News*, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service released a new “strategic growth policy.” In an article written in 2001, the question was asked if the national wildlife refuges are the “classic middle child: overlooked, ignored, underfunded and understaffed.”

www.hcn.org/issues/197/10285

For information on National Audubon issues and actions, go to the Audubon Action Center, [audubonaction@audubon.org](mailto:audubonaction@audubon.org).



Look for the Aiken Audubon Society Facebook page! [facebook.com/pages/Aiken-Audubon-Society](https://facebook.com/pages/Aiken-Audubon-Society)

## I JUST LOVE THESE BIRDS...

by Frank Dodge

FOR ABOUT FIVE OR SIX YEARS, I’VE been enjoying watching a pair of Canyon Towhees at my feeders. At first glance, you might get the impression they’re rather plain. But then, when you notice the spot of rust on the top of the head and all the wonderful rust color on its under-tail, and see the black spots on the neck and dark tail, you realize this bird is not so plain after all.



Like most members of the sparrow family, Canyon Towhees eat off platform feeders or off the ground. A couple of summers ago, however, they regularly ate while perched on the “Cardinal” ring on my Brome Squirrel Buster Plus Feeder. However, except for that one summer, they seem to have forgotten how they did it and have fed only from the platform or ground since. While feeding, they’re a bit of a bully—they like to chase the other birds away from their food source. It’s fun to watch them scurry back and forth trying to guard their chosen feeding spot.

A couple of years ago I was overjoyed when I noticed “my” Canyon Towhees feeding a baby on the platform feeder outside our kitchen window. My joy was short-lived when I learned they were caring for a Cowbird chick. Last year, however, they

...con’t on page 5.

actually brought their own baby to the feeder. Woohoo!

The Canyon Towhees have come to tolerate me—somewhat. They won't usually fly away when they see me at the kitchen sink just 18 inches from the platform feeder. If they're around when I fill the feeder, they'll frequently move a short distance away—maybe six feet or so—but they don't always fly off. After I finish and turn my back, they'll often fly back to the feeder and begin to eat.

I've become very protective of these birds. When we had a new roof, gutters and the house painted two years ago, I pointed out the juniper bushes where the Towhees roost (and probably nest) to all of the contractors and threatened grievous bodily harm if any of the workers disturbed the area. Though I don't know what I'd have actually done, they knew I was very serious. To their great credit, the workers did an excellent job protecting my special birds' hideout.

Of course, their song is delightful and a joy to the ears. It's very similar to that of the Spotted Towhee. This is one of those bird sounds that makes summer so great. I just love these little birds! ☘

with wet wetlands was a huge treat. Bear River is known for its large population of Western (*right*) and Clark's Grebes. At this time of year they were courting, the couples swimming together and twisting their necks in tandem—a sight I've always wanted to see! Of course there were plenty of ducks, Double-crested Cormorants and American Coots, along with other grebes, gulls, shorebirds and American White Pelicans.

A relatively scarce bird in Colorado, seemingly thousands of Yellow-headed Blackbirds (*below*) clogged the roads and perched in the cattails. They were feasting on the dense clouds of midges that filled the air—and soon the



car. Thankfully, midges don't bite, so I just had to remember to keep from smiling too broadly! Swallows were also in abundance, in pursuit of those same midges. Marsh Wrens called from the sides of the road, and occasionally ventured into plain view where I could snap their portraits. A Northern Harrier flew back and forth over the drier fields, looking for lunch.

If the refuge was this birdy in mid-April (and I was there mid-day—not the best time to visit), I can only imagine what it will be like in May and June. I'd love to go back to see the grebes carrying their babies on their backs, and to photograph ducklings following their mamas through the marsh. And while I did see some American Avocets (*photo on front page*) and Long-billed Curlews, I'm sure there will be

more waders in other seasons. Sandhill Cranes also use the refuge as a rest stop during migration. I definitely intend to return, even though the Great Salt Lake is a full day's drive from our home in Colorado. Road trip, anyone? ☘



## SPEAKING TWITCHER: ANSWERS

THE LAST ISSUE FEATURED A LITTLE quiz on British birding terms. Here are the definitions:

1. **Blocker:** A bird that is rare in the area where you are birding, and hasn't been seen in ages.
2. **Boggie Bird:** We would know this as a nemesis bird—one we've been looking for, and by rights should have seen by now, but haven't although we'd really like to.
3. **BOP:** Bird of Prey
4. **Certs:** Those stray birds (vagrants) that appear on a regular basis.
5. **Crippler:** An amazing sighting, with the bird being both very rare and very big/beautiful/impressive. The idea is that the

overwhelming emotion of the moment leaves you unable to function.

6. **Dip out:** To miss seeing your target bird. The target bird (often a vagrant) is then called a dip.
7. **Dude:** A casual birdwatcher, who doesn't care how rare the bird is or if they have seen it before. They just enjoy looking at birds. Dudes usually stick to good weather and reasonable hours. This person is at the other end of the spectrum from a twitcher.
8. **Duff gen:** Bad information on where to find a specific bird, or other incorrect information about the sighting.
9. **Get gripped off:** When everyone else sees the target bird (usually a rarity), but, for a variety of reasons, you do not. Sometimes

competitive birders grip someone off on purpose, which is not at all nice.

10. **Old badger:** Derogatory term for an older, female birder who is looking a bit shopworn. What do they expect of someone who spends a lot of time outdoors in the sun and wind? ☘



A crippler,  
for sure!



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

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**Note**, continued from front page

destinations such as Chico Basin Ranch and the Brett Gray Ranch, even advanced birders won't be bored.

Field trips are only the beginning. Pikes Peak Community College has lined up a series of interesting and informative workshops, Venetucci Farm is going all-out with hours of activities, and many locations will be banding birds (including hummingbirds at the Starsmore Visitor and Nature Center). Some familiar faces will be presenting seminars on Flammulated Owls and Bugwatching, while Ted Floyd is the keynote speaker for Saturday's banquet.

The registration deadline is May 1, but field trips fill up quickly, so don't wait to sign up. The festival is a bargain at only \$20 per person. Many activities are included at that price, while others have a modest surcharge to cover expenses.

Be sure to visit the festival website to see what else will be going on (there's a lot more!) and to register. You'll find it at [PikesPeakBirdingAndNatureFestival.org](http://PikesPeakBirdingAndNatureFestival.org).

**Leslie Holzmann,**  
Aikorns Editor

## Flores' Funnies



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