

# Bitterroot AUDUBON



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NEWSLETTER

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## AROUND THE WORLD IN A MONTANA SAILBOAT

Join the Bitterroot Audubon on Monday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, to hear the amazing odyssey of Richard and Kathy Bacon, recently returned to Montana from nine



years of travel around the world in the 43-foot sloop *Balmacara*. They crossed the Pacific and Indian Oceans, made their way up the Red Sea, through the Suez Canal and across the Mediterranean. Over the course of this journey they spent considerable time in New Zealand, Australia and Thailand. People in Frenchtown may remember seeing the *Balmacara* sitting among the pines in Richard and Kathy's yard for two and a half years before their journey began. In January, 1998 they sold their Frenchtown property, moved *Balmacara* to Port Townsend, Washington, and started their adventure.

Richard and Kathy lived many places in the United States before Richard retired as Deputy Regional Forester from the Missoula Forest Service Office.

The Bacons will present a slide show program to Bitterroot Audubon, which will begin with a quick overview of their nine years of travel around the world. The second section will focus on Australia, where they spent two years and, then, if interest and time allow, the audience can choose another region to explore. They promise to tell us the best places for viewing birds.

**The meeting will be at the 7:00 P.M., February 15<sup>th</sup>, at the Lee Metcalf Refuge, north of Stevensville. Contact Kay Fulton (642-3794) for further information.**

## WINTER RAPTOR WORKSHOP

Winter is a great time for observing raptors around the Bitterroot Valley. This month Bitterroot Audubon Society is offering a Winter Raptor



Workshop. One evening class and one mid-day fieldtrip will cover tips for winter raptor identification,

behavior, habitat and migration. The classroom session will take place on Friday evening, February 26<sup>th</sup>, with the field trip on Saturday, February 27<sup>th</sup>.

The instructor will be Steve Hoffman, Montana Audubon's Executive Director and founder of HawkWatch International.

Cost for the workshop will be \$20.00 for Audubon members and \$30.00 for non-members. **Pre-registration is required and space is limited to 20 participants.** The workshop is open to birders of all abilities from beginner to those with more experience.

For additional information or to pre-register, call Leslie Nyce at 961-3808.



## Letter from the President

By Peter Allen

The Montana Bird Festival 2010 is only a few months away, and planning efforts are in high gear. There'll be lots of field trips, workshops, and speakers to draw you to the Missoula Holiday Inn in June. Bitterroot Audubon is co-hosting this festival with Five Valleys Audubon. Your president meets with Montana Audubon and Five Valleys to ensure that it meets the expectations of attendees.



Part of the fund-raising effort is a raffle of some 'big ticket' items which are donated by businesses interested in supporting our efforts, and a silent auction of lots of other items. Over the last couple of weeks, Helen and I have been visiting a number of Hamilton businesses soliciting donations for the raffle and the silent auction, and the response has been gracious and generous.

If you have a business which would like to contribute, please let us know. Individuals, too, can donate items. Past silent auctions have included plates of cookies, brownies, and peanut brittle. Think about it – we can all contribute to this effort.

## Montana Audubon Update

By Fred Weisbecker, Conservation Chair

I recently attended the winter meeting of Montana Audubon in Helena and would like to provide an update on just one of the many projects our state chapter has been working on. For several years now the state chapter has been working with the Yellowstone River Parks Association (YRPA) to create a 27 acre Audubon Conservation Education Center, an exciting new outdoor education center for groups to engage in nature study. The YRPA agreed to build the center and Montana Audubon agreed to staff and run the facility. Thanks to a lot of hard work by many volunteers, the Billings community, and Paul Belanger of Montana Audubon, the grand opening was finally held last fall. The plan is to provide year round environmental science and nature based education programs for K-12 students as well as family and community natural history workshops. The center has already become a big hit with local schools with classes scheduled almost every day. Audubon is presently looking for a full-time director and hopes to have one on site by April. Heather Ristow is currently the education coordinator. I invite anyone who is in the Billings area to check out the center; it is truly an exciting place for people to learn about nature.

## Owl Research

By Kate Stone

I recently found out that I received an Audubon Wildlife Fund grant from Montana Audubon in support of small owl surveys in the Bitterroot Valley.



Many thanks to Montana Audubon and to those members of Bitterroot Audubon who wrote letters in support of the project! The money will be used to purchase a broadcasting device for detecting owls in the breeding season.

From 2006-2009, I have recorded detections of 22 great-horned, 9 northern saw-whet, 8 western screech, 5 northern pygmy, 2 barred, 1 boreal, 1 short-eared, and 1 great gray owl. 2010 looks to be a great year; members of the Bitterroot birding community have already added 2 new locations for western screech owls and 4 new locations for great-horned owls. All of these data are shared with the Montana Natural Heritage Program, improving the overall knowledge of owl distribution and habitat in the state.

Most of this work has been done with the help of members of Bitterroot Audubon. If you would like to participate in this project, you can do so in a number of ways:

**Report owl detections.** Have you seen or heard an owl of any species? If so, either contact me directly (381-1115) or use the "Contact Us" feature of the Bitterroot Audubon website. Pertinent information to report includes: date, time, owl species, location, and habitat description.

**Attend an Owl Walk field trip.** I hope to lead 2 field trips in the next few months. If you are not on our field trip notification list, please contact [basactivities@hotmail.com](mailto:basactivities@hotmail.com) to sign up.

**Sign up to survey an owl route.** I will provide you with a route convenient to you, data sheets, and instructions for using the broadcast caller.

## What's the Story, Story? *by Jim Story*

**Question:** What is "bird milk?"

**Answer:** The young of some birds are fed special secretions produced by the parents. Most notable is the "crop milk" that pigeons produce to feed their squabs. The milk is produced by sloughing of fluid-filled cells from the lining of the crop, a saclike food-storage chamber near the bottom of the



esophagus. Crop milk is extremely nutritious. Pigeon milk contains more protein and fat than does cow or human milk. Because the crop milk provides the critical amount of protein, young pigeons are not fed insects like the chicks of many seed-eating birds. Other birds that produce milk include doves, flamingos and some penguins. Young flamingos are fed milk for the first 2 months while young penguins are fed milk only in certain situations.

## Great Backyard Bird Count



On Presidents Day Weekend, February 12-15, join thousands of other birders around the country and count the birds you see in your own backyard. Then report your tally online to add to our store of avian knowledge. It's simple, it's enjoyable, and it's worthwhile. The more people who participate in the GBBC, the better the information scientists will have about how bird populations may be changing over time due to habitat loss, climate change, disease, or other factors.

1. Visit [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) for easy-to-follow instructions, including tips for identifying bird species. Download a checklist for your area.
2. Count the birds you see, wherever you choose to count, and write down the highest number of individuals you see at any one time – that way you'll avoid counting any bird twice.
3. After at least 15 minutes of watching in one place (you can spend more time observing if you prefer), report your results online at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org).

4. You can repeat your count at the same place on each day of the Great Backyard Bird Count. You can also visit other locations and submit separate tallies for those areas as well.

5. You can view your results. Online maps and lists are updated throughout the count, making it easy to see how your birds fit into the big picture. Speaking of pictures, you can submit your digital images of birds or of GBBC participants for the online gallery and photo contest.

Last year, participants counted over 11.5 million birds of 619 species. Let's see how many we can count this year, and find out together how bird populations may be changing.

## Audubon's Annual Bird Festival

*Wings Across the Big Sky* *By Steve Hoffman*

Montana Audubon is working with the Five Valleys and Bitterroot

Audubon Chapters to plan another fantastic festival June 4-6. We have 15 field trips planned for Saturday. They range from the local Clark Fork River/Grass Valley Important Bird Area, where Sora Rail and



Lewis's Woodpecker may be observed, to a 750-acre working cattle ranch west of Frenchtown. All field trips have been planned so that everyone can make it back to hear the lunch speaker, our own Kate Stone. Saturday evening will be filled with a social hour, banquet, silent auction, and fabulous raffle items. We will also host our dessert auction. Sunday has 15 field trips that range from a beautiful drive up to Upsata Lake to longer field trips like the 6 mile hike through Douglas-Fir and Ponderosa Pine forests. Information about conservation, habitat, and research projects will be shared. With the many field trips planned there will be something to meet everyone's fitness level and birding interest. More information about field trips, speakers, lodging, registration, and other highlights will be posted in early March at <http://mtaudubon.org>.

Until then, **save the date** and plan to be in Missoula in early June! *Be sure to register early, as group sizes will be limited.*