

Bitterroot AUDUBON



DECEMBER 2017

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 32, NO. 4

31st Annual Hamilton Christmas Bird Count, Saturday, December 16, 2017

By John Ormiston

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas and that means Saturday, December 16th, Bitterroot Audubon Society and friends will count all the birds in the 176 square mile Hamilton Christmas Bird Count circle for the 31st 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 31st time to Bill Good), and having a grand time with fellow birders. Just like always the total count will be heavily dependent 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 about 7,500 birds and about 67 species. In 2006 we saw about 6,900 birds of 74 species and led the State. Our cumulative species list contains 131 species with 28 species seen every year and 21 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 31st 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 John Ormiston at 360-9530 if you know someone who could count birds at their feeder, or if you need more information about the 31st annual Hamilton Christmas Bird Count.

53rd Annual Stevensville Christmas Bird Count, Saturday, December 30, 2017

By Dave Lockman

The 53rd annual Stevensville, MT Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for Saturday, December 30th at 7:30 AM. What a way to end the year! Please 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 for 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, MT CBC found 13,729 birds of 86 different species, which was slightly above the average for the last 10 years and also the highest species count of any Montana CBC in 2016! We didn't find any new species, so our cumulative species total remained at 158 over the 52 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 Dave Lockman at 381-7679 for more information.

11th Annual Big Hole Christmas Bird Count, Tuesday, January 2, 2018

By Kate Stone

Join members of Bitterroot Audubon on Tuesday, January 2nd for the 11th 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. And maybe you'll see one of those Snowy Owls, which seem to be making an appearance in Montana this year!! Participants usually leave the Hamilton area about 7:30 AM, spend about 4 hours in the field searching for birds, and end the day with lunch in Wisdom. If you'd like to participate, please contact Kate Stone (381-1115, krostone@hotmail.com) to register and for information about the meeting place and time.



Courtesy Kate Stone

Common Redpoll numbers are high this year.

Letter from the President

By Becky Peters, BAS President

Happy Holidays Everyone!

'Tis the Season to be with friends and family. Maybe you invite everyone over to your place, maybe you go to their homes. Wherever you gather it is a time of year to reminisce



and to savor the valuable relationships we have. And we human beings tend to do it over food! So too with your feathered friends who come to your bird feeders for food. It is a time to protect those valuable relationships.

In the winter your feathered friends are out there in the snow and the cold. Birds need three main things to get them safely through the winter: cover to hide in, fresh water, and good quality seed. Luckily they have some helpful avian traits going for them in the winter. They've hopefully been able to fatten up this last fall. They have down feathers and they fluff up their outer feathers. They're warm blooded. They can fly away if it gets too darn cold. They can cuddle up with their mates, if they are so inclined. They can gather in your brush piles and the bird boxes you made for them and in tree cavities. So that brings us back to what are you going to feed them? Make some suet for them if you have never done that. Here's one recipe I found:

No Melt Suet Recipe by SrtaMaestra

Ingredients: 2 cups quick-cooking oats 2 cups cornmeal 1 cup flour 1/2 cup sugar 1 cup lard (I use bacon grease) 1 cup crunchy peanut butter

1. Melt the lard and peanut butter together, either on the stove or in the microwave.
2. Combine all of the dry ingredients.
3. Add the dry ingredients to the melted fats.
4. The original recipe suggests pouring into a square pan about 2 inches deep, or spreading onto tree limbs. I just put it into Ziploc containers and scoop it out as needed to fill a screen type of feeder. I use my cookie scoop to take it out, but then mash and break up the scoops, because otherwise the squirrels can come and take a whole scoop at once, way too easily! I don't know if it would hold up well in cake form, as I haven't tried that, but it definitely doesn't melt or make a gloppy mess.

And here's a link to other suet recipes for our winter friends: <https://www.almanac.com/content/bird-food-recipes-winter>

Now when I'm making the suet for them I'm also going to make something for myself. (Especially since our two cats are at this moment taking every single ornament off the tree!) It's a summer drink but I just have to try this "Purple Finch" I found on a National Audubon site.

<http://www.audubon.org/news/cool-bird-inspired->

[cocktail](#) But I don't know what Pastis is!!

Have a relaxing, renewing Holiday and see you at the CBCs in Hamilton, Stevensville and the Big Hole! And look for our *BAS 2018 Calendars* there. Support a local non-profit that supports our Montana feathered friends and our Montana students!

ATTENTION: RAPTOR LOVERS

By Kay Fulton

Kate Davis, well-known Raptor Educator, will be doing a presentation on December 14th for the Bitterroot Cross Country Ski Club and the public is invited. Not only is this an opportunity to see Kate, but it is also a chance to meet her new Red-tailed Hawk, that our own Colleen Powell rescued this last June. She and the hawk became famous because they both ended up in the hospital. Colleen will also be at Kate's program to share "the human side" of this story.



Courtesy Kate Davis


Simone, a rehabilitated Red-tailed Hawk.

Kate Davis:

"I will present a lively Power Point with highlights of my program and then introduce four raptors including a Red-tailed Hawk that recently joined the


Teaching Team from Corvallis. As always we finish with a "group hoot" of a Great Horned Owl. I will also have books and calendars on hand for the perfect holiday gift!"

The Bitterroot Cross-Country Ski Club Presents:

Kate Davis 

Educator, Photographer, Author, Artist, Speaker and
founder of

Raptors of the Rockies



December 14, 2017
The First Presbyterian Church
1220 West Main St, Hamilton
Potluck Dinner 6PM, Meeting 7PM
Everyone is Welcome!

Presentation includes live raptors!

Update—Bitterroot Valley Winter Eagle Project

By Kate Stone

The second year of the Bitterroot Valley Winter Eagle Project is off to a good start! This project is a collaboration between Bitterroot Audubon, Raptor View Research Institute (RVRI), and MPG Ranch. We set out camera stations with deer carcasses in the hopes of re-sighting some of the 100+ Golden and Bald Eagles RVRI biologists have captured in the Bitterroot Valley. We also hope to document the many other wildlife species using private lands in the Bitterroot Valley.



Courtesy Kate Stone

An adult Golden Eagle about to land on a carcass in Florence.

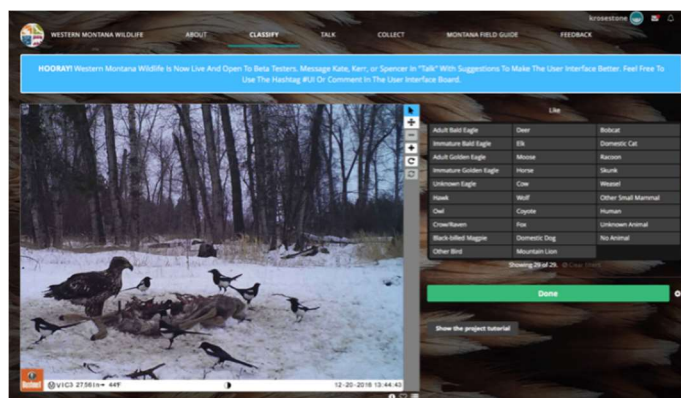
In 2016-2017, we managed to raise over \$10,000 to support the project, worked on 26 private properties, collected hundreds of thousands of images of wildlife, re-sighted several of our "marked" eagles, presented our work to over 1000 local citizens, and engaged with nearly 4,000 people on the website Zooniverse. I think we can call the project a

success!!

This winter, we are expanding to some new locations to increase our chances of detecting Golden Eagles. This species is more likely to use foothills and forested habitat than Bald Eagles. Already some of our new sites are yielding fantastic footage. This year we've also encountered our first black bears and mountain lions.

One of the most important components of this project that YOU can help with is processing the thousands of photos we've collected. Please go to the website Zooniverse, search for Western Montana Wildlife, and you can quickly be tagging wildlife in all of our pictures. There are hundreds of other Citizen Science projects on Zooniverse that you can help with—no one should be bored this winter!

You can follow this project's progress and see some of the incoming pictures by going to Bitterroot Audubon's Facebook page. Thanks for your interest and support!



Courtesy Kate Stone

Zooniverse interface for Western Montana Wildlife. Users help us identify the eagles and other wildlife appearing in our pictures

What's the story, Story?

By Jim Story

Question: How do groups of starlings fly in those intricate, coordinated patterns?

Answer: The phenomenon that results when hundreds of starlings fly in intricately coordinated patterns through the sky is called a murmuration. How do the birds fly in such a perfectly coordinated manner? A study by G.F. Young and his colleagues used sophisticated mathematics to analyze still shots of videos of starlings in flight. They determined that each bird pays attention to a fixed number (seven) of their neighbors in the flock, regardless of the flock

size. Using this “rule of seven,” each bird is thus part of a dynamic system in which the parts combine to make a whole, resulting in a murmuration. Starlings are most commonly associated with murmurations, but similar flight patterns can be seen with other birds, such as shorebirds. These aerial displays are truly marvels of nature.

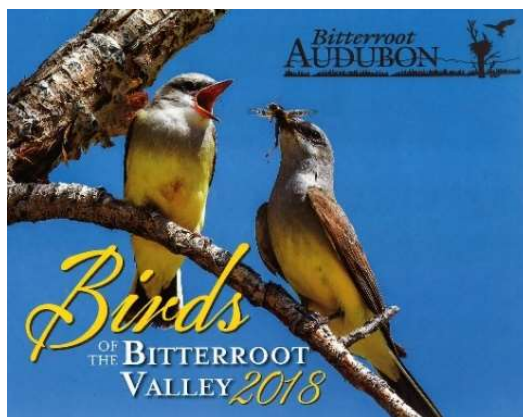
Local birding expert Jim Story answers your questions about birds and their habits. Jim welcomes your questions at jstory4689@gmail.com.

Bitterroot Audubon 2018 Calendar—What a wonderful holiday gift for bird lovers everywhere!

By Susie Duff and Becky Peters

Bitterroot Audubon has been an established organization in the valley for more than 30 years. We offer educational programs and field trips, promote the conservation of wildlife and their habitats and support local conservation-oriented projects. Our major fund raiser is the sales of our one-of-a-kind calendar. We showcase our birds and tell you where to find them each month. Plus, you can make notes on the calendar about the birds you see each month. This exquisite 2018 calendar was created by 17 Bitterroot photographers with art work by local 4th graders. All the proceeds stay here in the Bitterroot for BAS education, scholarship and conservation funds. You can find our calendar at stores in Stevensville, Victor and Hamilton for \$15 (Robbins, Bitterroot Drug, Hamilton Gifts, Art Focus, Wine Cave, Chapter One, and O'Hara Commons; also at Valley Drug in Stevensville, and at Bitterroot Audubon meetings). Visit our website to see pages of the calendar and the complete listings of the stores. You can purchase them online for \$20 by going to:

<http://www.bitterrootaudubon.org/support-us>.



Workshop on Invasive Streamside Trees a Success

By David Cronenwett, Montana Audubon

In late October, Montana Audubon hosted a first ever, two-day workshop for professionals involved with management and research of two highly invasive species: Russian olive and/or salt cedar, along Montana waterways. These Eurasian trees have begun to seriously threaten biologically valuable, native cottonwood-willow habitats in Montana particularly on some of our eastern rivers. Thirty individuals from 22 agencies and entities shared, networked, and planned for future activities. Ultimately, we will launch a new network in Montana to work on riparian forest issues. To learn more, and view some of the results from this workshop, visit: <http://mtaudubon.org/birds-science/bird-conservation/montana-audubon-river-initiative/conservation-workshop/>



Courtesy John Lambing

Marias River, Montana.

Audubon Adventures Classroom Programs need Sponsors

By Betsy Ballard

We are asking for support for the Audubon Adventures Classroom program. Audubon Adventures is an environmental education curriculum product created by the National Audubon Society for grades 3 - 5. Developed by professional environmental educators, Audubon Adventures presents standards-based science content about birds, wildlife, and their habitats. We are contacting the teachers from last year to see what kits they would like and also outreaching for additional teachers or home school parents who might be interested in participating. If you wish to participate this year, we and the teachers greatly

appreciate your support. Below is a link to Audubon adventures if you wish to see what curriculums are available.

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

The Classroom kits are \$45.95, which includes shipping. If you would like to sponsor a classroom kit, you can mail your donation to: Bitterroot Audubon, P.O. Box 326, Hamilton, MT 59840, or bring it to a monthly meeting. If you have questions please call or text Betsy Ballard (cell phone, 239-5105) or email at: diamondback@cybernet1.com

Calendar of Events

- Dec 7:** CBC Tune-up Workshops, Bitterroot Public Library, Hamilton, MT, 7-8PM.
- Dec 14:** Raptor Presentation by Kate Davis, Bitterroot Cross-Country Ski Club, First Presbyterian Church, Hamilton, MT, Potluck at 6PM, Meeting at 7PM.
- Dec 16:** Hamilton Christmas Bird Count, Teller Education Building, 7:30 AM.
- Dec 16:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 10AM-12PM.
- Dec 30:** 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 15:** Audubon Meeting, Forest Service/DNRC Building, Hamilton, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Jan 31:** Chapter-only membership renewal due, \$15.
- Feb 19:** Audubon Meeting, Forest Service/DNRC Building, Hamilton, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- 2018:** Wings Across the Big Sky Festival. More details to be announced.

Local Audubon Board Member Judy Hoy Publishes Book

By Judy Hoy

The book I have been working on for many years is finally finished and published. The name of the book is *Changing Faces: The Consequences of Exposure to Gene and Thyroid Disrupting Toxins*. It is available on Amazon at the following link or you can contact me at <bjhoy@localnet.com> if you want to get it from me.

https://www.amazon.com/dp/1979134804/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&qid=1511191037&sr=8-5&keywords=changing+faces+book

The book is about the birth defects on newborns, cancer and other health issues on all ages of animals (including humans). It also tells the stories of the birds and mammals that helped me learn how to mitigate some specific birth defects and health issues on newborns (again including humans). Anyone with children, grandchildren, livestock, pets or who love wildlife should be interested. I will get no money from book sales as all profit goes to the Bitterroot Audubon Wildlife Rehab Fund which pays for food and medicine for injured and orphaned wildlife that western Montana rehabbers receive for care.

Hold on to Your Bins: Another Blizzard of Snowy Owls Could Be Coming--Will this winter bring an irruption of the Arctic raptors to the continental U.S.? A few clues from up north have Project SNOWstorm predicting yes.

From National Audubon

Four years ago, thousands of Snowy Owls stormed the northern United States, taking up posts in surroundings drastically different from the flat Arctic tundra over which they typically preside. Some whiled away the hours peering at dog walkers from suburban fences; one learned to hunt around a Minnesota brewery with mouse problems. In a typical winter, around 10 Snowy Owls visit Pennsylvania, but in 2013 the state was graced by 400. They were part of the largest Snowy Owl irruption, or influx of a species into a place they don't usually live, the U.S. has seen since the 1920s.

If you missed it, you might be in luck. [Project SNOWstorm](#), a volunteer-fueled Snowy Owl-tracking organization founded after that irruption, predicts another wave of Arctic raptors will hit North America this winter, according to their most recent [blog post](#).

Scott Weidensaul, one of the directors of Project SNOWstorm, says the clues point to a big irruption, but the group also fully admits there's no way to definitively know how big it could be or if it will even happen at all. "There's a little bit of voodoo and black magic in all of this," Weidensaul says. Though Snowy Owl migration patterns are mostly mysterious, there have been some tell-tale signs that the birds are on their way.

For one, some Snowy Owls already seem to be retracing the last irruption's process. Data are sketchy and variable, but it appears that big southward movements occur about once every four years. That's because lemmings, their preferred prey, go through regional population explosions at about the same interval. In 2013, those little Arctic rodents had a banner year on the Ungava Peninsula in Northern Quebec, fueling a highly successful breeding season for the owls that flocked to that area. Sure enough, this past breeding season, Canadian wildlife biologists studying caribou reported an unusually high number of owls flapping around the same area, reports others have confirmed.

Early stateside migrators have also been spotted. A couple hundred have flocked to the Northeast and Upper Midwest, Weidensaul says—single birds have been spotted as far south as Oklahoma, Missouri, and North Carolina—and their numbers are building faster than they did in 2013. When more of the species catch up, SNOWstorm volunteers will know for sure if the irruption is bona fide, and where it will hit hardest.

Part of the uncertainty in predicting this year's potential irruption stems from the lack of people monitoring Snowy Owl nests in the wilderness of northern Quebec. According to Weidensaul, nests held eight or nine eggs each in 2013—far more than the typical three to four. Those unusually large clutches contributed to the impressive numbers from a few years ago. Without an estimate of recent clutch sizes, SNOWstorm can't predict how big this inundation could be.

No matter how many ultimately show up, these birds are tough. People often assume that if they see an Arctic bird in, say, Indiana, it must be sick or starving. In reality, these Snowy Owls are fairly fat and healthy, says Weidensaul, and will eat anything they find. That includes the Snowy Owl found gnawing on a bottle-nosed dolphin carcass in Delaware a few years ago, fending off its find from Turkey Vultures.

Sometimes, though, the birds struggle to navigate developed landscapes full of buildings and telephone wires. Airport runways especially lure Snowy Owls in with their flat, treeless expanses, where planes taking off pose a danger, says Weidensaul. If seriously injured, the birds might need assistance, but otherwise, people

shouldn't get too close. Young owls who have no experience with humans often let birders and photographers approach them; these interactions can end with the birds backing up into highways and other dangerous situations.

Weidensaul doesn't blame people for being curious—the birds are a rare glimpse of Arctic life that deserve all of the attention. As he says, “you're not going to see a polar bear walking through your neighborhood.”

News and Notes

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 this fall on December 16th, 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.

Bird Shots



Northern Harrier in flight.

Courtesy Nathan DeBoer

BITTERROOT AUDUBON
PO BOX 326
HAMILTON MT 59840-0326

Officers

President	Becky Peters*	369-5210
Vice-Pres.	Mike Daniels*	
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IBA Program	Sherry Ritter	370-4778
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* 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



Audubon

Renew or Sign up
for your
National Audubon Membership at
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