

Bitterroot AUDUBON



MAY 2010

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 24 NO. 9

May Meeting & Field Trip to the MPG Ranch – May 17th, at 6:00 p.m.

Bitterroot Audubon's monthly meeting on May 17th will be a field trip to the MPG Ranch, a conservation property of more than 6,000 acres northeast of Florence. A portion of the property is within the boundaries of the Bitterroot River Important Bird Area. The ranch contains a variety of excellent bird habitats, including floodplain forests, native grasslands, shrubby draws, bitterbrush and sagebrush areas, and upland conifer forest. We will discuss some of the restoration activities taking place on the ranch, and how such activities could improve bird habitat. Our field trip will focus on a few of the habitats that are currently not well-represented in the Bitterroot Valley, including sagebrush areas and native grasslands. Interesting species we may encounter include the long-billed curlew, Say's phoebe, Brewer's sparrow, vesper sparrow, as well as a variety of raptors. Participants should be prepared for a walk of approximately 3 miles on a dirt road with a gentle grade. **Please note the change in time from our normal monthly meetings –6:00 p.m.!**

Directions: From Highway 93: At the only traffic light in Florence, turn east, onto the Eastside Highway/State Highway 203. Travel 1.6 miles, crossing the Bitterroot River. The Eastside Highway will make a sharp bend south (right); continue to go straight at this bend onto 8 Mile Creek Road for 0.2 miles. The road bends to the north (left) and turns into 8 Mile Creek Rd/Lower Woodchuck Road. Continue travelling north for 0.75 miles. Go straight through the intersection with a 4-way stop; the road sign says Lower Woodchuck Road at this point. Continue following Lower Woodchuck Road north to its end, approximately 2 miles. You will see a house to the east (right) with an assortment of old agricultural equipment. The entrance to the property is just past

this house; you will see the road continue due north in front of you, bending to the east and up a hill. Follow the road up the hill and park at the top, just past the entrance gate. It is approximately 4.5 miles from the Florence light to the entrance gate of the ranch. It takes just under an hour to get to the MPG Ranch from Hamilton. Bear in mind there's construction on Highway 93 from Victor to Stevensville.

Field Trip to Great Bear Natives - Saturday, May 15th, 10-noon

Join Bitterroot Audubon for a tour of the facilities of Great Bear Natives, the wholesale branch of Great Bear Restoration (<http://www.great-bear.biz/>). Their 9000 sq. ft. nursery, which can grow up to 1.5 million seedlings annually, specializes in large scale native plant production from source-identified seed, offering over 300 species of native grasses, wetland plants, shrubs, trees, and wildflowers. Their mission is to *promote, practice, and advance the science of ecological restoration and to bring the beauty of our native flora to the cultural landscape.*

We'll discuss restoration projects, plants for bird habitat, and ongoing research and development of products. They'll also plan to give one native wildflower in a 4" pot to each visitor, and may sell more if folks are interested.



Directions: From Highway 93 in Hamilton, turn left (east) at the farthest south light in town, on to Golf Course Road. Travel approximately 0.4 miles, and then turn right (south) on to Grantsdale Road. Travel approximately 1.5 miles. Turn right (west) on to Blue Heron Lane. You will see a row of greenhouses in front of you.

Letter from the President

By Peter Allen

Volunteers are needed for the Bird Festival, Missoula, June 4-6.



As president, I hope that the Bitterroot chapter will be well represented at this year's bird festival. If you've never attended a bird festival, this is your best opportunity, as it's in your own back yard.

If you haven't already done so, now is a good time to complete and submit your registration, and consider volunteering to man one of the tables at the event, which is, after all, co-sponsored by this chapter. People are needed for such activities as Registration Assistance, T-shirt & Raffle sales, Silent Auction, Clean-up, Field Trip Questions, and more.

My wife, Helen, is still looking for a few good cooks willing to make a dessert for the banquet – something special which can serve a table of ten. Each dessert will be auctioned off as a fund-raising activity for the festival. If you'd like to volunteer or contribute a dessert, please phone us at 375-0331.

Citizen Science Opportunities *by Kate Stone*

Bitterroot River Important Bird Area (IBA): The Bitterroot River IBA committee is looking for people to “adopt” a portion of the Bitterroot River IBA. Adoption duties include visiting a location at least once between mid-May and mid-July to survey for birds. People can adopt their own property if they live within the IBA, choose from a variety of land-based locations such as Fishing Access Areas, or volunteer to float a section of the Bitterroot River. Last year volunteers collected information on >3,000 birds.

Fall Raptor Migration: Bitterroot Audubon is hoping to pair up with Raptor View Research Institute (<http://www.raptorview.org/>) to monitor raptors in the Bitterroot Valley during fall migration. Volunteers will be assigned to a location in either the north or south end of the Valley and will need to commit to monitoring that site 1-2 times from mid-September into October. People interested in participating in this monitoring must have some experience in raptor identification, and must also attend a training session..

If interested in participating in either of these Citizen Science activities, please contact Kate (381-1115; kroystone@hotmail.com).

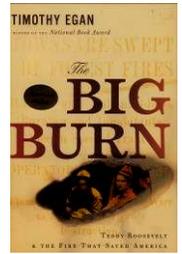
Conservation Reading *by Fred Weisbecker*

I recently read Timothy Egan's book *The Big Burn*, which tells the story of Teddy Roosevelt and the early American conservation movement.

With the support of visionaries Gifford Pinchot and John Muir,

Roosevelt used his powers under the Antiquities Act to set aside vast areas of public land in the west for national parks and a new concept called national forest reserves. Roosevelt and Pinchot eventually created a Forest Service to inventory and manage these new reserves. From the start, powerful members of Congress had other ideas and were dead set against these reserves and the inexperienced rangers assigned to protect them. Several western senators worked hard to starve the young agency out of existence. Somehow, in the face of this powerful opposition, using his own money and the sheer devotion of his rangers, Gifford Pinchot kept the young agency going.

On August 20th, 1910, it all changed! Hurricane force winds turned a normal summer fire season into a two day inferno, scorching 3 million acres in three states. The new Forest Service now had a mission and that mission was fire suppression. The vision was to control wildfire for the betterment of man. We have come a long way from that lofty goal. We now let fires burn in remote areas like the Bitterroot-Selway Wilderness and manage fires closer to private land in a much more complicated fashion. The safety of the firefighters involved, as well as the cost/benefit of the operation, must be considered. Even though we still live in the haunting shadow of the 1910 inferno, we are slowly changing how we perceive wildfire, its role in the arid west, and its positive effects on the landscape. This year is the 100th anniversary of that historic fire. As we get closer to another fire season, I invite everyone to read the book, *The Big Burn*.



Lee Metcalf Weed Round-Up

by Deb Goslin, Biological Science Tech, Lee Metcalf NWR

Please join us at the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center on Saturday May 15th from 9-12:30 for some competitive weed pulling and free lunch. There are many door prizes, with the grand prize being Vortex Diamondback binoculars (\$200 value). To register for lunch (before May 12th) or for questions please call 777-5552.

What's the Story, Story? by Jim Story

Question: How do birds drink?

Answer: Most birds drink by dipping their heads into water and then tilting their heads back to allow the water to flow down their throats.



Some birds, however, like pigeons, doves and Northern Fulmars, immerse their bill and suck up water, much like a horse.



Many small birds use dewdrops as a source of water. Pelicans sometimes drink by opening their bill during a rainstorm.

Annual Election of Officers

The Bitterroot Audubon Society's annual election of officers and members of the board of directors will occur during the general meeting on May 17.

Although nominations of additional candidates are welcomed and encouraged, either prior to or at the general meeting, the nominating committee has developed a slate of candidates, as follows:

Vice President - Fred Weisbecker

Secretary - John Ormiston

Treasurer - Jim Story

Board members- Helen Allen, Sara Ashline, Susie Duff, Kay Fulton, Karen Griffing, Skip Horner, Judy Hoy, Campbell Massey, Leslie Nyce, Kate Stone

The position of President is not up for election this year because the President is elected for a two-year term and current President Peter Allen is completing his first year.

Red Crossbill Genetics By Judy Hoy

In an article in this newsletter several years ago, I reported observations by wildlife rehabilitators concerning how post-fledgling Red Crossbills physically get their bills to cross. The fingernail like covering on the bills of most birds, made of keratin, is called the *rhamphotheca*. About a week after young crossbills begin flying, certain hormones are genetically programmed to activate. The hormone surge, especially growth hormone produced by the

pituitary gland, causes the young crossbills to have accelerated growth of the rhamphotheca at the tips of their bills.

The bill of a young crossbill, after hatching and prior to the sudden growth of the bill tips, looks similar in shape to the bills of other young members of the finch family. As soon as the bill tips go into fast growth mode, another genetic trigger prompts the young crossbill to bite on something, like a knot on a branch, twisting its head sideways to cause the tip of the upper bill to go to the side. Whichever way the bird twists the upper bill determines whether it will be crossed to the left or to the right. Once the bird begins to twist, it always twists the same way each time, many times per hour all day. The bills are permanently crossed in about three days, when the bill tips reach full growth. Researchers have not yet determined whether the direction of twist is genetically programmed or individual preference.

I was once asked what would happen if a young crossbill was not able to twist its bills while the tips were growing. Last spring, I received a fledgling Red Crossbill with a broken leg. It was brought to me right at the beginning of the period of fast bill growth. I splinted the leg and propped the bird upright with rags. In the middle of a nest of soft fabric and unable to stand, the bird could not twist its bills while the tips grew. The question of what would happen was soon answered. The tip of the fast growing lower bill began pushing up against the underside of the front of the upper bill, forcing its mouth to remain open (see photo). I had to tape the bird's bills in a crossed position between feedings to make its bills grow permanently crossed and able to close. When its leg was healed, the bird was able to extract and eat the seeds from pinecones, and consequently be released. Sometimes even genetics need help.



Field trip reminder

Interested in summer field trips? Check our website (www.bitterrootaudubon.org) for the latest field trip information. To be included in our field trip email list, send an email to basactivities@hotmail.com.

This newsletter is not published in June, July, or August. Look for a newsletter in September.