

Bitterroot AUDUBON



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NEWSLETTER

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COTTONWOODS AND OTHER RIPARIAN PLANTS: WHAT THEY MEAN TO MONTANA RIVER ECOLOGY

On April 20th, the Bitterroot Audubon Society will have the opportunity to learn about common riparian plants, particularly cottonwood trees, along Montana rivers, from Mike Merigliano, a research plant ecologist at the University of Montana's College of Forestry and Conservation. Mike will discuss the importance of these plants to stream processes, how they contribute to bird habitat, and will highlight some of the conservation issues. He will use examples from several rivers and streams in the Rocky Mountain valleys and the Great Plains.

Last year the National Audubon Society identified the Bitterroot River as an "Important Bird Area," (IBA) and the Bitterroot Chapter has made the Bitterroot IBA one of its major responsibilities. Members will find Mike's presentation to be a great foundation and preparation for upcoming field trips to monitor the River's habitat and bird populations. **Be sure to join us Monday, April 20th 7:00 P.M. at the Lee Metcalf Refuge Visitors' Center, Wildfowl Lane, north of Stevensville.** The public is invited. For further information contact Kay Fulton, 642-3794.

Field Trip to Cow Creek Rd

By Kate Stone

Welcome back some spring birds with a Bitterroot Audubon Society excursion up the Cow Creek road on Saturday, April 18. Birders of all levels and physical abilities are welcome on this gentle stroll through a forest that burned in the fires of 2000. We will be looking for many bird species, including the spotted towhee, mountain and western bluebird, western meadowlark, all three nuthatch species, and the red-naped sapsucker. There is no shortage of woodpeckers in this area! We will also be looking for spring flowers like glacier lilies, buttercups, and yellowbells. Wear sturdy shoes, as the road may be muddy. A carpool will leave at 8:45 from the Vanpool parking lot at Woodside Crossing; otherwise, meet at 9 am at the Cow Creek Trailhead. Call or email Kate Stone with any questions (krostone@hotmail.com; 381-1115).

Spring Bird Sightings?

Sapsuckers? Hummingbirds?
Ruby-crowned kinglets? We encourage you to post your first detections of returning migrants on our website, bitterrootaudubon.org. It is easy to do and will let other birders know what to be on the lookout for. Thanks!

Letter from the President

By Fred Weisbecker



You may not know this but our chapter's constitution says our May meeting is also our "annual meeting." It is the night we vote on next year's officers and board members. It is also the time when we present and vote on any changes to the constitution. The board has decided to make some minor changes in that document and we encourage everyone to be aware of those modifications. You can read about them on our new website at BitterrootAudubon.org

In other news, our bluebird house fundraiser project is going well. We have already sold 11 at \$25 a piece. Remember you can buy yours at Sam's Spade in the O'Hara House on South 4th Street in Hamilton.

Audubon Conservation Education Center in Billings Montana – News and Notes

by Paul Belanger

The Audubon Conservation Education Center (ACEC) in Billings is Montana Audubon's first Center in the state. This project originally began in 2000 when the Yellowstone River Parks Association (YRPA) acquired a 27-acre gravel mine adjacent to the Yellowstone River. YRPA then organized local educators and teachers to develop a master plan that included restoring the site into a native plant arboretum and an outdoor classroom for the community. Since that time, volunteers have planted over 45,000 native trees and shrubs and people and wildlife are returning to this once denuded landscape.

In 2004, Montana Audubon was invited by the local Yellowstone Valley Audubon Chapter and YRPA to lease the property and operate a year-round conservation education center. Over the past several years, with limited assistance from Audubon, local teachers have used the site for hands-on science education and the public has enjoyed the three ponds and walking trails for wildlife watching and recreation. In 2008 we hired our first staff and as a result, we engaged more youth (1,800) in more outdoor activities (100



Capturing insects at the ACEC
(Photo: Billings Gazette)

programs and 9,700 student contact hours) than ever before. This represents a 40% increase in participants and an 80% increase in participant hours compared to 2007.

Currently, YRPA is putting the finishing touches on an environmental science "wet lab" to better facilitate school and community education programs while also providing much needed offices, storage, and bathrooms. Montana Audubon is developing interpretive signs for a one mile trail and three information kiosks.



The Norm Schoenthal Wet Lab
(Photo: Paul Belanger)

Restoration activities continue with plans to restore 7 acres of non-native grasslands into native prairie ecosystems. You can learn more about the ACEC by visiting the Montana Audubon webpage at www.mtaudubon.org.

Next time you are heading through Billings, take a few minutes to visit the ACEC. It is easily accessed from Interstate 90 and is a beautiful and fun place to stretch your legs and view the abundant birds present at the Center and along the Yellowstone River.

Montana Audubon Offers Awards

By Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon

Montana Audubon will be giving at least 4 awards at its annual meeting this year. The awards acknowledge individuals who exemplify a commitment to birds, other wildlife, and habitat conservation. This year awards will be given for Conservationist of the Year, Environmental Educator of the Year, a Special Achievement, and a Lifetime Achievement Award.

To nominate your candidate, please call the Montana Audubon office to request an award nomination form or download the form from our website at <http://mtaudubon.org/about/awards.html>. To be considered for this year's award, nominations and all supporting material must be postmarked no later than May 8, 2009. All nominations and supporting material should be sent to Montana Audubon, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624, or by fax: (406) 443-7144. The award ceremony will take place on June 6 at Montana Audubon's Bird Festival in Great Falls.

What's the Story, Story? *By Jim Story*

Question: How exactly does the Peregrine Falcon kill its prey?

Answer:
Witnessing a Peregrine Falcon make a kill of another bird is one of the more spectacular



sights in the birding world. The falcon plunges downward (stoops) with wings partially closed at incredible speeds - up to 200 mph, although 100 mph is probably more the norm. High speed photography has revealed that the falcons strike their prey from above with all four toes fully extended. The talons often rip the prey on contact, resulting in a shower of feathers. Usually, the prey is picked up off the ground although the falcons will sometimes dive again and grab the tumbling prey before it reaches the ground. For smaller prey, the falcons capture the bird from above with their talons.



Great Backyard Bird Count Update

from National Audubon

2009 was another record year for the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)! Birders from across the United States and Canada submitted more than 93,629 checklists during the four-day event, a 9% increase in checklist submissions since last year. Participants counted a record 11,550,200 individual birds representing 619 species and submitted thousands of photos of common and rare birds.

Data Highlights: New species show up each year during the GBBC. This year we were excited by reports of the Sinaloa Wren, spotted north of the Mexican border for the first time. Xantus's Murrelet and Pink-footed Shearwater were two new oceanic species spotted from California this year. Black-billed Cuckoo, Blackpoll Warbler, and Baird's Sandpiper also made their GBBC debuts in 2009.

For a more detailed summary of this year's results and to view the year's 10 most-reported species, visit the GBBC website at www.birdcount.org. You can explore maps and photos and browse lists of participants who won GBBC prizes.

GBBC Photo Contest: Judging for the GBBC photo contest will take place in the months ahead, and the winners will be announced in the fall. Although we always receive many more photos than we can display in our gallery, we are thrilled that so many of you shared your photos with us. Visit the photo gallery at <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/gallery/2009-photo-gallery> to see the 400+ photos that are posted. These photos are a spectacular glimpse at birds across the continent during the weekend of the count. Thanks to all of you who gave us a peek through your camera lenses!

Staying Involved - Introducing *My Yard eBird!*

Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology are pleased to announce the launch of *My Yard eBird*, a new online tool that allows you to keep track of the birds around your home all year round. Visit <http://ebird.org/content/myyard> to find out more information. By reporting the birds you see each day, week, or whenever you'd like, you can help us track bird populations throughout the year. It's fun, free, and good for the birds!

Now that spring has officially arrived, consider getting involved in the *NestWatch* project from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Participants monitor nests and nest boxes to let scientists know when eggs are laid, when they hatch, and how many chicks fledge. It's an important way to measure the impact of climate change and other factors on breeding birds. Visit www.NestWatch.org to check it out!

Best Backyard Birds

The editors regret that Wayne Tree has elected to discontinue submission of BYB to the newsletter, although he continues to collect data by email and telephone.

