

# Bitterroot AUDUBON



NOVEMBER 2023

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 38, NO. 3

## A Risky Venture: A Mine at the Head of the West Fork of the Bitterroot River

By *Bonny-Bleu Ramsey*



*Mountain Pass Mine. The only active rare earth element mine in the US. From: [mpmaterials.com](http://mpmaterials.com)*

US Critical Metals, a Canadian company, is eyeing rare earth element deposits in the Bitterroot River's headwaters. Rare earth element mines are notorious for producing toxic and radioactive waste and for excessive water consumption.



*Courtesy Larry Campbell*

*Sheep Creek Mine Claims Location.*

Please join Philip W. Ramsey, Ph.D. and Bonny-Bleu Ramsey for a discussion of how the mine would affect our river and the valley. This program will provide an overview of rare earth element mining and impacts to the valley's economy. Better places to get rare earth elements in Montana will be

discussed. The presentation will be about 30 minutes long followed by an open discussion. The talk will not be overly technical; no chemistry background needed!



*Courtesy the Ramseys*

*Bonny-Bleu and Dr. Philip Ramsey*

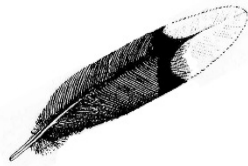
Dr. Ramsey earned his Ph.D. working in the Clark Fork Superfund site, developing methods to quantify the damage caused by mines in the river's headwaters. As a scientist with many years of experience working in a contaminated ecosystem Dr. Ramsey has firsthand knowledge of the risks associated with mining activities. Bonny-Bleu is Western Montana Realtor with deep roots in the West Fork and concerns about economic and environmental consequences of the mine.

**Our meeting will be held at 7 pm on Monday, November 20<sup>th</sup> in the Education Building adjacent to the Slack Barn at Teller Wildlife Refuge at 1180 Chaffin Lane in Corvallis.**

## Letter from the President

By Micki Long, BAS President

It's so much easier to procrastinate than in the pre-internet days. And procrastination can even follow a theme. For example, I am more easily distracted from cleaning and other chores by bird-related messages and emails than I am by news of mass shooting and war. I stay as informed as I can bear, and right now, I become easily overwhelmed and distressed by news stories. As I sat down to start writing this letter, I looked at my email first and saw something from national Audubon inviting me to take a quiz that would reveal what kind of owl I am. I'm sure many of you received the same email, and most of you probably resisted indulging in such a silly quiz. I, however, confess that I took the quiz and discovered I am a Great Horned Owl. Given my size, I expected maybe a Northern Pygmy-Owl or a Northern Saw-whet Owl. But I'll take the Great Horned—they are among my favorite subjects to photograph.



Courtesy Micki Long

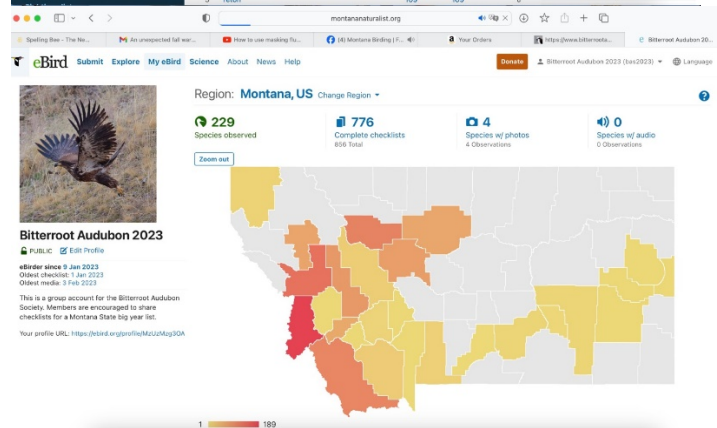
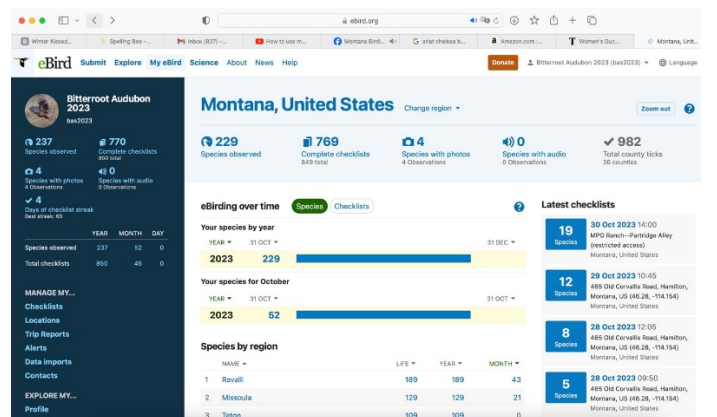
Great Horned Owl

I chose this particular photo of a Great Horned because it is looking pretty fierce; this owl has a better fierce face than I do (I think). We have great volunteers who serve on the Board and at various events throughout the year. But we need more of you to step up! You'd be surprised how many times a great idea emerges and then recedes because existing volunteers simply don't have the capacity to take on more responsibility. And sometimes volunteers want to step back from responsibilities they've shouldered for many years. For example, we are looking for someone to take over as the compiler

for the Hamilton Christmas Bird Count. John Ormiston has led the Hamilton CBC for decades, and he is willing to work alongside a new volunteer this year, to train them for future CBCs. Let me know if you'd like more info. And please take a look at the Volunteer Opportunities article included in the newsletter and let me know if you are interested in any of the described activities or just want to be on a list of people to contact when we need some help. Please, please, please help your Audubon chapter function better so we can offer more birding-related activities!

And here's an easy way to participate: we still have until the end of the year to submit eBird checklists for our eBird chapter-wide challenge. As of this morning, members have reported 229 species in 26 Montana counties. Just use eBird and share your checklist with BAS2023. Let's see how many species and/or counties we can add before the end of the year!

I hope you all have a wonderful (and wonderfully birdy) Thanksgiving!



Note: I think the discrepancy in 237 v. 229 species is due to birders sharing lists with birds seen outside of Montana.



## Volunteer Opportunities

By Micki Long, BAS President

### One-time or short-term opportunities:

- ❖ Semi-Annual Highway Cleanup
- ❖ Helping birders at annual Welcome Back Waterfowl Day
- ❖ Tabling one or more times at O'Hara Farmers Market
- ❖ Tabling at Teller Youth Expo
- ❖ Tabling at various, one-time events
- ❖ Participating in one of our Christmas Bird Counts
- ❖ Helping plant, water, and maintain pollinator plants at Skalkaho Bend Park
- ❖ Making refreshments for in-person meetings

### Recurring opportunities

- ❖ Serving on a standing committee (\*Programs, Education, Scholarship, Field Trips, \*Conservation/Important Bird Area, Social)  
\*key committees that need one or more volunteers
- ❖ Monitoring Peregrines and other Raptors in the Raptor Guardian/Peregrine Watch
- ❖ Participating in the 2023 Chapter-wide Big Year Challenge

### Long-term opportunities

- ❖ Serving on Bitterroot Audubon's Board
- ❖ Developing and coordinating a junior/youth group
- ❖ Assisting with and sharing responsibility for the Bitterroot Audubon newsletter.

In addition, share any ideas you may have about an activity you think Bitterroot Audubon should be offering (and be willing to help us offer it).



## It's Christmas Bird Count Time in the Bitterroot

By John Ormiston, Compiler, with Micki Long, Dave Lockman, and Susan Nelson

For birders, Christmastime means it's time to clean the binoculars and spotting scopes, find the warm field clothes, and be sure to find the bird guide. It's Christmas Bird Count time in the Bitterroot and nationwide. For the 124th time, citizen scientists will go to the field to count as many as possible of the birds occupying a 7.5-mile radius, 177 square mile circle. Compilers will report the results of nearly 2,000 count circles across the U.S. and another 500 in Canada, Mexico and Central America. Bitterroot Audubon sponsors two annual counts around Hamilton and Stevensville. The 37th Hamilton CBC occurs on December 16th and the 59th Stevensville count on December 30th. The Stevensville count, started in 1963, is one of the two oldest in Montana.

We welcome participation of anyone interested in learning more about winter birds in the Bitterroot. We especially like beginning birders, who will always be paired with more experienced folks who know the area and the birds. The groups gather at about 7:30 AM with the intent of getting to the field by daylight about 8:00. Hamilton counters gather at The Teller Education Barn (for the 37th time) and Stevensville birders meet at a location to be announced (see our Facebook page and the December newsletter). The Hamilton group honors a 35-year-old tradition by meeting back at The Teller for lunch featuring homemade chili, Oreos, and, of course, some delectable Christmas goodies. The counts are serious endeavors, but congenial birders interested in sharing their knowledge with beginners make the atmosphere competitive and lots of fun.

Those who would rather sit with a hot cup of tea or glass a wine and watch their feeders for a half hour or several hours can be extremely helpful by keeping a tally of what they see on count day. Feeder watchers can, in addition to counting birds at

## Calendar of Events

- Monthly:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.
- Nov 20:** Audubon Meeting/Program; A Risky Venture: A Mine at the Head of the West Fork of the Bitterroot River, By Bonny-Bleu and Dr. Philip Ramsey. Teller Wildlife Refuge Slack Barn, 1180 Chaffin Ln, Corvallis, MT, 7PM.
- Dec 16:** Hamilton Christmas Bird Count, Teller Wildlife Refuge, 7:30AM.
- Dec 30:** Stevensville Christmas Bird Count, details TBA, 7:30AM.

their feeders, count birds in their yard and property. As this is a 24-hour count, they can also take advantage of the owling time in those dark and twilight hours! Feeder watchers annually add around 5 species not seen in the field at each of the Stevensville and Hamilton counts. If you live within 7.5 miles of either the Hamilton Airport or the Stevensville Ranger Station, you could help with this citizen science project. Call John Ormiston, 406-360-9530 (Hamilton); or Deb Goslin (Stevensville), 406-381-7679 to participate as a feeder watcher.

Please take the opportunity to enjoy a day out with a great group of people and help the effort to count all the birds in the two official National Audubon Christmas Bird Count Circles.

### **BYRON WEBER MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP—FALL SEMESTER 2023**

*By Skip Horner*

Bitterroot Audubon awards our \$1000 Byron Weber Memorial Scholarship every semester to an upper-class student at a Montana four-year college studying a Natural Resource major. Preference is given to a Bitterroot Valley resident. This current semester represents the eleventh year of this award, which began as \$300 in 2013, increased to \$500 the next year, and to the full \$1000 in 2018, thanks mostly to the sales of our beautiful calendar. In all, we have helped eleven deserving students meet their financial needs, with several awardees winning multiple times. Philip Williams won the scholarship the first five times! And ultimately took a seat on the Board of Bitterroot Audubon, and on our Scholarship Committee. We are proud to have helped each awardee to complete their degrees and move into careers in their chosen Natural Resource field.

Our Fall Semester 2023 winner is Rocky Verrue, from Florence, who is studying crop and soil science, and entomology, at MSU. We're pleased to support this deserving local student. Along with all our previous winners, he promises to become an ambassador for Bitterroot Audubon as he moves out into the greater world. Congratulations Rocky!

### **Another Good Year for Bitterroot Peregrine Falcons**

*By Dave Lockman*

Peregrine falcon populations across Montana had a rough year, with fewer occupied territories and fewer young produced than average. Speculation is that this may have been due to the effects of avian influenza. The good news is that here in the Bitterroot there was little evidence of any such decline. Volunteers with Bitterroot Audubon's Bitterroot Peregrine Watch group documented 10 active territories this spring. Of these, eight were checked for productivity this summer. We documented successful fledging in all eight territories, and found at least 19 fledged juveniles for an average of 2.4 young fledged per territory with a fledge count (compared to 20 fledglings for an average of 2.5 in 2022). We likely missed some young in some of the territories (it can be challenging trying to keep track of them all), and several previously active territories went unchecked, so there were likely more young peregrines produced than what we counted. We also checked another territory that hadn't been looked at since 2017, and found a male and female occupying the canyon, but didn't get a fledge count. On a larger scale, the Montana Peregrine Institute website ([www.montanaperegrine.org](http://www.montanaperegrine.org)) shows that volunteers found 72 active peregrine territories across the state (compared to 88 in 2022). Volunteers found fledged young at 26 of these active territories (compared to 37 in 2022), and found at least 57 fledged juveniles for an average of 2.2 young per territory with a fledge count (compared to 98 fledged juveniles for an average of 2.6 young per territory in 2022). According to Jay Sumner, Executive Director of MPI, the long-term average for Montana is 2.4 young per territory with a fledge count. So in 2023, 33% (19 of 57) of the documented juvenile peregrines in Montana were found in the Bitterroot!

I'd like to thank Marrea Matthews for coordinating the Bitterroot Peregrine Watch efforts, and all the volunteers who donated their time and energy to monitor peregrine territories this year. To the best of my knowledge we had 16 volunteers who monitored at least one territory at least once, plus two Bitterroot National Forest biologists. There were some frustrating times when we couldn't find any peregrines, but several volunteers had more than one amazing peregrine experience. We saw lots of courtship activity including several copulation bouts

and prey deliveries, and later saw juveniles flying together and harassing each other and their parents in that typical annoying teenage manner. And we all increased our peregrine observation skills. Can't wait for next year's effort, watch for announcements in late winter if you're interested in participating.

### **North Bridger Bison becomes 1<sup>st</sup> Audubon Certified bison ranch in Montana!**

*By Lauren Smith, MT Audubon*

North Bridger Bison, located in Wilsall, MT (about 30 miles north of Livingston), is the first Audubon Certified bison ranch in Montana! This means that North Bridger Bison can now use the Audubon Certified bird-friendly seal, a product label that lets consumers know that these products come from bison that grazed on ranches managed for birds and biodiversity.

Learn more about the Audubon Conservation Ranching program in Montana and North Bridger Bison in this short video from Kyle Dudgeon Creative (the link takes to you the Montana Audubon website, and you'll need to scroll to the bottom of the page to see the video).

<https://mtaudubon.org/audubon-and-partners-announce-first-bird-friendly-certified-bison-ranch-in-montana/>

On Oct. 25, North Bridger Bison was featured on the news! Check out the segment on 7 KBZK Bozeman here:

<https://www.kbzk.com/news/montana-ag-network/montana-ag-wilsall-ranch-becomes-first-certified-bird-friendly-bison-ranch-in-montana>



*Courtesy of Matt Skoglund*

*The Skoglund family on their ranch, holding a sign with the Audubon Certified seal.*

### **Save the date for the 2024 Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival**

*By Lauren Smith, MT Audubon*

Though next summer seems far away, we are already hard at work planning the next Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival!

The festival will be held in Helena, May 31–June 2 2024. Montana Audubon is partnering with Last Chance Audubon, and we're working to put together some fantastic field trips- we're excited to share those details as soon as they're finalized! We're also going to have multiple hotel options, including a budget-friendly option to stay at Carroll College, our main festival location.

More information coming soon!



*Courtesy Janice Miller, Last Chance Audubon*

### **Something to Consider**

*By Becky Peters*

I was listening to an NPR podcast the other day from Going Wild with Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant. This particular episode was titled "Fight and Flight: Christian Cooper's Story" from Sept. 19, 2023.

It was about the incident three years ago where a man in New York City's Central Park was accused by a white woman as being a threat to her. His crime? Birding while black (and asking her to leash her dog in the park)

[\(https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/white-woman-in-central-park-confrontation-with-black-birdwatcher-made-false-assault-charge-da-says/2667375/\)](https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/white-woman-in-central-park-confrontation-with-black-birdwatcher-made-false-assault-charge-da-says/2667375/).

The Wynn-Grant podcast is about 40 minutes long and covers many aspects of Christian Cooper's life



situations. I found it fascinating to listen to what Mr. Cooper has gone through during his 60 years, and his childhood love of birding. But what got my attention was what he had to say about John Audubon toward the end of the episode. As a board member of his NYC Audubon society he understood why National Audubon was doing a yearlong study of whether or not to change their group's name due to John James Audubon's racism and slave ownership. With much soul-searching he concluded that diversity is very much needed within our Audubon groups, especially if we want to save our birds. "If we fail to engage new audiences with the natural world - if concern for the welfare of our wild birds is perceived as something for 'Whites only' - then only a dwindling group of Americans will fight for the birds. There will be no constituency for their

### **Fall Snow Geese Migration in the Bitterroot!**

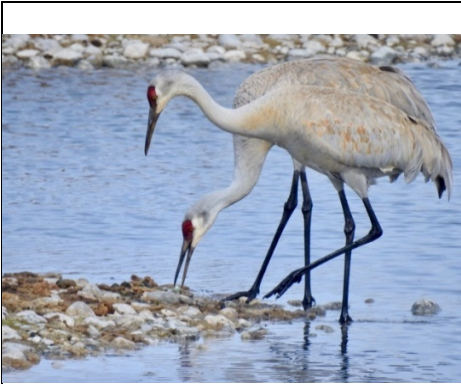
*Photos courtesy Carol Babel*

protection." I had not thought of it that way. Bottom line – if people of diverse backgrounds and skin color don't want to join a conservation group that has a devout racist's name, they won't. That point of view, in my opinion, needs to be listened to, accepted, and heeded. If you want to read more about Mr. Cooper's thoughts for Audubon groups he wrote an article about it in April of this year.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/04/04/audubon-enslaver-name-change/>

D.C., NYC, Seattle, Portland, OR, and other Audubon groups, have changed their names. They chose to be more encompassing. What is BAS's stance for our group's diverse future?





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.

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### Officers

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Vice-Pres. Mike Daniels\*  
Secretary Pam Murphy\*  
Treasurer Jim Story\* 406-493-9813

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Website Kate Stone\*  
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Education Betsy Ballard\*  
Nwsltr. Ed. & Distribution Sara Ashline [baseditors@gmail.com](mailto:baseditors@gmail.com)  
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Audubon Mike Daniels\*  
Scholarship Skip Horner\* 406-642-6840  
Aud. Adv. Betsy Ballard\*  
Field Trips Open role  
At large John Ormiston\*

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WEBSITE: [www.BitterrootAudubon.org](http://www.BitterrootAudubon.org)

INSTAGRAM: @bitterroot\_audubon  
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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National Audubon Membership at  
[Audubon.org](http://Audubon.org)