

Bitterroot AUDUBON



APRIL 2023

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 37, NO. 8

The Land of the Horse People

By Micki Long

The presentation for our April meeting will be by Jan Bullock. Jan grew up in western Massachusetts and earned a BS in Wildlife/Fisheries Biology from the University of Massachusetts. She studied Eastern coyote behavior in Massachusetts and snow leopards in the Himalayas. She also became a licensed Veterinary Nurse. Jan then lived in Alaska for twenty-six years, seventeen of them in a one-room cabin off the road system, using solar and wind power. She had thirty-three sled dogs and two horses. Jan served as the Head Vet Tech for the Iditarod Sled Dog Race for twenty years. In 2013, she retired from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, as a Research Fisheries Biologist and then moved to Hamilton in 2014. She is currently working part-time as a Veterinary Nurse and living in Hamilton with her husband, Ed, five cats, two dogs, and five horses.



Courtesy Jan Peloskey Bullock

Jan always wanted to visit the land of the horse people in Mongolia. She met someone, online, who lived there and started planning her trip. She spent one week working with children at a summer camp and eleven days on a pack trip by horseback. She

visited the oldest monastery in Mongolia and lived with a traditional Mongolian family for two weeks. Jan also went to see the Przewalski's horses. She's planning on going back this September. Jan will be presenting photos of her trip and telling us a bit about Mongolian history, culture, and present-day happenings. She'll bring traditional Mongolian art and clothing to show us.

This meeting will be in person, at the Bitterroot Valley Church of the Nazarene's Neely Center, 150 South A Street Victor. Note that it is not at the church itself but at their Neely Center, in the gym. The gym door is on the south side of the building. The meeting will begin at 7 p.m.



Courtesy Jan Peloskey Bullock

Letter from the President

By Micki Long, BAS President

I recently went owling, on my road, with two friends who also live on my road. After dusk deepened into darkness, we were thrilled to hear both a Northern Saw-whet and a Western Screech-Owl. If you've never heard of, or know little about owling, the internet can give you plenty of information about an activity that's exciting and peaceful at the same time. A Google search on owling yielded hundreds of thousands of hits (but watch out for autocorrect—you may get millions of hits for bowling). I hope you will all try owling. There is nothing like that moment when you and your owling companions suddenly go quiet, turning to a stand of trees or a hillside, listening to haunting songs.



search on the topic yields 1.5 million hits, far more than the “owling” search. For some, owls represent death or evil. For many others, owls represent wisdom. I see owls as beautifully powerful and magical, evoking joy and awe. For me personally, they don't need to represent anything—they are wild creatures, invaluable simply as themselves. That is why I'm so thankful when I see or hear an owl and why I am so horrified when I hear about yet another owl shot in Ravalli County, found dead or wounded. Think about how many are never found! The ones who are found alive may find themselves at the Wild Skies Raptor Center, a wonderful rehab organization in Potomac (which, by the way, will present at our May meeting).



Courtesy Micki Long

Northern Saw-whet Owl last fall.

I am, like so many others, fascinated by owls. I've often been mesmerized by the cold stare of a Great Horned Owl as I walk in the woods by my house. Eyes that thrill and possibly intimidate must come naturally to these birds, as even fledgling or branchling owls have fixed me in a powerful stare. But as hard as it is to do, I force myself to move along after just a couple of minutes, trying to respect the owl's space. I cringe when I see small or not-so-small crowds close to a perched or nesting owl. But I am guilty too—I have traveled to see a Snowy Owl near the north shore of Flathead Lake and a Northern Hawk Owl in Beaverhead County. I don't think most who make similar trips just want another bird on their life lists. Instead, for many, something about owls makes them almost irresistible.

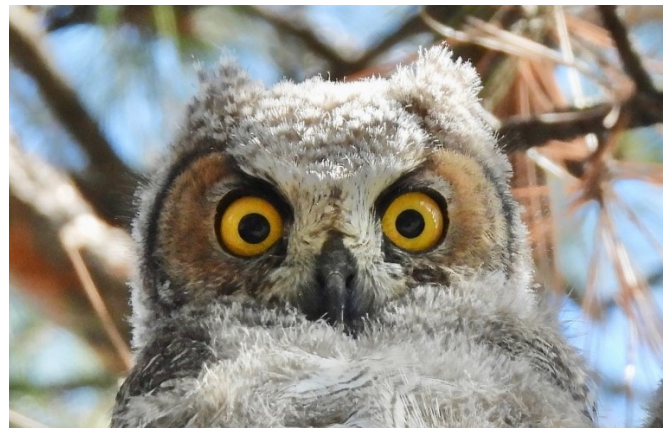
What is that irresistible quality? Owls symbolize many ideas or qualities in many cultures; a Google



Courtesy Micki Long

Western Screech-Owl, last summer.

Don't forget to join us for Welcome Back Waterfowl Day, at Lee Metcalf Refuge, April 15th from 10-1:30. And if you're interested in attending Montana Audubon's birding festival, Wings Across the Big Sky, June 9-11, see <https://mtaudubon.org/outreach/wings/> Happy Birding!



Courtesy Micki Long

Young Great Horned Owl.

Welcome Back Waterfowl!!

By Judy Hoy and Kate Stone

Mark your calendars: Bitterroot Audubon will be welcoming back waterfowl and wonderful birders on Saturday, April 15th. We'll meet on the dike west of the Visitor's Center from 10 am to 1:30 pm. We'll help the public with bird identification and observing the waterfowl, other birds, and mammals that use the refuge wetlands. This special event is for everyone. Bring binoculars, a scope (if you have one), and warm clothes. For more information or questions, check the Bitterroot Audubon Website (www.bitterrootaudubon.org)



Courtesy Larry Dewey

Byron Weber Scholarship Goes to Jake Kleimann

By Skip Horner

Bitterroot Audubon Scholarship Committee

Twice a year, Bitterroot Audubon awards our \$1000 Byron Weber Memorial Scholarship to a student at a Montana university studying a Natural Resource major. Most of this money comes from our calendar sales over the past years, so thanks go to the hard-working volunteers who created and marketed those exceptional works of bird-art.

Each applicant sends an essay, two letters of recommendation, their transcript, a list of their activities and involvements, and a statement on their financial need. We normally receive between three and six applicants each semester. These applicants represent the cream of the crop of eligible students. It's an honor for our Scholarship Committee, made up of Betsy Ballard, Annie Bernauer, and me, to study and discuss each application, to choose the most deserving, and to present our choice to our Board for approval. Over the years we've encountered many outstanding students, some of whom have remained in touch with us as they take

AWESOME HIGHWAY CLEANUP

By Skip Horner

Our semi-annual highway cleanup will take place on Tuesday, May 30th, at 4PM. We'll meet and park on the west side of Bell Crossing and clean miles 60 to 62 north and south from there. Bitterroot Audubon's name is on those big highway signs, so come out and help us, and the highway, look good. Bring your own gloves. We'll supply high-visibility vests and stout plastic bags. Questions? Call Skip at 406-369-5367.

their careers out into the world. One multiple winner, Philip Williams, even joined our Board for a while!

This semester's winner is also last semester's winner. Jake Kleimann is a senior at UM studying forestry and conservation. Jake is a top student, an Eagle Scout, and has just accepted a job with the City of Missoula as a Conservation Lands Attendant for natural resources and restoration work. Look for his interview with our local papers soon.

Our choice is often a difficult one, with multiple deserving applicants. In an unprecedented decision, this semester we chose to give a secondary award of \$500 to Samantha Westfahl, a student at UM studying archeology and forestry. Her application was so strong we just wanted to help her out.

Calendar of Events

- Monthly:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, 3rd Saturday of each month, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.
- Apr 15:** Welcome Back Waterfowl Day, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 10AM-1:30PM.
- Apr 17:** Audubon Meeting/Program: *The Land of the Horse People* with Jan Bullock, Audubon Meeting, Bitterroot Valley Church of the Nazarene's Neely Center, 150 South A Street Victor, MT; 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Apr 22:** Freezout Lake Cleanup, 9AM. See article for details.
- June 9-11:** Wings Across the Big Sky Festival—Save the Date. See article for details.

The Board of Bitterroot Audubon is proud of the many projects and activities we sponsor, from guided bird walks, to habitat restoration, to education at all levels, to advocating for conservation with political and business leaders. The Byron Weber Scholarship is one more aspect in the wide range of our good works, all pursued for the good of birds.

Movie “Grounded” Screening at the International Wildlife Film Festival

By Kate Stone



Photo by Jordan Hoffmaster

Grounded Film Poster.

Bitterroot Audubon has been involved in non-lead ammunition education for years. Our members should be pleased to know that a film made by Jordan Hoffmaster of MPG Ranch, has been selected to screen as part of the 2023 International Wildlife Film Festival (IWFF) in Missoula. The film artfully describes the impacts of lead poisoning on eagles and other wildlife, and features local organizations like Wild Skies Raptor Center, Raptor View Research Institute, and MPG Ranch, as well as community and Bitterroot Audubon members whose lives have changed because of this topic. This award-winning movie will screen as a part of the Working FOR the Wild shorts block on April 23 & 27 at 4 p.m. After the shorts block on the 27th, there will be a Q&A with Mike McTee, Rob Domenech, and Jordan Hoffmaster. If you're interested in attending, you can find ticket and other festival information on the [IWFF website](#).

Watch those Shrikes!!

By Kate Stone

Late March and early April are a time of transition for the shrikes we see in the Bitterroot Valley. The Northern Shrike overwinters and should be moving out. Loggerhead Shrikes breed in eastern Montana, but individuals might migrate through at this time of year. I had just been talking with a coworker about

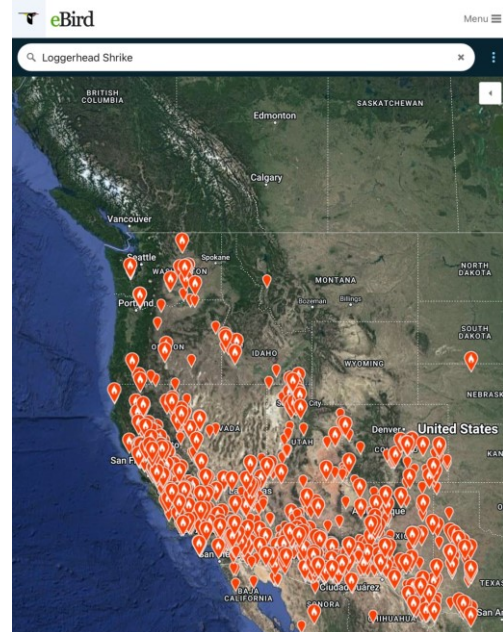
how we suspected people don't look at late-winter shrikes closely enough, and might just default to Northern Shrike. The next day I looked out in my yard, and saw a shrike perched in a chokecherry bush. The black mask looked strikingly thick. I grabbed my binoculars and camera, and sure enough: Loggerhead Shrike. A quick look at eBird showed zero recent observations anywhere near our part of Montana, but plenty of Northern Shrike reports.

Though I watched to see if the shrike might go after House Sparrows or voles in my yard, the only thing I saw it eating were the thatch ants emerging from a giant ant mound. It went back and forth to the mound several times in the course of the afternoon. I only saw the bird for this one day, and hope it has a successful journey north or east!



Courtesy Kate Stone

The Loggerhead Shrike in my yard on 3/26/23, showing a thick black mask, black over the eye and top of the bill, and nice, clean white chest.



Loggerhead Shrike observations reported to eBird, including my lone dot in Montana. I suspect if more people looked closely at shrikes in late March and early April, we would have more detections.

Avian Flu: Forgotten but not gone

By Kate Stone

As spring migration washes over us, it's good to remind all of us that the highly pathogenic avian flu (HPAI) has been and still is amongst us, even if most people aren't aware or talking about it. Most at risk are waterfowl followed by birds of prey.

Infected birds often die a traumatic death within 48 hours of exposure. I witnessed a Great Horned Owl and Red-tailed Hawk die of HPAI over the winter. Both were found just south of Stevensville. The Great Horned Owl was still clutching a dead teal that it likely contracted the flu from- perhaps it saw a compromised bird and thought it might have an easy meal. HPAI is spread through oral and nasal secretions and feces. It can also be spread on contaminated feed, clothing, or equipment.

Though most people talk about waterfowl, please know many other avian species die from avian flu, and most are likely never detected let alone tested. Current FWP protocol is to test when five birds of one species are found dead of no apparent cause. This numeric threshold is rarely encountered with birds of prey. Individual birds may be tested if they have a special designation or management interest (e.g., Bald Eagle or Trumpeter Swan) or if they are in close proximity to domestic poultry. Testing is also considered in counties where HPAI has not been detected before, but not necessarily in counties where it's already known to occur. In our local rehab community, we have had great success working with individuals within FWP to push for testing when we have a bird of interest. But in general, the agency is not pursuing or recommending a comprehensive monitoring or testing strategy. So the current level of disease, impact, or species dying is unknown. Reported cases should be considered a MINIMUM of outbreak status. In addition to many duck species, in Montana we have confirmed positive cases for: Red-tailed Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Bald Eagle, Long-eared Owl, Prairie Falcon, Common Raven, Common Grackle, Wild Turkey, Trumpeter Swan, Tundra Swan, American White Pelican, Great Blue Heron, and Turkey Vulture. Species that occur in Montana and have tested positive for HPAI in other parts of the country include all ducks, hawks, just about every owl, gulls, terns, egrets, Black-crowned Night Heron, Sandhill Crane, White-faced Ibis, American Coot, Common Loon, Double-crested Cormorant, Golden Eagle, American Crow, Black-

billed Magpie, Greater Sage Grouse, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, House Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, and Tree Swallow. You'll note that quite a few of these species do not primarily reside near water.

In the past few months, we've also learned that HPAI is carried by and has killed wild mammals in Montana, including two grizzly bears, striped skunk, raccoon, and red fox. Other states have seen mountain lion, bobcat, black bear, river otter, coyote, opossum, and harbor seals test positive. A barn cat has died of HPAI in Wyoming. So the pathways of spread are themselves spreading, and there's still much we don't know about this pathogen. Though we still lack comprehensive testing and guidance from our state agency, here are some best practices you might consider as we enter the spring season.

Stop bird feeding: Bird feeders congregate birds of all kinds, many of which are either susceptible to or can spread avian flu. Bird species that congregate in large numbers, move between land and water, or move around a lot can all be vectors of avian flu or die themselves. I challenge people to think about if their feeders DON'T attract birds that fit into the above categories. Common feeder birds that I would be concerned about include: California Quail, Wild Turkeys, Red-winged Blackbirds, House Sparrows, European Starlings, House Finches, Dark-eyed Juncos, any corvids, and MANY MANY more. Virtually all sparrows are migrating right now. Who knows what situations they were just exposed to and where they might go next? Are you near water of any kind? Adjacent to domestic poultry? Please do your part and take those feeders down. Some birds may carry HPAI and not appear sick. So waiting until you see a problem will mean it is too late.

If you find a live but "downed" bird of prey, please call Wild Skies Raptor Center like you always would (406-210-3468). Call MT FWP (Torrey Ritter, torrey.ritter@mt.gov, 406-381-2339) with reports of any other apparently injured or compromised birds. Please be ready to provide the date and exact location for the bird when it was found, species, any symptoms or signs of disease/cause of death you see, and notes on any other birds around that appear to be affected. Birds suffering from HPAI may appear lethargic or show neurological symptoms such as an arched back, rearing up and down flapping their wings, head-

bobbing or tremors, or toppling over. People should not touch or expose themselves directly to anything suspected of avian flu. Please leave handling birds to the experts, but if the scenario arises that you are in close contact with a suspect bird, wear a mask and gloves.

If you find a dead bird of any species in a scenario where there is no obvious cause of death (e.g., collision, electrocution, predation), call Torrey of MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks at the contact info listed above so he can assess the situation.

Thanks for doing your part to keep our birds safe!



Photos by Kate Stone

This Great Horned Owl and Red-tailed Hawk both died of avian flu here in the Bitterroot Valley this past winter.

Reminder: Freezout Lake Spring Cleanup

By Morgan Marks

This will be the second year that Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Montana Wildlife Federation, and Sun River Watershed Group gather volunteers to clean up spent ammo and trash at Freezout Lake, a popular birding, hunting, wildlife viewing, and photography location forty miles west of Great Falls. The three groups hope to hold this event annually. By working together, volunteers can help make this park safer for waterfowl and wildlife and more enjoyable for people. Good work takes many hands.

This year's event will occur on April 22, starting at 9 a.m. Volunteers will meet at the Freezout Lake Wildlife Management Area, break out into groups, spread out throughout the park, and clean up garbage and ammo until midday. Last year we collected several buckets of ammo and large trash items.

Volunteers are encouraged to dress for wild Montana spring weather. Bring work gloves and

buckets if you have them; some will be available to borrow if you don't. Drinking water and snacks will be provided. RSVP to morgan@mtwf.org or tracy@sunriverwatershed.org.



Sneed Collard III to Present at Wings Across the Big Sky 2023!

Montana's premier birding festival, organized by Montana Audubon and this year's local host chapter, Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon June 9-11, 2023

Registration opens in mid-April. Stay tuned for more information.

Heritage Inn, Great Falls, Montana

www.mtaudubon.org

Our keynote speaker for the festival is acclaimed author, Sneed B. Collard III, who has written more than ninety books for young people. Sneed is a popular award-winning speaker and has spoken at numerous birding festivals and events.

During the presentation, Sneed will recount the entertaining adventures behind his humorous, award-winning memoir *Warblers and Woodpeckers: A Father-Son Big Year of Birding* (Mountaineers, 2018) and other bird books and articles. Along the way, participants will travel to some of America's best birding hotspots as well as South America, the Galápagos, and the Middle East. Sneed will share highlights of his son's and his "accidental Big Years" of 2022 starring Pinky, America's most famous flamingo.

To learn more about Sneed, visit his websites

www.sneedcollardiii.com and

www.FatherSonBirding.com.

March 28th 2023 Montana Audubon Legislative Update: Hang on to your dollars, the money bills are flying

Montana Audubon

We've reached the second major transmittal deadline in the legislative session: the deadline for all revenue bills or referendums to pass the first chamber. We've heard bills that strip funding from Habitat Montana, strip certain subdivision regulations, target reductions to state water quality protections, and target nonprofits that take state legal action. Most importantly, the legislature is again proposing a constitutional amendment to add

the right to hunt, fish, and trap to our constitution through House Bill 372.

As we were watching Senate Bill 442 especially closely, a bill proposing to put Habitat Montana funding from the recreational marijuana tax towards county roads, a dramatic shift in the conversation took place! Conservation groups like Montana Audubon, Wild Montana, Montana Conservation Voters, and Montana Wildlife Federation made their voices heard and when executive action took place on the bill, it was amended to reinstate Habitat MT and the state's Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) funding and create an additional trust for conservation and wildlife, the "Habitat Legacy" account. The way the new plan will work is that after the Habitat Montana account reaches \$50 million dollars, the rest of the money will be allocated to on the ground conservation projects through the WHIP program and Habitat Legacy account. These amendments drastically shifted the outcomes of the bill and could help keep almost \$30 million in revenue going to Habitat Montana. Compare this bill outcome to what is currently being proposed in HB669 that would remove all conservation programs from the marijuana tax revenue allocations.

Beyond funding and particular to water, we dealt with sub-division planning bills (SB240, SB285) and coal bills (HB576) that could have broad unintended consequences for water quality and quantity. Both Senate Bill 285 and Senate Bill 240 would lead to increased development with reduced water quality oversight. SB 285 would exempt certain residences, including family transfer parcels, and commercial facilities from sanitation review and stormwater review based on being 500 feet from surface waters. SB285 would surprisingly apply to all subdivisions in Montana, and would likely increase nutrient pollution from nonpoint source polluters; with the burden of cleanup most often landing on municipalities and other point-source emitters.

Unusual since my time lobbying for Montana Audubon, the Senate Natural Resources Committee heard Senate Bill 524, a bill to change the taxation of certain expenses by non-profits used for taking legal action. Though intended to target non-profits that regularly use the legal system to accomplish their mission, the bill's broad language may also impact nonprofit's ability to comment on

legislation, rule-making processes, and other permit decisions that groups could challenge. And SB 524 takes an odd approach, taxing expenses for lawsuits rather than taxing income. From the sponsor himself, the intent is to change the way nonprofits operate; "If I really wanted to get vindictive, I'd say if you sue under these laws in the State of Montana, your nonprofit status is hereby revoked, and make all of their donations subject to taxes, but I did not," Hertz said. He continued, "To me, it makes common sense. It is somewhat unique turning an expenditure into taxable income. But we are allowed to do what's right under taxation." This bill is unfortunately now making its way to the House after passing the Senate right before transmittal.

Finally, we have our eyes on HB 372 that will be the legislature's 4th attempt to amend hunting, fishing, and trapping, directly into the Montana Constitution. Somehow the bill drafters think that trapping is the primary way we should manage Montana's wild fish and wildlife, terms not well defined in statute. But we know when it comes to conserving and managing Montana's wildlife, protecting habitat and its values should be the core and focus. The bill passed third reading in the house 62-38 and will head to the Senate. Because it's a constitutional referendum, it requires 100 representatives to vote yes for it to pass.

This last month will be a rat race, but we couldn't do it without your support and civic engagement!

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to Director of Policy & Science Amy Seaman (aseaman@mtaudubon.org), or Legislative & Conservation Ranching Assistant Peter Dudley (peter@mtaudubon.org).





Bitterroot Audubon's

BIG YEAR

2023

Let's see how many total species our chapter members see **in Montana** from 1/1/23 until 12/31/23.

We'll count by using eBird and sharing our lists to a group eBird account.

Eric Rasmussen will present a workshop on using eBird for beginners or those who need a refresher, on Jan.9 at 3 p.m.

You must register in advance for this workshop:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlvf-mrrzlsHtMr0etOS9Wcm06xfO_GEtAC

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

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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: _____
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
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