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aikorns
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

BIRDING AUF DEUTCHLAND

Photos and story by Tanja Britton

It is a stroke of good fortune that my father's residence is located a mere three miles from one of Germany's 30 so-called "hotspots of natural variety," islands of re-naturalized habitat wrested from the agricultural or industrial landscape. They are living proof that nature, given the opportunity, will reclaim its own.



Since the regional branch of the country's largest conservation group (Naturschutzbund, aka NaBu) completed this particular site in Rhineland-Palatinate in 2011, a minimum of 160 bird species have re-populated this oasis, along with additional animals and plants. It is formed by a creek, called Seebach, a tributary of

the Rhine River, one of Europe's major shipping arteries. In order to facilitate nautical traffic and to prevent flooding which had occurred throughout the centuries, the large stream and its side channels had been straightened, resulting in loss of habitat. Once the creek in question was allowed to once again leave its prescribed bed and to flood fields, it created ponds and wetlands which attract numerous resident and migratory birds. A viewing platform and an observation hut invite the nature lover to linger and observe the surroundings.

In another bit of luck, my visit in the fall of 2016 coincided with Euro Birdwatch, an annual continent-wide bird count in early October that also covers this very location. One of my regrets is my non-interest in birding when I grew up in Germany. Except for the most frequent feathered denizens, I did not know most of their names until recently. I also did not know any birders, and groups like MAMBO do not seem to exist even today, or are not easy to find.

Birds in Germany appear more skittish than in the United States. I wonder if this is, at least partially, in response to the fact that they are still considered a culinary delicacy by some societies along their migratory routes. So when I had the chance to set out with four experienced local birders for this European bird event, I jumped at it, benefitting from a higher number of avian sightings than I could have reached on my own, and expanding my German vocabulary. Among the rarities I surely would

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

THE EVOLUTION OF A BIRDER

I am often asked which field guide is best or what binoculars should be purchased. The field guide question is easy, I show them whatever I have with me at the time. For binoculars, I often hear "Purchase the best quality you can afford at the time."

When I began birding in 1982, I used an ancient, very heavy set of binos that belonged to my father. I don't know what magnification they were or which company manufactured them. But they are still in Minnesota and usable. For my first trip to Costa

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Coming programs

MARCH 15

Birding Cuba

John Drummond

APRIL 19

Volunteering with Colorado Parks & Wildlife

April Estep

MAY 17

Habitat Heroes

Bonnie Morgan & Linda Hodges

NO PROGRAMS OVER THE SUMMER

See you September 20!

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!

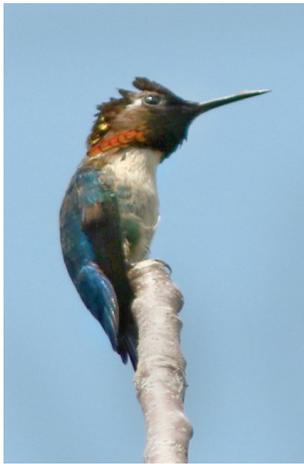
Note: The deadline for the May/Summer 2017 issue of the *Aikorns* is Wednesday, April 19.

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

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MARCH 15 / JOHN DRUMMOND BIRDING CUBA



Cuba is the largest island in the West Indies. Its natural beauty and high level of endemism attract naturalists from all over the world. Until very recently, visits by US citizens were not normally permitted. Now, tourist permits are available from the US government, as long as the visit falls under one of twelve allowed purposes.

John Drummond was part of a group that visited Cuba in April, 2016. They were led by Arturo Kirkconnell, Jr., the son of Arturo Kirkconnell, Sr., who is the author of Cuba's definitive bird guide, *Birds of Cuba*.

Cuba contains a wide variety of habitats—tropical forests, palm savanna, mangroves, coastal wetlands, and coral islands—all of which support 27 endemic birds, a further 22 West Indian endemics, plus a large number of North American wintering migrants. John's presentation illustrates his search for these endemic birds, including the national bird of Cuba, the Cuban Trogon, and the World's smallest bird, the Bee Hummingbird. Along the way we'll

enjoy some photos of the old world culture that still exists on this isolated island.

John started birdwatching in his native England as a teenager. His 35 years in the oil industry allowed him to travel extensively on business, using his free time to bird. His world list is approaching 8,000 species! Moving to Colorado from Virginia in 2006, John became active in the birding community. Some of his contributions have included sitting on the DFO Board member, CFO trip leader, membership in the Colorado Rare Bird Committee, and acting as a regional coordinator for the new Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas. He's currently a partner and trip leader for Partnership for International Birding. John is a popular field trip leader and speaker for Aiken Audubon.

APRIL 19 / APRIL ESTEP VOLUNTEERING FOR COLORADO PARKS & WILDLIFE

Do you love beautiful scenery, getting fresh air, and that great feeling after a hard day's work? How would you like to meet friends, learn a new skill, and work together as part of a project team? Colorado Parks and Wildlife has a long and rich history of counting volunteers as valuable members of our team, with some being involved for over 20 years! Volunteers serve in a variety of roles including hosts, naturalists, wildlife transporters, trail workers, assisting CPW staff and much, much more.

Among the over 200 current job listings, you can volunteer for these bird-related opportunities: bird nest monitoring, the statewide raptor monitoring project, and bluebird monitoring.

April Estep is a wildlife conservation biologist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Among her other responsibilities, she monitors breeding birds, such as the Perigrines that breed on Cheyenne Mountain, and the bluebird trails in the SE section of the state.



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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.

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 8:30 AM - ? **TIGER BEETLE HUNT IN LAKE** **PUEBLO STATE PARK**

Tiger beetles are the insect equivalent of gaudy shorebirds: run, stop, run again... fly a short distance when frightened. Join Eric Eaton as we seek these metallic emerald and ruby jewels along the Arkansas River at Lake Pueblo State Park. Bring your close-focusing binoculars and camera or phone to view these common but challenging predators of the beach. Should the weather be under 65° F and/or totally overcast, the trip will be re-scheduled to Saturday, April 22. We will surely get something on either day.

This trip is limited to 12 participants. Drivers need an annual state parks pass or will have to purchase a day pass (\$7) or, if you have a DV (Disabled Veteran) license plate, entry is free. Contact Eric Eaton at bugeric247@gmail.com to sign up and for meeting instructions.



Cicindela splendida

PHOTO: ERIC EATON

SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 8:00 AM - NOON **WIDFIELD COMMUNITY PARK &** **CREWS GULCH REGIONAL TRAIL**

As many of you know, birders recently provided input for the Widefield Community Park Master Plan. But many don't know that the park incorporates the Crews Gulch Regional Trail that goes all the way from the Bluestem Prairie Open Space surrounding Big Johnson Reservoir down to the Willow Springs Ponds in Fountain Creek Regional Park. Water runs year-round in Crews Gulch.

The primary purpose of this outing is to familiarize birders with this largely neglected (and in some places possibly rather trashed) trail that in season hosts birds such as Lincoln Sparrow, Mississippi Kite, Cooper's Hawk, and American Goldfinch. Often too narrow and suburban to be a birder's paradise, the presence of water and a little open space can nonetheless allow for some nice birds in this area. We'll start at the parking lot and head over to the underpass access to McCrae Reservoir (Carp Lake). The underpass usually contains an inch or so of water so be prepared or you can choose to wait and bird the area of the plane crash monument. Then we'll head down along the disc golf course following the water through the park.

This trip will likely finish before noon unless you are interested in the upper portion of the trail. People needing early departure have an option to leave at the half-way point of this out-and-back walk if they can arrange a car at the Willow Springs Ponds.

Meet at the parking lot just off Fontaine Blvd. This trip is limited to 15 participants. To sign up, contact Diana Beatty at otowi33.33@gmail.com.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19, 2017, 7:30 AM - NOON **(RAIN DATE IS APRIL 26TH)** **RAMAH SWA**

Join Jeannie Mitchell and John Drummond for a trip to Ramah State Wildlife Area. Shorebirds should be there in good numbers, as well as waterfowl and perhaps some early migrants.

Meet at Falcon Safeway parking lot. This trip is limited to 15 people. To sign up and for more information, please contact Jeannie Mitchell at vancerus@earthlink.net.



SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 7:00/7:30 AM - ? **AIKEN CANYON PRESERVE**



Join Gary Conover in Aiken Canyon Preserve, a 1,621-acre Nature Conservancy-managed state property named after Charles Aiken, a U.S. surveyor and ornithologist. The preserve has top quality pinon/juniper scrublands habitat with islands of Ponderosa Pine and spruce/fir in the upper canyon. Ash-throated Flycatcher, Juniper Titmouse, and all Colorado species of jays, nuthatches and chickadees are possible.

This is a four mile hike over uneven hilly terrain. It is moderately strenuous so wear sturdy walking/hiking shoes. Bring plenty of water, snacks, sunscreen, hat, etc.

Meet at the Broadmoor Towne Center near the Starbucks and Affordable Dentures at 7:00 am or at the Aiken Canyon parking lot at 7:30 am (16 miles south of Lake Ave. off Hwy 115—3350 Turkey Canon Ranch Rd, Colorado Springs, CO, 80926). The parking lot is a right turn off Hwy. 115 across from the Turkey Canon Recreation suite on Fort Carson. Please contact Gary Conover, (719) 635-2505 or garylge@yahoo.com for more information.

More trips online!

For the latest information on field trips and events:

www.AikenAudubon.com

CITY'S TREE REMOVAL PROJECTS

Beginning in mid-January, the city of Colorado Springs began cutting swaths of ponderosa pine, Douglas fir and scrub oak in Stratton Open Space as part of a fire-mitigation plan. Fearful that the city foresters might not be aware of potential owls and other raptors nesting in the area, Aiken contacted them about their project. To the city's credit, they altered their plans to clear out an area near a Cooper's Hawk nest before nesting season began. Additionally, they hope to wrap up the project by the end of March, which will avoid disturbance of most nesting avifauna. It's upsetting, however, that the foresters didn't seek input from anyone in the birding community.

Steve Getty and I have spent a good deal of time on the property, and are concerned about the vast amount of understory that is being removed, as well as a plan to dramatically clear a birdy riparian area along the Stratton Springs Path. Many of you wrote to the forester, asking that a greater portion of the understory be kept intact. It remains to be seen if the city will comply.

The project will continue in parts of Austin Bluffs Open Space and Bear Creek Canyon. If any of you are aware of owl/raptor nests on those properties, please let me know.

KIOWA CREEK SANCTUARY

In response to citizens' and Aiken Audubon's outcry over clear-cutting on part of this Black Forest, Audubon-owned property last year, work on a habitat master plan has begun. Alison Holloran, who heads Audubon Rockies, has been working on how to better manage KCS with Dr. Rick Reynolds and Sandy Boyce of the USFS, as well as Ty Woodward, whose work is funded through both the Natural Resource Conservation Service and Bird Conservation of the Rockies. Though logging has resumed, it's now focused on charred areas along the eastern edge of the property, where long-horned beetles have begun to invade. In addition, the USFS has marked trees to be saved.

We are pleased to see the involvement of these agencies, and look forward to getting back onto the property to do some birding.



ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

The Aiken Audubon board recently agreed to sign on to a letter by The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) to the Western Governors Association (WGA). The CBD opposes the WGA's policy resolution and recommendations, which the CBD felt would significantly weaken the Endangered Species Act. Audubon Colorado Council signed on to the letter on behalf of Colorado's Audubon chapters.

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.

WIDEFIELD COMMUNITY PARK MASTER PLAN



In the recent draft master plan, I recommended action items include the installation of a seasonal floating wildlife observation platform on McCrae Reservoir, and improvements to the tunnel leading to the reservoir under Fontaine Boulevard. It will likely be five to ten years before funding allows implementation.

The draft master plan may be viewed at <http://adm.elpasoco.com/CommunityServices/planning/Documents/Widefield%20Community%20Park%20Master%20Plan/WCP-Master-Plan-Draft-020917-Web.pdf>

QUARRY APPEAL

Alas, the decision to deny the opening of a quarry off Hwy. 115 and adjacent to Aiken Canyon, hasn't stopped Transit Mix Concrete (TMC). After recently asking for a reconsideration of the decision, TMC has now withdrawn that petition, and will submit a new application. We'll keep you posted.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on National Audubon issues and actions, go to the Audubon Action Center, audubonaction@audubon.org.

SAVE THE DATE: MAY 19 – 21:



... continued from front page

have missed were Dunlins, Little Stints, Spotted Redshanks, and Common Greenshanks. Just thinking of shorebirds puts me into a state of complete confusion.

After count day I continued to frequent this enclave. One morning, I happened upon one adult and one juvenile Mute Swan, as yet asleep in a pond, seemingly without a worry in the



world. Only when Eurasian Coots and Common Moorhen approached did they pull their elegant necks from under their wings, survey their watery realm regally, and commence their morning toilette.

A flock of Graylag Geese interrupted the silence as they circled noisily before landing in the water, where they continue their garrulous chatter.

I typically encountered Great Egrets, Gray Herons, Little Grebes, Mallards, Eurasian Green-winged Teals, Tufted Ducks, Gadwalls, and a lone Common Shelduck. Common Buzzards are, indeed, common, but I got lucky on a few occasions and saw Red Kites and Eurasian Marsh Harriers. Cormorants, Common Kingfisher, Common Snipe, and Northern Lapwing also counted among the regulars. Some of the smaller callers were Eurasian Wrens, European Stonechats, Common Reed Buntings, and Northern Wheatear.



One of Europe's most abundant and most gregarious little birds are Great Tits, as cheerful to behold as are chickadees in America, to whom they are related.

Sunrise and sunset painted the boggy, reedy scenery in warm auburn hues and the air was filled with the waxing or waning of bird calls. I immersed myself in this sanctuary as often as I could.

During a previous trip to Germany I was gladdened to learn of the successful increase of the White Stork population in Western Europe. This thriving ecological niche is the second encouraging example of what can be accomplished when humans put heads and hands together. ☘

President's Message, continued from front page

Rica in 1994, I used an 8x24, compact Pentax. I still have them but the rubber eyecups have been torn and taped and are pretty much unusable.

Knowing what I was missing, by my next Costa Rica trip in 1996 I had upgraded to my current pair of 10x42, Swarovski binoculars. They have served me well these 20+ years and I should really send them in to be cleaned, etc. While they are away, I have already purchased and will use a back-up pair of 10x42, RazorHD by Vortex; but that will happen later this year. I have two trips already planned and can't spare my Swarovski's until I return.

Think about your own bino evolution. What did you use when you began birdwatching, and how quickly did you "upgrade" to better quality optics? What were your priorities when you went to get a better pair of binoculars? The magnification, the amount of light allowed in, the weight around your neck, the cost or some intangible factor? I think we all try to have the best binoculars budgets can afford.

I also take photographs, but that evolution story will have to wait for another time.

Risë Foster-Bruder
President, Aiken Audubon Society

IN MEMORIAM:

NORMAN LERCH

Norman Lerch passed away in August, 2016 at the age of 86. A previous field trip coordinator for Aiken Audubon, he was also a fixture on the Black Forest Christmas Bird Count.

Norman had such a passion for birds and birding, with many wonderful birding stories. He was an "old school" birder. He couldn't understand why folks would stop to eat lunch. "Can't we eat while we bird?!" he'd exclaim.

We hope you see many lifers in your new home, Norman.



Ramah Reservoir's shorebirds were a special treat for Norman. In particular, he was always on the lookout for the Marbled Godwit.



At home in Black Forest.



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

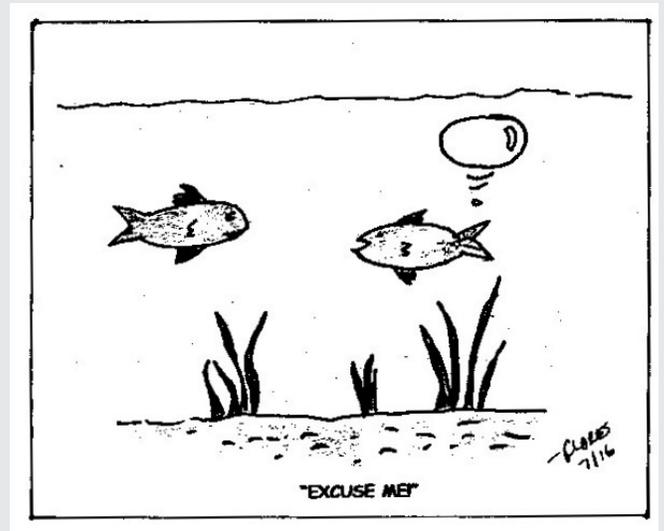
AIKEN'S WEATHER CANCELLATION POLICY

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.