

# Bitterroot AUDUBON



MARCH 2023

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 37, NO. 7

## Dark Skies

By Kristine Komar

Darkness is increasingly rare in our world, yet it is critical to all life. Light pollution, especially in urban areas, is now a problem that prevention alone cannot address. Those working on the issue talk about restoring the night sky, but we are past the saving. While many, perhaps most, people are not even aware of the issue and associated problems of light pollution, gaining a grasp of this existential threat to life is, oddly enough, straightforward. Even more remarkable, many problems are fairly easy to address, and individuals and communities can take positive action. Birds can be a vector to a better understanding of the night sky and impact of light pollution; because you already love birds, this topic will attach new information to your existing passion. Join Kristine Komar, a board member of the new group Starry Skies Montana, to learn more about light pollution, how what we believe about lighting is part of the problem, and how you can help make a difference for birds and the earth by making the world around you a little darker.



Courtesy of John Ashley, [johnashleyfineart@gmail.com](mailto:johnashleyfineart@gmail.com)

Kristine Komar's lifework has been devoted to helping nonprofits and public land managers partner for public land stewardship. Her work has provided

her with spectacular experiences in the outdoors and access to experts in a dizzying array of disciplines. But in the past few years, backyard hens and an interest in the night sky have served to bring into focus the practical reality of some of the amazing ways nature works... and how each of us can work to more meaningfully support her. Kris was born and raised in Seattle and lives in Hamilton.

**You must register for this program;** please do so before 5:00pm the day of the presentation. Attendees will not be allowed into the meeting after 7:15pm.

You are invited to a Zoom meeting:

When: Mar 20, 2023 07:00 PM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

Register in advance for this meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/join/jgtGNVfk-my6sXeXb4auY2mEHaU>

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

## Letter from the President

By Micki Long, *BAS President*

March is Women's History Month, the perfect time to learn more about the contributions of women to the activity which brings us, members of this organization, together. National Audubon has a concise article that can acquaint you with seven women important in the history of birding and Audubon: "Seven Women Who Made the World Better for Birds and People"

<https://www.audubon.org/news/seven-women-who-made-world-better-birds-and-people>. Among the seven are two socialites, Harriet Lawrence Hemenway and Minna Hall, who fought to quash the practice of



killing birds merely to get feathers to adorn “fashionable” clothing, mostly hats; these two women also helped establish the Audubon Society. Thank you, Harriet and Minna!



*Courtesy Micki Long*

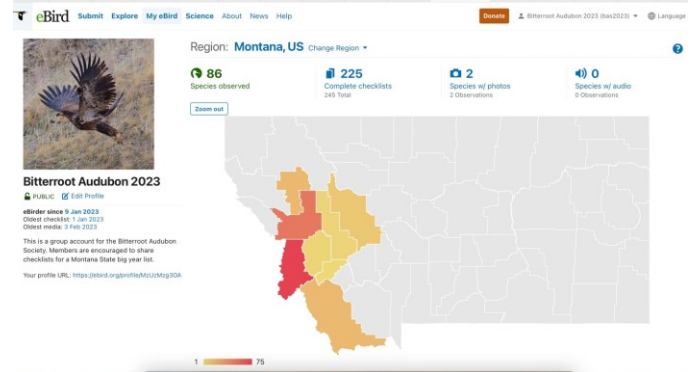
We have quite a few women birders in our chapter who have contributed greatly to birding in our area and who have inspired and influenced me and many others. They’ve sat through meeting after meeting, helping to shape Bitterroot Audubon, and led countless field trips and workshops, helping to educate us all as amateur naturalists. We all know who they are! But while appreciating women birders from the distant and recent past, let’s not forget future women birders—our daughters, granddaughters, nieces, and young friends. My granddaughter Stella had a small pair of binoculars when she was only a year old. And at seven (and ½, she’d point out), she can identify many species. The future of birds and the habitat they require to survive depends in large part to young girls and boys growing up with a love of and commitment to conservation. Let’s get these kids outside and away from their devices, at least for a while!



*Courtesy Micki Long*

*Spotted Towhee.*

The Bitterroot Audubon Big Year project is slowly gaining in the number of species and lists, including lists from counties not represented last month. Soon, we’ll see more and more migrants on our collective list. I am watching out for Spotted Towhees and Varied Thrushes, as in previous years I’ve seen them in my yard, scratching around under leaves or in my trees, in early to mid-March. I’m hoping to be able to include them in one of my eBird lists soon! Contact me ([mickilong@gmail.com](mailto:mickilong@gmail.com)) if you want to participate—or just eBird and share your lists with bas2023. There are plenty of good instructional videos available on the eBird site.



Raptor Guardians/Peregrine Watch—the season is upon us! There is a Zoom Orientation/Refresher on March 15—see invite elsewhere in this newsletter. I do plan to record this Zoom session, so if you want to be involved but miss the program, please contact me at [mickilong@gmail.com](mailto:mickilong@gmail.com)



*Courtesy Micki Long*

*Varied Thrush.*

Finally, I’d like to make a plea for volunteers to serve on a Social Committee. Some of you may remember that we had a Holiday Party at the Tin Can in Stevensville, shortly before Covid put a stop to social gatherings. We had so much fun! Please let me know at [mickilong@gmail.com](mailto:mickilong@gmail.com) if you are interested in helping plan more social activities.



## 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](http://www.bitterrootaudubon.org))



*Courtesy Larry Dewey*

## Feminist Bird Club

By Kate Stone

After several years of social isolation, I've gotten pretty comfortable in my "alone" time, hunkered down with cats (indoors!), a good book, or individual and small-group forays into the field to enjoy birds and nature. It can be hard to push ourselves into new spheres of experience or social engagement as adults. It might seem like either a diversity of perspectives or demographics can be difficult to come by in Montana. But as we know from close observation of nature, time and active engagement lead to new discoveries. It can be the same with people.

I was admiring a Belted Kingfisher patch on a friend's backpack a few weeks ago, and she revealed that its origins were with the [Feminist Bird Club](#), and that patch sales helped support the organization. We immediately went on-line together and she showed me their website. Their goals and mission align well with some of Bitterroot Audubon's recent efforts to be more inclusive. In

their words: **Our goal is two-fold: Make birding and the outdoors inclusive and affirming to people who may not have safe access to it, and leverage people's passion for the environment and social justice to help create lasting social change. More simply put: There is no reason why we can't celebrate birds and support our most cherished beliefs in equity and justice at the same time. For us, it's not either/or.**

Wow! I thought. This sounds great. I saw that there are chapters leading trips and experiences in many places throughout the United States, a growing international presence, and that indeed there is a newly formed NW Montana Chapter. Like Bitterroot Audubon, the group has a small number of actively engaged people willing and able to lead trips. But they've done several field trips in the past few months and this weekend they're gathering near Frenchtown to play the game Wingspan. My friend convinced me to sign up for a recent trip to the National Bison Range. That's when I discovered that ANOTHER friend and all-around amazing person had agreed to co-lead the trip, I knew I should push myself to go.



*Courtesy Kate Stone*

*We saw very few birds on our outing to the National Bison Range. But this American Robin was a nice surprise!*

It may sound silly, but it was hard for me to commit to a potentially large group field trip, where, though I might know a few people, I likely wouldn't know that many. Also it just seems like a big deal sometimes to drive up and even past Missoula- do I really want to leave my house? Perhaps awkwardly help identify a distant raptor with people I don't know? I am so glad that I overcame my hesitations and went. Though I generally am not a big fan of multiple-car birding trips, we brought walkie-talkies and enjoyed the fun of amateur radio chatter. Birds

were few and far between, but our three carloads enjoyed stunning scenery, random large mammals, and a handful of fun birds like Bohemian Waxwings and Townsend's Solitaires. We had great age, background, and birding diversity. I might work harder next time to join a car with people I don't know, but I would have no hesitation in joining a trip again.

I'd urge people to explore the [Feminist Bird Club](#) website for more information and potential upcoming activities. If the concept resonates with you, you might also consider purchasing a bird patch- the species changes annually, and they feature female birds. This year the patch is a female Common Nighthawk!!!



*Courtesy Kate Stone*

*The Feminist Bird Club patch for 2023 features a female Common Nighthawk.*

Join us for an Orientation/Refresher via Zoom, with Dave Lockman, former Wildlife Biologist with the Bitterroot National Forest at 4 p.m. on March 15th.

Topic: Raptor Guardians/Peregrine Watch Orientation/Refresher

Time: Mar 15, 2023 04:00 PM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86246940441>

Meeting ID: 862 4694 0441

Dial by your location: +1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

## Calendar of Events

- Monthly:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.
- Mar 15:** **ZOOM** Raptor Guardians/Peregrine Watch Orientation/Refresher, 4PM. See article to register.
- Mar 20:** **ZOOM** Audubon Meeting/Program: *Dark Skies*, 7PM, Zoom Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Mar 24-26:** Wild Wings Festival, Choteau, MT. See insert for details.
- Apr 15:** Welcome Back Waterfowl Day, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 10AM-1:30PM.
- 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.

### A Surprise Visit at Breakfast

*By Peter and Helen Allen*

Peter and Helen Allen were seated at their breakfast table this week, enjoying their morning coffee when Helen suddenly looked up and said, "Oh, my God! Right there by the house." Peter looked out the window expecting to see an elk or a moose in the front yard, but, no, they had an adult Northern Goshawk perched in a birch tree about 15' from the house. We were fairly confident of the identification, but goshawks are infrequent at the Allen residence, and we wanted to confirm the ID. Helen went for our faithful Sibley and Peter, trying to be modern, took out his phone and attempted to photograph the bird, intending to use Merlin to confirm what they had seen.



*Courtesy Helen and Peter Allen*

The hawk sat still for a short time, long enough for three photos (unfortunately taken through window glass) and then flew to a crabapple tree outside a bedroom window. After perching a short time, it flew off, leaving us considering that it was a great start to the morning. Peter was pleased that Merlin agreed it was a goshawk, and, of course, so did Sibley. Trying still to be modern and helpful, we submitted the sighting to eBird, and Kate Stone encouraged us to submit the photograph as well.

We had heard a bit about e-bird, but had never used it until encouraged by Bitterroot Audubon to participate in the Big Year by sharing sightings with 'bas2023.' Doing so has re-awakened our interest in the birds we see, particularly those in our own yard and neighborhood, and we're happy to share our information with others, as requested.

Our use of eBird and Merlin would have been unlikely without the training and encouragement of the BAS leadership. We certainly encourage others to try Merlin and eBird.

### Hamilton Christmas Bird Recap

*By John Ormiston, Compiler*

Our 36<sup>th</sup> annual Hamilton Bird count occurred on 12/17/2022, once again meeting at the Teller Wildlife Slack Barn to organize and disperse to the 6 segments of the 7 ½ mile circle. It was a cool (-8F) morning with dense fog in the valley and a slight north breeze to lower the wind chill to nearly below comfortable. The afternoon high was only 18 degrees. I've counted the Mansion pond every year of the count and have never seen as small an area of open water. Water vapor (fog) on the surface limited visibility so the number of waterfowl was a near record low. We did enjoy the view of 6 Trumpeter Swans, now regular wintering birds in the valley. The turnout of 20 observers was below average and only 14 feeder watchers took part in the count. We saw a record low 53 species and way below average numbers of birds, only 4,093 compared to the average of 7,482. We've recorded 27 species every year and 6 species 35 of 36 years. Few rodent dependent raptors were hanging around the valley; my theory is the early snows in November resulted in migrants continuing south for better hunting opportunities. The "Maki Group" spent a real day in the field, walking over 5 miles and recording 32 species, more than any other group. The Snow Bunting, they saw was only the 3<sup>rd</sup> time they were recorded, 1 was seen in 1997 and 10 in 2013. It was

generally a slow day for birders but the noon meal of chili and oreo cookies was a big hit, as usual.

COMMON NAME	2022
CLARK'S NUTCRACKER	1
SNOW BUNTING	1
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK	1
HARLAN'S HAWK	1
KILLDEER	1
HAIRY WOODPECKER	2
PILEATED WOODPECKER	2
STELLER'S JAY	2
COOPER'S HAWK	2
WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH	3
BUFFLEHEAD	3
DOWNY WOODPECKER	4
CEDAR WAXWING	4
COMMON REDPOLL	4
RING-NECKED DUCK	4
NORTHERN HARRIER TOTAL	4
GREAT BLUE HERON	5
BALD EAGLE IMM	5
AMERICAN DIPPER	6
NORTHERN SHRIKE	6
TRUMPETER SWAN	6
GREEN-WINGED TEAL	6
BALD EAGLE ADULT	6
GREAT-HORNED OWL	6
BELTED KINGFISHER TOTAL	7
AMERICAN KESTREL	8
AMERICAN COOT	8
RED CROSSBILL	10
MOURNING DOVE	10
AMERICAN ROBIN	11
BALD EAGLE TOTAL	11
RING-NECKED PHEASANT	12
ROCK PIGEON	13
SONG SPARROW	14
RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH	17
PYGMY NUTHATCH	18
AMERICAN GOLDFINCH	18
DARK-EYED JUNCO TOTAL	27
RED-TAILED HAWK	29
ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK	29



WILD TURKEY	41
EUROPEAN STARLING	42
AMERICAN TREE SPARROW	42
RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD	58
NORTHERN FLICKER	78
COMMON GOLDENEYE	92
HOUSE FINCH	95
EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE	96
COMMON RAVEN	103
BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE	116
BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE	176
CALIFORNIA QUAIL	182
HOUSE SPARROW	324
MALLARD	457
CANADA GOOSE	1874
TOTALS	4093
TOTAL SPECIES	52
Feeder watchers	12
Observers	20

### 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](mailto:morgan@mtwf.org) or [tracy@sunriverwatershed.org](mailto: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](http://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](http://www.sneedcollardiii.com) and [www.FatherSonBirding.com](http://www.FatherSonBirding.com).

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](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlvf-mrrzlsHtMr0etOS9Wcm06xfO_GETAC)

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



**Celebrate the Spring Light Goose Migration through Montana!**  
**March 24-26, 2023**

All events located at the Choteau Pavilion and FREE to the public  
204 1st St. NE

**Friday, March 24**

**6:00-7:00PM: Meet and Greet.** Raffle items featuring local vendors on display. Food trucks providing dinner and beverages for purchase. Educational booths from Montana based wildlife conservation organizations.

**7:00PM: An Interpretation of Birds.** A presentation by renowned author Jim Robbins.  
Raffle drawing after the presentation (Must be present to win.)

**Saturday, March 25**

**6:30-10:30AM: Guided tours of Freezout Lake WMA** and vicinity targeting Light Geese activity in the area. Meet at pavilion parking lot for van carpool and caravan options.

**10AM-5:00PM: Educational booths featuring:** Montana WILD, Montana Wildlife Federation, Montana Dinosaur Center, Sun River Watershed Group, Montana Wetlands and Waterfowl, Montana Audubon and Boone and Crockett Club!

**1:00-3:00PM: Gift of Birds to the Blackfeet,** Presentation by Tyson Running Wolf, MT State Representative

**Avian Evolution, from Feathered Ancestors to Freezout Lake: general overview,** Presentation by Dr. Stella Capoccia, Associate Professor Montana Tech.

Raffle of Vortex Binoculars, Red Ants Pants tickets and More! (Must be present to win.)

**Check out our other Community Events!**

**10AM-5PM: Choteau Arts Studio Spring Migration Show.** Including live music, refreshments, and activities from 2-5PM. FREE

**5:30PM: Doors open for the Old Trails Museum Wild Game Feed.** Museum Fundraiser. Admission is a free will donation. Potluck with game and non-game dishes, silent auction, live auction, and 50/50 drawing. Located at the Stage Stop Inn's Rocky Mountain Convention Center.

**Sunday, March 26**

**6:30-10AM: Guided tours of Freezout Lake WMA** and vicinity targeting Light Geese activity in the area. Meet at pavilion parking lot for van carpool and caravan options.



**Stage Stop Inn Motel Reservations**

(406)466-5900 or [www.stagestopinn.com](http://www.stagestopinn.com)

**General Info:** [Facebook.com/wildwingschoteau](https://www.facebook.com/wildwingschoteau)

**Freezout Lake Wildlife Management Area Info:** (406)467-2646



BITTERROOT AUDUBON  
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HAMILTON MT 59840-0326

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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



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