

Bitterroot AUDUBON



APRIL 2020

NEWSLETTER

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NO APRIL MEETING, BAS SPRING PROGRAMS POSTPONED TO LATER DATES!

By Kay Fulton

Actually, when I was about three quarters through this paragraph explaining the change of schedule for our Spring Programs, it suddenly disappeared off the screen; almost as if I should not give you any hope of ever hearing them! ENOUGH! We will defeat this virus and we will be able to be together again with less than 6 feet between us because sharing our love for birds and the environment is our life blood!! The following are the postponement reschedule dates for BAS meetings.

On November 16, Chris Hammond will still share his program on Harlequin Ducks and the research into what is causing their serious population decline

And on January 18, 2021, Kristy Blye will present her program on Grassland Birds and related Wildlife and Ecology of "Back East" in Montana!

In general, BAS Programs focus on Birds and numerous issues related to them, such as habitat, other wildlife, threats, research and best practices in supporting the survival of birds and wildlife.

I often feel like a talent scout in finding good speakers and programs. I depend on recommendations from you, BAS members. Please contact me with suggestions for programs for September 2020-May 2021 at 360-8664 or kayinmt@cybernet1.com. Thank you, Kay Fulton

What's The Weirdest Bird in the World?

By Skip Horner

My Nominee: The Hoatzin (*Opisthocomus hoatzin*, the sole member in the family *Opisthocomidae*)

The Hoatzin is a bizarre and ungainly bird about the size of a skinny turkey that lives in the Amazon along lakes and slow streams. It lives strictly on

leaves and fruit which then sits in its gut fermenting before final digestion. This partially digested mash stinks, creating an obnoxious odor that keeps predators away. Thus its colloquial name: Stinky Turkey.



Plate from "The Birds of Ecuador," by Ridgely & Greenfield, 2001. Cornell University Press.

It has extensive bare bright blue skin on its face, a big red eye, a loose shaggy crest of long, stiff rufous feathers and a stout olive-colored bill. Overall plumage is rufous and white. They give a near-constant wheezy and nasal "whaah" with a distinctively breathless quality. It's found in sluggish sedentary colonies of 50 or more birds. They're largely tame, allowing for close approach as they peer about looking dazed, clumsily clambering and shuffling in vegetation, often holding their wings partially outstretched as if for balance. Their babies don't ferment their food, so they don't stink.

When threatened, they drop out of the nest and plop into the water and disappear. They then climb back up to the nest using two long, hooked vestigial claws at the bend in each of their wings. These claws are one reason they're considered similar to dinosaurs. The claws disappear about the time they start to ferment their food.

Letter from the President

By Becky Peters, BAS President



Okay, it's Spring! (I always prefer to capitalize that word no matter how spell checker scolds me). Spring means to start anew, right? New growth, new beginnings, new life. So there are some new adventures ahead and nature is going to keep going, with us or without us. But Spring also means the end to some things – snow, gray skies, cold nights, icy walkways. I will miss the warm fires and the soft throws over my legs while reading. And that is my segue to what I have been thinking about lately – how do we nest? (Such a good birding term!) What do we do during these very isolating and unfamiliar times? Well, we simply have to take very good care of ourselves! Now, I have a whole bunch of questions for you: Are you getting enough sleep? Are you eating healthy food? (Gad, I want to make another batch of cookies, but . . .) Are you getting some exercise? Are you making sure to wear those really comfy socks that you love to wear? Are you finding time to laugh? That means talking to friends that will add to your laughter quotient, watching comedies, reading books where you laugh out loud, watching kitten videos. We're talking endorphins here! The stress hormone cortisol is then reduced! This is brain chemical talk, yay!

How about watching some other videos along with those kitten ones? Suzanna McDougall shared a video a while ago of hummingbirds in slow motion. Loved it! Watch for the hummingbird scouts returning soon! <https://1funny.com/hummingbirds-ultra-slow-motion-amazing-facts/>

And then watching some Cornell Lab's webcams? allaboutbirds.org/cams

Or do you have a desire to travel? Then take a virtual tour to some national parks!! <https://www.nationalparks.org/connect/blog/take-virtual-visit-national-park>

You might have seen the article in the Missoulian about Harriet the Osprey returning to the Dunrovin

Ranch for the 11th year. Get on their webcam for free for two weeks and watch to see if her mate gets here in the next week or so.

<https://daysatdunrovin.com/live-cam/> They do such a great job with all their links.

Put your birding expertise to work, or simply become a better birder! Sign up for some Citizen Science projects with Montana Audubon (MA). There are some great ones coming up in May. <https://www.montanabirdsurveys.com/chimney-swifts.html> (Our Rosan can tell you how to count the Swifts)

Also MA has a great Climate Watch project you can help out on starting May 15th:

<https://www.montanabirdsurveys.com/climate-watch.html>

And to conclude, here's something you can make for yourself, if you sew, to keep yourself and your loved ones healthy when you go out hiking in our beautiful canyons or birding at Lee Metcalf (while staying 6' away from others): https://media.rainpos.com/2875/non_elastic_face_mask_ask.pdf. And here's two options for people who do not sew: masks4all.co

Stay well, and the way to really stay well any time you absolutely have to go out is to act as if anyone and everyone you see has the virus!

Sadly, I am also reminding you, our members, that there will be no Welcome Back Waterfowl Day that was originally scheduled for April 18th at the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, and there will be no monthly BAS meeting on April 20th. We will miss being together with all of you but please consider visiting the Refuge, going for a hike and appreciating our birds as they migrate through or as they stay to settle in and start a family. We are so blessed to live here as we listen to the Western Meadowlark sing and see our American Robins hopping around and watch the kettle of Turkey Vultures as they circle up. Enjoy!

Bird Together, Virtually!

By Micki Long

Because we will miss meetings, field trips, and special events like Welcome Back Waterfowl Day, we have devised a way for members to bird together, at least virtually. You should have received an email on March 28th about birding challenges we are posting on Bitterroot Audubon's

Facebook page. There have been some changes to the plan; instead of responses coming to me, they are simply posted under the Weekly Challenges, specifically, under the Discussion portion of each Weekly Challenge. You can quickly find the current and past challenges under Events in the menu on the left of the home page.

The first challenge asks people to share what birds they are seeing in their yards and neighborhoods, either via eBird lists or the more old-fashioned kind of lists. People have reported Spotted Towhees, Western Meadowlarks, Varied Thrushes, and much more. The second challenge is to bird at night, something many of us have not done before. There is much novel (pun intended) about this pandemic—night birding can be one of the more pleasant new experiences of this strange and memorable period.

We plan to add a challenge a week for the foreseeable future. You are welcome to continue posting to past challenges as the weeks progress. I believe we are very lucky in loving to bird; we do not have to give up an activity that gives us much joy and solace. Please share your birding experiences with others in our Audubon community and learn what others are seeing and hearing. And stay safe!

Calendar of Events

- Apr 18:** ~~Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.~~ **CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19 UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE**
- Apr 18:** ~~Welcome Back Waterfowl Day, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT~~ **CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19.**
- Apr 20:** ~~Audubon Meeting/Program "Grassland Birds, Wildlife & Ecology" by Kristy Blye, Forest Service/DNRC Building, Hamilton, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.~~ **CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19.**
- May 18:** ~~Audubon Meeting/Program "MPG Ranch: History & Research" by Kate Stone, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.~~ **CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19.**
- Jun 5-7:** Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival, Lewistown, MT

Welcome Back Waterfowl Day at the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge on April 18, 2020 is **CANCELLED**



Courtesy Mike Daniels

"Today at the refuge things were calm; then an eagle flew by."
April 2020.

Help Feed the Injured and Orphaned Birds

By Judy Hoy

The injured and orphaned birds that Brooke Tanner at Wild Skies Raptor Center or other wildlife rehabilitation centers care for do not stop eating because people get a virus or stay home so as not to get it. It is important for anyone who can, to keep supporting wildlife rehab centers with all donations possible. This will help the rehabbers obtain necessary food and medicine for the birds and other animals in their care. Brooke Tanner is the main wildlife rehabber in our area of Western Montana now. Her mailing address is P.O. Box 3676, Missoula, MT 59806.

All other permitted wildlife rehabbers who can take care of birds, especially eagles, hawks and owls, have moved away or retired. I can no longer take birds because of a chronic lung issue. I would like to take this opportunity to say a heartfelt thank you to

the Bitterroot Audubon Society for your support and for your donations to the Bitterroot Audubon Wildlife Rehabilitation Fund for the last 50 years. Please give all your wonderful assistance to Wild Skies Raptor Center.

Proposed Changes in Hunting and Fishing at Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge

By Micki Long

Lee Metcalf is one of the places most loved by Bitterroot Audubon members. So I want to make you aware of changes proposed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and of the opportunity to comment on those changes. In summary, the FWS wants to expand areas for sport fishing and white-tail deer hunting and add turkey hunting to the refuge. For details, see the Draft Environmental Assessment:

https://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/huntfish/LeeMetcalf_EA_Draft_Clean_508-compliant.pdf

An overwhelming number of visitors to the refuge are there to recreate in ways other than hunting. The Draft EA says the less than 1% of visitors come to hunt. Expanded hunting will result in short-term disturbance to wildlife; FWS expects that disturbance to be minimal. And FWS anticipates controversy over turkey hunting in the spring, when many visit the refuge to observe and photograph wildlife.

For more information, please read the Draft EA. Submit comments to Ben Gilles, Project Leader, Western Montana National Wildlife Refuge Complex, by phone at (406) 727-7400 or by email at Benjamin_Gilles@fws.gov.

Earth Day is 50 years old!

By Becky Peters, BAS President

April 22nd we will celebrate taking care of our planet, which we hopefully do every day. The theme for Earth Day this year is climate ACTION -how to take care of the life-support systems. If you would like to participate in any way with the Earth Day activities here's a link:

<https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2020/> Since it will be rather hard to join an event or a clean-up activity in our community there are links to activities you can do at home or digitally and with kids. As you further explore the links one comes up that might be of interest especially to 'Auduboners' about our use of cell phones and what the increase of radiation is doing to the bird population!

<https://www.earthreminder.com/how-to-save-birds/>.

Time to plant a tree and pick up garbage and call your Congress-people!

A Step Backwards for Conserving our Wildlife

By Becky Peters, BAS President

You may have seen the article in the Ravalli Republic, Friday April 3rd: "Trump Rule could kill billions of birds". Montana Audubon has been vigilant for a few years now about the fragileness of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. "While the press release affirms that loosening regulations and clarifying definitions found within the Endangered Species Act are intended to increase the law's transparency, most conservation groups recognize *the changes are intent to spur natural resource development, like logging, mining, and gas drilling in critical habitats across the country.* These changes are most likely to affect three species in Montana that our state provides critical habitat for, the Piping Plover, the Bull trout, and the Canada Lynx. Beyond these three, an additional 16 plant and animal species fall under the act in Montana, including the Grizzly Bear and Black-footed Ferret. Surely this is something to keep a watch on as these rule changes continue to face legal challenges."

Even though the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service disputes what one of its former directors, Dan Ashe, states, and disagrees with him when he predicts that up to a billion birds a year will die due to this rule change, US FWS still contends that the *voluntary* measures the industries comply with will prevent most of the deaths. Not only Ashe, but the National Audubon Society disagree with the voluntary approach and feel the relaxing of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, coupled with the rollbacks of the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act will "Put birds and their habitat at greater risk."

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/2020/02/accidental-bird-deaths-law/>

One particular industry's attitude to the life of a bird is akin to a small child running after a ball into a busy roadway: "The American Petroleum Institute suggested in a regulatory filing that the birds themselves are the actors, colliding or otherwise interacting with industrial structures."

Okay ...I'll keep certain words to myself right now!

So here is Montana Audubon's prediction of what could happen to our birds,

<https://mtaudubon.org/conservation-policy/protections-for-migratory-birds-vanish/>

Examples of incidental take of birds in Montana and the surrounding states:

- **Berkeley Pit:** No protection for birds that land (and die) in the Berkeley Pit. The latest significant incident was when about 3,000 Snow Geese (and Ross's Geese) died there in November 2016.
- **Pipeline Spills:** there have been 2 pipeline spills with birds oiled on the Yellowstone River within the last 10 years (July 1, 2011 Silvertip Pipeline Spill, ExxonMobil pipeline, 1,500 barrels of oil, company paid \$12 million in damages; January 17, 2015: Bridger Pipeline Company spilled crude oil into the Yellowstone River near Glendive, 42,000 gallons of oil spilled).
- **Oil Wastewater Pits:** this is the main law that ensures oil companies will manage their wastewater pits to ensure that they don't excessively kill birds during migration.
- **Wind Farms:** this is the main law that ensures wind farms will not be located in areas where they might significantly kill birds (migration corridors or where Species of Concern nest).
- **Utility Line Electrocutions:** this is the main law that ensures utility companies work to prevent bird (especially raptor) electrocutions on power lines.

Time for a positive Montana historical note here: Voluntary Industry compliance can work if the non-profits step up and keep the industry's feet to the fire!! Montana Audubon's Board worked with a Spanish wind farm company several years ago (Grupo).

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/great-energy-challenge/2012/montana-wind-turbines-give-way-to-raptors/>

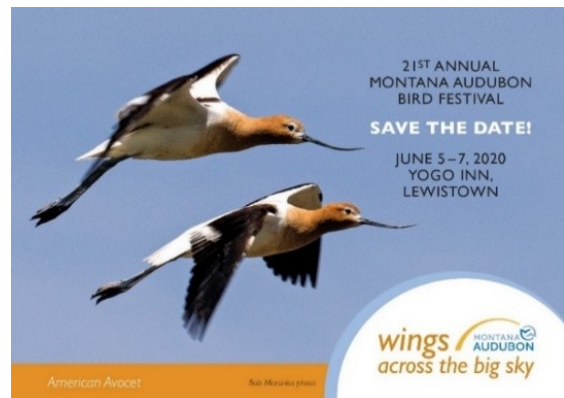
We explained to them that where they were placing the wind turbines at Kevin Rim was too close to the nesting sites of several raptor species. We educated them, they listened, they established their scientists to monitor the area and they moved several of their turbines to where our Montana Audubon experts suggested, far away from the cliffs. What a challenge, what an accomplishment, in a working

relationship with a big industry! However, I do remember when their representative first came to meet with the MT Audubon Board. He stepped out of his Cadillac in his tan three-piece suit and our jaws just dropped. Who did he think he was meeting with? But I digress. The point being, if a group is lucky enough to have great data (thanks in large part to our own MA/BAS member, Kristi DuBois, and her valuable research she started in 1988!), great staff and great, consistent support from their members, then a lot can be accomplished when a greedy oil company or utilities industry, or a caring-impaired government administration feels that it's the little three-year old's fault if the car runs him over while chasing his ball.

Stay vigilant Auduboners and stay ready to step up and help!

Wings Across the Big Sky Festival

Montana Audubon will host its 21st annual Wings Across the Big Sky bird festival at the Yogo Inn, in Lewistown on June 5th – 7th, 2020! This longstanding event rotates around the state each year and celebrates Montana's native bird species, typically drawing hundreds of wildlife enthusiasts from across the state and beyond. Front and center will be two days of field trips to destinations in stunning Central Montana, along with traditional festival on-site activities such as our Friday keynote speaker, interactive Saturday afternoon presentations, Montana Audubon Conservation Awards, Cakes for Conservation auction and more. NEW THIS YEAR! We are excited to announce we are planning an optional, pre-festival grassland science conference Thursday and Friday, June 4th and 5th, also to be held at the Yogo Inn. More information will be forthcoming as planning proceeds. Visit the "Outreach" section of Montana Audubon's website: www.mtaudubon.org or call 406.443.3949.



What's the story, Story?

By Jim Story

Question: *How do robins detect the worms that they pull out of the soil?*

Answer: It is likely that robins detect the worms by a combination of vision, sound and maybe “feel.” American Robins, like all songbirds, have exceptional vision. They can spot the tiny end of a worm as it pokes out of the soil. They can also see small changes in soil and grass as worms move about just below the surface. Songbirds have monocular vision in which each eye can operate independently, so when robins cock their heads to the side, they are actually turning one eye to look

News and Notes

Highway Clean-up Postponed

Due to the coronavirus, we will postpone our highway clean-up until May. This will give us more time to understand the implications of the virus in Ravalli County, and to decide if it's safe for us to congregate in that way. Plus, the weather is nicer in May. Look for our announcement in the May newsletter.

Bird Walks at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19 UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. ~~New to birding? Beginner Bird Walks at the refuge are held the third Saturday of each month. Meet at the Refuge Visitor's Center at 10AM for a two-hour bird walk. Bring binoculars if you have them. Contact the refuge at (406) 777-5552 for more information. Please note the Visitor~~

more closely at the soil. The head cocking may also be aiding the robin's hearing. As worms move about, they disrupt the soil and small particles of dirt rub together, making faint noises that the robin may be able to hear. Another possibility is that robins detect the subtle movements of worms in the soil beneath their feet. The upheaval of the soil or the gentle movements of grass blades disturbed by worm activity may alert a nearby robin. It is likely that all three senses contribute to worm detection, but vision is probably the most important.

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

~~Center is no longer open on Saturdays, so the indoor bathrooms at the Refuge headquarters will not be available. An accessible outhouse is available at the Wildlife Viewing Area.~~

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



Mountain Bluebird.

Courtesy Barb Garten

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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: _____
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Send this application with \$15 to:



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NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION



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