



January/February 2017
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aikorns
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

COLD BRRRRDS!

Story and photos by *Leslie Holzmann*

Brrrrr. I woke up this morning to -17 degrees, and the weather folks are predicting cold and more cold. While I ventured out to refill the bird feeders, and I need to dig out the car later (something about mailing Christmas gifts), for the most part I can snuggle up at home, with the thermostat in the 60s and a cup of warm tea defrosting me from the inside out.

The birds aren't so lucky.

As I watched my feeders through the window, I wondered—how in the world do these little balls of fluff stay alive, much less warm, when the temperatures are this low? Most sensible birds migrate (although that option also has its dangers), but many of my yard birds are here year round. How do they survive?

With their high metabolisms, clearly these birds need to eat, and eat a lot! I've been carrying gallons of black oil sunflower seeds to the feeders and providing daily refills to my suet cages. Good thing this cold weather doesn't last all winter, or my bird budget would be through the roof!

In very cold weather, suet is particularly important as a high energy food. I've noticed birds that normally prefer seed (such as juncos and finches)



crowded around a suet feeder. I'm glad I have two suet stations separated by the width of our driveway. The nuthatches have monopolized one feeder, and they hang there all day. The block is frozen so solidly that it takes a lot of pecking to make a meal.

Most of the seed stays on the platform feeder, but enough falls off to attract a flock of ground feeding juncos. Imagine wanting to walk around barefoot in the snow! My feeders and poles are metal (the squirrels ate the wooden ones), and I cringe to see little bird feet holding on to the frozen steel. How do birds manage to avoid frostbitten toes?



...continued on page 5

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy 2017! I would like to thank everyone and anyone who braved the very cold 17 December weather and still participated in the 2016 Colorado Springs Christmas Bird Count. This one will be remembered for a long time. It will be quite interesting to view Tyler's final report and see how the species and individual numbers add up.

Mark your calendar and remember that January's program is happening on the 25th, not our

...continued on page 3

Coming programs

JANUARY 25 (4TH WEDNESDAY)

Owl

Paul Bannick

FEBRUARY 15

Eggs

Gloria Nikolai

(Includes our annual "Death by Chocolate" potluck buffet)

MARCH 15

Birding Cuba

John Drummond

APRIL 19

Volunteering with Colorado Parks & Wildlife

April Estep

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!

Note: The deadline for the March/April 2017 issue of the *Aikorns* is Wednesday, February 15.

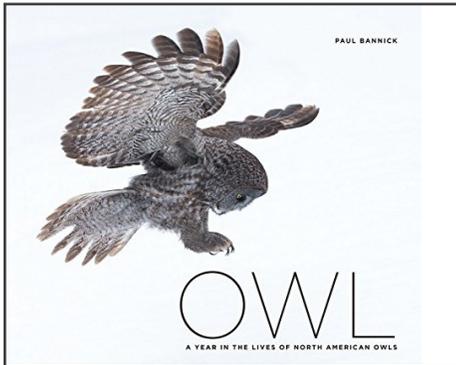
/// Contact the editor, *Leslie Holzmann*, at aikenaudubon@gmail.com, or call (719) 964-3197.

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JANUARY 25 / PAUL BANNICK OWL: A YEAR IN THE LIVES OF NORTH AMERICAN OWLS

Award-winning photographer Paul Bannick will present a new program featuring video, sound, stories from the field and several dozen new images from his brand-new book: *Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls*. Paul uses intimate yet dramatic images to follow owls through the course of one year and in their distinct habitats.



We will witness the four seasons on territory, as each stage in an owl's life is chronicled through rare images: courtship, mating, and nesting in spring; fledging and feeding of young in summer; dispersal and gaining independence in fall; and, finally, winter's migrations and competitions for food. His program shows how owls use the unique resources available to them in each habitat to face those challenges. All 19 species found in Canada and the United States are featured in photos, video and narrative throughout the book, with a special focus on the Northern Pygmy-Owl, Great Gray Owl, Burrowing Owl, and Snowy Owl.

Owl is a stunning follow-up to Bannick's bestselling title, *The Owl and the Woodpecker*, giving bird lovers yet another gorgeous photographic tribute, engaging natural history, and a compelling call to preserve the habitats that sustain these most iconic of birds.

Paul will be selling his books after his presentation. This is a perfect opportunity to get your autographed copy. Finally, please note that the January meeting will be on the *fourth* Wednesday of January.

FEBRUARY 15 / GLORIA NIKOLAI EGGTACULAR!



Have you ever wondered about eggs? How are they made? What makes them so large or small, blue or speckled, elongated or circular? The world of eggs and egg-laying is full of interesting factoids. Come to a fact-filled presentation down egg lane with Gloria Nikolai.



Gloria Nikolai is a professor at Pikes Peak Community College and whiles away her free time exploring nature and the natural world. She has traveled far and wide across Canada and the United States with goals of branching out much farther. There is nary a bit of bird information to be had that she doesn't find fascinating.

DEATH BY CHOCOLATE! According to tradition, our February meeting includes a potluck dessert: Death by Chocolate. Bring something yummy (and preferably chocolate!) to share, and come at 6:30—early enough to sample all the goodies before the program begins at 7 pm.

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.

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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, JANUARY 14, 8:30 – 11 AM **FOUNTAIN CREEK WINTER 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 migration. \$5 per person. Reservations required, 520-6745. This citizen science project is sponsored by Fountain Creek Nature Center, and is listed here for your convenience.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY FEBRUARY 4, 8:30 AM – 3:30 PM **21ST ANNUAL EAGLE DAY FESTIVAL** **AT LAKE PUEBLO STATE PARK**

Join us for the annual Audubon trip to Pueblo Reservoir in search of our national bird, the Bald Eagle. We will explore back roads in search of Golden Eagles, Ferruginous, Red-Tailed and Rough-Legged Hawks, Merlin, Kestrel and Prairie Falcons on the way to Pueblo.

At the Reservoir, we will take some time to enjoy activities at the Division of Parks & Wildlife and Arkansas Valley Audubon Society's Eagle Day Celebration. Prior years featured Air Force Academy falcons, rehab bird releases and a visit to the Pueblo Raptor Center.

Please bring a sack lunch and a full tank of gas. We will be outside for short periods with a few short walks if the weather is bearable. This is a great trip for beginners!

Meet at Broadmoor Towne Center near the Starbucks. Plan to return by mid afternoon. A parks pass is required for entry to the state park. Please call Gary Conover, (719) 635-2505 for more information. Reservations not required.



PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN

More trips online!

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

SAVE THE DATE: MAY 19 – 21:



President's Message, continued from front page

regular third Wednesday meeting date. Paul Bannick will present his latest book. If you received a copy for Christmas, bring it along and have it autographed by the author. Paul will also have books available for purchase—cash or checks please. And remember our annual “Death by Chocolate” event at the February meeting. Bring your most decadent chocolate fare and embrace the sugar coma.

I hope many of you were able to go and see the Purple Sandpiper. It was a lifer for me and I made my family stay nearly an hour while I observed the bird. It didn't seem reasonable to drive all that way and not spend a bit of time with the objective. A fun time was had by all.

Risë Foster-Bruder
President, Aiken Audubon Society

UN-COMMON GRACKLES

by *Leslie Holzmann*

It seems no one likes grackles. Granted, Boat-tailed Grackles (in Florida) and Great-tailed Grackles (in Texas) are pretty obnoxious. Huge flocks fill palm trees, bombarding the ground (and any parked cars) below with their stinking droppings, and shrieking and squawking from the moment the sun comes up—or even earlier. Compared to their ill-mannered cousins, Common Grackles are almost demure.

Perhaps their black plumage turns people off. Black is pretty boring.



But look what happens when the sun hits their feathers. They're absolutely, breathtakingly gorgeous. That's why I think they should be called “Gleaming Grackle” instead. (I considered Resplendent, Iridescent, and Magnificent,

but Gleaming Grackle has that alliteration going for it.) Do you think I can convince the ornithologists? ☿

DRAINING BIG JOHNSON RESERVOIR

Have you noticed in the past few months that the water level at Big Johnson Reservoir has fallen with each visit? Have you wondered what the heck is going on? It turns out that Fountain Mutual Irrigation Company (FMIC), the owner of the reservoir, is draining the reservoir in order to make repairs on the dam and do some dredging. This is to bring the reservoir back to capacity.

According to Fountain Valley News: “On the dredging side of the equation the capacity has been diminishing through the decades as sediment settles out of the millions of gallons of water that flow through the reservoir each year. For the past 15 years or so when they begin releasing water you notice an island appearing on the east side and as they continue to release water the island becomes a peninsula. The water is then concentrated in a pool by the outlet. Previous attempts to restore the capacity of the reservoir without draining it have proved to be cost prohibitive, not effective or both. The work is expected to take a couple of years and the reservoir will remain dry for that time.”

It will be interesting to see whether the Bald Eagles that often nest at nearby Fountain Valley School will decide to nest there this year, and whether the reservoir will provide enough food for them if they do.

PINELLO RANCH LEASE WILL NOT BE RENEWED

According to David Rudin, Education Coordinator at Pinello Ranch and Venetucci Farm, the Pikes Peak Community Foundation (PPCF) will not be renewing its lease on Pinello in 2017. As of February 1, Colorado Springs Utilities (CSU) will be putting the property to its own use. David says that the property will soon be the site of a lineman school, with the buildings being used as classrooms, and the field to the south for practice poles. There’s a chance that David will be allowed to continue education efforts at Pinello, but that has yet to be determined.

In addition, a wetlands mitigation project has been initiated on the property, per Kirsta Scherff-Norris, Senior Wildlife Biologist at CSU. It will create 9.8 acres of wetlands in three separate areas. Construction work on the wetlands is expected to be completed by September of 2017.

As for Venetucci, who knows what the future holds? With PPCF divesting itself of its community projects, Venetucci may be on the chopping block before long. On a positive note, however; their self-guided birding tours are due to open this spring.

AIKEN CANYON UPDATE

Now for some good news! You may recall that Transit Mix Concrete recently applied for a quarrying permit on property adjacent to Aiken Canyon. To virtually everyone’s surprise, on October 27 the Colorado Mined Land Reclamation Board denied their application. Water and wildlife issues were the board’s main concerns. Though Transit Mix will likely appeal the decision, for now, opponents of the quarry are welcoming the unexpected victory.

JOIN THE CONSERVATION ACTION TEAM

Are you interested in learning about regional conservation issues? Might you be willing to send off an email to a legislator to protect a property or a species that you care about? Aiken Audubon is looking to put together a list of folks who could be contacted for issues of import. No commitment required. If this sparks an interest, please contact Linda Hodges at (719) 635-5551 or hikerhodges@gmail.com.

GETTING GREEN LAWS

(formerly the Legislative Forum)

Date: Saturday, February 25, 2017

What: Getting Green Laws, co-sponsored by Audubon of Greater Denver and the Sierra Club

When: 8:00 am to 1:30 pm

Where: First Plymouth Church, 3501 S. Colorado Boulevard, Denver

New: First 20 people under 30 who register will get in free!

Audubon of Greater Denver and the Sierra Club are teaming up for a great session on Getting Green Laws passed on Feb. 25, 2017. Come meet other activists, find out how to contact your legislators, which legislators are major players, how to effectively communicate environmental concerns to them, and what the hot environmental topics are this year.

Legislators are invited for lunch and further discussions, which gives us a chance to meet and engage them. We’ve had anywhere from one to five accept our invitation.

The cost of the Forum is \$12 in advance and \$15 at the door. You can register and pay on line at <https://sierraclub.org/rocky-mountain-chapter/blog/2016/11/getting-green-laws-legislative-forum>. Alternatively, call the Audubon office at (303) 973-9530, Monday – Thursday, 9 am to 2 pm to use a credit card, or send your check to: Audubon of Greater Denver, 9308 S. Wadsworth Blvd., Littleton, CO 80128.

If you are interested in volunteering at the Forum, mention this when you register and be sure to leave a phone number where you can be contacted.

Remember: Decisions are made by those who show up!

For the tentative agenda, visit <https://aikenaudubon.com/conservation/conservation-news/2979-2/>

Turns out that bird legs and feet are pretty frost-proof. They operate on a system of levers—tendons—and the muscles (along with their good blood supply) are all tucked up under the feathers where they are well-insulated. Of course, wet feet can still freeze onto the metal posts, but there is very little heat lost through a bird’s legs and feet. (That also explains how ducks and shorebirds manage to stand around in cold water all the time.)

Thankfully, the wind we had earlier has died down and things are relatively calm (for Colorado). The birds are daring to emerge from the shelter of the bushes and trees. With our Ponderosa pines and scrub oak (which still has dead leaves attached to the twigs and branches), and a number of nest boxes, there are plenty of places in our yard for birds to huddle for warmth.

I know that Pygmy Nuthatches will crowd into an empty nest box or roosting box to share body heat, but I was surprised to see this same behavior on an exposed tree trunk. The entire time I was outside taking pictures (granted, not very long!), these three nestled birds never moved.



In addition to providing food and shelter, offering liquid water is another way we can help birds survive severe cold. My electric bird bath is managing to keep its contents from freezing, and

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

We’ve given birds some pretty bizarre names. Does the Secretarybird take notes? Who does the Wandering Tattler tattle on? Do chatterers and babblers ever shut up? Here’s a list of birds that may be unfamiliar to us here in North America. Can you figure out which are the real birds, and which are made up? Answers are on the back page.

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Bare-faced Go-away-bird | 12. Large Frogmouth |
| 2. Bare-faced Lyrebird | 13. Lark-like Brushrunner |
| 3. Colorful Puffleg | 14. Laughing Falcon |
| 4. Dollarbird | 15. Macaroni Penguin |
| 5. Familiar Chat | 16. Mysterious Starling |
| 6. Firewood-gatherer | 17. New Zealand Kaka |
| 7. Freckled Duck | 18. Singing Quail |
| 8. Giggling Guan | 19. Spectacled Tyrant |
| 9. Green Hermit | 20. Streaky-breasted Flufftail |
| 10. Horned Screamer | 21. Wrybill |
| 11. Invisible Rail | 22. Zigzag Heron |

it has a steady stream of customers. The evaporating water vapor has rimmed the pan with hoar frost.

It doesn’t get this cold every year, but it happens often enough that the birds know how to manage. Those who survive will pass their hardy genes to their offspring, as they have for thousands of generations. Mother Nature isn’t always kind to the individual, but the species will endure. ☘

OUR HABITAT HERO!

Aiken Audubon is proud to announce that our very own chapter treasurer, Bonnie Morgan, is a Habitat Hero!

Audubon describes Habitat Heroes as “people who practice a form of landscape stewardship called ‘wildscaping,’ landscaping designed to provide habitat for wildlife, large and small.”

Here are the principles and what Bonnie did to meet them. Her yard earned Gold, which is the highest award level. Congratulations, Bonnie!



Plant bird- and butterfly-friendly species for year for year-round food, cover, and shelter

- Hummingbird plants,
- Bird bath year round
- Birdhouses
- Scrub shelter
- Grow plants with berries and seeds for the birds and squirrels
- Let sunflowers planted by squirrels bloom, and leave over winter for the birds

Use less water (and thus less energy) by planting natives and regionally adapted plants

- Xeriscape principles that we learned from CSU: https://www.csu.org/Pages/xeri_scapebasics.aspx
- Reduce lawn areas--grow edibles, perennials, and trees and shrubs where appropriate where my bluegrass lawn died I put in xeriscape garden

Reduce or eliminate chemical use to make a more sustainable and healthier world for all of us

- Hand pull weeds

Control invasive plants that degrade habitat in and beyond our yards

- Russian Olive, Salt Cedar (Tamarix)

/// You too can be a Habitat Hero. Learn how at <http://rockies.audubon.org/whats-a-habitat-hero>



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

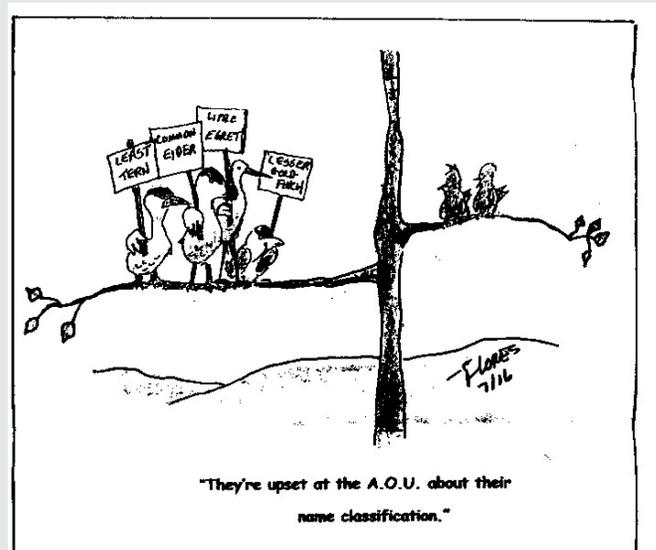
AIKEN'S WEATHER CANCELLATION POLICY

Sometimes inclement weather may cause us to cancel an Aiken meeting. If this happens, a decision will be made by 1 pm on the meeting date. Notification will be placed on our website, on our Facebook page and sent out through our email notification list. In addition, a message will be posted on the CoBirds Listserv, to which many of our members subscribe. If there is any doubt, please do not hesitate to contact any of Aiken board members via telephone. Always, your safety is first so use your own judgement when coming to a meeting.



**Look for the
 Aiken Audubon Society
 Facebook page!**
facebook.com/pages/Aiken-Audubon-Society

Flores' Funnies



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

Answers to "What's in a Name?": I invented the Bare-faced Lyrebird and the Giggling Guan. The rest are all actual birds.