



SacajaweaAudubonNews

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON BUILDS ON AN INTEREST IN BIRDS TO PROMOTE THE CONSERVATION OF OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT THROUGH ENJOYMENT, EDUCATION AND ACTION.

February 2014

Calendar at a Glance

Feb 10th SAS Meeting
 March 7th & 8th Raptor workshop & field trip
 June 6th - 8th Wings Across the Big Sky Festival

Mark Your Calendars!

The next Madison Valley IBA bird survey will be held on Saturday, March 15th. More to come in the March newsletter.



Who Doesn't Love Bluebirds?

Monday February 10th, 2014 at 7:00 p.m.
Hope Lutheran Church
2152 W. Graf Street (off of South 19th) in Bozeman

Who doesn't love bluebirds? The answer is don't miss our February 10th program at 7:00 p.m. featuring Sacajawea Audubon's own Mountain Bluebird Trail citizen science project. Chapter bluebird trail monitors Lou Ann Harris, Janne Hayward and Diane Gresham will present a fascinating talk on the life cycle of the Mountain Bluebird and the history of the bluebird trail project in the Gallatin Valley. Lots of great photos will be shown of bluebirds in all stages of their lives. Mountain Bluebird males will be returning in early March, so this is a perfect time to bone up on your knowledge of these beautiful and gentle birds.

Lou Ann Harris is a longtime Audubon member and currently serves as Vice President on both Sacajawea Audubon and Montana Audubon boards. She became involved in the bluebird trail through Mary Geis in 2007 and received her Master Banding License in 2010.

Janne Hayward is also an Audubon member and longtime conservationist in Bozeman. She became involved with the bluebird trail through Lou Ann in 2010, and is now training to become a licensed bird bander. She monitors 50 boxes on Dry Creek/Pass Creek Roads.

Diane Gresham joined Sacajawea Audubon in 2006 and has been very involved with chapter activities. She has served on the Board of Directors and currently is the chapter Hospitality Chair. Diane has been assisting Lou Ann on the bluebird trail since 2007 and logs all the data in addition to training to become a licensed bander.

Abstract of Sacajawea Audubon Society Board Meeting, Jan. 6, 2014.



Meeting called to order at 6.35 p.m. by President Loreene Reid. Paulette Epple's December Board Meeting minutes approved. Evelyn Acton's Treasurer's Report approved.

Reports of Committee Chairs

- Audubon Bird Festival, June 6-8, Bozeman (Lou Ann Harris).
 - John Parker has lined-up 20 Field Trips for Saturday, 17 for Sunday.
 - Potential sponsorships of the Festival were discussed by Leo Freeman and Jeff Safford.
 - A move to obtain full rights to Andrew Guttenberg's original art work for the Festival program cover was considered.
- Education: Richard Keigley's proposal to inaugurate a partnership between Sacajawea Audubon, Yellowstone National Park, and the Park County School District to promote an awareness of habitat and land management in school children was discussed at length with no action taken.
- Program: See announcement for February in this issue.
- Conservation: Vickie Backus is working to arrange a survey for a new trail on the Holcim property at Sappington.
- Newsletter: It was moved and approved to underwrite the expansion of the Newsletter to six pages. Abstracts of Board Minutes to be regularly included. Mike Becker's literary contributions to the last two issues were gratefully acknowledged.
- Membership: Hereafter, new members to be listed periodically in the Newsletter.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Bird of the Month -

Downy Woodpecker

Picoides pubescens

Length: 6 ¾" Wing Span: 12" Weight: 0.95 oz

Another of Montana's hardy winter residents, the Downy Woodpecker is the smallest and most widespread of our North American woodpeckers. Easily confused with the much larger Hairy Woodpecker, the Downy is best distinguished by a shorter, stubbier bill and less powerful vocalizations (see below). It can be found in any wooded habitat and is equally at home in the suburbs or wilderness forests. The Downy readily comes to backyard feeders, especially suet. It is primarily insectivorous and it's interesting to note that the sexes differ in their foraging technique. Males tend to forage more on smaller branches and stems of weeds, where females seem to favor larger branches and trunks of trees. The Downy hitches upward on vertical surfaces, using its stiff tail feathers and *zygodactyl* feet for gripping. *Zygodactyl* means two toes face forward and two face backward. It is easy to tell the sexes apart. Males have a red patch on the nape and females don't. Their call is a short, gentle, flat *pik*. Their rattle call is slow, squeaky and descending. Their drum is short and slow and repeated frequently. The Downy Woodpecker was named so for the soft white feathers of the white stripe on the lower back.



-Photo courtesy of Christine Haines

Raptor Identification Workshop and Field Trip March 7th and 8th

(Presented by: Steve Hoffman, Executive Director, MT Audubon and founder of HawkWatch International)

Have you ever wanted to sharpen your raptor identification skills? If so, this is the workshop for you! On Friday evening Steve will provide a detailed discussion of the identification and natural history of all raptor species wintering in the Gallatin Valley. Steve's illustrated talk will include a description of the many plumage variations (including subspecies and color forms, as well as age and sex variations) of the more common and observable species. Helpful behavioral clues will also be incorporated. Eagles, falcons and the "buteo" hawks (such as Red-tailed Hawks) will be emphasized. Participants will then go into the field on Saturday to practice their newly-developed skills. Steve's presentation will be especially valuable for "intermediate" and "advanced" raptor watching enthusiasts, although beginners will also find this workshop quite helpful.

The Friday night presentation will start at 7 PM and last till 9 PM, in the Bozeman Public Library's small conference room.

Saturday morning's field trip will meet at the Museum of the Rockies at 8:30 am, and leave at 8:45. Be sure to dress for the weather and bring any necessary drinks or snacks for this 4-5 hour trip. If you have a spotting scope that you can bring, that would be helpful.

There is a \$30 fee and 20 person limit for the workshop and field trip. Advance reservation and payment is required. For more information and to make reservations please call John Parker at 586-5863 or email him at birdsightings@sacajaweaudubon.org



Bird Notes

In mid winter, things slow down and the birds are a bit harder to come by, but with more time spent outdoors or watching a feeder it's still possible to see some great birds.



While walking around the Regional Park in west Bozeman the first of the year, Dorrie Green saw both a **Wilson's Snipe** and a **Northern Shrike**. Dorrie saw both of these birds at the park last winter, too.

During the month of December Becky and Kevin Ward had a **Yellow-shafted Flicker** frequenting their yard on Holly, in east Bozeman. They have also seen Red-shafted Flickers and a variety of intergrades in the neighborhood. Bozeman, and especially to the east along the Yellowstone River Valley, covers an area where these two forms of Northern Flicker actively interbreed, creating some interesting combinations of field marks.

On January 8th, Chuck Steele had **3 Pinyon Jays** visit his yard north of Manhattan. Though Pinyon Jays are seen with some regularity in the Horseshoe Hills, this was the first time Chuck has seen them in his yard near the Gallatin River.

A **Spotted Towhee** was coming to Joyce Lee's feeder in south Bozeman, off and on during early to mid December.

The **Great-tailed Grackle** that was discovered two years ago at the Gallatin Valley Mall was found again on January 9th, at the same location. After not being seen for nearly eight months two people, Scott Dean and Tamie Parker spotted the grackle within minutes of each other.

After last winter's invasion of winter finches, we have a tendency to expect to see these birds every year, but sometimes these cyclical irruptions may only happen every 5-20 years. Last winter you could almost count on seeing White-winged Crossbills nearly anywhere in Bozeman where there was a large concentration of spruce trees. But so far this winter the only report of **White-winged Crossbills**, were the 20 that Andrew Guttenberg saw on the MSU campus December 12th.



Bozeman's 75th Christmas Bird Count

The Bozeman CBC was conducted on December 14th with no wind, and temperatures into the thirties, making for nearly ideal conditions on count day. 34 people participated in the count, plus another 6 people watching feeders. This year 65 species (the second highest total after last year's 70) were seen, plus three count week species (Ruffed Grouse, White-winged Crossbill, and Evening Grosbeak).

Amazingly, 4 new species were added to the all time species list! The new species added to the count were Tundra Swan, Ring-necked Duck, Virginia Rail, and Chipping Sparrow. Other birds rarely seen on the count included Northern Pintail and Lesser Scaup (second time), Ruddy Duck (third time), and American Coot (fourth time). A total of 121 species have been seen on the Bozeman count.

Overall, there were record high counts for 9 species. The species that had new high counts were: Common Goldeneye-75, Sharp-shinned Hawk-11, Cooper's Hawk-4, Golden Eagle-4, Prairie Falcon-5, Rock Pigeon-868, Hairy Woodpecker-18, Black-capped Chickadee-560, and White-breasted Nuthatch. 12,617 individual birds were seen during the count.



Common Goldeneye
-Art by Robert Steiner, winner of the 2012 federal duck stamp contest



2014 *Wings Across the Big Sky*



Field Trips

It's not too early to begin planning your summer activities. During winter, when birds are sparse, it's easy to dream of long summer days and abundant birds. Where you will find plenty is in the beautiful Gallatin Valley and surrounding area. Come join us for **Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, this year co-hosted by Sacajawea Audubon Society, June 6–8 at the GranTree Inn in Bozeman.**

As for field trips we have close to 40 planned!—almost 20 each on Saturday and Sunday—guided by knowledgeable birders and naturalists familiar with the species and their habitats in the Bozeman area. Here is just a brief sampling of some of those trips to contemplate as you anticipate the upcoming Bird Festival:

Yellowstone's Northern Range

The Northern Range, often called “America's Serengeti,” is home, either seasonally or year-round, to a wide variety of birds. We will explore the area's diversity beginning in the dry Gardiner Basin, where Horned Larks and Mountain Bluebirds are common along the Old Yellowstone Road. En route, we will stop at higher elevation woodland, willow, and wetland habitats searching for different ducks, grebes, woodpeckers, flycatchers, and sparrows. Breeding pairs of Harlequin Ducks are possible in the fast moving waters of the Gardiner and Yellowstone Rivers. Raptors, such as Osprey, Red-tailed Hawks, and American Kestrels are likely along this route. The trip will end at the lower Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, where Peregrine Falcons have nested in recent years.

Deep Creek, Paradise Valley

We will visit the recently burned habitats of the south fork of Deep Creek via a Forest Service trail that begins in the foothills of the Paradise Valley. We begin with a moderate climb (half-mile) through open grassland and shrub-dotted hills, likely observing a variety of towhees, sparrows, warblers and bluebirds. The trail then drops into a forested canyon as it crosses the south fork of Deep Creek and heads into the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. This area was thoroughly burned during the 2012 Pine Creek Fire so we will be looking for woodpeckers, sapsuckers, and other fire-dependent species and observing the post-fire ecology.

Headwaters State Park Area

The Headwaters area has a variety of habitats, including sage/grassland and riparian, where species from Common Mergansers to Clay-colored Sparrows may be seen. One of the unique features of the Headwaters area are the limestone cliffs, which support several cliff nesting species such as Prairie Falcons, White-throated Swifts, and Canyon Wrens. The park where Lewis and Clark camped, at the confluence of the Jefferson, Madison, and Gallatin Rivers is steeped in history. Beside the many nesting species here, numerous other birds use these river corridors as they travel between feeding sites, and during migration.

Keep watch in early March: Festival Brochures with all field trip information and schedules will be in the mail and the online system for registration will be active.

For more information please contact Montana Audubon Bird Festival Coordinator, Cathie Erickson, cerickson@mtaudubon.org, or call (406) 443-3949.

THE NATURE LIBRARY

by Mike Becker

Like Walt Whitman's plea to read Leaves of Grass in the open air every year of one's life, A Sand County Almanac (Oxford, 1949) also repays reading again, especially by conservationists with battle fatigue in the cause of wilderness and a sane land-use ethic. After years of environmental neglect, a global population that defies containment, stark evidence of climate change, and a horrific BP oil spill, Aldo Leopold's slim prophetic, classic book, now many years old, should be required reading, issued with every sheepskin at June commencements—or instead of it.

His was one of the first and most eloquent voices arguing that in the 20th century economics should not determine all land use. The private landowner and every citizen have an ethical obligation to an earth "in biotic pain": Only wilderness preservation, "a resource which can shrink but not grow," and a conservation aesthetic, can get us back in step. The Almanac is a cogent early statement of interdependencies, which now happily we see as ecological commonplaces. It is also a book for artists and nature folk.

The first of the book's three sections, the Almanac proper, details the joys of owning 120 acres of rural western Wisconsin, a sand farm with tenants like all noble estates. From January to December Leopold introduces the tenants and the landscape. From tracks in the snow we infer skunks and mice, owls and

Rough-legs and rabbits. In the rings of the oak that heats the stove in February he reads the natural history of key years back to our Civil War (1908: "A dry year when the forests burned fiercely, and Wisconsin parted with its last cougar"). March finds the stubble fields that were once prairies host to "the proceedings of the goose convention," and April's damp and dusky woods to the sky dance of the "timberdoodle"—("the drama of the sky dance is enacted nightly on hundreds of farms, the owners of which sigh for entertainment" in the cities). May brings the upland plover up from the still-unspoiled Argentine, June the hoodwinked trout to a fly ("how we rue our haste!"); July wakes up the tenants—"negligent about rents, but very punctilious about tenures"—at 3:30 am, when the landlord and his dog record the song sequences of awakening birds and the "olfactory poems" left in the night. The July chapter is one of his best, but through the heat of late summer and its silent mornings to the "smoky gold" of autumn, the writing is never pure description. It is always purposeful, sometimes nostalgic, often humorous, full of the idea of man the citizen of nature, of the extension of social consciousness from people to land, who share with their wild tenants the same struggles and destiny.

The December chapter is a perfect gem, a blend of Darwin and Beatrix Potter. Entitled "65290," it is the tale of a banded chickadee ("so small a bundle of large enthusiasms"), one of seven of "the class of '37," who has outlived his fellows to an age of five years. His distinction is not treated sentimentally but as a case lesson in the rigors of survival. Leopold deduces the mortal sins taught in the chickadee "Sunday School": "Thou shalt not venture into windy places in winter"; "Thou shalt not get wet before a blizzard"; and "Thou shalt investigate every loud noise." With characteristic whimsical humor he concludes, "to the chickadee, winter wind is the boundary of the habitable world. If the chickadee had an office, the maxim over his desk would say: 'Keep calm.'"

The remaining sections of The Almanac, "Sketches Here and There" and "The Upshot," are quite different in substance but not in the urgent tone. Leopold chronicles our painful lessons in conservation. He grieves at the monument to the passenger pigeon in Wisconsin's Wyalusing State Park, where only the hills remember the great flights of the birds, now reduced to "a flightless one, graven in bronze on this rock." He recounts the states' extirpation of the wolf, the saga of the last grizzly bear in Arizona, the jaguar in the delta of the Colorado. He revisits in a speeding bus the former prairies of the Midwest. Over the opulent miles he laments the land ethic "that made Illinois safe for soybeans." What good is a vista of prairie or an undrained marsh, anyway? He warns the stewards of Canada and Alaska that this may be "their last call."

"The Upshot" of all this is the pragmatic last section. The reordering of recreation that does not consume or dilute resources; the promotion of the "sport" of wildlife study by amateurs, who, like Margaret Nice and her study of the Song Sparrow, may actually turn in valuable contributions; the extinction of the outdated attitudes about predators; and, above all, the preservation of the wilderness not only for its primitive and personal values but also for its 'unexpected importance as a laboratory of the study of land health"—all of these inform the vision of the book. If they sound familiar today, we can take heart that a pen in the hand of a nature writer like Leopold can change attitudes. As he reminds us in several places, true "Development" is a job

"not of building roads into lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human mind."

And, again:

"Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language. The quality of [sandhill] cranes lies, I think, in this higher gamut, as yet beyond the reach of words."



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SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

President	Loreene Reid	600-6666	pres@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Vice President	Lou Ann Harris	600-3585	louann@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Treasurer	Evelyn Acton		treas@sacajawea audubon.org
Secretary	Paulette Epple	586-0932	sec@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Board members	Jackie Wilson	599-0942	jackiewilson@sacajaweaaudubon.org
	Chris Nixon	544-4901	christopherfnixon@yahoo.com
	Leo Freeman	414-403-7943	leofreeman@sacajaweaaudubon.org
	Peter Norlander	222-4646	norlander@q.com
	Richard Keigley	582-5833	richardkeigley@sacajaweaaudubon.org
	Jeff Safford	587-3782	jeffsafford@sacajaweaaudubon.org
	Martha Collins	579-0506	marthacoll@msn.com
Education Chair			
Field trips, Bird Count and Bird Sightings	John Parker	586-5863	birdsightings@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Conservation Chair	Vickie Backus	600-2280	conservation@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Hospitality / Coffee	Diane Gresham	219-3543	dgresham@bresnan.net
Membership Records	Sally MacDonald	223-9167	membership@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Newsletter Ed. / Design	Mary Cloud Ammons	600-0301	newsletter@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Program Chair	Jackie Wilson		programs@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Publicity Chair	Karen Ehlert		kehlert44@gmail.com
Chapter Rep. to State	Sharon Hanton	586-9500	
Webmaster	Lou Ann Harris	600-3585	louann@sacajaweaaudubon.org

Montana Audubon: 406-443-3949; PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624; mtaudubon@mtaudubon.org; www.mtaudubon.org For direct contact: shoffman@mtaudubon.org
 Montana Bird Hotline: 406-721-9799 to report unusual or out-of-season birds

Membership Application

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