

Bitterroot AUDUBON



DECEMBER 2016

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 31, NO. 4

30th Annual Hamilton Christmas Bird Count Saturday, December 17, 2016

By John Ormiston

Deck the Halls, it's nearly Christmas and that means Saturday, December 17, Bitterroot Audubon Society and friends will count all the birds in the 114 square mile Hamilton Christmas Bird Count circle for the 30th time. We need to uphold tradition by meeting at The Teller Education Building (south of Quast Lane on Chaffin) at 7:30 AM, eating chili and Oreos at noon (thanks for the 30th time to Bill Good), and having a grand time with fellow birders. Just like always the total count will be heavily dependant on favorable weather, but we'll count no matter what the conditions. We'll organize into 6 or more groups, each with an experienced leader, and get out into the field shortly after daylight. Participants will have choices of area and routes to count, some involve walking, others mostly driving and looking. At noon we'll reorganize and try to cover any place missed in the morning.

We annually see over 7,000 birds and about 65 species. In 2006 we saw about 6,900 birds of 74 species and lead the State. Our cumulative species list contains 128 species with 31 species seen every year and 23 only once. The Hamilton Count annually finishes in the top 5 in the state, most often in the top three, competing with Big Fork, Missoula and Stevensville. We need the help of birders of all skill levels to help find and identify all the birds in the 7 ½ mile circle centered on the Hamilton Airport.

Feeder watchers provide essential help. Every year folks who can't go to the field add several species to our list. You can help by counting the birds at your feeder for the entire day, or for a few hours or minutes when you can take the time during the day. You all know someone who feeds birds; encourage

them to report their findings to Colleen Powell, the feeder watcher coordinator for the 30th time, by calling her at 363-2116. We've only had about 20 feeder watchers each year, surely more folks than that feed birds and can identify their beneficiaries.

Please call Colleen at 363-2116 or me at 360-9530 if you know someone who could count birds at their feeder, or if you need more information about the 30th annual Hamilton Christmas Bird Count.

52nd Annual Stevensville Christmas Bird Count Saturday, December 31, 2016

By Dave Lockman

The 52nd annual Stevensville Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for Saturday, December 31st. What a way to end the year! We hope you'll be able to join us for a fun day (or morning) of meeting new folks and finding birds in our local winter wonderland. It's a big area and we need all the help we can get. Experience is helpful, but certainly not required. Field observers will meet in the basement conference room of the Stevensville Ranger Station between 7:30 and 7:45 AM to form small teams and get area assignments. Birders who live in the Count Circle (anywhere within 7.5 miles of the Ranger Station) can opt to get up at their leisure and count the birds on their property. Both types of counters are critical to a successful count. You don't have to spend all day counting birds, any time you have is helpful.

Bird counters on last year's Stevensville CBC found 12,266 birds of 80 different species, which was our lowest species count since 2010. We didn't find any new species last year, so our cumulative species total remained at 158 over the 51 years of the Count. We've found some pretty wild birds in the past, including the 2000 sighting of what is still the only Vermillion Flycatcher ever reported in Montana, a Brambling in 2014 and a Northern Mockingbird in

1997. There are always some interesting birds out there just waiting to be discovered, so come and help us find all the common and unusual birds hiding in our winter landscape. Please contact me at 381-7679 for more information.

10th Annual Big Hole Christmas Bird Count, Monday January 2, 2017

By Kate Stone

Join members of Bitterroot Audubon on Monday, January 2nd for the 10th annual Big Hole Christmas Bird Count. We will have options for both hiking and driving surveys. You will be sure to see several interesting species; commonly seen species include Snow Buntings, Common Redpolls, and Rough-legged Hawks. Participants usually spend about 4 hours in the field searching for birds, followed by lunch in Wisdom. If you'd like to participate, please contact Kate Stone (381-1115, krosestone@hotmail.com) to register and for information about the meeting place and time.



Courtesy Debbie Leick

Snow Buntings.

Letter from the President

*By Becky Peters, BAS
President*

Since the election

I have been asked by many concerned Audubon members about what to do to help the environment and the birds. No matter what your political views are I believe it is always foremost to help the environment; for without the healthy land, healthy water and healthy air, we ain't existing folks!! Here's a few of my favorite organizations. There are plenty more agencies that we can be participating in and donating to. Now is time to step



up and be a consistent caretaker of our space ship, our exquisite home.

1. League of Conservation Voters

<http://www.lcv.org/>

Mission

LCV works to turn environmental values into national, state and local priorities. LCV, in collaboration with our state LCV partners, advocates for sound environmental laws and policies, holds elected officials accountable for their votes and actions, and elects pro-environment candidates who will champion our priority issues.

2. MEIC, Montana Environmental Information Center

<http://meic.org/>

Mission

The Montana Environmental Information Center is a non-profit environmental advocate founded in 1973 by Montanans concerned with protecting and restoring Montana's natural environment.

Nearly 5,000 individuals in Montana and around the country support MEIC as members, both financially and with their activism. Join

3. National Audubon

<https://action.audubon.org/onlineactions>

America's strongest and most important law for protecting wildlife, the Endangered Species Act, is under a coordinated assault. More than 80 bills and amendments have been introduced in the U.S. House and Senate that would dismantle the Act, and dozens of policy provisions in year-end legislation threaten numerous birds and other wildlife. **Please urge your members of Congress to oppose efforts to dismantle the Endangered Species Act.**

4. Montana Audubon

<http://mtaudubon.org/conservation-policy/global-warming/actions-solutions/>

Affecting Conservation Through Policy Change

Montana Audubon is a respected and influential voice on complex natural resource issues across the state, with a proven ability to work with diverse stakeholders to solve tough problems. Public policy is an important element of our conservation work. We safeguard Montana's natural heritage by influencing decision makers to protect our state's healthy environment and rich biodiversity.

5. Environmental Defense Fund

<https://www.edf.org/> (94.4 out of 100 Charity Navigator)

Mission

Environmental Defense Fund's mission is to preserve the natural systems on which all life depends. What distinguishes EDF from others is the combination of what we protect and how we protect it. We work to solve the most critical environmental problems facing the planet, focusing on mitigating climate change, restoring the ocean's bounty, protecting wildlife and their habitats, and safeguarding our health. Since these topics are intertwined, our solutions take a multidisciplinary approach. We work in concert with other organizations-as well as with business, government and communities-and avoid duplicating work already being done effectively by others.

Holiday Gift Ideas from your Bitterroot Audubon Board Members

By Becky Peters

We asked our Board members to share some bird related gifts they enjoy giving or receiving for the holidays. Here are some of their responses. May you and your bird-type friends have an enjoyable and relaxing holiday season.

From Kate Stone:

<http://www.birdsbesafe.com>

My vote is for the Birds Be Safe collar, which leads to an 87% reduction in birds brought back to their owners by roaming outdoor cats. They work by visually alerting birds to a cat's presence with a ridiculous yet fashionable neck adornment- complete with reflective trim so you can find your sneaky feline at night. If your cat must be outside, it should be wearing one of these. Costs \$10. **An Important**

Conservation Issue:

Nearly 100 million individual birds may die annually from cat predation in this country alone. See [our Cats'n'birds page](#) for more information and see [our FAQ page](#) for product details. **Join us in protecting birds from cats with our Birds Be Safe collar.**



From Kay Fulton:

Kay's favorite is a large (about 1&1/2 feet long or tall) Canada geese and a Great Blue Heron made from barn wood. I have them mounted on my living room wall. I guess they are my version of hunting trophy!!

The woman who makes them is Karen France. She's in Hamilton. Her phone number is 381-8255.



Currently she has three geese in stock & can take orders but no guarantee for Christmas.

From Micki Long:

My best bird present is not one easily replicated. An artist friend painted a beautiful female cardinal,



based on one of my photos, as a going away gift when I moved to Montana. Aside from that, a cool *holder filled with nesting material*

has been the best gift.

Here's an idea on how to make your own holder:

<http://davesgarden.com/guides/articles>The Frugal Gardener: Money Saving Projects and Tips; How to make a Holder for Nesting Material

From Susie Duff:

For this time of year I really like my heated bird bath so my birds can have fresh water whenever they need it.

From Skip Horner--Our adventurous guide with a sense of humor:

I brought a Chinstrap penguin skull home for my wife that I found on a beach on an island off Antarctica. She likes bones. It sits on the window sill over her desk. During a first-descent river expedition in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, a tribal chieftain gave me a headband with feathers from a Bird of Paradise. It has since disappeared. Same trip, I bought for my wife the femur of a Cassowary, a large flightless bird, from a man wearing nothing but a penis gourd. It's sharpened to a point (*not the penis gourd!*) and was used as a dagger during their frequent inter-tribal fights. It's halved lengthwise, creating a groove on the backside facilitating the release of blood from the stab wound to an opposing tribal member. It has feathers attached with strips of bark through holes

bored in the femoral head at the knee joint, and it's carved with crude geometric designs along its entire length. It sits on a different window sill along with the blowgun & poison darts I brought home from another river expedition to Borneo. I'll bring it to the next meeting. – Skip

From Susan Nelson--Another comedic Board member:

Mine is a magazine cover mock-up following one of our more brutal CBCs in Illinois. (The best place for birds was the warm waters at the water treatment plant).



From Rosan Stover:

(The best gift she received from a bird): How about what has been placed on my car? And also the adapter that enables a smart phone be attached to a spotting scope is another possible gift. I am waiting for an adapter that will work with the iPhone 7.

From Becky Peters:

Any book about my favorite birds – Corvids and Cedar Waxwings! And any bird earrings.

From Sherry Ritter:

Well, the best was a spotting scope! Also great is an optics cleaning kit. Here's a photo of a gift I often give. The Artist's Shop in Missoula sells felted birds that

don't necessarily look like local birds. That's good, because



they can be presented everywhere. For example, I've given them as host gifts in Colombia and Mexico. Here's the artist's page on Etsy:

<https://www.etsy.com/shop/UpInFlight>

Patagonian Hands also creates felted birds. They are expensive but so beautiful. They are usually at the Made Fair on December 12 in Missoula at the Adam's Center. Here's their

website: <http://www.patagonianhands.com/>

Ceramic birds, also at the Artist's Shop. I have a chickadee, nuthatch, and pileated woodpecker perched in various places around my yard.

[The Birder's Handbook](#). This has been an important resource for me for many years and although published in 1988, it's still valuable. On the left side is information about each bird (but no photos) such as nest type, incubation periods, who cares for the young, food types, foraging methods, and lots more. I tell people it's the information you wish was in your field guide. On the right hand pages, there are essays about many different topics.



Field guide bag, such as a [Pajaro](#) ones. <http://www.pajaro.com/fieldbag>. An absolute essential for birders because they can hold multiple field guides, a pad of paper, a pencil, and the bigger ones can hold more like a bottle of water.

Fred Weisbecker:

My wife gave me some great binoculars.

And just a few more gift ideas:

Check out this unbelievable list of 44 ideas to get anyone excited: <http://www.audubon.org/news/44-perfect-gifts-bird-and-nature-lovers-your-life> <http://www.uncommongoods.com> Search "bird" for some interesting gifts for a birder.

The Sibley Birds Coloring Field Journal

<http://www.sibleyguides.com> \$19.95 In time for the holidays, the perfect coloring book for the birder or naturalist. A selection of previously unpublished bird paintings by David Sibley, transformed into detailed and accurate outline drawings for you to color.

From Cornell Lab of Ornithology:

<https://give.birds.cornell.edu>

Please give today to help birds as they journey through a world without borders. Your gift will go twice as far. Cornell Lab scientists used millions of sightings from eBird citizen-science participants this year to reveal new details of the migratory journeys of bird species across the Western Hemisphere. **The map glows** where Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala meet, indicating where the highest densities of migratory birds spend their winter. These eye-opening findings have spurred us — with new urgency — to help protect the world's most vital regions for birds, such as the Yucatán Peninsula. Your gift to the Cornell Lab will go twice as far, and will help us: Encourage and train communities and partners to monitor birds.

Translate bird data into science-based conservation actions. Inspire people of all ages to learn and care about the birds that connect our hemisphere

For feeding the birds in the winter:

<http://blog.nwf.org/2010/12/ten-simple-tips-for-successful-winter-bird-feeding/>

...AND of course any donation to National Audubon, Montana Audubon or Bitterroot Audubon!!

Bitterroot Valley Winter Eagle Project

By Kate Stone



*Courtesy Raptor View Research Institute
Banded Golden Eagle on a deer carcass.*

Bitterroot Audubon is joining forces with Raptor View Research Institute (RVRI) to develop a new winter Citizen Science Project. RVRI has already captured 69 Golden and 19 Bald Eagles in the Bitterroot. Some have been outfitted with satellite transmitters, and others have been marked with either wing tags or numbered leg bands. Our idea is to develop a Citizen Science network of camera stations and eagle capture sites on private, working lands throughout the Bitterroot Valley this winter. We also hope to raise community funds to purchase and deploy two satellite transmitters on adult Golden Eagles.

Our goals include:

- Increase the detections of previously marked eagles with camera stations set around the Bitterroot Valley
- Develop areas where researchers can safely trap eagles for additional banding, marking, and deployment of satellite transmitters
- Collect information on the use and importance of working lands in supporting over-wintering eagle population and other scavenging wildlife species

- Encourage dialog between farmers, ranchers, and scientists about conservation issues concerning eagles, landowner needs and management goals, and the positive intersection of these two concepts
- Engage people of many backgrounds in a Citizen Science project

We anticipate several ways Bitterroot Audubon members can be involved, including allowing access to your private land for a carcass station, talking to friends and neighbors about land access, setting and maintaining carcass and camera stations, observing eagle behavior at carcass sites, helping to process collected images on a public website, donating funds or a premium towards equipment purchases.

If you'd like to participate or support this project, please contact Kate (kroestone@hotmail.com). We will send you a volunteer survey to record and organize your interest. Thanks!



*Courtesy Kate Stone
Golden Eagle in the Big Hole.*

Winter Raptor Survey Routes

This year we are trying a new type of survey for people interesting in documenting winter raptors. We will be continuing our surveys on a 60-mile route at the north end of the valley- from Lolo south the Stevensville, on both the west and east sides. The route will be broken up into short sections, and people can survey any section(s) they want, any time they want, and as many or as few times as they want. All we ask is that you feel reasonably confident in identifying winter raptors, and that you are willing to record and report your birds using eBird. To participate, please contact Eric Rasmussen (erasmussen@mpgranch.com).

What's the story, Story?

By Jim Story

Question: *Is it true that some birds eat their feathers?*

Answer: Yes, Horned and Pied-billed Grebe adults and chicks regularly eat feathers. The gizzard in these fish-eating birds is apparently unable to completely crush the bones of the fish that are swallowed. The feather balls may protect the stomach and slow the digestive process so that the bones are completely dissolved before passing into the intestine. This idea is supported by the fact that the Least Grebe, which eats fewer fish than the other grebes, has a smaller feather ball in its stomach. This theory, if true, raises the question: Why haven't grebes evolved a more efficient gizzard? More studies are needed to understand the feather-eating behavior.

Local birding expert Jim Story answers your questions about birds and their habits. Jim welcomes your questions at jstory4689@gmail.com.

How to Make Home-made Vegetarian Suet

Audubon Website

With this vegetarian version of suet (traditionally it's made from rendered animal fat) you can provide the perfect winter substitute for birds that normally feast on insects. This lipid-rich treat can help prepare year-round residents for the long winter and is quite the draw for birds such as woodpeckers, wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, and titmice. Check out this recipe, inspired by ["The Misfit Baker" blog](#).

Materials:

- 1 1/2 cups shortening (look for palm oil free options)
- 3/4 cups nut butter (any kind)
- 3 1/2 cups wild bird seed
- 1 cup quick oats
- 1/2 cup corn meal
- Ice cube tray

Steps:

1. Mix the dry ingredients of bird seed, oats, and corn meal together and set aside.
2. Combine the shortening and nut butter in a separate bowl and melt. Stir until completely combined.
3. Pour the melted mixture into the dry ingredients and stir until combined.
4. Spoon mixture into the ice cube tray.
5. Freeze for one to two hours and place in your suet

feeder!

Note: Not recommended for outdoor temperatures above 50 degrees.

How Golden Eagles Spot Prey from Incredible Distances?

By Adam Sedgley, Audubon Website

The secret is in the density of their visual cells.

Ever used the term "eagle eye"? The eye of an eagle is one of the most sensitive in the animal kingdom, and its size can cause it to weigh more than the eagle's brain. The secret to the bird's exceptional vision is the density of visual cells, the rods and cones of its retina.

Look at the back of your hand: your rods register the overall shape, the cones register details such as contour and color. The density of rods and cones within a raptor's eye may be five times more than in your own eye.

So when hunting in open country, the Golden Eagle uses its seven-foot wingspan to ride thermals high into the air. There, it spots the minute movement of its favorite prey, a rabbit, over a mile away. That's like you driving at forty miles an hour, and being able to look back to where you were when this BirdNote started and see a jack rabbit. So the next time you give the "eagle eye" to a raptor, chances are, it saw you first.

This audio story is brought to you by [BirdNote](#), a partner of The National Audubon Society. BirdNote episodes air daily on public radio stations nationwide.

News and Notes

Feeder Birds

By John Ormiston

Have the birds returned to your feeders? I've had many comments about the lack of birds and have consistently, for many years, said to just wait for snow and cold and they'll be back. This year was unusually snow free until now and the temps have not been that cold. I'm still waiting for the birds to come back to our feeders and for my prediction to come true. So far I've been wrong. Hope you're having different results.

Chapter Members Renewal Deadline

If you are a BAS chapter member, your membership fee (\$15) is due by January 31, 2017. Please send payment to Bitterroot Audubon Society, PO Box 326, Hamilton, MT 59840.

Calendar of Events

Dec 17- Hamilton Christmas Bird Count, Teller Education Building, 7:30 AM.

Dec 17- Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 10AM-12PM.

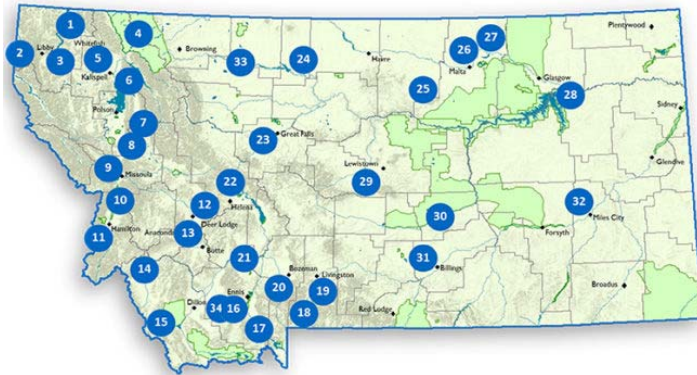
Dec 31- Stevensville Christmas Bird Count, Stevensville Ranger Station, 7:30 AM.

Jan 2- Big Hole Christmas Bird Count, contact Kate Stone 381-1115, krostone@hotmail.com to register.

Jan 16- Audubon Meeting, Forest Service/DNRC Building, Hamilton, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM

Jan 31- Chapter-only membership renewal due, \$15

Jun 9-11, 2017- Wings Across the Big Sky Festival, Great Falls, MT. More details to be announced.



Map Courtesy Montana Audubon

Locations for all Montana Christmas Bird Counts. View the website to find information for each count.

Call for Photos Bitterroot Audubon is seeking images of birds for a 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, to BASeditors@gmail.com.

Bitterroot Audubon is on Facebook If you use Facebook, please look for Bitterroot Audubon and “Like” us!

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 December 17th at 10AM for a two hour bird walk. Bring binoculars if you have them. Contact the refuge at [\(406\) 777-5552](tel:4067775552) for more information.

Montana Audubon Christmas Bird Count Results

By Janet Ellis

As of today information for 28 of Montana's 34 Christmas Bird Counts are up on Montana Audubon's website. The website will be updated as results are provided from this year's CBCs. The link is here: <http://mtaudubon.org/birds-science/citizen-science-opportunities/christmas-bird-count/>

Bird Shots



Courtesy Mike Daniels

Trumpeter Swans at Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, December 2016.



wings MONTANA
AUDUBON
across the big sky

FOR YOUR CALENDAR: Wings Across the Big Sky
June 9-11, 2017 Great Falls, Montana

Time to begin making those summer plans! ... **Montana Audubon's *Wings Across the Big Sky Festival*, co-hosted by Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon** , will be held June 9-11, 2017 in Great Falls. We invite you to spread the news and enthusiasm so we can all enjoy a fantastic celebration of **40 Years of Montana Audubon**. Invite your out-of-state and nearby friends, birders and non-birders alike, to visit the Missouri River corridor and participate in a myriad of festival activities.

Included in this year's activities are amazing field trips scheduled both Saturday and Sunday. These include excursions to the Rocky Mountain Front, Benton Lake, Kevin Rim, the Highwood and First Peoples State Park, among others, with the anticipation of seeing a varied array of species and habitats, as well as some education on surveys and conservation issues.

Festival headquarters will be located at the Best Western Heritage Inn. Nora Gray and Kay Silk, local festival chairmen, and Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon have been working with us and the Heritage Inn team on event logistics and service. This venue will provide excellent opportunities to display our 40 years of history, Saturday afternoon presentations by Montana Audubon past and present programs, an outdoor barbecue to kickstart the anniversary celebration and this year's festival, our keynote speaker, and a Saturday evening banquet dinner.

Each month we will continue to feature developing news on the 2017 Bird Festival. Registration will begin in March. Stay tuned!

For more information contact Montana Audubon's Bird Festival Coordinator, Cathie Erickson: cerickson@mtaudubon.org.



PILEATED WOODPECKER *Dryocopus pileatus*

L 16.5" WS 29" WT 10 oz

from THE SIBLEY BIRDS COLORING FIELD JOURNAL

BITTERROOT AUDUBON
PO BOX 326
HAMILTON MT 59840-0326

Officers

President	Becky Peters*	369-5210
Vice-Pres. & Conservation Chair	Fred Weisbecker*	375-9317
Secretary	John Ormiston*	363-5464
Treasurer	Jim Story*	961-4689

Directors & Committee Chairs

IBA Program	Sherry Ritter	370-4778
Programs	Kay Fulton*	642-3794
Website	Kate Stone*	381-1115
Education	Jodi Prout*	
Newsltr Eds & Distribution	Sara Ashline* baseditors@gmail.com	
Hospitality	Karen Griffing*	
Membership	Rosan Stover	
Publicity	Susie Duff*	961-5455
Rep. to MT	Dave Lockman	777-2929
Audubon	Becky Peters*	
Scholarship	Skip Horner*	642-6840
Aud. Adv.	Betsy Ballard*	
At large	Judy Hoy*	777-2487
At large	Thomas Arminio*	
At large	Susan Nelson*	
At large	Michelle Long*	

* 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 the full color e-newsletter, and enjoy Chapter benefits. To join as a Chapter Only Member, complete this form.

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

Send this application with \$15 to:



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

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION



Renew or Sign up
for your
National Audubon Membership at
Audubon.org