

Bitterroot AUDUBON



NOVEMBER 2021

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 36, NO. 3

Distant Early Warning Systems in the Forest: Alarm Calling and Communication Networks

By Micki Long

Our November presenter, Erick Greene, is a professor in the Division of Biological Sciences and in the Wildlife Biology Program at The University of Montana. He grew up in Quebec, Canada, with twin passions for music and nature. Erick dropped out of high school and lived for a year in the Galapagos Islands, helping with studies on Darwin's Finches. He then worked on seabirds 800 miles north of the Arctic Circle with the Canadian Wildlife Service. He returned for undergraduate studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he studied biology, music, and mathematics, and then received a PhD from Princeton University.

Erick and his family now call Montana home, having lived here for 30 years. He has been able to combine his interests in wildlife biology and music by studying how animals use sounds to communicate with each other. These studies in bioacoustics show that animals convey a fantastic amount of information with their vocalizations.



Courtesy Jeremy Roberts

Our November presenter, Dr. Erick Greene.

Animals use sounds to communicate many different types of information to each other, such as defending territories, attracting and assessing mates, keeping in contact with others in their social groups, and warning about danger. Birds and mammals are exceptionally good at detecting predators, and they produce a wide variety of important alarm calls. These alarm calls can be used by individuals of their own species and many other species in complex communication networks. We know little about how different species participate in these communication networks, nor how far and fast information travels. Dr. Greene and his students have been investigating these amazing communication networks with a wide variety of experimental approaches. We conducted much of this research right here in the Bitterroot Valley. In this presentation, Dr. Greene will give an overview of the astounding "infoscapes" and talk about how animals share information about predators with each other.

Special thanks to Dr. Greene for his willingness to present this month instead of in January, the original plan.

You are invited to a Zoom meeting.

**When: Nov 15, 2021 07:00 PM Mountain Time
(US and Canada)**

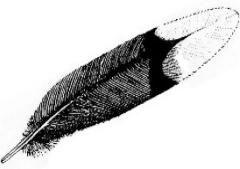
Register in advance (by 5 PM on 11/15) for this meeting:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAuce2gqj4vGN3o7eHgQ2QzMQcXG4ii_z2u

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Letter from the President

By Micki Long, BAS President



After a hot and smoky summer, we've enjoyed a truly beautiful autumn. The bright yellow of the cottonwood leaves, the deep gold of the larch needles, the various reds and oranges of shrubs are colors that rival the maples, oaks, and sweetgum of my old home in northeast Ohio—and we have mountains!

Autumn has always been my favorite season. When I was young, that was because I had fun planning a costume and then going trick or treating, armed with a large pillowcase; plus, I have an October birthday, and I grew up as college football fan. Many birthdays later, I now love fall because of the stunning colors and crisp air. And among my favorite poems is one by a woman in the ancient court of Japan, Izumi Shikibu: "As I dig for wild orchids / in the autumn fields, / it is the deeply-bedded root / that I desire, / not the flower." I reread this poem and others in the same volume each autumn.

Another joy of autumn are birds who migrate here this time of year. Among the favorites of many are Rough-legged Hawks, which usually arrive in our valley in October and stay throughout the winter. I haven't seen one yet this fall, but the power poles along roads I drive frequently are often topped with hawks, so it shouldn't be long now. If I see a large raptor in flight, I look for diagnostic dark wrist patches—diagnostic for the light morphs, anyway—I am not very good with dark morphs!



Courtesy Micki Long

Fall also brings Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch, which kicks off on November 13. If you haven't registered, don't worry. You can

register throughout the FeederWatch season, which ends in April. I have participated and enjoyed FeederWatch for years now. I love watching the birds at and around my feeders the rest of the year too, but with FeederWatch, I'm contributing to a large-scale citizen science project, along with thousands of others in the U.S. and Canada. There are many resources on the project's site, including under "Learn" and "Explore."

<https://feederwatch.org/welcome-to-feederwatch/>

I have used the resources to learn more about distribution trends of my favorite bird, the Clark's Nutcracker.

And last, but certainly not least, fall is a great time to buy Bitterroot Audubon 2022 calendars! They make great Christmas gifts. If you missed our booth at the Hamilton Farmer's Market, you can still buy a calendar at several locations in the valley. For a list of locations selling the calendar, see:

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

I hope you all have a wonderful Thanksgiving!

Support Audubon Adventures in the Classroom

By Betsy Ballard

Bitterroot Audubon Society board members will be contacting teachers and homeschoilers in the Bitterroot valley for grades 3 through 5 this fall to see if they are interested in a gift of Audubon Adventures curriculum. These curricula are graciously available through the donations from Bitterroot Audubon Society members. If you would like to donate, the total cost of one printed classroom kit is \$42.90. Individual topic and homeschool kits are available for lesser cost. You can mail donations to:

Bitterroot Audubon Society
PO Box 326
Hamilton, MT 59840

Donations by December 10 would be most helpful. The links below have information about the printed and online materials that are available. Thank you in advance for your help!

<http://audubonadventures.org/Purchase.htm>

[Audubon General order form Sep 2021.pdf
\(audubonadventures.org\)](http://audubonadventures.org/Audubon_General_order_form_Sep_2021.pdf)

Winter Raptor Survey Opportunity

By Kate Stone

The Owl Research Institute is looking for volunteers to conduct monthly winter raptor surveys in the Mission Valley. Raptor identification experience is preferred, though we also have some opportunities for beginners to learn. The first survey will kick off on November 15th, 9 am. If interested in this effort, please contact Beth (406) 396-7770; beth@owlresearchinstitute.org to sign up or for more information.



Courtesy Kate Stone

Rough-legged Hawk.

Skalkaho Bend Park Update

By Becky Peters

Weeding is Completed! Now on to Scattering Wildflower Seeds at the Skalkaho Bend Park



Courtesy Becky Peters

Volunteers at Skalkaho Bend Park.

We have had three glorious days of volunteers weeding at Skalkaho Bend Park to prepare the area for native wildflower seeds. We ended up filling over 40 huge bags of weeds, cleared from around the plantings at the bench and down in the swale enclosures by the river. We pulled lots of Bull Thistle (don't worry bees, there's more of it in other

places!), Houndstongue, Nightshade, Knotweed, Tansy, Redstem, Madwort, etc. We know that a weed is a plant that is where you don't want it, so with that definition, we cleared them away from stifling any of the native plants that volunteers with BAS, Bitter Root Land Trust, and Bitter Root Water Forum had spent so much time and energy planting.



Courtesy Becky Peters

Volunteers Bill and Becky Peters at Skalkaho Bend Park.

A HUGE thank you to all of you who came out to weed. This project that you "Weeders" started will establish a place that will not only be beautiful and but will also become a haven for protecting native pollinators. Bravo to your hard work!



Courtesy Becky Peters

Volunteers at Skalkaho Bend Park.

Now that patches of ground have been cleared, the next step is for volunteers to scatter our native wildflower seeds that can be set out in this cold weather. The reason for seeding this area is to create pollinator friendly spaces where there aren't any. These native wildflowers will provide sources of food, protection, and nesting sites for a variety of our native bees, butterflies, ants, moths, and other pollinators. The wildflowers chosen are drought-resistant and native to Montana.



Courtesy Becky Peters
Volunteers at Skalkaho Bend Park.

We have set the date of **Tuesday, November 23rd, at 10:00 am** to seed the areas at Skalkaho Bend Park. If you would like to help us scatter wildflower seeds just email me at rpeters@montana.com, with subject line: Seeding Skalkaho. I will then send you more information! Thank you, and the birds and bees thank you!!

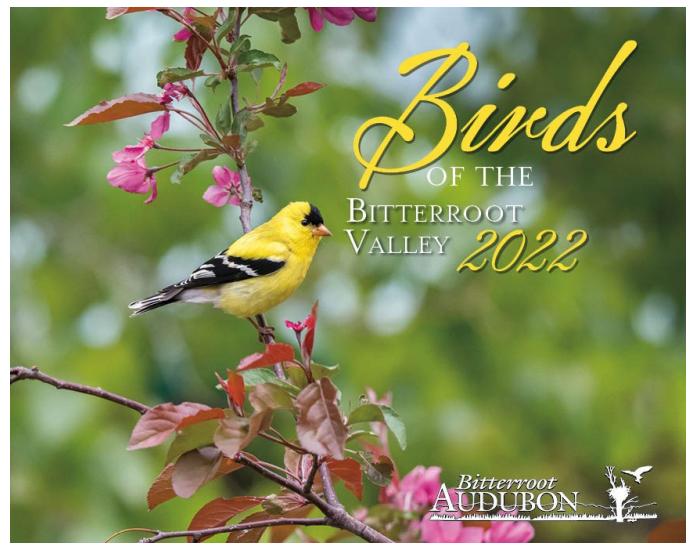
Don't Forget to Get Your Copy of 2022 BAS Calendar!

By Becky Peters

It's beautiful! It's unique! It's locally made! And the \$20 that it costs stays local.

Yes, you get a glut of “free” calendars and you don’t want one more, HOWEVER! If you have never purchased one of our calendars you are in for a treat. Photos were taken here in the Bitterroot Valley. The birds are our birds. The photographers are our photographers. They live here in the valley and donated their art to this project. The adorable students’ drawings are our Daly Elementary students. Each month tells you were to find which birds. Each month has a place where you can write

down which birds you saw and when. Then in 2023 you can look back at the calendar to check on when that bird might show up again.



What do we do with your \$20? We give it away! We give scholarships each year to two Montana university students in environmental studies; we donate to other non-profits that are working on local conservation and habitat restoration; we donate to local bird rescue and rehab centers; we donate to summer camps for our valley kids; we donate to citizen science projects such as the Bitterroot Valley Winter Eagle Project; and we are now helping with seeding the new Skalkaho Bend Park with wildflowers for pollinators and birds. Talk about money well spent!



So, help us help them. You can buy the calendar online at <https://bitterrootaudubon.org/support-us> or at these valley stores:

Florence: **Florence Ace Hardware, Gary and Leo's Foods**

Stevensville: **Stevensville Ace Hardware, Valley Drug and Variety, Browsing Bison Book Store**

Corvallis: K&S Greenhouse, Corvallis Drug

Hamilton: Lakeland Feed, Robbin's Hallmark, Joe's Studio, Bitterroot Drug, Stone Cottage, Chapter One Books

By the way, they make wonderful Holiday gifts for a host/hostess or for far away relatives to see some of the beautiful things we have in our valley!

BIRD-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES | PREVENTING COLLISIONS WEBINAR SERIES



Courtesy Georgia Audubon Society

Vinyl dots at Chattahoochee Nature Center.

Preventing Bird Collisions, a Two-Part Webinar Series

Join Audubon's Bird-Friendly Communities team for an exciting two-part webinar series focused on the issue of bird-window collisions, solutions we can take to address this problem, and lessons learned from across the Audubon network.

Register below for each event:

A Discussion with Researcher Dr. Daniel Klem

Tuesday, November 16, 2021

5–6:30 pm MST

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Solutions and Successes Across Audubon

Tuesday, November 30, 2021

5–6:30 pm MST

[REGISTER HERE](#)

The series kicks off on Tuesday, November 16 with a discussion with well-known bird-glass collision researcher and leading expert, [Daniel Klem, Jr.](#), Acopian Professor of Ornithology and Conservation

Biology at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania. His new book, *Solid Air/Invisible Killer: Saving Billions of Birds from Windows*, highlights decades of his research and summarizes both challenges and solutions.

Following this discussion with Dr. Klem, we explore collisions further in part two, Tuesday, November 30, as we chat with a panel of experts from across the Audubon network, sharing experiences and highlighting specific challenges and varied approaches to preventing bird collisions, considering the problems that light and glass pose to birds. Solutions and successes encompass policy change, coalition building, and outreach to community members and groups in implementing home and commercial solutions.

The Hamilton Christmas Bird Count is 35!

By John Ormiston, Compiler

It's getting time to be counting birds in the Hamilton Circle for the 35th time on December 18, 2021. Is it getting old, or becoming a tradition? I prefer to think it's a tradition and we're doing the same thing year after year. We're doing it again. Please take the time to enjoy a day in the field, or counting the birds at your feeders, if you live within 7.5 miles of the Hamilton airport. We need all the help we can get. Meet at The Teller Education Building, at 7:30 (please wear your masks) form small groups and we'll do the best we can to count all the birds in the six circle segments.

The Stevensville Christmas Bird Count

By Dave Lockman, Compiler

The 57th Stevensville Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for Sunday, December 26, 2021. This is a correction to the tentative December 31, 2021 date published in the October BAS newsletter. There are still Covid restrictions on groups using federal offices, so it's likely that we won't be able to gather at the Ranger Station this year. So, like last year, please contact me with your preferred area so we can spread the effort out and get reasonable coverage. Many of you have counted in the same area for years and know where the birds tend to be, and I encourage you to stick with those same areas again. I can help find places for those new to the count. I'll email more info to those who have participated in the past, but feel free to contact me at stevicbc@gmail.com or on my cell at 406-381-7679.

Owl Rescue: Raptors in the Crosshairs

By Kate Stone

In early August, I got the call as I was on my way home from an appointment in Corvallis: “I was out haying and found an injured owl along a fence line close to the Eastside Highway. How can we help it?” Steve Kauffman took several hours from his busy day to help me relocate the owl, who had moved a few hundred yards into the shade of the lone tree near the field. The owl was clearly injured, unable to fly, and seemed slightly emaciated. From the small size we guessed it was a male. We easily grabbed him, put him in a box, and I called Brooke Tanner at Wild Skies Raptor Center. We arranged for the owl to be transferred to her in Missoula the next morning.



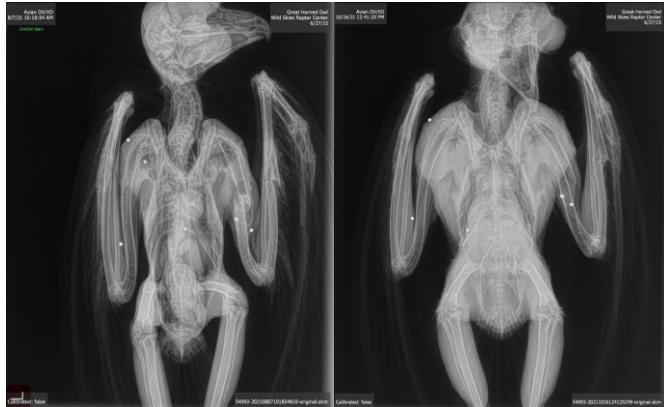
Courtesy Kate Stone

Thanks to Debbie Leick and Mike Alix for transporting the owl from Stevensville to Missoula and giving him water overnight to remedy major dehydration.

I have been volunteering for Wild Skies for several years now, and even recently joined the board. I usually help with the capture and transport of birds injured in the Bitterroot Valley. During the peak summer season, I might help with one or two raptors a week. This work can be very tough and heart breaking; sometimes the birds are in horrible shape, and often, despite all efforts, they don't make it. Luckily, the story of this particular owl has a good outcome, despite some major and preventable injuries.

Upon x-ray, Brooke found a broken wing and multiple shotgun pellets embedded in the owl's flesh. Someone had done this to the owl on purpose. Though we can never really understand why people would shoot birds like this, it's a pattern all too common in places like the Bitterroot and elsewhere in Montana. And probably more common than we

know, given that few of these birds are likely found. It's the ones who don't die and make feeble attempts at movement that are found by people. In addition to this Great Horned Owl, Wild Skies also admitted a shot Red-tailed Hawk and Merlin from the Bitterroot Valley this year. Both of those birds had to be euthanized. For the birds not killed immediately and never found, it would be a slow and painful death. Surely that would have been the reality for this owl if Steve had not found him.



Courtesy Wild Skies Raptor Center

The clear culprit for this owl's injuries: he was shot. These x-rays taken on admittance (left) and just prior to release (right) show how well the breaks in the left wing healed over time. You can also see how the owl's body works to expel the remaining pellets- some are gone completely in two months. The process of natural expelling is much less traumatic for the owl than trying to remove them manually.

Despite the injuries, Brooke saw potential for the owl's recovery and put in over TWO MONTHS of rehab and flight training to get him back out in the wild. I was able to release him in mid-October and watched as he left his carrier and flew with slow, powerful wingbeats into a large willow on the Bitterroot River floodplain. Fingers crossed he has a long life ahead of him.

Often injured raptors don't have the happy outcome we witnessed with this owl. But all attempts to either humanely euthanize them or release them take an incredible amount of effort, starting with the concerned citizens who make the call, followed by layers of volunteer efforts for capture and transport, and finally the skilled care performed by Wild Skies. Bitterroot Audubon has a history of providing financial support for this work, and several of our members actively volunteer for capture and transport and for workdays at the rehab facility in Potomac (thanks Max and Larry!!). Wild Skies also recently received a generous donation from the Rapp Family Foundation to help care for Bitterroot birds.



Courtesy Kate Stone

He wasted no time in eating soon after admittance at Wild Skies. A good sign!



Courtesy Kate Stone

Jesse Varnado and Brooke Tanner of Wild Skies Raptor Center place a numeric leg band on the owl prior to release.

What can you do? You can be an advocate for these birds in everyday life, making sure people understand that they are federally protected, and that shooting them is illegal. Refer people who have “problem” raptors to MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to discuss non-lethal deterrent options. Or volunteer to help people even when it seems like it should be on them to find a non-lethal solution; I just offered a person spare fencing material for his chicken coop to help alleviate an owl predation problem. Raptors are also often injured in window collisions, so seek information from qualified organizations on how you might prevent them. I recommend the information from the American Bird Conservancy

[Glass Collisions: Preventing Bird Window Strikes.](#)

And remember, direct donations to [Wild Skies](#) are the easiest way to support the on-going costs of rescuing and caring for birds injured here and elsewhere.

Thanks to everyone who helped give this owl a second chance!

Virgin Births Reported for California Condors

By Judy Hoy

In a long-term study, wildlife researchers found that two California condors gave birth without any male genetic DNA.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/30/science/san-diego-zoo-condor-virgin-births.html>

Virgin births have been documented in other birds and in reptiles and fish, but the discovery that condors can have virgin births was a surprise. San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance published their findings in the American Genetic Association's Journal of Heredity.

Kids' Corner: World Migratory Bird Day

By Ada Bernauer (age 10) and Annie Bernauer

On October 9, 2021, our Girl Scout Troop participated in World Migratory Bird Day with a bird watching activity at Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge. World Migratory Bird Day is an annual global campaign to raise awareness of migratory birds and the importance of protecting habitats they need to survive. World Migratory Bird Day is usually celebrated on the second Saturday of May and the second Saturday of October. You can learn more about it on the [Migratory Bird Day website](#).

Our Girl Scout Troop also participated in World Migratory Bird Day in May 2021 but the weather was blustery and cold, so our activity was short. On October 9th, we met at Lee Metcalf on a beautiful, warm, fall morning, and were excited to have better weather than our May bird watching activity!

Before we started bird watching, we talked about bird migration, the basics of bird identification, the variety of habitats at Lee Metcalf and which birds we might see there. We also talked about what it means to be a Citizen Scientist, how to use the [eBird website](#) to record our bird sightings and how the data is used to study birds.

We had ten Girl Scouts and their families join our bird watching activity. We walked the trail by the

visitor center and watched birds on the ponds and flying over us. We saw a total of 81 individual birds and 17 different bird species.

Highlights of our bird watching activity were watching a Belted Kingfisher dive into the pond to catch a fish and watching a group of Trumpeter Swans. We also saw a Red-tailed Hawk flying with something in its talons and another Red-tailed Hawk flew by and tried to steal it! Another highlight was seeing a Great Blue Heron perched very still on top of a tree next to a pond. It was really fun and I can't wait to go bird watching again in the Spring for World Migratory Bird Day in May 2022!

Calendar of Events

Nov 13-Apr 2022: Project Feeder Watch.

- Nov 15:** Winter Raptor Survey Opportunity, contact Beth (406) 396-7770; beth@owlresearchinstitute.org, 9AM.
- Nov 15:** ZOOM Audubon Meeting/Program. 7PM, *Distant Early Warning Systems in the Forest: Alarm Calling and Communication Networks*, Zoom Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Nov 16 & 30:** Preventing Bird Collisions, a Two-Part Webinar Series, 5-6:30PM. See link in article to sign up.
- Nov 20:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.
- Nov 23:** Volunteer Day to spread wildflower seeds, email Becky at rpeters@montana.com to sign up, 10AM.
- Dec 18:** Hamilton Christmas Bird Count, Teller Wildlife Refuge, 7:30AM.
- Dec 26:** Stevensville Christmas Bird Count, contact Dave Lockman to participate: stevicbc@gmail.com or 406-381-7679.
- Jan 15:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.

Field Update: The Search for Cuckoos

By Peter Dudley, Big Sky Watershed Corps

Montana Audubon was back on the Missouri and Madison Rivers for Black-billed Cuckoo and avian surveys this summer, after a great pilot year in 2020. For nearly a decade, we have carried out land bird monitoring in partnership with the University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab (UMBEL) Montana, Fish & Wildlife and Parks (FWP), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Every year we try to both refine the project and increase its scope in order to gain a better understanding of Black-billed

Cuckoo, as well as other species, and their distribution in the state.

We worked with the UMBEL, FWP, and Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute to use a new tool this summer: Automated Recording Units (ARUs). The ARUs, microphones that periodically record throughout the day, can record cuckoos from up to 150 meters away. That audio data is then run through a program trained to detect cuckoo calls within the audio recordings. With 43 of the 44 ARUs along the Missouri River retrieved (we think someone ran off with one of the units), we expect to gain a much better understanding of cuckoo population in Montana.

Along with the ARUs, Montana Audubon staff and research technicians set out to conduct our riparian bird surveys and "call-back" surveys in late-May. At each survey point, we conduct a 10-minute bird survey followed by a vegetation assessment, with an emphasis on important riparian species that appear to be in decline, such as the plains cottonwood, and noxious species that unfortunately are generally not declining. Black-billed Cuckoos are known to prefer cottonwood galleries with dense understory, so survey points in that habitat also included playback surveys, where we broadcast Black and Yellow-billed Cuckoo call recordings with a speaker. Cuckoos are very territorial birds, so if they are present anywhere within hearing distance of our playback, they typically respond and make themselves known very quickly.



Courtesy Peter Dudley
Black-billed Cuckoo.

Although results from our ARU's won't be available until later this fall, the season is already a success. We found two Black-billed Cuckoos at the end of our first multi-day survey float on the Missouri River! Two individuals of this highly elusive species is great, but it didn't end there. One playback survey on a small Missouri River island between Loma and Coal Banks yielded a territorial Black-billed Cuckoo to our surprise; they are more likely to be found further east. This individual stayed and coo-cooed for about 20 minutes, allowing us to get several good photos and video recordings. Several days later we went on another beautiful multi-day float from Coal Banks to Judith Landing, finding an incredible total of five Black-billed Cuckoos along the way. The ARU's we left around that area will hopefully record the vocalizations of these individuals and may give us insight into how, and for how long, they use that great stretch of habitat before leaving the area in fall. It will be even more interesting to see how many ARU's will actually capture the calls of this unique species in areas where we did not detect cuckoos in person. Now we just have to be patient and hope our data was well-recorded.

As usual, work like this would not be possible without the help of our partners and the Bureau of Land Management, who took us out on their boat to pick up the last group of ARUs. We look forward to working with these organizations in the future on this important work.

What's the story, Story?

By Jim Story

Question: How do birds fly?

Answer: All flying objects whether bird, bat, or airplane use two aerodynamic forces: lift and drag. The key to flight lies in the shape of the wing. The wing is shaped such that the air moving over the wing must travel farther and faster than the air moving under the wing. The increased speed of the air over the wing causes a lowering of the air pressure over the wing compared to under the wing. Since high pressure always moves toward low pressure, the air under the wing pushes the wing up, a process called "lift." For a bird to fly, the amount of lift must counteract the bird's weight. The amount of lift increases with increased speed of flight and with wing size, so birds with smaller wings must fly faster to achieve the same amount of lift as birds with larger wings.

"Drag" is the force opposite to the direction of motion and is therefore the cause of energy loss in flight. Drag is caused by the force of air against the front of the moving bird and friction from the air moving along the bird's body. For flight to be possible, the amount of drag must be offset by the amount of forward motion or "thrust." Drag is reduced by the feather configuration at the wingtips and by the streamlining of the birds' bodies. A gliding bird is able to maintain lift by tilting the wings but, because of drag, the gliding bird must occasionally dive briefly to maintain forward speed.

Birds move their wings with an up-and-down motion that propels them forward. The entire wingspan has to remain at the correct angle during the down stroke, so the wings have to automatically twist with each downward stroke to stay aligned with the direction of travel. (*Source: Tong and Schwab 1997*).

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

News and Notes

Bird Walks at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT: New to birding? Beginner Bird Walks at the refuge are held the third Saturday of each month. Meet at the Refuge Visitor's Center on November 20th at 10AM for a two-hour bird walk. Bring binoculars if you have them. Contact the refuge at (406) 777-5552 for more information.

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 BAEditors@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 Kate Stone

Recently rehabilitated and released owls from Wild Skies Raptor Center.

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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: _____
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Send this application with \$15 to:



Bitterroot Audubon Society
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