

Bitterroot AUDUBON



DECEMBER 2009

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 24 NO. 4

Bitterroot Christmas Bird Counts

by John Ormiston, Hamilton, & Dave Lockman, Stevensville

The 23rd Hamilton Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for Saturday, December 19th.

Has it really been 22 years since the first Hamilton Christmas Bird Count? Yes it has -- Amazing! There are lots of good memories, like the year it was -10° with a cool breeze out of the north, or 1997, when we accumulated almost 2 feet of snow over the Christmas Holidays. Fine weather for counting birds. We should also remember 22 years of Bill Good's secret chili and Oreos, and 22 years of bird watcher bonding while enjoying a day in the field. December 19, 2009, will be the 23rd time the Hamilton Christmas Bird Count has been hosted at facilities provided by Teller Wildlife Refuge.

2009 also marks the 110th year of National Audubon sponsoring the annual count. Now, over 1,000 circles with a radius of 7½ miles are surveyed for birds in North America. The data collected between December 15 and January 3 every year add to our knowledge of winter bird distribution from Mexico to Canada.

You may participate in the field by showing up at 7:30 am, Saturday, December 19th, at the Teller Education Center, Slack Barn (that's the barn just south of the corner of Chaffin and Quast Lane, north of Corvallis). We'll divide into 7 groups to cover as much of the 144 square mile circle as possible in the short daylight hours of this date so near the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. At noon, we return to the barn to have some of that famous chili and Oreos. We'll compare notes and stories to ready our minds and bodies to spend the rest of the daylight hours finding every last bird in the circle. Bitterroot Audubon will again pick up the tab for the required \$5 per participant fee charged by National Audubon, but you can help out by donating the fee on the day of the count.

You may also participate in the count by noting all the birds that come to your feeder. Feeder watchers always



add several species to our list and, whether you can count for an hour or all day, the information you provide can add to the data we report to National. If you live within about 7 miles of Hamilton, know most of the species coming to your feeder, and have a few hours, or all day, to count the visitors, call Colleen Powell, 363-2116, to receive instructions so you can help.

For more information, phone John Ormiston: 363-5464.

The 45th annual Stevi Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for Sunday, December 27th, and we need all the help we can get. Experience is helpful, but certainly not required. Field observers will meet in the basement conference room of the Stevensville Ranger Station at 7:30 to form small teams and get area assignments and depart by 8:00. Birders who live in the Count Circle (anywhere within 7½ miles of the Ranger Station) can opt to get up later and count the birds on their property. You don't have to spend all day counting birds; any time you have is helpful.

Last year had low participation but the Stevi survey still had the highest species count in Montana. We hope this year will see increased participation as well as a lot of species.

Please contact Dave Lockman (777-2929) for more information.

3rd Annual Big Hole Bird Count

By Kate Stone

Do you like combining birding with snow, wind, and hay bales? Then think about participating in the Big Hole Christmas Bird Count, centered around the town of Wisdom. The count will take place on Saturday, January 2nd. There will be opportunities for surveys by ski or snowshoe, but the majority of birding will be from or near a vehicle. Car birding in this area is particularly attractive in January; last year, while it was -20° outside, 4 people observed 68 rough-legged hawks from the car! Some of the other



Snow Buntings by Kate Stone

interesting species we have seen in the past 2 years include the greater sage grouse, snow bunting, ferruginous hawk, Harris's sparrow, common redpoll, and American tree sparrow.

Participants adding a new species to the count will earn themselves a free Bitterroot Audubon t-shirt. We've only seen 27 species thus far, so chances are good you may be going home with new clothing.

Due to the potentially inclement weather, hazardous road conditions, and general isolation of the Big Hole, please make sure you register to participate in this CBC. To register, contact Kate Stone at 381-1115 or kroystone@hotmail.com. A meeting place and time, as well as carpool arrangements, will be coordinated in late December.

Letter from the President

By Peter Allen

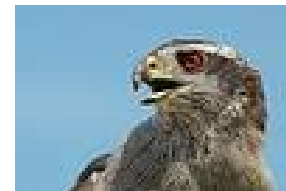


After expressing some frustration, it appears that the California Quail will become a reportable species for the upcoming Montana Bird Distribution edition. We're hoping that members will be diligent in reporting their observations of California Quail throughout the Bitterroot Valley. Only then can the ornithological community determine if we're seeing recent escapes from game farms and sportsmen's clubs, or the quail has truly become a resident, over-wintering, breeding population in our area.

I was thinking about this today as we counted 40 quail crossing the back of our property. Our mentor in poultry husbandry had told us that the one English word our chickens could speak was *HAWK!* and that was exactly what we heard a few minutes later. Investigating the raucous hullabaloo, I saw that the rooster was speaking the truth, for I spotted a Northern Goshawk as it flew into a cottonwood.

We'd never seen this species on our property before, and, while I went for the spotting scope, Helen watched as the hawk

attempted to take a quail for lunch. And the chickens...well, they had already taken cover and were keeping a very low profile. With neither chicken nor quail, the goshawk flew up into another tree and sat there for a long while, contemplating hunger.



Moving?

Please let Bitterroot Audubon know as early as possible of any change in your postal address. Under the terms of our bulk mailing permit, the Post Office does not forward your newsletter to your new address. Instead it returns it to us and we pay a return fee. You can write, phone, or email the change of address to us, giving your name, old address, new address, and date of change.

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

Question: Do owls locate their prey primarily by sight or by sound?

Answer: Sight and sound are both very important to owls in locating prey. The eyes of owls are very large, forward-facing, and packed with "rods" (the receptors that are specialized to function in dim light). As a result of these features, owls have exceptional stereoscopic vision in dim light, reportedly up to 100 times more sensitive than ours. But, owl hearing is equally specialized and important to prey location. In fact, studies have shown that Barn Owls can locate and capture prey by sound alone. Their excellent hearing is aided by large ear openings and the shape of the facial disk which acts like a satellite dish. The ear openings on some owls are asymmetrically located to provide additional hearing accuracy.



Global Warming Letter Writing Campaign *By Fred Weisbecker*

Bitterroot Audubon has agreed to work with Montana Audubon to generate 10-20 letters to the editors of our local newspapers on global warming concerns and to encourage legislation dealing with this serious problem. Some recent surveys show that fewer people believe that global warming is a real threat than a year ago, so we need to get the word out. We are looking for volunteers to write letters in their own words emphasizing ramifications to Montana as well as national implications. Amy Cilimborg, Montana Audubon's climate change expert, has agreed to send talking points to writers if they need some background to work from. Fred Weisbecker has agreed to coordinate this campaign over the next couple of months. If you would like to be part of this letter writing campaign, call him at 375-9317 or email at fredweis@cybernet1.com. Don't be afraid, it's almost painless.



Quail can be reported! *By Judy Hoy*

Last February, in these pages, Dave Lockman called for observational data on the California Quail in the Bitterroot Valley, and several members responded. The data collected by Dave has been vital in convincing the folks who compile the statistics for *Montana Bird Distribution* [see article in last October's BAS Newsletter] to include the California Quail as a reportable species. They're not sure that the California Quail is actually an established population, but have agreed to accept data for consideration. We are hopeful that with Dave's collected data supporting observations of extensive breeding and winter survivability of the California Quail here, we may soon be able to count California Quail on our Christmas Bird Counts as well. Thank you very much, Dave, for your efforts.



If **you** haven't yet added your observations on the quail in **your** area, please send it to Dave at dlockman@fs.fed.us or call him at 777-7426(d) or 777-2929(n). Please include:

1. Your name and contact info;
2. Location where you see quail coveys;
3. Number of quail in covey (estimates are fine);
4. Evidence of reproduction (including year, # broods and total # chicks seen each year);
5. Time of year you see quail;
6. How long you've been seeing quail there and any trends in numbers over that time.



Participants on the Sula Peak Raptor Trip. Photo by Fred Weisbecker