

Bitterroot AUDUBON



FEBRUARY 2012

NEWSLETTER

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“ADOPT-A-LEK”

A Program Using Citizen Science to Monitor Greater Sage-Grouse Populations Across Montana

by Ben Deeble

The Bitterroot Audubon Society invites you to a fascinating program about the Greater Sage-Grouse and the challenges that affect their survival. In 2000, there was a petition to place them on the Federal Endangered Species list due to concerns that conservation of the species may be on a collision course with major economic sectors such as farming, ranching, oil and gas development and modern urbanization. The National Wildlife Federation began a project to help collect data for determining population trends by doing a census of the birds' springtime breeding sites (leks).



Courtesy W. Steve Sherman

“Adopt-a-Lek” has been training volunteers to survey the Greater Sage-Grouse breeding leks and habitat trends across Montana. The project will be hosted by

Montana Audubon starting in 2012, and needs a few additional volunteers in central and southwest Montana. Ben Deeble, a specialist in Avian Biology and Habitat Management, has been working on Greater Sage-Grouse conservation in Montana for over a decade. He helped craft the state's Sage-Grouse management plan, has testified before Congress and currently co-chairs the western Montana Sage-Grouse Local Working Group. His presentation will describe the current status of Greater Sage-Grouse, an iconic species of the West's sagebrush landscapes, and the efforts to conserve the species.

Join us Monday, February 20th at 7:00 P.M. at the Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge, north of Stevensville. Contact Kay Fulton for further information at 642-3794.

Riparian Habitat Grants Available

We are excited to offer small grants to landowners for enhancing riparian habitat along the Bitterroot River within the boundary of the Bitterroot River Important Bird Area (IBA). We are now soliciting proposals for projects to take place in 2012 or 2013. Grants will be provided for projects having 5 acres or more lying within the boundaries of the IBA. Adjacent landowners may work together to meet this qualification. Grants won't exceed \$1,000 per project and/or can request volunteer labor from Bitterroot Audubon. Examples of appropriate projects include fencing to keep livestock, deer, or elk from eating shrubs and trees, purchase and planting of native shrubs and trees, or pulling noxious weeds.

There are two deadlines for proposals, **February 13 and April 13, 2012**. Proposal forms are short; they can be obtained from Sherry Ritter at s287ritter@mac.com or 777-7409.

Letter from the President

By Kay Fulton, BAS President

“An Ancient Ritual Viewed by the Uninvited”



Just before dawn, we crept up to the crest of the hill and hid behind a large obstruction. Then as the grass and sagebrush began to turn light yellow from the rising sun, we saw them: Native Warriors, in full regalia made of glorious feathers, marching up the hill and drumming rhythmically, sending out a message we could not understand. They strutted and danced. The females looked utterly bored and ran the other way.

Well, that was my impression of the first time I participated in an “Adopt-A-Lek” Greater Sage-Grouse survey a few years ago. My friend Mel and I were assigned to survey a mountaintop lek. In the early morning dark we drove up a winding mountain road to the lek site, turning our headlights off well before reaching the top. We sat in the car (our blind) and waited for dawn. We were able to see the Greater Sage-Grouse males come to their favorite breeding ground and compete with each other by puffing up, drumming, and strutting. What an amazing sight!

It will be great to hear Ben Deeble talk about the “Adopt-A-Lek” program at our next meeting, Monday Feb. 20th and I encourage you to participate in a survey.

-Kay

Editors Note: At youtube.com there are some great videos of the Greater Sage-Grouse lek displays. Check them out!

News and Notes

Call for Photos

Bitterroot Audubon is seeking images of birds for a new feature in our newsletter: *Bird shots*. If you have taken a great photo and would like to submit it for consideration, please email the jpeg image with a brief description (who took the photo, what is the subject, where the photo was taken, and any interesting details) to BASeditors@gmail.com.

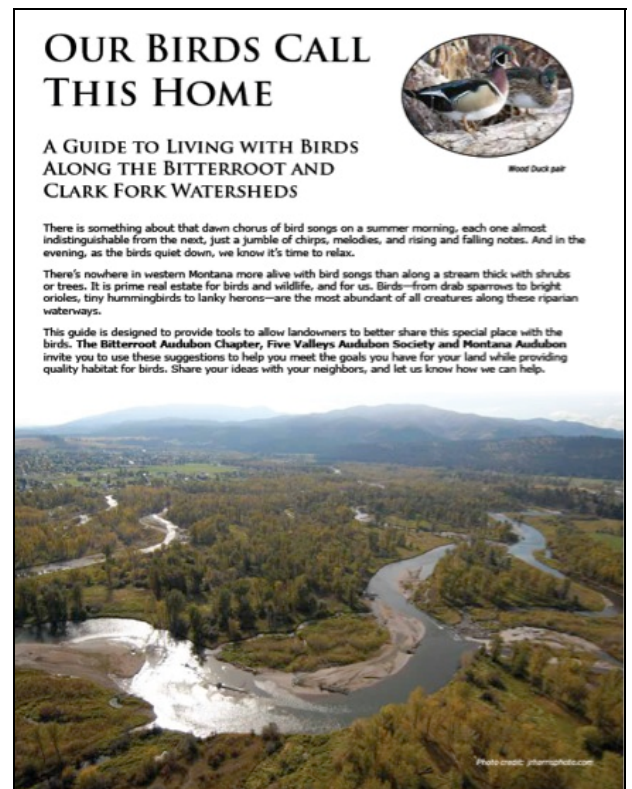
Hawk Migration

The Hawk Migration Association of North America is looking for Citizen Science Volunteers to monitor over-wintering raptors. Kate Stone is coordinating this effort in the Bitterroot Valley. Participants generally commit to identifying and counting hawks along a 30-mile route, four times in the winter season. If

interested in participating in this project, please contact Kate (381-1115) to be assigned a route. More information is available at the following website: <http://www.hmana.org/wrs.php>.

A new IBA Brochure is Available

Bitterroot Audubon and its Important Bird Area Committee are excited to announce a new brochure. *Our Birds Call This Home*, downloadable from bitterrootaudubon.org, provides guidance for managing riparian habitat for birds. This brochure was a collaborative effort by Bitterroot, Five Valleys, and Montana Audubon.



Float Trip Raffle

In the spirit of supporting our community, Hannah Spencer (river guide and birding enthusiast) and Samantha O'Byrne (Sam's Spade proprietress and birding enthusiast) have joined to co-sponsor a raffle for a guided scenic float and bird-watching trip for two on the Bitterroot River in 2012. All proceeds will go directly to the Bitterroot Audubon Society, the local chapter of the National Audubon Society. Tickets are available at \$5 per ticket or 5 for \$20, and can be purchased from Bitterroot Audubon Society board members, at the meetings in January and February, or from Sam's Spade Garden Tools & Wares located at 111 South 4th Street in Hamilton, MT. The drawing will be held at the store on March 1, 2012.

2012 *Wings Across the Big Sky* Bird Festival

The Hilton Garden Inn, Your Lodging Options, and Friday Pre-Festival Workshops

Come join us for Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, this year co-hosted by the Flathead Audubon Society, June 8–10, 2012, at the Hilton Garden Inn and

Conference Center, 1840 US Hwy 93 S in Kalispell. We are very excited about this new facility, which will be center stage for festival activities Friday through Sunday, including registration, birding field trips departure point, guest speaker presentations, meals, banquet festivities, and much more.

The Hilton is centrally located in the Flathead Valley and provides easy access to all our birding activities, field trips, and workshops, and is within a short drive of abundant recreational destinations, such as Flathead Lake and Glacier National Park.

Currently we have 50 rooms blocked out for festival-goers Friday and Saturday nights. (25 King beds and 25 Queen/Queen beds at \$99 per night plus applicable taxes.) This rate will be extended to us for three days prior and post event. Be sure to tell them you're with the Bird Festival group to get the special rate! We suggest you make your reservations soon at the hotel directly at 1-406-756-4500.

For nearby accommodations within walking distance of the Hilton, here are more options:

- Aero Inn, 1830 US Highway 93 South | Kalispell, MT | 59901. 1-406-755-3798
- Motel 6, 1540 US Hwy. 93 South | Kalispell, MT | 59901. 1-406-752-6355
- Super 8 Motel, 1341 1st Avenue East | Kalispell, MT | 59901. 1-406-755-1888
- The Outlaw Hotel, 1701 Hwy 93 S | Kalispell, MT | 59901. 1-406-755-6100

Alternative accommodations can be found at www.kalispell.stayingj.com, toll free 1-877-STAY-HGI.

2012 Pre-festival Workshops

Our workshops were so popular at our 2011 Festival in Glasgow that we again are offering two pre-festival Conservation Workshops, plus adding one pre-festival Education Workshop, all scheduled for Friday, June 8. You can sign up for these during registration from March 15 to May 22. The festival brochure will be arriving in your mail box mid-March. So you will want to act fast—space is limited for each workshop! We're excited to offer the following three pre-festival (Friday) workshops this year:

Conservation

1). ***Northwestern Montana Birds and Wildlife in a Warming World.*** We'll tour local forests and, hopefully, Glacier National Park. Participants will get up close and personal with the flora and fauna of the area, discuss the impacts of our changing climate, and delve into how we can lessen the impact by reducing carbon pollution and building resilient ecological systems best able to adapt to a changing climate.

Limited to 20 participants, Lunch: included
Time: tentative, 8 A.M. – 2 P.M. Cost: TBD

2) ***River-to-Lakes Initiative.*** Since 2000, the River-to-Lake Initiative has been providing conservation and restoration expertise to private landowners along the Flathead River and along the North Shore of Flathead Lake. River-to-Lake partners, spearheaded by the Flathead Land Trust, work directly with landowners to craft conservation efforts that meet their needs. We'll meet many of these partners and visit several project sites, including two Important Bird Areas (Owen Sowerwine Natural Area and North Shore Flathead Lake).

Limited to 20 participants, Lunch: included
Time: tentative, 8 A.M. – 2 P.M. Cost: TBD

Education

Develop a Bird Education Program in your Community. This six-hour training is for any Audubon Chapter member looking to begin or improve their bird education programs within their community. Each participant will receive training and curricula-oriented materials from Flying Wild, a Council for Environmental Education program which introduces students to bird conservation through standards-based classroom activities and environmental stewardship projects. In addition, instructors will share their expertise and experiences in developing new environmental education programs for all ages. (For more information on Project Flying Wild go to www.flyingwild.org.) This workshop will be presented by the Montana Audubon Conservation Education Center: Darcie Vallant, Center Director, and Heather Ristow, Education Director. For questions on this training please contact Darcie at 406-294-5099, ext. 302. Limited to 30 participants, Time: TBD, Cost: \$25/individual

For more information about the festival please contact: Montana Audubon Bird Festival Coordinator, Larissa Berry at lberry@mtaudubon.org/406-443-3949, or any Flathead Audubon Board Member. For updates, visit

<http://www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival.html> and "like" us at <http://www.facebook.com/MontanaAudubon>

Great Backyard Bird Count Perfect for New Birders

15th annual count takes place Feb. 17-20, 2012



*Cassin's Finch, Gary Botello, AZ
2011 GBBC*

December 2011--As movie-goers watch the stars of The Big Year in their quest to count birds, some may be motivated to try the hobby for the first time. The annual Great Backyard Bird Count is the perfect opportunity. The event is hosted by Audubon, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada. The results provide a snapshot of the whereabouts of more than 600 bird species.

Anyone can participate in this free event and no registration is needed. Watch and count birds for at least 15 minutes on any day of the count, February 17-20, 2012. Enter your results at www.birdcount.org, where you can watch as the tallies grow across the continent. The four-day count typically records more than 10 million observations.

"When thousands of people all tell us what they're seeing, we can detect patterns in how birds are faring from year to year," said Janis Dickinson, director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "

The Great Backyard Bird Count is a perfect example of Citizen Science," says Audubon Chief Scientist, Gary Langham. "Like Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, volunteers help us with data year after year,

providing scientific support that is the envy of many institutions. It's also a lot of fun."

"We're finding that more people are taking part in our bird count programs every year--and the more that take part, the better it is for the birds," says Richard Cannings, Senior Projects Officer for Bird Studies Canada.

The 2011 GBBC brought in more than 92,000 bird checklists submitted by participants from across the United States and Canada. Altogether, bird watchers identified 596 species with 11.4 million bird observations. Results from the 2011 GBBC included:

- Increased reports of Evening Grosbeaks, a species that has been declining;
- A modest seasonal movement of winter finches farther south in their search for food;
- The Eurasian Collared-Dove was reported from Alaska for the first time, more evidence of an introduced species rapidly expanding its range.

Although it's called the Great "Backyard" Bird Count, the count extends well beyond backyards. Lots of participants choose to head for national parks, nature centers, urban parks, nature trails, or nearby sanctuaries. For more information, including bird-ID tips, instructions, and past results, visit www.birdcount.org.

The count also includes a photo contest and a prize drawing for participants who enter their bird checklists online.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is made possible in part by sponsor Wild Birds Unlimited.

Would you like to see the newsletter in **COLOR**? Visit www.BitterrootAudubon.org and click the link to download the current newsletter or visit the archives.

You can sign up to have an e-copy sent to your email inbox by contacting Susie Duff, our Membership Chair at 961-5455 or sduff1@aol.com. Please include "Newsletter" in the subject line.

News and Notes

(Continued from page 2)

Bitterroot Audubon is on Facebook!

To increase the scope of our outreach efforts, Bitterroot Audubon has created a Facebook page. We will use the page to update people on chapter activities, post information on bird-related issues in the media, and to allow people to post their bird photos and sightings. If you use Facebook, please look for Bitterroot Audubon and “Like” us! Five Valleys Audubon, Montana Audubon and National Audubon also have Facebook pages.



Website update

We are working with Irestone Web Designs to give our website a facelift. One of the features we are improving is the Photo Gallery feature, which allows approved users to post their bird photos on our website. If you are interested in creating your own photo gallery, please use the “Contact Us” feature of the website to let us know of your interest. We will then create a personal photo gallery for you.

Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT

New to birding? Beginner Bird Walks at the refuge sponsored by Bitterroot Audubon and Five Valleys Audubon are held the third Saturday of each month. Meet at the Refuge Visitor's Center on February 18th at 9AM for a two hour bird walk. Bring binoculars if you have them. Contact the refuge at (406) 777-5552 for more information.

Local Chapter Members

To simplify record keeping the board has approved making all chapter only memberships due on the first of the year, except for those joining in October, November or December of the previous year. Those memberships will expire December 31st one year later.

As this is the first year for this policy, no local only members will be removed from the mailing list before the May newsletter.

Calendar of Events

Now-Feb 29, 2012-Bitterroot River float trip raffle tickets on sale.

Feb 13-1st Deadline for Riparian Habitat Landowner Grant. Contact Sherry Ritter for a proposal form: s287ritter@mac.com

Feb 17-20-Great Backyard Bird Count

Feb 18-Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, 9-11AM

Feb 20-Audubon Meeting at the Lee Metcalf, 7 PM, Board Mtg. at 5:30 PM

Mar 19- Audubon Meeting, Location TBD, 7 PM

Apr 13-2nd Deadline for Riparian Habitat Landowner Grant. Contact Sherry Ritter for a proposal form: s287ritter@mac.com

Jun 8-10, 2012-Montana Bird Festival, Kalispell

Bird Shots



Courtesy Karen Griffing

Sandhill Crane at the Lee Metcalf NWR, April 2010.

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At large	Campbell Massey*	381-0197

* Board Member

EMAIL: contactus@bitterrootaudubon.org

WEBSITE: www.BitterrootAudubon.org

Chapter Only Membership

The Bitterroot Audubon Chapter Only Membership is \$15/year. These members will be supporting local chapter activities, receive 9 issues of the newsletter, and enjoy Chapter benefits. To join as a Chapter Only Member, complete this form.

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____
Email: _____

Check this box to receive full color email-only newsletters delivered to your inbox.

Send this application with \$15 to:



Bitterroot Audubon Society
PO Box 326
Hamilton, MT 59840-0326

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Become a member of the **National Audubon Society** and **Bitterroot Audubon** [Chapter Code C1ZN580Z]. You will receive *Audubon* magazine, *Bitterroot Audubon Newsletter* and a membership card. *Introductory membership is \$20.*

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____

Send this application and your check to:



Audubon

Membership Data Center
PO Box 422250
Palm Coast FL 32142-2250