

Bitterroot AUDUBON



OCTOBER 2023

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 38, NO. 2

Saving the Mountain Caribou

By Cory DeStein and Kate Stone

Though Bitterroot Audubon members often think about the decline and even extinction of bird species, how often do we pause to consider the plight of mammals? Few people know about or discuss the dire situation facing the mountain caribou. Once common throughout northwest Montana, the mountain caribou is now considered one of North America's most endangered species. In 2019, the continental United States lost its last caribou with the extirpation of the South Selkirk herd, which ranged into northern Idaho and northeast Washington. At the same time, the closest herd to the north in Canada, the Central Selkirk, plummeted to only 24 animals.



Courtesy Cory DeStein

Mountain caribou cow from the Kennedy Siding Herd in Hart Range, BC.

Southern mountain caribou are a unique ecotype of woodland caribou in that they occupy high-elevation, forested areas with deep snowfall. Here, caribou use their large, rounded hooves to 'float' atop the snow, allowing them to feed primarily on arboreal lichen that is out of reach from other species. This trait allows them to spend their winters in areas where other ungulates have migrated to

lower elevations, providing a spatial separation from predators. In recent years, habitat loss and fragmentation from development, disturbance from winter recreationists, and changes in predator-prey dynamics have led to a dramatic decline in herd numbers.



Courtesy Cory DeStein

Mountain caribou bull from the Columbia North Herd in the Selkirk Mountains, BC.

Despite habitat protection from industry, backcountry recreation restrictions, and predator removal, the numbers of the Central Selkirks continue to decline. In 2022, the Arrow Lakes Caribou Society launched its first year of a

maternal penning operation. The pen provides cows and calves protection from predators and a boost in nutrition during their critical first six weeks of life. How well has this strategy worked? What other actions are being taken to protect the caribou?



Courtesy Cory DeStein

Mountain Caribou calves in the Central Selkirk maternity pen.

Cory DeStein is a wildlife photographer and conservationist in Missoula, Montana. He has strived to document the mountain caribou's story through his photography to inspire others with the same appreciation he has developed for these unique creatures. In addition to his photography, Cory has volunteered on numerous projects dedicated to caribou recovery, including serving as a board member for the Arrow Lakes Caribou Society.

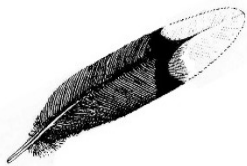
Please join Cory and members and friends of Bitterroot Audubon to learn more about these grey ghosts of the mountains and the collaborative efforts to save them.

Our meeting will be held at 7 pm on Monday, October 16th 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

Happy Autumn, everyone! Autumn can be a little sad for birders, as we say goodbye to many species (and we have to bundle up to go birding). But I try not to let my mood reflect the often-gloomy fall skies; instead, I celebrate the return of some of my favorite species. The number of Clark's Nutcrackers in my yard and



surrounding woods is steadily increasing. I love their raucous calls, each individual bird with its own style of raucousness. A quick glance at my recent eBird checklists shows that another fall and winter regular at my place, with calls and songs far more melodious than those of the Clark's Nutcracker, the Townsend's Solitaire, has returned; if past years are any clue, their numbers will increase from the 4 or 5 here now to well over a dozen in a few weeks.

Cornell's *All About Birds* website says, "During the winter, the male and female are both strongly territorial, defending patches of juniper trees against other solitaires and other birds. They feed largely or even exclusively on the juniper's ripe, fleshy berries for the entire nonbreeding season"

(https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Townsend's_Solitaire/overview). The large number of junipers in the woods around me support many Solitaire territories, so I get to enjoy the beautiful calls and songs of male and female Solitaires throughout the fall and winter. Working in the yard, sitting on my deck, or walking in the woods, serenaded by the contrasting calls of the two species, lifts my spirits.



Clark's Nutcracker.

Courtesy Micki Long



Courtesy Micki Long

Townsend's Solitaire.

The weekend of October 13-15 is Global Bird Weekend, October 14 is October Big Day, and October 13-14 is World Migratory Bird Day (although it's actually two days). Consider getting together with birding friends that weekend. If you do, please send me a sentence or two (or three) about your birding experience (mickilong@gmail.com).

The most recent issue of Montana Natural History Center's *Montana Naturalist* magazine caught my interest immediately because its cover story is about searching for tall trees with LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging). I'm sure many of you share my love of big trees and would enjoy this article. There is also an article on pollinators in winter; many of us have learned a great deal about pollinators in our yards and gardens in the summer, and we try to provide food and shelter for the bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. This article can complement our knowledge about pollinators! But the magazine also includes an article called, "Northern Flickers: Birds of Varied Feathers," by Board member Kate Stone and her MPG Ranch colleague Mary Scofield. The article is about *intergrade* Northern Flickers; it's likely that some of us have seen intergrade Flickers in our yards or on our walks. I cannot find a digital version of the issue (but I think one will be available eventually). I did, however, find an Spring 2023 update on Kate and Mary's Flicker research on the MPG website:

Calendar of Events

- Monthly:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, 3rd Saturday of each month, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.
- Oct 17:** Highway Clean-up, 4PM, see announcement in this newsletter.
- Oct 16:** Audubon Meeting/Program; Saving the Mountain Caribou, By Cory DeStein and Kate Stone. Teller Wildlife Refuge Slack Barn, 1180 Chaffin Ln, Corvallis, MT, 7PM.

https://zivranch.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023_04_03_KRS_NOFL.pdf Check out just one of Kate's research interests—we are lucky to have her on our Board!

We had a nice turnout for the September potluck at the Larry Creek Recreation area. You will see photos from the event in the newsletter. I think you can tell that we enjoyed good food and great companionship!

AWESOME HIGHWAY CLEANUP

By Skip Horner

Our semi-annual highway cleanup will take place on Tuesday, October 17th, 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 look good. Bring your own gloves. We'll supply high-visibility vests and stout plastic bags. Questions? Call Skip at 406-369-5367. Thanks!

September Meeting: Bitterroot Audubon Potluck Photos



Former BAS President Becky Peters with good ideas at our “Build a Story table; Micki Long and Skip Horner transforming Cornhole into Volehole; Quite a spread of delicious food! And Robin and Larry Dewey, with Percy. *Courtesy Kate Stone*
Larry Dewey and Skip Horner, sad that there are no marshmallows. *Courtesy Micki Long*
Kate Stone and Kathy Stroppel-Hall playing VoleHole; and BAS members enjoying the potluck. *Courtesy Susan Nelson*

Bitterroot Resilience Forum

You are Invited....

To a community discussion on resilience planning strategies to address the impacts of a changing climate.

Bitterroot Resilience Forum will include:

- Expert presentation to increase understanding of our community's vulnerabilities to anticipated climate changes
- Resilience planning through facilitated group discussion and deliberation
- Defining our own local action strategies to adapt to and mitigate climate impacts
- Exploring a spectrUM science exhibit on climate impacts
- Intergenerational dialogue
- Ongoing follow-up planning for resilience preparedness

Forum Topics

- Drought & Flooding
- Smoke & Fire
- Extreme Heat

Sponsors:



Location: Hamilton City Hall
223 S 2nd Street

Friday Oct. 13th 10-2pm

Resilience Day

Dr. Bruce Maxwell will present on forum topics followed by facilitated breakout groups for discussion. The forum will conclude with a selected panel of subject experts and group Q&A.

Free Lunch Provided for all participants

Wednesday Oct. 18th 5:30-7:30pm

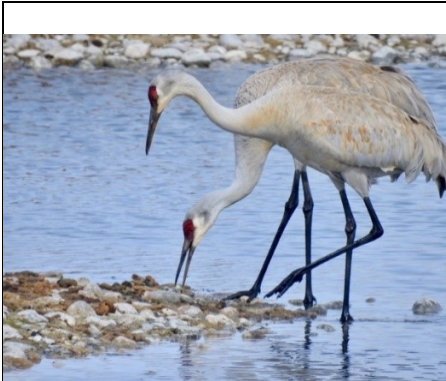
Resilience Night

Summary of key takeaways from Resilience Day, facilitated breakout groups for additional discussion and follow up on issues/solutions.

For registration and schedule:



bitterrootcaq.org/resiliencemt2023/



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
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NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION



Renew or Sign up
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