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# aikorns

AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

## CAMP CHIRICAHUA 2018: GROWING A PERMANENT PASSION

by David Tønnesen



PHOTO: BRIAN PATRICK GIBBONS

Thanks to financial assistance from the Aiken Audubon Society, I was able to attend Camp Chiricahua, a phenomenal, and very educational, young birder's camp in southeastern Arizona, from July 15 to 24. Our group explored regions of heavy biodiversity, from the Santa Catalina, Chiricahua, and Huachuca mountain ranges to the lowland deserts of Tucson and Patagonia. This camp was conducted by Victor Emmanuel Nature Tours, which for over 40 years has been operating tours aimed at educating participants on the wonders of the natural world, and was focused particularly on aspiring young birders and biologists ranging from 14 to 18 years old.

The first day I met the ten other campers who I would be adventuring with over the next two weeks. We were fortunate to have leader Brian Patrick Gibbons, co-leader Willy Hutcheson, and counselor Kathy to share knowledge, point out creatures, and coordinate logistics. Right off the bat I could tell that this terrific crew would amplify the camp experience for everyone.

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to a new year of programs, complete with a new board of officers. Because this is my first message as president, I wanted to take the chance to briefly introduce myself to those of you who I haven't had the pleasure of meeting yet. My interest in birds started the summer after my freshman year of college, when I volunteered at a wild bird rehabilitation center near the University of Delaware. Although I had always loved nature, and was majoring in wildlife biology, I had always dismissed birds as a focus because I was convinced that I was not a morning person.

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### Coming programs

#### SEPTEMBER 19

End of the World: Capturing Siberia's Wildlife on Video  
Nathan Pieplow

#### OCTOBER 17

Where's the Beef? A Closer Look at Chico Basin Ranch  
Bill Maynard

#### NOVEMBER 14 (2<sup>ND</sup> WEDNESDAY)

Birding by Boat on the Rio Negro  
John Drummond

#### DECEMBER 15

Colorado Springs 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!

The deadline for submissions to the November/December 2018 issue of the *Aikorns* is Wednesday, October 17. Contact the editor, Leslie Holzmann, at [aikenaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:aikenaudubon@gmail.com) or call (719) 964-3197.

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## SEPTEMBER 19 / NATHAN PIEPLOW END OF THE WORLD: CAPTURING SIBERIA'S WILDLIFE ON VIDEO

PHOTO: ANDREW SPENCER



In 2017, Nathan Pieplow and three other birders traveled to the ends of the earth—through Siberia from the Mongolian border to the Arctic Ocean—to make video and audio recordings of some of Earth's most remarkable creatures. In this tale of their adventure, Nathan shares video footage that illuminates the family lives of Great Gray and Snowy Owls, the survival tricks of the Arctic Fox, the courtship antics of the Ruff, and much more.

Nathan Pieplow is a professor at the University of Colorado and author of *The Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds of Eastern North America*. He lives in Boulder, Colorado.

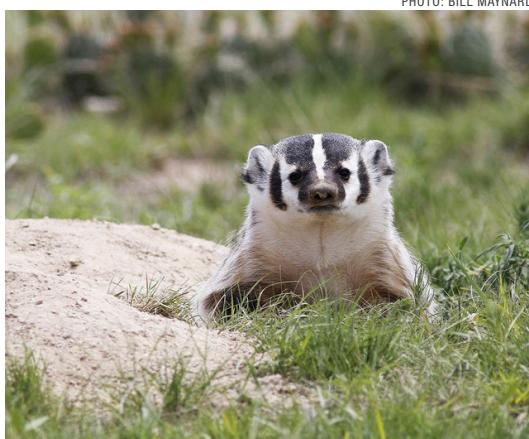
*Pomarine Jaeger sparring with an Arctic Fox, on an island in the Lena Delta of northern Siberia.*

## OCTOBER 17 / BILL MAYNARD WHERE'S THE BEEF? A CLOSER LOOK AT CHICO BASIN RANCH

Close to Colorado Springs, and split between El Paso and Pueblo counties in the Chico Basin, lies Chico Basin Ranch. The ranch's 87,000 acres are leased from the Colorado State Land Board.

A cattle ranch to those who live there, a spring and fall migrant trap to bird banders and bird watchers, to mammals and insects it is a maze of shortgrass prairie carpeted in native grasslands, a part of the Great Plains encompassing vegetated sand hills and steep sand dunes. Along with Black Squirrel and Chico creeks, natural springs, multiple ponds, the Blue Hole, and multiple riparian areas with towering plains cottonwoods, the varied terrain provides exceptional habitat for a wide assortment of wildlife.

A former biology teacher and biologist, Bill Maynard has worked from the Florida Everglades to northernmost Alaska. An excellent photographer and very frequent visitor to the ranch, he'll share with you some of the wonders that can be found at Chico Basin.



**Aiken Audubon programs are free and open to the public. They are held at Bear Creek Nature Center, located at 245 Bear Creek Road in Colorado Springs, 80906. Coffee and socializing begins at 6:30 pm and programs begin at 7 pm.**

If inclement weather cancels an Aiken meeting, decision will be made by 1:00 PM on the meeting date. Notification will be placed on our website, on our Facebook page, and sent out through our email notification list. If there is any doubt, please contact any Aiken board members via telephone. Always, your safety is first, so use your own judgement when coming to a meeting.

### Aiken Audubon Board Members

#### PRESIDENT

Anna Joy Lehmicke  
alehmicke@gmail.com

#### VICE-PRESIDENT

Clark Jones

#### SECRETARY

position open

#### TREASURER

Linda Hodges  
(719) 425-1903  
hikerhodges@gmail.com

#### PROGRAM CHAIR

Diane Luck  
AikenAudubon@gmail.com

#### CONSERVATION CHAIR

Linda Hodges  
(719) 425-1903  
hikerhodges@gmail.com

#### PUBLICITY CHAIR

Christine Bucher  
(719) 596-2916  
baccab@aol.com

#### EDUCATION CHAIR

position open

#### FIELD TRIPS

Diana Beatty  
otowi33.33@gmail.com

#### AIKORNS EDITOR/WEB

Leslie Holzmann  
(719) 964-3197  
AikenAudubon@gmail.com

#### HOSPITALITY

Kathy Minch  
(281) 435-6850  
kathydaboo@gmail.com

#### CHRISTMAS COUNT

Tyler Stuart  
(719) 661-9308  
tylerhstuart@gmail.com

#### AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

6660 Delmonico Dr. D-195  
Colorado Springs, CO  
80919

AIKENAUDUBON@  
gmail.com

AIKENAUDUBON.COM

## 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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### **FRIDAY – SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7 – 9 BIOBLITZ AT CORRAL BLUFFS OPEN SPACE**



Numerous organizations are contributing to this effort to record all the plants and animals at this county-owned open space. Contact Anna Joy Lehmicke regarding counting birds, and Eric Eaton, [bugeric247@gmail.com](mailto:bugeric247@gmail.com), for more information on counting insects and other arthropods. This event is not sponsored by Aiken Audubon, and is listed here for your convenience.

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### **SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 7:30 – 10:30 AM FOUNTAIN CREEK NATURE CENTER FALL BIRD COUNT**

Help record the number of bird species and populations found in Fountain Creek Regional Park. This event is sponsored by the nature center, and is listed here for your convenience.

Suggested donation of \$5/person goes to pay for feeding the birds at the nature center. Please let them know if you plan to participate: (719) 520-6745, [nancybernard@elpasoco.com](mailto:nancybernard@elpasoco.com), or [communityservices.elpasoco.com/nature-centers/](http://communityservices.elpasoco.com/nature-centers/).

### **More trips online!**

For the latest information on field trips and events:

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

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### **WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 6:30/7:15 AM – 3 PM CHICO BASIN RANCH**

John Drummond is leading this trip to Chico Basin Ranch in mid-September to take advantage of the bird banding that will be taking place there from September 5 through October 5. Expect to see the usual Chico birds (Ladder-backed Woodpecker, thrashers, owls, sparrows, etc.) plus some fun surprises, as migration will be in full swing.

Bring the usual—food, water, two-way radios, etc. Scopes come in handy at the ponds. There is a strict limit of 15 participants in no more than four vehicles, no exceptions! Meet at the Tejon Park & Ride at 6:30 am or the Hanover Fire Station at 7:15 am. Chico charges \$10 per person in groups of five or more.

Contact John at [jxdrummo@aol.com](mailto:jxdrummo@aol.com) to make your reservation and indicate where you are starting the trip. As usual, this trip will fill up quickly..

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### **SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 7:30 – 11 AM FOUNTAIN VALLEY SCHOOL**

Mel Goff and Jim Mariner are co-leading this trip to Fountain Valley School, a private college preparatory school in the middle of 1,500 acres of open short-grass prairie. There are wetlands, open fields, riparian areas, and a pond. Bald Eagles nest on the property, along with a large variety of other birds. This will be Aiken Audubon's first fall trip to the campus, although several spring trips have been very productive. Bring binoculars, water, snacks, sunscreen, and be prepared for a fun morning at this quiet oasis.

Meet at the Fountain Creek Regional Park nature center to carpool. Trip is limited to 16 participants. Contact Mel at [melgoff@comcast.net](mailto:melgoff@comcast.net) with questions and to sign up.

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### **SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 7 AM – 1 PM BEAVER CREEK STATE WILDLIFE AREA**

Beaver Creek State Wildlife Area is a 2,200+ acre parcel of land in northeastern Fremont County. It is characterized by piñon-juniper woodland, mixed conifer forest, and dramatic canyons. Expect to find breeding and migrant birds typical for early fall in the Pikes Peak foothills, arid scrubland, and riparian habitats. Possible species include Yellow-breasted Chat, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Blue Grosbeak, Bewick's and Canyon Wrens, Juniper Titmouse, Canyon Towhee, Golden Eagle, and numerous woodpecker and Corvid species. Although we will primarily be birding on trails, expect to hike over difficult terrain. This will be a strenuous trip, but the scenery is worth it.

Meet in the SW corner of the Safeway parking lot at 6520 S. Academy to carpool. Maximum of 10 participants. Contact trip leader Tyler Stuart with questions and to sign up: (719) 661-9308 or [tylerhstuart@gmail.com](mailto:tylerhstuart@gmail.com).

## **GREATER SAGE-GROUSE UPDATE**

There's mixed news on the sage-grouse front. On a positive note, thanks to numerous calls from Audubon members, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) passed without a sage-grouse rider. The rider would have prevented the Greater Sage-Grouse and the Lesser Prairie-Chicken from becoming listed as endangered species for ten years. The removal of the rider was especially rewarding as sage-grouse protections continue to weaken under the Interior Department.

On the other hand, western governors, including Colorado's Hickenlooper, are concerned that the BLM is no longer allowing "mandatory off-site compensatory mitigation" on federal lands. In layman's terms, this is a tool that allows states to require developers (e.g., oil and gas companies) who damage habitat to replace it with similar land elsewhere. Though it's seen as a last-resort practice, its loss will jeopardize the Sage-Grouse Initiative.

## **LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND SET TO EXPIRE**

The expiration of the critical and bi-partisan Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is drawing dangerously near. Since 1965, the fund has conserved iconic landscapes across the country and provided funding for Garden of the Gods, Rocky Mountain National Park, and Black Canyon of the Gunnison, among numerous other Colorado properties. Without reauthorization by September 30th, the LWCF will expire.

Colorado Senators Michael Bennet and Cory Gardner have both co-sponsored legislation to permanently reauthorize the LWCF, which derives \$900 million annually through offshore oil drilling revenue, and is supported by environmentalists and sportsmen alike. Obstacles to fund conservation efforts in the current administration remain, however.

## **KANE RANCH OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN**



A few board members recently visited this 440-acre El Paso County open space, which is on the eastern plains, south of Squirrel Creek Road. Now that funding is available, the open space is finally being master-planned to include trails, a picnic area, and parking. Along with nesting Western Kingbirds and two families of Burrowing Owls, birds spotted on the property include Eastern Kingbirds, Cassin's Sparrows, and Lark Sparrows.



## **PAWNEE GRASSLANDS SHOOTING**

If you read COBirds posts, you're aware of the shootings that have been reported on the Pawnee, along the birding trail. Representatives from the Audubon Society of Greater Denver and several other Audubon groups (including Wyoming) will be meeting with the Pawnee District Ranger on Sept 19 regarding these reckless incidents. The birding trail is mainly along roads, and shooting has taken place across these roads, endangering drivers/birders. One of the rangers has suggested moving the birding trail, rather than attempting to curb shooting. Birders find that to be a poor solution. Organization of a Pawnee "friends group" is in the works.

## **COLORADO WATER TASK FORCE**

The Audubon Colorado Council (ACC) has instituted a Water Task Force to address the most pressing state water issues. Steve Getty will represent Aiken Audubon, and will work alongside other Colorado Audubon representatives, including Audubon Rockies' Western Rivers Program Manager, Abby Burk.

One issue of great concern is the Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP), which would create two new reservoirs in the Fort Collins area. It's believed that NISP would negatively impact the Poudre and South Platte Rivers, which are already over-appropriated. The ACC agreed to oppose NISP, and asked the Water Task Force to take it on.

If there's an issue you'd like the task force to look into, please contact Linda Hodges at [hikerhodges@gmail.com](mailto:hikerhodges@gmail.com).

### **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](mailto:hikerhodges@gmail.com).

# IN MEMORY OF MOTSWARI

by Leslie Holzmann



We're trained from childhood to consider vultures nasty birds, yet we can't do without them. Imagine if nothing ever came to clean up the mess that predators and automobiles leave behind.

More critically, vultures are toxic waste clean-up workers. Even other scavengers know better than to eat animals felled by disease. Vultures, however, have extremely corrosive stomach acid that can render harmless the most deadly of diseases, including anthrax, botulism, rabies, and cholera. Imagine the epidemics that would result, among animals and humans, if vultures weren't on the job!

Unfortunately, vulture species worldwide are in serious decline, primarily due to human activity. Carcasses poisoned to kill jackals, rats, and other scavengers also kill vultures, sometimes in huge numbers. The California Condor nearly went extinct due to lead poisoning from bullets in piles of offal left behind by hunters. And in India, more than 95% of the resident vultures died off between 1990 and the early 2000s due to a drug used in cattle that proved to be highly toxic to the birds.

As vulture populations decline, other scavengers increase in number. That's a problem. While vultures rarely come into close contact with people, other scavengers, such as dogs and rats, transmit diseases from wildlife to humans. The decline of vultures in India may be directly responsible for a huge increase in feral dogs--and a rabies outbreak that killed an estimated 48,000 people.

Motswari's role at the zoo was to educate the public about the essential role vultures play in the ecosystem and in human health, and bring awareness of their endangered status. She will be sorely missed. ♫

## Camp Chiricahua... continued from front page

Our first birds turned out to be a few Verdins and Hooded Orioles at an urgent Wendy's food stop, lifers for some of the group. Next we stopped at Brian's house, where campers were delighted to observe Costa's, Anna's, and Black-chinned Hummingbirds, Gila Woodpeckers, Pyrrhuloxias, Phainopeplas, and the unique Saguaro-nesting subspecies of Purple Martins, all of which provided a good taste of Arizona desert species.

Our destination for the next few days was Rose Canyon Lake Campground, where the ABA's first Red Warbler had been photographed and then eluded a crowd of Arizona birders the next day, just a few months prior. On arrival, we were greeted by the confusing songs of bountiful Yellow-eyed Juncos. That night, after settling into our tents, we were treated to a lone Whiskered Screech-Owl's eerie song. This first day was only a sample of what was to come.

The twelve days seemed to pass swiftly, which is always the case when great times are had. On my favorite day, we started early at The Nature Conservancy's Ramsey Canyon. After a two mile hike, accompanied by the constant chatter of Bridled Titmice and squeaky outbursts from multiple pairs of Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers, we reached the spot where a much sought-after pair of Flame-colored Tanagers had been spotted. It took some time puzzling over the tanager song, but eventually a bright orange-red male took our breath away when it alighted in a Douglas-fir tree next to the trail, before proceeding into the forest on the other

side—a brilliant success, both physically and figuratively! Most of the group had already left to hike back, but two of us, who had stayed a bit longer to enjoy the silence, were further awed by a sudden chorus of several Elegant Trogons, whose husky ascending coos echoed off the canyon walls and created a mysterious transcendence. This single hour provided perhaps the most iconic moment of the entire camp.

Over the territory we covered during the camp, from Tucson and Patagonia to Portal, we collectively recorded exactly 200 species. Including the other wildlife we encountered brings the complete biotics list to over 400. Highlight species included nesting Rose-throated Becards, nesting Elegant Trogons, a Black-capped Gnatcatcher, Lucifer Hummingbirds, Buff-breasted Flycatchers, and my personal favorite of the trip, the singing adult male Flame-colored Tanager.

Even with boisterous teenagers and loud music in crowded vans, Camp Chiricahua was a wondrous experience, involving new friends and incredible nature encounters. Because of this, the last night was a long and emotional one for many campers. Knowing the experience had engrained lasting memories was enough to keep me together. I'm looking forward to what the future contains and how these incredible days will impact it.

This was a professional tour with a current fee of \$1950, beyond what most aspiring young birders and biologists can afford. I was incredibly fortunate to obtain grants from two organizations, as well as the generous donation from the Aiken Audubon Society, which I've mentioned above, and have parents able to afford the remainder. However, many other students have a harder time raising the finances needed to attend such inspiring events. To ensure that future generations have the same privilege of enjoying the natural world as we do, it is imperative that we support and mentor our minors in such a way that they gain appreciation for nature and the need to conserve it. Young birder camps are one way youths acquire this support. ♫

PHOTO: LESLIE HOLZMANN



Flame-colored Tanager



Botteri's Sparrow

PHOTO: DAVID TONNESSEN

## Flores' Funnies



Artist Rick Flores, an El Paso County Nature Center volunteer, enjoys sharing his views of happenings at Bear Creek & Fountain Creek Nature Centers.

President's Message, continued from front page

At the rehab center, I was fascinated by the unique “personalities” shown by different species, from the quiet and polite American Robins to the raucous and demanding Common Grackles. After that summer I never strayed from my interest in birds, and began birding recreationally in addition to working with birds for school and jobs.

I moved to Colorado Springs four years ago after graduate school in Athens, Georgia (go Dawgs!). When looking for houses to rent before the big move, my husband and I were most concerned with finding areas with good eBird lists, so we ended up right between Fountain Creek Regional Park (270 species) and the Big Johnson Reservoir (245 species).

One of the first people we met in town was Bill Maynard, while birding along Fountain Creek during fall migration. Bill got me volunteering at the banding station at Chico Basin Ranch, where I met many local birders, including a number of Aiken Audubon members. When the opportunity arose last year to sit on the board as the vice president, I was excited to get more involved with an organization whose values and goals so closely align with my own.

As my time as president begins, I’m looking forward to getting to know all of you better, and to introduce more people to the wonderful world of birds through our public walks and other outreach opportunities. I know that I have big shoes to fill, and I’m grateful that I have such an experienced board and so many enthusiastic chapter members to help me along the way. If we haven’t met yet, please introduce yourself to me at the next meeting, and share any thoughts or ideas you may have about our wonderful local Audubon chapter.

Happy birding, and I hope to meet many of you at our next meeting.

**Anna Joy Lehmicke**  
President, Aiken Audubon Society

## CAN BIRDS DRINK SEAWATER?

by Leslie Holzmann

Because my friends know I like birds, they tend to ask me bird-related questions. Recently, a couple just returned from a cruise came up with this challenger: “How do birds survive at sea for so long? Can they drink salt water?

Wanting to give them an accurate answer, I did some research, and learned some interesting facts. And unsurprisingly, it boils down to “it depends.”

Consider Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. Like most land birds, they cannot tolerate sea water, yet many of them fly for 26 hours across the Gulf of Mexico. They have no food or water, or even a rest stop! How do they do it?

The tiny birds have an ingenious solution. Before leaving for the trip, they lay on fat—lots of fat, two grams, enough to double their body weight. Then, once they’re over the water, they burn that fat for energy. One of the by-products of this metabolic process is water,

enough to keep them hydrated for the duration of their flight. However, you can bet that the moment they reach shore, they head for the local canteen!

Marine birds, such as this Pigeon Guillemot, *can* drink salt water. That’s because they have a desalination plant in their heads. When these birds take in salt, it’s absorbed into



their bloodstream in the same way as in any non-marine bird—or human, for that matter. As you’d expect, their kidneys filter out some of the excess. However, they also have a salt gland over their eyes—something other birds lack—that removes far more salt than the kidneys can. This gland creates a concentrated brine that flows through a pair of ducts to the nostrils, openings in the upper beak. The next time you see a marine bird with what appears to be a runny nose, you’ll know that it’s been drinking seawater. ♫



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