

Bitterroot AUDUBON



MARCH 2010

NEWSLETTER

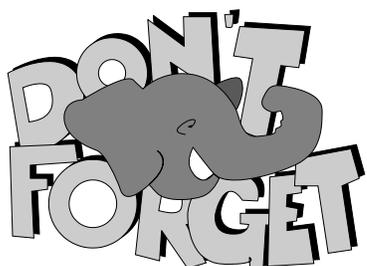
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Nestbox Hanging Opportunity

By Kate Stone

Although we don't yet have a date set, Bitterroot Audubon is organizing a day in April for mounting nesting boxes at the MPG Ranch, the former Schroeder property. Since the Ranch will also be the featured field trip for our May meeting, we'd like to assist them with this project.

If you'd like to participate, watch next month's newsletter for details, or keep checking our website, www.BitterrootAudubon.org.



CALENDAR of EVENTS

2010

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| March 15 | Audubon Mtg, 7:00 pm
USFS Bldg, Hamilton
Birdscaping – Molly Hackett
(Board Mtg @ 5:30) |
| April | Nestbox Project, date TBA
See next newsletter for details |
| April 19 | Audubon Mtg, 7:00 pm
Lee Metcalf Refuge
Dragonflies – Bob Martinka
(Board Mtg @ 5:30) |
| May 17 | Field Trip to MPG Ranch
This will be our regular May Mtg |
| June 4-6 | Bird Festival, Missoula
Watch for details in future newsletters! |

GARDENING IS FOR THE BIRDS

Molly Hackett, avid birder and co-author of the *Dirty Fingernails* newspaper column in the Ravalli Republic and Missoulian, will spend an evening with Bitterroot Audubon describing how to make our gardens and yards attractive to birds (and other wildlife if you want). Molly says that she has been a bird lover and gardener for “more years than I care to think about. The two make good parallel interests.” Most people know Molly from the weekly gardening column that she and Georgianna Taylor have been writing for over twenty years. Molly explains, “What that really means is that my fingernails truly are dirty most of the time and I have personally killed more plants than most people who read the column. I try not to kill birds, though, and I welcome them to eat at the cafeteria that is located in my personal garden and to live in the available apartments.”



The Bitterroot Audubon Society invites you to Molly's program Monday, March 15th, at 7:00 P.M. at the Forest Service Headquarters building, 1801 N. First Street in Hamilton (enter from the West side). Come prepared for a fast moving question and answer session where you can ask about anything and everything you ever wanted to know about gardening and landscaping for birds. Bring notebooks, tape recorders, laptops and/or whatever to record her bits of wisdom. The public is invited. For more information contact Kay Fulton at 642-3794.

Letter from the President

By Peter Allen

Well, February is behind us, and the Great Backyard Bird Count is over. I could tell because the very next day the yard was visited by a flock of goldfinches, some Steller's Jays, a pheasant, and several other species which had observed the entire GBBC *in absentia*. I have the same good luck in the stock market; gains are shown only *after* I sell.



Still, it's March, and the weather yesterday brought me out into the garden, building some framed beds for the new herb garden. Some magpies appear to be gathering nest materials, and a pair of House Sparrows are poking their heads into one of my bird houses. A couple of Canada Geese are checking out my pathetic little pond – can spring be far off? We took advantage of the sunny warm weather to make the rounds of all the bird houses, cleaning them out and making them presentable to prospective tenants.

We put some fresh shavings into the bird house in the field, and hope that it will again attract a pair of kestrels like it did last year.

If it's flickers, that's OK, but the kestrels were a joy to watch.



Montana Access to Outdoor Recreation

by Chris Clasby, MATOR

Are you planning a recreational outing with family or friends, possibly attending a Bitterroot Audubon Bird Walk or workshop? Do you have a family member or friend who would like to participate but who experiences functional limitations due to disability or aging? Perhaps you, yourself, have a disability or are experiencing arthritis or other physical changes resulting from aging. If so, the *Montana Access To Outdoor Recreation* (MATOR) program is a free resource that can help.

MATOR is a program of MonTECH at the University of Montana Rural Institute and works in partnership with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to disseminate information and increase awareness of possibilities for participation in wildlife viewing, fishing, hunting, and related outdoor activities for those with disabilities and those who are aging. MATOR services include



education and awareness to let people know what is possible, demonstration events to provide hands-on opportunities with equipment, a free recreational equipment loan program to provide access for participation, and a volunteer network to provide assistance when requested.

Equipment available through MATOR's equipment loan program includes autofocus and image-stabilizing binoculars, spotting scopes, tripods and mounts, switch-activated autofocus digital and video cameras, digital SLR cameras, trekking poles, outdoor wheelchairs, GPS units and navigational equipment, adaptive fishing equipment, a variety of shooting sports equipment, ground blinds and tents, and much, much more. This equipment is free for Montanans to use through the MATOR equipment loan program and can be viewed on our website. Those without computer access can simply call the program for assistance.



Our goal is to help people realize their potential for participation and to empower them to become and remain fully active outdoors. To learn more about this program or about adaptive recreation, attend a scheduled MATOR activity, request our participation in an activity you know of, or see how you or someone you know can access Montana's natural environment, visit the MATOR website at <http://recreation.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/Mator/index.asp> or contact us at mator@ruralinstitute.umt.edu. or 406-243-5751

What's the Story, Story? By Jim Story

Question: Why do the young of some bird species hatch asynchronously?

Answer: Whether the eggs in a clutch hatch simultaneously or sequentially over an extended period depends on the onset of incubation. Many bird species delay incubation until the last egg is laid which results in all of the eggs hatching within a few hours.

Other birds begin incubation **before** the last egg is laid, resulting in a prolonged or asynchronous egg hatch. Asynchronous egg hatch is likely an approach used to ensure the largest number of offspring when the availability of food cannot be predicted at the time the eggs are laid. The



youngest chicks will not receive their “fair share” and will survive only in years when food is abundant. Eagles, owls, pelicans, cranes, and boobies exhibit “obligate siblicide,” where the larger chick generally kills the younger sibling. Because this behavior occurs even when food is abundant, the second egg serves only as insurance against mortality to the first egg, rather than a means of rearing two chicks.

True Confessions of a Couch Potato Birder

By Poody McLaughlin, Five Valleys Audubon

Identifying birds by sound is fascinating and compelling. By hearing a song or chip coming from the tree canopy or a shrub, a birder has a step up on locating and then identifying the bird -- especially those zippy warblers. It's especially gratifying to identify a bird by sound and have that ID confirmed by sight. I thrill at the song of a hermit thrush (or any of the genus *Catharus*). Maybe a chickadee call will lead me to other species of the feeding flock or best yet, to a hidden owl.

So it goes that my passion for bird sounds in the field has created a new venue from which to identify bird sounds: television. Commercials were the first lure, perhaps due to their annoying incongruity: as a bald eagle soared gracefully over the car lot, it opened its

bill and cried out the distinctive *keeeeeeer* of a red-tailed hawk. This nonexistent eagle x hawk hybrid must have sold lots of SUVs, since the commercial appeared all too frequently. A Febreze commercial forever linked that product in my mind with the song of a savannah sparrow. Perhaps the only benefit to the seemingly endless repetition of commercials is that, as with this commercial, the sparrow sang so frequently I was able to make a positive ID.

In tense, action-packed thrillers, if there's a night scene with even the smallest of natural areas, expect to hear a great horned owl. And in especially scary scenes, expect to hear a loon, regardless of the scene's proximity to water (thanks to Cynthia, Missoula Audubon, for pointing this out).

Outside the world of commercials and TV dramas, the greatest source of TV bird songs is golf. There's a lot of quiet time in golf, quiet time that birds fortunately choose to exploit. Tiger Woods can be lining up a crucial putt or drive and a

northern cardinal will take that moment to belt out his *whurty whurty whurty whurty whurty whurty*. Blue jays, robins, house wrens, and northern mockingbirds also proclaim their territory loudly to a national audience. In addition, golf provides good visuals for some bird species. Water hazards in golf are habitat for mallards, great egrets, cattle egrets, and great blue herons.



In other sports venues, gulls and pigeons are regular attendees. During San Francisco Giants' baseball games I've identified Heermann's and ring-billed gulls and a red-tailed hawk. But the best TV bird appearance was during a nighttime NFL football game at which a sora picked up bugs on the sidelines and in one of the end zones. To his credit, announcer John Madden kept drawing the camera's attention to the sora, which appeared oblivious to the human antics on the field. Madden didn't let up until someone on staff correctly identified the bird for him.

Which leads me to the inevitable birder query: how does one list birds seen or heard on TV? Are different lists required for virtual vs. real birds and song vs. sight? With listing criteria I tend to be inclusive, although birds on nature shows don't belong on this list. My life list of TV birds totals 16. Of those, I'm most proud of that elusive savannah sparrow.