

# Bitterroot AUDUBON



DECEMBER 2019

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 34, NO. 4

## It's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) Time in the Bitterroot

By John Ormiston

Christmas time for birders means it's time to clean the binoculars and spotting scopes, find the warm field clothes and be sure to find the bird guide. It's Christmas Bird Count time in the Bitterroot Valley and nationwide. For the 120<sup>th</sup> time citizen scientists will go to the field to count as many as possible of the birds occupying a 7.5-mile radius, 178 square mile circle. Compilers will report the results of nearly 2,000 count circles across the U.S. and another 500 in Canada, Mexico and Central America. Bitterroot Audubon sponsors three annual counts around Hamilton, Stevensville and in the Big Hole Valley. The 33<sup>rd</sup> Hamilton CBC occurs on December 14, the 55<sup>th</sup> Stevensville count on December 28 and the 10<sup>th</sup> Big Hole count in the first week of January depending on weather (see [www.BitterrootAudubon.org](http://www.BitterrootAudubon.org) for details). The Stevensville count, started in 1963, is one of the two oldest in Montana. Yellowstone Audubon in Billings initiated their count the same year or in 1964.

We welcome participation of anyone interested in learning more about winter birds in the Bitterroot. We especially like beginning birders who will always be paired with more experienced folks who know the area and the birds. The groups gather at about 7:30 AM with the intent of getting to the field by daylight about 8:00. Hamilton counters gather at The Teller Education Barn (for the 33<sup>rd</sup> time) and Stevensville birders meet at the Stevensville Ranger Station. The Hamilton group honors a 32-year-old tradition by meeting back at The Teller for lunch featuring homemade chili and Oreos, and of course some delectable Christmas goodies. The counts are serious endeavors, but congenial birders interested in sharing their knowledge with beginners make the

atmosphere competitive but lots of fun.



Courtesy Nathan DeBoer

Bald Eagle.

The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count data represents the largest bird data base compiled in North America with 119 years of records of bird counts throughout the U.S. Just considering the local data, we can learn something about the fluctuation of local populations and think about range expansion of exotic or native species. For instance, California Quail first appeared in the Stevensville count in 2000 when 17 were enumerated. By 2005 they appeared in both count circles and 74 were seen. In 2010 participants counted 1,049. Eurasian Collared Doves first appeared in Steve in 2017 when 11 were seen. They were seen in the Hamilton circle in 2008, but there

were only 3. In 2018 over 1,200 were seen in the two count areas and 11 were sighted in the Big Hole. The invasive doves rapidly expanded from the Florida where they successfully moved across the Atlantic from Bermuda in the 1980's clear to Alaska and into most of the lower 48 states. You can easily track current and historical data on the National Audubon website at:

<http://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/CurrentYear/ResultsByCount.aspx>.

The Stevensville count annually competes with the other 33 counts circles in Montana for number of species seen. We've averaged 70 species a year with a record high count of 90 in 2012 and over 7,000 birds counted. The Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge provides winter habitat for large flocks of waterfowl, as long as open water occurs. Over 158 species have been recorded in the Stevensville count circle.

Hamilton counters see an average of 67 species with a high count of 78 in 2013. The Hamilton area averages nearly 7,500 birds seen, many of which are waterfowl on the Daly Mansion Pond where open water remains available every year. We've recorded 133 species in the Hamilton circle.

Weather in the Big Hole severely limits the number of species and birds seen. The average number of species seen, 19, actually outnumbers the average number of participants by only one. But, it's a great place for winter raptors and tundra birds that nest in Canada or further north.

Feeder-watchers, folks who identify the species and count the birds out their windows or in their yard, annually add around 5 species not seen in the field at each of the Stevensville and Hamilton counts. If you live within 7.5 miles of either the Hamilton Airport or the Stevensville Ranger Station you could help our citizen science project. Contact Susan Nelson via email at [SNELSON600@aol.com](mailto:SNELSON600@aol.com) or by phone at 815-472-3734 to participate as a feeder watcher.

Please take the opportunity to enjoy a day out with a great group of people and help the effort to enumerate all the birds in 3 official National Audubon Christmas Bird Count Circles. Contact Mel Holloway at [tromper@bitterroot.com](mailto:tromper@bitterroot.com) if you have any questions about the Hamilton CBC.

## **Stevensville Christmas Bird Count is Saturday, December 28th**

*By Dave Lockman*

The 55th annual Stevensville Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for Saturday, December 28th. 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 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 12,051 birds of 77 different species, both slightly below the average for the last 10 years. We didn't find any new species, so our cumulative species total remained at 158 over the 54 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 or [Stevensvillecbc@gmail.com](mailto:Stevensvillecbc@gmail.com) for more information.

## **CBC Feeder Counters**

*By Susan Nelson*

Well it is Christmas Bird Count time again this year! And many of us like to go out and trudge around in the cold and snow to count all the little birdies that we can see and hear. But then, there are those important counters who are smart enough to stay indoors and count the birds at and around their feeders! Could you be one of them?

Coming up on Saturday, December 14<sup>th</sup> and December 28<sup>th</sup>, your help would be appreciated if you would like to be a feeder counter! After 30-some years, Colleen Powell is retiring from compiling the feeder counter's results and has handed the responsibility on to me, Susan Nelson. If you live within 7.5 miles of either the Hamilton

Airport (December 14<sup>th</sup> count) or the Stevensville Ranger Station (December 28<sup>th</sup> count) you could help our citizen science project. If you are interested in reporting your results for our count, please contact me via email at [SNELSON600@aol.com](mailto:SNELSON600@aol.com), or by phone at 815-472-3734.

### Letter from the President

By Becky Peters, BAS President

Gifts to Give – Less

Plastic! This month is

about my third of the Seven

Simple Action Steps we can all do to help our birds

([www.birds.cornell.edu/home/seven-simple-actions-to-help-birds](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/seven-simple-actions-to-help-birds)) and this one is just in time for our holiday gift giving. To review my two previous letters: October was about Pollinator Gardens and the importance of planting natives; November was about watching the birds and gathering data for the backyard CBC and [feederwatch@cornell.edu](mailto:feederwatch@cornell.edu), and helping count birds by coming to our Christmas Bird Counts Dec. 14<sup>th</sup> at Teller Wildlife refuge and Dec. 28<sup>th</sup> at the Stevensville Ranger Station.

This month I want to touch upon what we do about all this PLASTIC, especially since many of us will be buying objects encased in plastic during this holiday season, maybe protecting them with plastic wrap, then wrapping and sending them off. That tends to be the routine and it is killing not only our birds but other wildlife as well when we toss the used plastic away. Some of you might have seen pictures of animals with the contents of their stomachs showing nothing but plastic that they had eaten because humans had dumped the plastic. Ever wonder why on earth the seabirds go for the plastic in the first place? It's the sulfurous chemical – DMS - that floating plastic gives off. The birds smell it and it smells like food. Now the seabirds and turtles and whales swallow the plastic and their guts are clogged and they can't eat real food. Greenpeace says that 8 million tons of plastic a year goes into the ocean!!



Since China isn't taking our plastic that we "recycle" anymore, what does our country do with all this plastic we will be buying? It doesn't have a place to go, except the trash – our landfills. Even though some cities tell their residents that they are recycling, the plastic is going in landfills. Yes, there is Reduce, Reuse and then Recycle but there is also Refuse. Don't buy those loads of plastic water bottles in the first place, nicely decline the person who offers you one and tell them why. Look for canned pop in a machine and if the machine doesn't have one – request the owner of the machine to start stocking recyclable aluminum cans. We all know to bring our own bags to the grocery stores. Now when you're at the store buy food that isn't mega-packaged in plastic. Ask the waitress before you do Take Out what they package their food in, and decline the package if it is in styrofoam or plastic and tell them why. If you do get a plastic item –

## Calendar of Events

- Dec 11:** BAS Holiday Party, The Tin Can, Stevensville, MT, 6-10PM.
- Dec 14:** Hamilton Christmas Bird Count, Teller Wildlife Refuge, 7:30AM.
- Dec 28:** Stevensville Christmas Bird Count, Stevensville Ranger Station, 7:30AM.
- Jan 20:** "The Use of Drones in Studying & Monitoring Wildlands & Wildlife," by Philip Williams, Forest Service/DNRC Building, Hamilton, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Jan 2020:** Big Hole Christmas Bird Count, details TBA, see BAS website: [www.BitterrootAudubon.org](http://www.BitterrootAudubon.org).
- Feb 17:** Audubon Meeting/Program "Fossil Hunting" by Jill Davies, Forest Service/DNRC Building, Hamilton, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Mar 16:** Audubon Meeting/Program "Harlequin Ducks & Climate Change" by Chris Hammond, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Apr 20:** Audubon Meeting/Program "Grassland Birds, Wildlife & Ecology" by Kristy Blye, Forest Service/DNRC Building, Hamilton, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- May 18:** Audubon Meeting/Program "MPG Ranch: History & Research" by Kate Stone, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Summer 2020:**  
Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival, TBA

please find a way to use it over and over again at home.

I'm in my 70's. I didn't grow up with everything plastic; we used glass and paper sacks, but plastic sure took off during my lifetime thanks to the oil industry saying we couldn't live without it! We all gave in to it - TV dinners being the 50's rage, for example - and then we all went along for the ride.

So I am sharing some Tips to Use Less Plastic that you probably already know. We need to go beyond these tips for our earth's sake, for our wildlife's sake: [www.audubon.org/news/eight-easy-ways-reduce-your-plastic-waste](http://www.audubon.org/news/eight-easy-ways-reduce-your-plastic-waste);

[www.greeneducationfoundation.org/nationalgreenweeks/waste-reduction-tips/tips-to-use-less-plastic.html](http://www.greeneducationfoundation.org/nationalgreenweeks/waste-reduction-tips/tips-to-use-less-plastic.html)

Thank you for helping the birds, and Happy Holidays to you and your loved ones!

### Montana Audubon Notes

By Mike Daniels

Montana Audubon launched its Montana eBird portal during the 19th annual Wings Across the Big Sky bird festival in Kalispell in June 2018. On this site you can access a great deal of Montana-specific bird information about species, recent checklists, local hotspots and links to data collected by thousands of other eBirders across the state. In addition, photos from local birders, sightings of uncommon birds, and Montana Audubon's news feed can easily be found there. Montana eBird is seamlessly integrated into the popular and global eBird database. Visit [www.ebird.org/mt](http://www.ebird.org/mt) and make it your homepage today! You too can join the more than 9000 birders that have submitted more than a quarter million checklists.

### Local Chapter Member Renewal

By Heather Miller

BAS membership renewal for 2020 is due by December 31st. It is only \$15. Renew online through the BAS website:

<http://www.bitterrootaudubon.org/membership> and click on the "Join Now" button to pay with credit card. You can also renew through mail by sending your name, address, email, and check (made out to the Bitterroot Audubon Society) to:

**Bitterroot Audubon Supporting Member**  
**P.O. Box 326, Hamilton, MT 59840**

### What's the story, Story?

By Jim Story

#### Question: *How long do birds live?*

**Answer:** I addressed this question back in 2010, but the question has come up again so I'm reprinting my response. Accurate information on bird longevity is hard to obtain. Some of the best information has come from annual bird banding data. For example, long-time bird bander John Ormiston has documented that a Swainson's Thrush that he routinely captured over the years in a net near Hamilton was 12 years old. But, the longevity of that thrush is probably unusual. Generally, the larger the bird, the longer they live. Birds don't usually die of "old age." They simply run the gamut of risks each year until they are killed. The annual risk of being killed varies from about 70 percent in small temperate-zone songbirds (adult life expectancy about 10 months) to about 3 percent in Royal Albatrosses (life expectancy over 30 years).

*Local birding expert Jim Story answers your questions about birds and their habits. Jim welcomes your questions at [jstory4689@gmail.com](mailto:jstory4689@gmail.com).*



Join us for  
**Bitterroot Audubon's Holiday Party**  
**December 11**

**6:00-10:00**

**The Tin Can**

(we'll have the place to ourselves)

**207 Main Street**  
**Stevensville**

RSVP, if possible, to Micki at [mickilong@gmail.com](mailto:mickilong@gmail.com) or  
Susan at [snelson600@aol.com](mailto:snelson600@aol.com)

If you have bird-themed holiday attire and/or  
accessories please wear them!

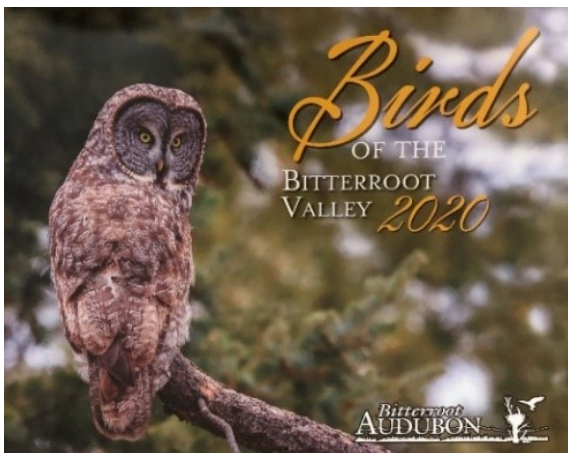


## Adopt a Raptor

By Kate Stone

Did you enjoy our November program from Wild Skies Raptor Center? Are you looking for some holiday gift ideas and want to support a good cause? Please consider “Adopting a Raptor” from Wild Skies this holiday season. The costs of caring for ambassador birds- like the ones you saw at our program- run into the tens of thousands of dollars annually. These costs accrue on top of the myriad of resources needed to transport and care for many, many rehabilitation birds each year. All of this work is funded privately from grants and small donations from PEOPLE LIKE YOU!! You can “adopt” any one of Wild Skies’ ambassador birds, with adoption fees ranging from \$30 for Daya the Northern Saw-whet Owl, to \$100 for Frith the Great Horned Owl. New parents will receive an adoption certificate as well as a photo and information about their son or daughter. And they will join a grassroots family of people who care about wildlife and conservation education. Please go to the Wild Skies Raptor Center website and click the tab for “How You Can Help” to make your donation.

## News and Notes



### The Bitterroot Audubon 2020 Calendar is here!!

By Becky Peters, BAS President

The Bitterroot Audubon has the perfect calendar for your family and a perfect gift for you to send to loved ones. It is lightweight, packs easily and shows off the beauty of the Bitterroot so well. It is our 2020 Calendar with some photos of our stunning avian friends that live here. Wait till you see the beauty of these birds! The photos were taken

by talented Bitterroot photographers, with drawings of birds by Lone Rock 4<sup>th</sup> graders. These useful and informative calendars are only \$20 and the proceeds from our only fund raiser stay here in the valley for Bitterroot Audubon's work on conservation, education and scholarship projects. You can't find another calendar that does that! Help a local non-profit help the valley's habitat and wildlife! **Make sure to get your calendars at these stores: Florence Ace; Stevensville Ace; Stevensville Valley Drug and Variety; Corvallis Merc; Hamilton Gifts; Chapter One; Bitterroot Drug; and Robbins' Hallmark. Thank you for helping our birds and wildlife!**

### 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](mailto:BASeditors@gmail.com).

### Bitterroot Audubon is on Facebook and Instagram

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

# Bird Shots



*Red-tailed Hawk.*

*Courtesy Nathan DeBoer*

BITTERROOT AUDUBON  
PO BOX 326  
HAMILTON MT 59840-0326

### Officers

President	Becky Peters*	369-5210
Vice-Pres.	Mike Daniels*	
Secretary	John Ormiston*	360-9530
Treasurer	Jim Story*	493-9813

### Directors & Committee Chairs

IBA Program & Conservation Programs	Micki Long*	
Website	Kate Stone*	381-1115
Instagram	Philip Williams*	
Education	Betsy Ballard*	
Nwsltr. Eds. & Distribution	Sara Ashline* <a href="mailto:baseditors@gmail.com">baseditors@gmail.com</a>	
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Field Trips	Micki Long*	
At large	Judy Hoy*	777-2487
At large	Susan Nelson*	
At large	Michele Falivene (Mimi)*	

\* Board Member

EMAIL: [contactus@bitterrootaudubon.org](mailto:contactus@bitterrootaudubon.org)

WEBSITE: [www.BitterrootAudubon.org](http://www.BitterrootAudubon.org)

INSTAGRAM: @bitterroot\_audubon  
and on Facebook!

### 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](http://Audubon.org)