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aikorns
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

BIRD BRAINS

By Leslie Holzmann

A lot of people don't like crows. There's something sort of spooky about them. Maybe that's because they're black, and black birds seem to encourage superstition. Why else would a flock of crows be called a "murder"? It's true that they're not as colorful as many other songbirds, and they do make pigs of themselves at feeders, but crows are fascinating. With Halloween approaching, this seems an appropriate time to take another look at these very common and highly intelligent birds.

A variety of websites describe crows, but these fascinating birds are more than a list of facts—much more. They are now considered one of the smartest animals in the world! Want proof?



When hunters fired shotguns at the Chatham crows, ... the birds figured out exactly how high to fly to escape the pellet range. When city workers made nightly rounds to disturb them, the crows learned that the workers clocked out at 11 p.m., and simply waited until 11:01 to head into town for the night.¹

As the residents of Chatham are learning, it's quite difficult to outsmart a crow! Crows have impressive memories. An article at Cracked.com stated: Crows have been known to change their entire migration pattern to avoid farms where even a single crow has been killed in the past. Generations upon generations later, they still remember specific houses where one measly bird has died.²



Take the case of Chatham, Ontario. Situated at the convergence of two major migratory routes, with a river to provide water and warmth and fields full of delicious crops, Chatham is an ideal rest stop for crows. Too ideal—the birds were everywhere, hundreds of thousands of them, noisy, messy,

annoying. They ripped open garbage bags, even learning which days of the week the trash was collected in each part of town. If the trash was placed in a solid container, the clever birds simply removed the lids. In an effort to control the population, the townspeople started shooting at them. According to one article,

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

TIME ON HUMMINGBIRD WINGS

There is an old saying: "Time flies when you're having fun." Well, I've decided that time flies on hummingbird wings. As quickly as these little gems buzz around, is just as quickly that summer has flown by. It is hard to believe that Labor Day is around the corner, school has started and birds are beginning to migrate. I've hardly had a chance to catch my breath and I'm left wondering where the time went. Whatever you did this summer, I hope it was rewarding and bird-filled.

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Coming programs

SEPTEMBER 16

Snap, Crackle, and Hop—Colorado Grasshoppers

Eric Eaton

OCTOBER 21

Birding Panama

Bill Maynard

NOVEMBER 11 (2ND WEDNESDAY)

Topic TBD

Ted Floyd

DECEMBER 19

Aiken Audubon Christmas Bird Count

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 November/December 2015 issue of the *Aikorns* is Wednesday, October 21.

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

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SEPTEMBER 16 / ERIC EATON

**SNAP, CRACKLE, AND HOP—
COLORADO GRASSHOPPERS**

Colorado is home to over 140 species of colorful, cryptic, and noisy grasshoppers. You'll find them from the prairies and plains to the steep slopes of the mountains. Few are pests, and their diversity and beauty rival that of birds. Join us for a peek into the mysterious world of these amazing insects.

Eric R. Eaton is principal author of the *Kaufman Field Guide to Insects of North America*. He has also been published in *Birds & Blooms*, *Ranger Rick*, *Missouri Conservationist*, *Orion*, and other popular journals.

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



OCTOBER 21 / BILL MAYNARD

**PANAMA IS MORE THAN A CANAL—
BIRDS, MONKEYS, ANTS, AND MORE**

"THE LAND IS ONE GREAT WILD, UNTIDY LUXURIANT HOTHOUSE MADE BY NATURE FOR HERSELF." —Charles Darwin

Bill Maynard is a former biology teacher at a private girls' high school in the Cleveland, Ohio, area. He has worked on bird- or plant-related research projects in South Florida, California, Arizona, and New Mexico. In Colorado he surveyed for Mountain Plovers and Black-tailed Prairie Dogs for the Department of Defense on Fort Carson and on Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site. He has worked for the American Birding Association as an editor and as a conference and convention planner. Bill enjoys exploring remote areas of Chico Basin Ranch and birding/wildlife photography in any Central or South American country.



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.

President's Message, continued from front page

I also want to take this opportunity to thank all of the board members who have given of their time and talent to make this chapter so successful. I would especially like to thank Gary Conover (Treasurer), Jackie Heyda (Conservation) and Debbie Barnes-Shankster (Programs). These three individuals have served for several years and are moving on from these positions. We are happy to announce that Linda Hodges will now serve as Conservation Chair. We are still looking for a new Treasurer and

a new Programs Chair. If you are interested, please contact me at 596-2916.

We've got an exciting year coming up with interesting programs so don't forget to mark your calendars! I look forward to seeing everyone as our new program year begins on September 16.

Christine A. Bucher,
Aiken Audubon President

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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, SEPTEMBER 5, 8 - 10 AM BIRDING/HIKING AT CLEAR SPRING RANCH

This event is sponsored by Bear Creek Nature Center and is listed here for your information.

ACTIVE ADULTS CLUB: Bring your walking shoes and binoculars. We will break into two groups, one for birding and one for hiking and take to the trails in this 970 acre park. Easy hiking on less than 5 miles of flat terrain. Cost is \$3 per nature center member, \$4 per nonmember. Adults only. For more information and to sign up, contact Jamie Bequette, 520-6388, jamiebequette@elpasoco.com.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 7 - 10:30 AM FOUNTAIN CREEK FALL BIRD COUNT

This event is sponsored by Fountain Creek Nature Center and is listed here for your information.

Fountain Creek Nature Center invites birding enthusiasts of all ages and abilities to participate in an ongoing citizen science project counting species and populations in Fountain Creek Regional Park. A \$5 donation for bird seed is requested. Reservations are required. Email Stephen.Getty@ColoradoCollege.edu, or call Fountain Creek at (719) 520-6745.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 9:30 - ? BUGS—AND MAYBE A BIRD OR TWO

Join Eric Eaton, trip leader and entomologist extraordinaire, as we go bugwatching in Homestead Regional Park. This open space near Peyton has a good variety of habitats, with plenty of bugs and birds. If time and interest allows, we'll also migrate out onto



the plains for a different assortment of insects, including the Great Crested Grasshopper (shown here). This is the perfect lead-up to Eric's grasshopper program on September 16.

We'll meet at the park. The parking lot has restrooms and is near an artificial lake. RSVP to Eric at bugeric247@gmail.com.

More trips online!

For the latest information on field trips and events:

www.AikenAudubon.com

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 8 - 10:30 AM PINELLO RANCH

Fall migration should be in progress so there should be a good deal of activity around the ranch's ponds, fields, and along Fountain Creek.

There is a \$9 fee for the ranch; please have exact change. Limit of 15 participants. For more information or to sign up, contact Mel Goff at melgoff@comcast.net

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 8 - 11 AM KETTLE CREEK LAKES

This trip will give participants a chance to bird a variety of habitats within a relatively small area. There are three lakes and a level trail along Kettle Creek. Bring water and a snack if you wish. Meet in the parking lot. The area is at the south end of the Air Force Academy.

For more information, directions, and to sign up, contact Risë at riserefb@comcast.net.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 7:30 AM - NOON CLEAR SPRING RANCH

Clear Spring Ranch is an El Paso County park that includes riparian, grassland and cropland. The trails are well maintained and the birds vary by season but should include sparrows, song birds, woodpeckers and raptors. Expect to walk 2 to 4 miles on wide relatively level trails.

Trip leader Gloria Nikolai has banded birds at CSR the past two years and is very familiar with the area.

The trip starts from the parking lot of the Ranch. Clear Spring Ranch is located off of I-25 at exit 123, south of Fountain. After exiting, head east under the road and turn in to the Clear Spring Ranch parking lot. While the trip officially ends at noon, participants can bring a lunch to eat after the field trip as there are picnic tables and an outhouse.

RSVP to Gloria at: glorianikolai@hotmail.com.

WE NEED YOU!

The Aiken board has openings for treasurer, program chair, and education chair. Descriptions and contact information are on the Aiken website—aikenaudubon.com/about-aiken-audubon-2/volunteer-with-aiken/.



Look for the
Aiken Audubon Society
Facebook page!

facebook.com/pages/Aiken-Audubon-Society

MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT UNDER THREAT

by Linda Hodges

You may have read that a recent House bill (HR 2578) contained an amendment seeking to defund enforcement of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), and that it had passed the House. Well, fortunately, the amendment was removed before it reached the Senate.

That's the good news.

The bad news is that the same Congressman, Jeff Duncan (R, SC), has proposed another bill—H.R. 493—which would undermine the MBTA and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. It would permanently alter the MBTA by removing the liability for birds taken “incidentally.”

According to the National Audubon Society, the bill would:

- Require 30-year eagle take permits to be automatically issued one year after a permit application is submitted under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Audubon strongly opposes the 30-year permit for Bald and Golden Eagles and this bill would worsen an already flawed approach.
- If HR 493 is enacted, bird “death traps” like unshielded power lines, waste oil pits and other modern hazards would no longer fall under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. These bird death traps can otherwise be avoided with low-cost mitigation measures like nets covering waste pits and bird scaring devices on power lines. But HR 493 ignores common sense, low cost, win-win solutions like these and mandates that the law not help these birds at all.

This bill is currently in the Subcommittee on Federal Lands. The ABA recommends contacting subcommittee representatives with your concerns, and Colorado Rep. Jared Polis (303.484.9596) serves on this committee. The bill specifically states that it is concerned with updating “avian protection laws” in order to support a “domestic energy strategy.”

Audubon strongly opposes HR 493.

PAWNEE NATIONAL GRASSLANDS UPDATE

The BLM is planning to auction off 79,487 acres, in 102 parcels, of underground mineral rights in the Pawnee National Grasslands in Weld County this coming November. This comes after lease sales of 25,000 acres this past May. The Pawnee covers 193,060 acres. Says Jeremy Nichols, the Golden-based climate- and energy-program director for WildEarth Guardians. “The bottom line is, when you go into the Pawnee now, the oil and gas industry has basically overtaken the entire landscape.”

For more information, check out this article in Westword: <http://www.westword.com/news/the-blm-just-sold-more-leases-on-the-pawnee-and-environmentalists-say-thats-for-the-birds-6965224>

WELCOME LINDA HODGES!

Linda is our new Conservation Chair, replacing Jackie Heyda. Thank you Jackie for all your hard work and a job well done, and thank you Linda for stepping up and volunteering!

NEWS & NOTES

by Jackie Heyda

LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN CONSERVATION IN SE COLORADO

The May, 2015 issue of *Birding* (the magazine published by the American Birding Association) had an article about the Lesser Prairie-Chicken in Southeastern Colorado.

The Lesser Prairie-Chicken occurs in only five states—Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico. According to this article, “Populations have declined from an estimate of millions before 1900 to approximately 17,600 in 2013”.

In southeastern Colorado, many populations of the Prairie-Chicken are on private land, so conservation by landowners is very important. Rangeland management, and conservation recovery programs and enhancement, are the two key aspects of Lesser Prairie-Chicken habitat in Colorado.

For more information on this issue, contact Casey Cardinal, who is from Lamar, Colorado. His e-mail address is casey.cardinal@co.usda.gov

SAVING SPECIES

“To save the most species, conservationists might do best to save the common ones they depend on.” This comment is from an article titled “Tree of Life” that is in the June 8, 2015 issue of *High Country News*. Tom Whitham came out west in 1973 to pursue a biology degree at the University of Utah. He imagined the west as untamed and thought that the west was still too big and sparsely populated to be threatened. He thought that the environment should be left alone and nature could often heal itself.

This is a very interesting article by Cally Carswell and can be found at www.hcn.org/issues/47.10 Then go the article “Genetic research foundation for bold conservation strategies.”

...continued from front page

Then there is the study that looked at crows' ability to recognize human faces.³ To us humans, all American Crows look pretty much the same. Would they in turn see us as looking more or less identical? It turns out that not only do crows recognize individuals, but they can share that knowledge with other crows, including their offspring!

In the study, reported in the New York Times, one person was chosen to trap and band some crows, while others walked around without bothering any birds. Somehow, the birds in the study were able to communicate what the bander looked like in enough detail so that birds that had never seen that particular human before still recognized him (and attacked him). Yikes.

Memory is only one aspect of intelligence. How about problem-solving? It turns out that crows excel at that as well. If you've ever read Aesop's Fables, you might remember the story of the crow that dropped pebbles into a jar of water, raising the level until it was high enough for him to get a drink. It turns out that Aesop knew something. Scientists tried re-enacting the



scenario, and the crows caught on right away.^{4,5} In fact, they were as good at solving this problem as 5- to 7-year-old children!

Not only can crows use tools, in at least one instance, a crow made a tool:

In a landmark 2002 experiment, investigators watched as a [New Caledonian] crow called Betty spontaneously bent a piece of wire into a hook to snag some food. (It was the first time she'd ever encountered wire, but that wasn't going to keep her from lunch.)⁵

This behavior isn't surprising, given that wild members of this species will "pluck, smooth and bend twigs and grass stems to procure a variety of foodstuffs."⁶

These are just a few examples of how crows are not at all "bird brains." They've been known to place nuts in front of cars, so the weight of the car will crack open the shell (and they wait for the green walk sign before venturing out into traffic).⁷ They play tricks on one another. They have a complex social structure, with regional and family dialects and behavior patterns. They'll unzip backpacks to reach the tasty lunch inside. In short, crows are amazing birds.

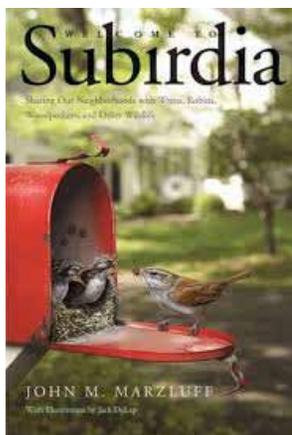
There's even a popular video of a crow sledding down a steep roof on a plastic saucer.⁸ It appears that crows are smart enough to know when take a break and enjoy life. That's a lot smarter than many humans! ☘

NOTES:

1. www.theglobeandmail.com/life/a-murder-of-crows/article1091590/
2. www.cracked.com/article_19042_6-terrifying-ways-crows-are-way-smarter-than-you-think_p2.html
3. www.nytimes.com/2008/08/26/science/26crow.html?_r=1&
4. journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0092895
5. time.com/42068/crows-intelligence-animals/
6. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corvus_%28genus%29
7. www.pbs.org/lifeofbirds/brain/
8. www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dWw9GLcOeA

BIRDING SUBIRDIA

by Jackie Heyda



John Marzluff's new book, *Welcome to Subirdia*, holds that the suburbs hold a surprising variety of creatures and can often increase diversity.

For example, the Pileated Woodpecker, which lives in New England's deep forests, can also be found in Seattle, and the Cooper's Hawk may be the most common urban raptor in the world.

Birds living in cities, like the House Sparrow, can develop different local races which have evolved over less than 50 years. Cliff Swallows, who nest under freeway bridges, are developing longer, thinner wings for maneuverability. Some birds, such as the Pinyon Jay, are laying more eggs in areas where they are fed—and people feeding birds use nearly

1.25 million tons of birdseed every year. (This, of course, often leads to more birds being killed by cats.)

As the cover blurb points out, this book is full of "Marzluff's patented mix of hard science, anecdote, and humor." ☘

KEEP FEEDERS CLEAN!

THE BEST WAY TO REDUCE THE potential spread of feeder/bird diseases is to adhere to the following guidelines:

- Clean feeders and bird baths on a regular basis with a 10 percent bleach solution.
- Use nonporous feeders that are easy to clean.
- Avoid using moldy seed.
- Keep the ground area around the feeder as clean as possible. Rake to remove accumulated seeds beneath the feeder. In winter, shovel fresh snow over the area.
- Put out only the amount of seed that birds can consume within a day or two.



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

AUTO-CORRECTED BIRDS

by Heidi Eaton

I USE MY TABLET TO KEEP A BIRD LIST WHEN ERIC AND I are traveling. We are often amused at the way the auto-correct tries to change the bird names. Some aren't that funny, like it always wants heron, blackbird, and starling to be plural (I can kind of understand why, with blackbirds and starlings). Here are some others:

Northern Barrier	Yellow-throated Video
Common Crackle	Soar
Common Nightshade	Spotted Sandpaper
American Avowed	Brown-headed Cowgirl
Brown Thrashed	Summer Manager
Northern Shoveled	American Restart
Gladwell	Carolina Wrench
Killeen	Indigo Hunting
Long-billed Switcher	Double-crested Corcoran
Dublin	Northern Paula
Eastern Phone	Ballard
Yellow-trumped Warbler	House Wrench
Black-capped Chicken	Great Crested Leather
Eastern Songbird	Belted Finisher
Western Songbird	American Pigeon
American Goldfish	Greater Yellowing
Pleated Woodpecker	Wallet

Flores' Funnies



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