

Bitterroot AUDUBON



SEPTEMBER 2019

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 34, NO. 1

THE WATERFOWL MITIGATION ON THE BERKELEY PIT

By Gary Swant

Headlines November/December, 2016:

“Metals, acid in the Berkeley Pit Water (Butte, Montana) killed 3,000 to 4,000 Geese, forced to land due to bad weather”



Courtesy Montana Resources Personnel

Aerial View of the Berkeley Pit.

Do you remember this news and have you wondered what has happened since then to prevent a similar tragedy? On Monday, September 16th, at the Bitterroot Audubon meeting, Gary Swant will present the work that the “Berkeley Pit Waterfowl Mitigation Committee” has been doing since that “die off”. This Committee was formed after the above event at the request of Montana Resources and Atlantic Richfield to address solutions to the problem. Swant is currently on the Advisory Board for the Committee. He will review the steps that have been taken, the equipment and manpower needed and the results to date.

Gary described the following: “As a committee we first focused on a scientific method of hazing the various species of waterfowl off the pit, using rifles, drones, sirens, remote control boats, lasers, and air

cannons. In this process, we have found that one procedure does not fit all waterfowl, and we have developed different protocols for divers, dippers, grebes and loons. We also found a different protocol is needed for day versus night migrators. We have trained pit miners on the identification of waterfowl and established record keeping that allows students at Montana Tech to apply statistics to our data with interesting outcomes. The pit is monitored hourly during high migration seasons. We have now established a 99% success rate of hazing waterfowl off the pit once they have landed. Our next project is to develop methods that keep waterfowl from landing, which is more difficult.



Courtesy Montana Resources Personnel

Laser Testing.

The waterfowl activity at the pit is directly related to the number of birds that are in the valley and we weekly survey 40 bodies of water in the Upper Clark Fork drainage so that we can predict activity at the pit. The correlation between the pit and 50 species of birds that may possibly use the pit is directly tied to the waterfowl numbers at the Warm Springs Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and I will describe that area as well.

Participants will leave with a better understanding of what Montana Resources and Atlantic Richfield

are attempting to achieve and most are surprised at the effort and the results that we are attaining in our work.”



Courtesy Montana Resources Personnel

Air Boat.

In 2018 Swant along with his co-researcher Professor Stella Capoccia of Montana Tech's Biology Department received the 2018 Wildlife Conservation Award from the Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society for their work in reducing bird mortality at the Berkeley Pit. As a board member of the Committee, Gary will continue searching for solutions to the waterfowl and white goose migration issues at the Berkeley Pit.

Swant has a long history in education, birding, biology, birding, ecology, birding, writing and publishing, birding -----



Courtesy Montana Resources Personnel

Air Cannon.

Swant attended high school in Deer Lodge, and received his Bachelor's in Education with an emphasis in Biological Sciences and his Master's in Education with an emphasis in Environmental Education from the University of Montana. Swant taught biology and field ecology at Powell County High School in Deer Lodge for 25 years and retired in 1993. While teaching he received the Montana "Outstanding Biology Teacher" of the Year,

Presidential Award for Excellence in Science Teaching, and the Montana Environmental Educator of the Year.

He has written numerous articles, curriculums, and science guides. He writes articles for three newspapers in Montana and received first place in outdoor writing for small newspapers in 2018 and second place in 2019.

Back to birding: In 2005, Swant founded GoBirdMontana, LLC, which continues today, and conducts field ornithological research for private corporations, state, and federal agencies. In 2016, Montana Audubon recognized Swant's work by presenting him the 2016 Citizen Scientist Award. Swant holds the record for the most birds seen in a single year in Montana, a record that he set in 2007. He is also in first place on ebird for total number of birds seen in Montana.

What does he do when not birding professionally? He travels around the world with his wife, Laura Lee, to find BIRDS to add to his Bird Life List!!

Plan to join Bitterroot Audubon Monday, September 16, 7:00 P.M. to gain a thorough understanding of what the Berkeley Pit Waterfowl Mitigation Committee, Montana Resources and Atlantic Richfield are attempting to achieve and the results already attained. The meeting will be held in the Visitors' Center at the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, north of Stevensville on the Eastside Highway, go west on Wildfowl Lane. The Public is invited. Contact Becky Peters for more information, 369-5210.



Courtesy Montana Resources Personnel

Geese recovery.

Letter from the President

By Becky Peters, BAS President



There is so much to write about – the importance of nature in our lives (now more than ever), the fantastic programs we have in store for the meetings, the ways we can help our avian friends, and so on. But along with wanting to welcome you to another great year of Bitterroot Audubon I thought I would brag to you about BAS in this article. I'm not sure how much everyone knows of all the wonderful things that your local Audubon does, so I am just going to start listing a whole bunch of things we did, or are doing just in this last year. You have a right to know where your membership dues and supportive time and money go.

- ❖ We increased our General BAS account, Scholarship account, and Scholarship investment account (thanks mainly to the sales of our calendars!)
- ❖ We give out a \$1,000 Bryon Weber Scholarship each semester to a sophomore, junior or senior in any Natural History field of study, who is attending any Montana University or College, who has top academic standing and shows financial need.
- ❖ We have maintained a high quality of monthly presentations! With luscious treats at every meeting!
- ❖ We sent out a Membership Survey and found out important subjects that matter to our members and that most of our respondents were 66 years or older!
- ❖ We coordinated with various Bitterroot agencies – for example, Bitter Root Land Trust and the River Bend Park Field Trip
- ❖ We financially supported various students: A Florence student who won the Wildlife Society Poster Contest, and a Work Study student at MPG Ranch doing the Night Flight Project.
- ❖ We presented to Game Wardens from 4 states on how to handle injured raptors safely and donated \$2,000 of necessary equipment to them.
- ❖ Once again we had an Audubon table at the Teller Youth Expo and donated \$500 for youth camps.
- ❖ We coordinated with Dave Lockman and Jay Sumner on training volunteers to observe if and

where Peregrine Falcons are nesting up our valley canyons.

- ❖ We always have a hardy group of volunteers cleaning up a section of Hwy 93 twice a year.
- ❖ We've welcomed new Board Members on to our board this year!
- ❖ We've increased our membership! Yay! We love seeing our regular members and meeting our new members!
- ❖ We once again supported the Winter Eagle Project, either through Zooniverse or buying t-shirts or having the deer carcasses on some lucky person's land! Sad to see this project coming to an end but it lives on through the MAPS project. Thanks to our Kate Stone coordinating with Raptor View Research Institute and MPG Ranch the videos premiered Sept. 6th.
- ❖ We had/have an Audubon presence at the Farmer's Market, answering questions like "what is that small brown bird with the strange call", handing out bird stickers and talking to kids, and of course selling gorgeous BAS calendars. Talk about members' volunteer hours! Talk about organizational skills (Kay!)
- ❖ Our 2020 Calendar Committee began meeting in February of 2019 and started going through 400+ stunning local photograph submissions. Lone Rock 4th graders were our artists this year.
- ❖ We had Welcome Back Waterfowl Day later this year, in April, in hopes that it was warmer. And it was!
- ❖ We have a Conservation Committee which incorporates the Important Bird Area Committee.
- ❖ We also have a Field Trip Committee, Education Committee, Scholarship Committee, Social Committee (I know I'm forgetting one or two.)
- ❖ We donated \$1,000 to Montana Audubon to help on behalf of Montana wildlife during the Legislative session.
- ❖ We financially support Audubon Adventures in 10 classrooms in the Valley, thanks to our members!
- ❖ We presented 2 Christmas Bird Count Workshops and coordinated 3 CBCs in the winter.
- ❖ We send a BAS representative to the Montana Audubon Quarterly Board meetings.

- ❖ We are very proud of financially supporting Wild Skies Raptor Center with \$2,000 to create a curriculum of presentations to some of our valley students for the 2019-2020 school year.
- ❖ And we are equally proud of financially supporting Montana Natural History Center with \$3,000 to expand their environmental lessons in the valley to include lessons on birds, also for the coming school year.

See why I wanted to brag?? We are a wonderful organization, with wonderful, supportive members – YOU! Your BAS Board members are a great group of dedicated professionals with a varied mixture of talents and we wouldn't be doing what we do if it weren't for the birds! So, as you see where the

money goes out as we support these good causes, and you see the investment money being saved for future projects, please be aware that we rely on our only fundraiser – the Calendar Sales - so please consider supporting what we do. Buy a calendar! Buy two!

Thank you so much, Becky Peters

Update on Gracie the Great Gray Owl

By Becky Peters, BAS President

Last February I wrote about the Great Gray Owl in our neighborhood who was injured twice. Once she conked her head when she flew into a very nice man's truck – John Ormiston's. (How lucky can you get?) She went to rehab and then was released. The second time she was hurt was when she was trampled by overly protective pregnant cows. The cows get agitated when there are moving things on the ground. She was rescued in the nick of time by two heroic ladies (Estelle and Barbara) who jumped the fence, shooed the pesky cattle away, and called in nearby raptor specialists. Again, how lucky can you get?? Gracie made it through a broken pelvis and clavicle thanks to the expertise of **Wild Skies Raptor Center**. Since January it has been a slow process of her healing and then flying, little by little, farther and farther in the various flight cages. She is now in the process of molting and they hope to release her this fall into the wild – though thankfully not back to where she keeps getting into trouble!

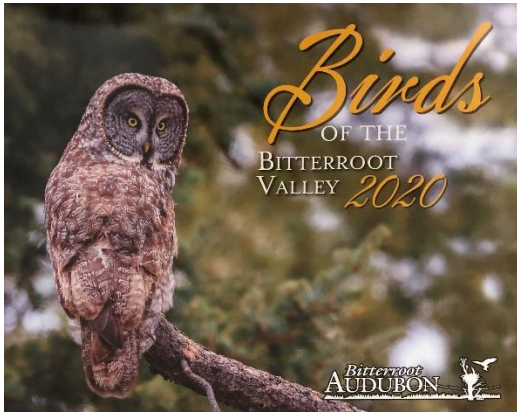
Now, if you have seen our new glorious BAS 2020 Calendar you will notice that Gracie graces the cover! That is her after the head conk and before the cattle trampling. She is special to us - and gorgeous, yes? On the back of the calendar the paragraph explains how Great Gray Owls are listed as a Sensitive Species "Public information as to their location is restricted due to potential harmful impact." Those of us who were lucky enough to see her did not even enter her data into eBird. I have also noticed that photographers usually don't enter information on social media as to where they've seen a GGO. These are just some ways bird lovers can show how we care for them.

If you would like to help out this wonderful rehab organization that not only took such great care of Gracie but so many other injured raptors, please go to their website <http://wildskies.org/> to see what materials they need and then donate to their cause, because they help the birds that need them!! Brooke Tanner and associates – Bitterroot Audubon thanks

Calendar of Events

- Sep 16:** Audubon Meeting/Program "Waterfowl Mitigation at the Berkeley Pit" by Gary Swant, Audubon Meeting, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Oct 21:** Audubon Meeting/Program "Climate Smart Missoula" by Amy Cilimburg, Forest Service/DNRC Building, Hamilton, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Nov 18:** Audubon Meeting/Program "Raptor Rehab/Wild Skies Raptor Center" by Brooke Tanner, Audubon Meeting, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Dec 2019:** Christmas Bird Counts, TBA
- Jan 20:** Program TBA, Forest Service/DNRC Building, Hamilton, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- 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, Audubon Meeting, 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, Audubon Meeting, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Summer 2020:**
Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival, TBA

you! “If you’ve found an injured raptor (eagle, hawk, owl, etc.) or songbird please call 406-210-3468 or 406-244-5422 for assistance”



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 4th 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 the Stevensville Farmer's Market and the Hamilton Farmer's Market and 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!**

What's the story, Story?

By Jim Story

Question: *What is the best seed to use in my bird feeder?*

Answer: The most popular seed among most birds is black oil sunflower; any bird coming to your feeder in western Montana will love black oil sunflower. This seed has a high fat content and its shell is easy to crack. Birds also eat striped sunflower seed but its shell is harder to

crack and it doesn't have a high fat content. White millet and Milo are a favorite among ground feeders like quail, native sparrows, juncos, and doves. Nyjer, a thistle-like seed, is a favorite of small finches like goldfinches, siskins, and redpolls. Peanuts are very popular with jays, crows, chickadees, and woodpeckers. Cracked corn is a favorite of pheasants, turkeys, crows, geese and jays, but it is also a favorite of House Sparrows, starlings, deer, raccoons and bears. Seeds that you should avoid include Golden Millet, Red Millet and Flax. These three seeds are used as fillers in packaged seed mixes and are generally not eaten by birds. Unfortunately, the invasive House Sparrow will eat all of the above seeds. Preventing this bird and squirrels from dominating your feeder involves different feeder designs and strategies, which is another whole topic.

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

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 and Instagram

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

Bird Shots



Courtesy Mike Daniels

American White Pelican.

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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
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