



May/Summer 2020  
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**aikorns**  
AIKEN AUDUBON SOCIETY

## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It is astounding how much has changed since our last newsletter went out just two short months ago. First and foremost, I hope that you and all of your loved ones are well during these trying times. I also hope that you are all managing to find some joy in birds, whether by watching your feeders, learning about birds online or through books, or discovering the birds that live in your neighborhood.

Following the lead of the National Audubon Society, The Aiken Audubon Board has made the difficult decision to cancel all events at least through the end of June. While we hope that you continue to enjoy birds in a way that makes you feel comfortable, the Board felt that it would be irresponsible to encourage group activities before public health officials say it is safe to do so. We are

...continued on page 5

## BIRD BEAKS

Story & photos by Leslie Holzmann

We have hands. Birds have beaks. Have you ever noticed how useful a beak is? While lacking our manual dexterity, birds have no problem securing their dinners and stuffing said meal down the gullets of their young. Beaks are used to manipulate objects and preen ragged feathers. Some birds use their beaks to impress potential mates, or to scare away intruders. Beaks can even be used as weapons. Have you ever tried to steal an egg from under an irritated hen?

Beaks are also useful to birders, as their size, shape, and color are all helpful when it comes to identifying bird species. In fact, the more attention I pay to birds' beaks, the better birder I become.

I've long noticed the obvious differences, such as between a dabbling duck's bill, adapted for eating plants, and a grebe's pointy beak, just right for grabbing fish—or between the wedge-shaped, seed-eating beak of a finch and a warblers sharp, insect-nabbing beak.

Recently I was going through some old photos, trying to label a number of shorebirds. They were all in their non-breeding plumage, so I was reduced to examining other details. Leg length and color is very helpful, but most of the birds were wading, so I couldn't see their legs. However, shorebirds show a remarkable diversity of beak length and shape, largely to avoid competing for the same buried resources. For example, long-beaked birds, such as curlews and godwits, probe for creatures buried far down in the muck, while short-billed plovers and turnstones search through piles of stranded seaweeds. The beaks were different enough that I was able to put names to most of the birds I'd seen.

While we're on the subject of shorebirds, I learned that the females typically have longer bills than the males of the same species, likely so that they aren't searching for food at quite the same depth. Similarly, the beaks of female American Avocets turn up more at the end.



Rhinoceros Hornbill, Denver Zoo



It's easy to tell the curlews from the godwits.

...continued on page 5

### Coming programs

#### ALL PROGRAMS CANCELED UNTIL FALL

#### SEPTEMBER 16

##### Live Birds of Prey

Diana Miller, Pueblo Raptor Center

#### OCTOBER 21

##### Birds and Renewable Energy

Amy Sherman

### 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 September/October 2020 issue of the *Aikorns* is Wednesday, August 19. Contact the editor, Leslie Holzmann, at [Editor@AikenAudubon.com](mailto:Editor@AikenAudubon.com) or call/text (719) 964-3197.

### Inside this issue

Coming Programs .....	2
Field Trips & Events .....	3
5MR Birding .....	3
Abert & Abert .....	3
Conservation Corner .....	4
Help Wanted! .....	5
Flores' Funnies .....	5

*All Aiken meetings have been canceled until September. We'll see you then, and in the meantime, stay safe!*

## **SEPTEMBER 16 / DIANA MILLER LIVE BIRDS OF PREY, FROM THE PUEBLO RAPTOR CENTER**

Learn about hawks, owls, eagles, falcons, and vultures through an hour-long presentation featuring live birds of prey. Naturalist Diana Miller will discuss raptor adaptations, predator/prey relationships, natural history, personal stories of the birds presented, and the Nature and Wildlife Discovery Center's work to rehabilitate sick, injured, and orphaned birds of prey.

Diana's fascination and passion for birds of prey started the day she met Buddy, the Great Horned Owl. That was August of 1985 when she arrived at the Greenway & Nature Center of Pueblo Nature (now the Nature & Wildlife Discovery Center) to do an internship in environmental education. That internship led to another, and to further education. She has been the Center Director since 1989.

For more than 30 years she has dedicated her career to the pursuit of quality rehabilitation care for wildlife, especially birds of prey. Diana also puts equal energy into educating the public about our native raptors and wildlife in general. Her greatest rewards in her career are experiencing the joy of an animal returning to its home, seeing children's faces when they meet an educational raptor in their classroom, and the honor of meeting others who share her passion of all things wild.

## **OCTOBER 21 / AMY SHERMAN BIRDS AND RENEWABLE ENERGY**



With the increase in demand for renewable energy across the U.S., there is also increasing concern over potential impacts to birds and other wildlife. This presentation will provide an overview of the various federal regulations that govern development of renewable energy with respect to birds, as well as the best management practices and mitigation measures utilized by wind projects in order to manage avian impacts. Major regulations discussed will include the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, the Endangered

Species Act, and how the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service managed compliance with these regulations. We'll also discuss how local renewable energy projects are addressing avian concerns, and what you can do to support changes to regulations to strengthen protection of birds.

Amy Sherman is a Project Manager and Biologist with Tetra Tech, Inc. in Colorado Springs. She has over 12 years of experience specializing in environmental permitting support for energy, transportation and water projects across the Great Plains and Western United States. Ms. Sherman is a member of the Aiken Audubon Society and an avid local birder.

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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 member via telephone. Always, your safety is first, so use your own judgement when coming to a meeting.

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# FIVE-MILE BIRDING

by Leslie Holzmänn

Probably most birders keep life lists. Many also record year lists. Then there are lists based on location—by the ABA area, state, county, or your own yard. You can even combine these—how many



This Black-headed Grosbeak was well within my 5MR.

state birds can you see this year? Now there's a new way to list—the birds you find with a five mile radius (5MR) of your home. It's the ideal challenge for a time when travel is restricted and we need to stick to our own neighborhoods.

Finding the five mile radius is easy. You can go the old fashioned route and use a compass to draw a circle on a paper map, or check out this handy [website](#) from Map Developers. When I tried creating my own circle, I was surprised at how many potential birding sites there are within this area—both

suburban and rural. It even included a number of places that I've been frequenting for years. Now I have a head start on my 5MR species list.

If you live in the city, you can still try 5MR birding. Urban birders may be amazed at the number of species near home. Back in October, 2016, I was visiting New Delhi, India. While my husband met with some coworkers, I wanted to go birding, so our hosts arranged for a young woman who had lived there all her life to go with me. She had never paid much attention to birds, although she was familiar with the ubiquitous House Crows, Rock Pigeons, and Black Kites. She honestly thought that there were no other birds in the area. Then we spent the morning at the Okhla Bird Sanctuary, a lake in the middle of the city, where I identified at least 40 species (I'm still mulling over a few photos). To say she was astonished is putting it mildly. That afternoon we visited Lodhi Gardens, a park and tomb, where I added 13 more species. She thoroughly enjoyed



Western Tanager, another 5MR bird.

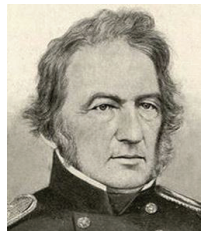
## ABERT & ABERT

by Leslie Holzmänn

Many plants and animals have either common or scientific names that honor people, often the person who discovered the species, or someone famous. For example, ornithologist Alexander Wilson named Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*) after Meriwether Lewis, who discovered the species, and Clark's Nutcrackers were named after his fellow explorer, William Clark. So as I was reviewing my photos of both Abert's squirrels and Abert's Towhee, I had to wonder—who was Abert?



It turns out that there are two Aberts involved, the father and the son. The squirrel is named after the father, John James Abert. Born on September 17, 1788, this Mr. Abert was a soldier in the early days of the United States, serving in the War of 1812. He eventually became the head of the Corps of Topographical Engineers under the U.S. Secretary of War.



As such, he was in charge of mapping what would eventually become the United States west of the Mississippi River. The position was both military and scientific, and Abert was interested in both aspects. John Abert died in 1863.



John and his wife, Ellen, had a son, James William Abert, who was born in 1820. He was obviously influenced by his father, as in 1843 he too joined the Corps to explore the west. A bird collector (in those days, birders killed and stuffed their lifers), he was the first to describe the Abert's Towhee, which was named in his honor.



He was also an artist, sketching the sights he saw on his expeditions. He retired from the army in 1864 after being wounded, and died in 1897.

So there you have it. Discover a new species, or excel in your field, and you too may have a plant or animal named after you. ☞

our day, and I may have created a new birder in the process!

Even after the stay-at-home restrictions are listed, there are obvious advantages to 5MR birding. Since you're close to home, you save on transportation costs. It's easier to fit birding into your schedule; you can quickly bop over to a local park for an hour, instead of spending an entire morning (or day). And you may discover a new hotspot no one else knows about—your own personal birding site.

If you keep an eBird list, you can create a patch with your home in the middle and add your sightings as you go. There's a good chance you'll be adding data for areas where there is none, helping ornithologists create a more realistic picture of which species and how many birds are in a given region.

Once you're a 5MR birder, you can link up with other 5MR birders. There's a [Facebook group](#) and even annual contests, such as the 5MR Challenge. One of my goals for this year is to go birding more often. I think 5MR birding is just what I need! ☞

All Aiken-sponsored field trips have been canceled through June. For the latest information, visit

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

# CONSERVATION ACTIONS 2020

by *Linda Hodges*

Do you ever wonder what your conservation team is up to? There's rarely a dull moment, though the coronavirus has slowed issues to a small degree. To date this year, Aiken has:

- continued to speak with the manager of Fountain Mutual Irrigation for updates on water levels at Big Johnson Reservoir.

- signed on to a Citizens' Petition to Ban Wildlife Killing Contests in CO, which was sent to Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Colorado Department of Natural Resources and the Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture.

- opposed expanded mining at Red Canyon Quarry, off Barrett Rd. The permit application was officially withdrawn on Feb 21.

- visited Senator Bennet's office to ask for support of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Migratory Bird Protection Act (HR 5552).

- attended a Protect Our Parks meeting to gear up for the ballot initiative, which would prevent the city of Colorado Springs from selling or disposing of any city parkland without a vote of the people.

- signed on to Audubon comment letters re the BLM's March and September oil and gas lease sales in northwest Colorado, particularly stressing protection of sage-grouse habitat.

- attended Colorado College's State of the Rockies event, and spoke with Senator Bennet's aide about supporting full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. In addition, we asked Governor Bullock of Montana to continue his efforts to protect the sage-grouse.

- presented information on the affects of birds by solar installations to the CSU Utilities Policy Advisory Committee (UPAC).

- signed on to a letter requesting that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) not be weakened.

- visited Smith Creek Natural Area in advance of a master planning meeting. The meeting was eventually postponed due to Preble's Jumping Mouse issues.

- contacted The Nature Conservancy, the Palmer Land Trust and Duke Phillips IV of Chico Basin Ranch to discuss how to best protect Chico from division or selloff. We also attended two State Land Board (SLB) meetings and spoke up requesting that Chico be kept intact due to its high level of biodiversity and to avoid habitat fragmentation.

- spoke with Colorado Parks and Wildlife about the lack of prairie dogs in typically strong p-dog communities along Squirrel Creek Rd. CPW wasn't aware of any eradication treatments. They also hadn't found any wrongdoing by the USDA at the Fountain Burrowing Owl site, which has garnered a good deal of attention.

- attended three Audubon Colorado Council (ACC) meetings via zoom.

- contacted the conservation team several times, asking for support on various concerns.

- conducted research on many issues including: the effects of solar and wind power on birds, CO water concerns, SLB proposals, management plans, and Mexican Spotted Owl habitat.

- attended Audubon webinars on the state of the Colorado River, the Salton Sea, and the Great Salt Lake.

In addition, we are currently:

- working on comments to the BLM on their Proposed Resource Management Plan of the Brown's Canyon National Monument. Of concern are their proposals to remove the Area of Critical Environmental Concern designation, remove Wilderness Study Area considerations, open more areas to recreational shooting, and possibly allow e-bikes.

- composing a letter, in conjunction with the Audubon Colorado Council, to the SLB, requesting that they discontinue oil and gas leasing on their properties, which we feel are endangering Colorado's wildlife populations. A similar letter will go to Governor Polis, urging that he use his influence to help achieve this. Chico Basin Ranch and Aiken Canyon Preserve, for example, are owned by the SLB, which could potentially encourage drilling on those parcels.

- gathering arguments regarding US Fish and Wildlife Service's proposal to expand hunting at Alamosa and Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuges.

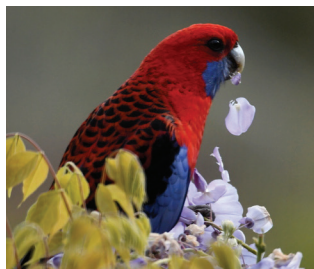
- giving our all, every day, to benefit the birds and their habitat!

## JOIN THE CONSERVATION ACTION TEAM

Inspired? Are you interested in learning about regional conservation issues? In sending an email to a legislator, to protect a property or species that you care about? Aiken Audubon has a list of folks who could be contacted for issues of import. No commitment required. To join, please contact Linda Hodges at (719) 425-1903 or [Conservation@AikenAudubon.com](mailto:Conservation@AikenAudubon.com).

**Beaks...** continued from front page

How do these probing birds know when their beaks come into contact with prey such as a worm or clam? Their beaks have a sensory organ at the tip, aptly named the “bill tip organ.”



The surface of the beak has many nerve endings (known as the corpuscles of Herbst) that sense changes in pressure—even if the beak isn’t actually touching the prey! Parrots, such as this Crimson Rosella, are similarly equipped, which may explain their incredible dexterity.

Some beak adaptations are truly remarkable. I’m fascinated by the specialized pliers of Red Crossbills, which allow them to open pinecones to extract the seeds. Pelicans have giant scoops for catching fish, while kingfishers have long, pointed beaks for more precise fishing. Sunbirds, hummingbirds, and other nectar eaters have long, thin beaks for probing the depths of flowers—which have evolved tube-shaped blossoms to accommodate them. And woodpeckers have perfectly formed chisels for pounding holes into trees.



An orthodontist would diagnose skimmers with having a significant underbite—if birds had teeth—but the protruding lower beak is perfect for collecting fish from the surface of the ocean. Flamingos’ beaks require the birds to feed upside down as they strain the water for tiny crustaceans.

Beaks tell you a lot about a bird’s diet and habitat, but they have many other purposes. Preening is an essential behavior, as it allows birds to “fix” their feathers, cleaning and oiling them (in the case of water birds), and reconnecting any interlocking barbs that have become separated. Preening also removes parasites such as lice.

Beaks also allow birds to regulate their body temperatures. Birds in colder climates have smaller beaks, while the huge bill of the toucan is as effective as an elephant’s ears at radiating heat.

A number of species use their beaks when courting. For example, “[Gannets raise their bills high and repeatedly clatter them](#), the [male puffin nibbles at the female’s beak](#), the [male waxwing puts his bill in the female’s mouth and ravens hold each other’s beaks in a prolonged ‘kiss’](#).”



Bill clapping behavior doesn’t always have to do with mating. Birds of some species, such as this Australian Noisy Miner, clap their bills to communicate with one another. In some species, it’s used to threaten possible territorial trespassers or predators. Barn Owls, for example, hiss and clap their beaks to warn away intruders.

I used to feel a bit sorry for the poor birds, having to manage with their beaks instead of having fingers and an opposable thumb. But now I realize—with beaks like this, who needs hands? ☘

**President’s Message**, continued from front page

exploring options for hosting a virtual speaker in place of the May meeting—please check our website and Facebook page for updates! For summer trips, we will closely follow current guidelines and reassess the situation by the end of May.

Please stay healthy and safe until we see you again, and try to find the time and space to appreciate the small wonders of nature that are all around us.

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

## HELP WANTED!

Is there a bird- or nature-related subject you’d love to learn more about? Do you know experts on topics of interest to Aiken members?

Aiken is looking for a new **Program Chairperson**, who will be responsible for lining up interesting and educational speakers and other programs for our monthly meetings. To give you time to come up to speed, speakers for next September and October have already been scheduled.

In addition, the Program Chair is an unelected board position, so you would be asked to participate in Aiken’s board meetings, held one evening every other month with a break over the summer.

Please contact President [Anna Joy Lehmicke](#) or Vice-president [Clark Jones](#) to volunteer.

### 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.



Look for the  
**Aiken Audubon Society**  
**Facebook page!**

[facebook.com/pages/Aiken-Audubon-Society](https://facebook.com/pages/Aiken-Audubon-Society)