

Bitterroot AUDUBON



DECEMBER 2011

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 26, NO. 4

2011 Christmas Bird Counts

Hamilton

By John Ormiston

My how time flies when you're having fun! Mark your calendars for the 25th Hamilton Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, December 17, 2011. We need the help of birders of all skill levels to help find and identify all the birds in the 7 ½ mile circle centered on the Hamilton Airport.



Courtesy Sara Ashline

Great Blue Heron, Hamilton, MT, November 2010.

In previous years, the constant has been the camaraderie of birders doing their best to count all the birds in a 144 square mile circle. The variable has been weather ranging from near spring-like to sub-zero, windy conditions. Whatever the forecast this year, we'll start the day at The Teller Wildlife Refuge Slack Barn at 7:30AM. From there, we'll organize into six field groups, each with a designated leader,

and get to the field to start the count shortly after daylight. The Slack Barn is on Chaffin Lane, north of Corvallis, south of Quast Lane. Bill Good promised to provide a chili (with two new secret ingredients) and Oreo lunch at The Teller before we regroup to cover the areas left over from the morning efforts.

Based on the averages for the previous years, we should count on finding something over 6,000 birds from 65 species. Occasionally, the Hamilton CBC species numbers have topped all Montana CBCs, and we're always in the top 5, most often in the top 3.

Feeder watchers provide essential help. Every year folks who can't go to the field add several species to our list. You can help by counting the birds at your feeder for the entire day, or for a few hours or minutes when you have time. We've only had about 20 feeder watchers each year. Surely more folks than that feed birds and can identify their beneficiaries. Encourage them to report their findings to Colleen Powell, the feeder watcher coordinator for the 25th time, by calling her at 363-2116.

If you can, please bring \$5 to donate to Bitterroot Audubon to defray the cost of our CBC. We will "balance the books" for our contribution to National.

Please call Colleen at 363-2116 or me at 360-9530 if you know someone who could count birds at their feeder, or if you need more information about the 25th annual Hamilton Christmas Bird Count.

The Big Hole

By Kate Stone

The 5th annual Big Hole Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will take place on Friday, December 23, 2011.

Birding in the Big Hole Valley varies with the weather. Past participants can attest to challenging weather conditions which have included freezing fog, drifting snow, and frigid temperatures. Luckily this count has options for birding both from the car and by snowshoe.



Courtesy Karen Griffing

Participant, Big Hole CBC, January 2010.

We have documented 36 species in four years of observation. The most abundant species on past counts are Snow Bunting, Black-billed Magpie, Rough-legged Hawk, and Common Raven. Other species that participants have a good chance of seeing include American Tree Sparrow, Common Redpoll, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, and Greater Sage-Grouse.

Registration is required for this count. Please contact Kate Stone (381-1115) to register and for information on meeting time and place.

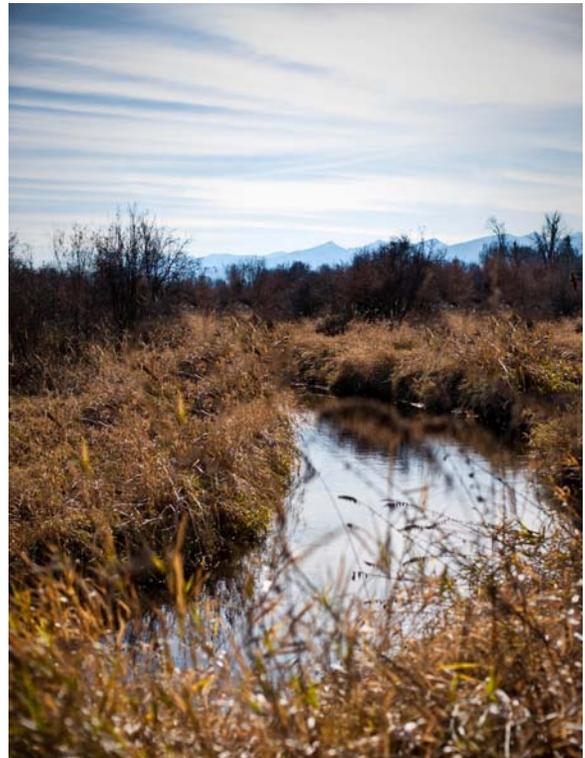
Stevensville

By Dave Lockman

The 47th annual Stevensville Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is scheduled for Saturday, December 31st. I know this date conflicts with New Year's Eve party preparations, but hopefully counting birds is a higher priority for some folks. It's a big area 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 between 7:30 and 7:45 AM to form small teams and get area assignments. Birders who live in the Count Circle (anywhere within 7.5 miles of the Ranger Station) can opt to get up at their leisure and count the birds on their property. Both types of counters are critical to a successful count. You don't have to spend all day counting birds; any time you have is helpful. National Audubon does request a voluntary \$5.00 participation fee to defray the

expenses of compiling and publishing the data. Bird counters on last year's Stevensville CBC found 10,562 birds of 79 different species, both of which were a little lower than in recent years. We didn't find any species new to the count, so our total cumulative species has remained at 155.

There are always some interesting birds out there just waiting to be discovered, so come and help us find all the common and unusual birds hiding in our winter landscape. Please contact Dave Lockman (777-2929 or 381-7679) for more information.



Courtesy Sara Ashline

Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, October 2009.

Letter from the President

By Kay Fulton, BAS President

November has offered up some great bird sightings. I've seen a light morph Red-tailed Hawk in the Missoula area, Tundra Swans flying over my head, and hundreds of Snow Geese migrating. Lots of raptors have been seen soaring, scouring the fields, and sitting on power poles. Now here we are nearing the beginning of winter, the holiday season, and THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT! You will see articles in this newsletter from the leaders of each of the three counts the Bitterroot Audubon sponsors (John Ormiston, Dave Lockman, and Kate Stone). It is interesting to note that while this will be the 112th CBC of National Audubon, it is the 47th count in Stevensville, the 25th



in Hamilton and the 5th in the Big Hole. This annual event is a worthwhile adventure for anyone interested in the status of birds in our area. The information gathered contributes to conservation. The data is used to assess the health of bird populations and to guide conservation efforts. The Christmas Bird Count may not be the warmest activity, but the camaraderie is great, the sightings are exciting, and the hot lunches are the best!! Be sure to join us.

-Kay



Courtesy Wayne Tree

Light morph Red-tailed Hawk, Missoula, MT, 2011.

Fall raptor migration in the Bitterroot Valley

By Kate Stone

Many of us have a favorite raptor nest that we observe through the breeding season. Or we look forward to the Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks dotting the power poles along the East Side Highway in the winter. But what is going on with raptors in the Bitterroot Valley during fall migration?

Raptor View Research Institute (<http://www.raptorview.org/>) and the MPG Ranch (<http://www.mpgranch.com/>) teamed up to answer some basic questions about the role the Bitterroot Valley plays in raptor migration. We conducted raptor counts from the top of Mt. Baldy, northeast of Florence in the Sapphire Mountains. In over 62 days of observation, from September 1 to November 8, we counted 2,155 raptors. The greatest number of raptors was seen on October 13, with 186 raptors counted, and October 8, with 163 raptors counted.

The Red-tailed Hawk was the most abundant hawk to fly by. Though it is one of the most common hawks



Courtesy Ashley Jensen

Ferruginous Hawk, MPG Ranch during fall raptor migration, Florence, MT, 2011.

we see while out birding, the total number of migrants- 776 - was really surprising. The largest group was counted the afternoon of November 1, when 84 soared overhead in less than an hour. Sixty-eight moved through as a kettle, meaning the group rose on thermals together and departed south in a continuous stream. We also saw an increase in the number of Harlan's Hawks towards late October. Harlan's Hawks are a subspecies of the Red-tailed Hawk that breeds in Alaska and northwestern Canada. Their plumage is quite different than that of the Red-tailed Hawks that breed in the Bitterroot. It is a good raptor to watch out for while birding in the winter.



Courtesy Ashley Jensen

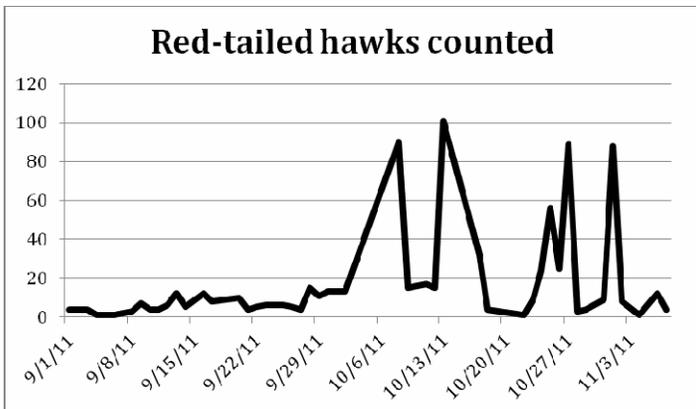
Harlan's Hawk, MPG Ranch during fall raptor migration, Florence, MT, 2011.

We were also able to compare our Bitterroot Valley count with those conducted in other parts of Montana, including Nora Ridge east of Lincoln, the Bridger Mountains north of Bozeman, and Jewel Basin northeast of Bigfork. The species composition

of raptors migrating over the Bitterroot Valley is very different from the other sites. Our area funnels relatively high numbers of migrating Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, Northern Harriers, and Osprey, but relatively low numbers of Golden Eagles. For example, at the Nora Ridge site, observers counted 217 Red-tailed Hawks and 1,395 Golden Eagles, compared to the Bitterroot's 776 Red-tailed Hawks and 84 Golden Eagles.

Species	Count
Red-tailed Hawk	776
Sharp-shinned Hawk	383
American Kestrel	225
Cooper's Hawk	167
Northern Harrier	136
Golden Eagle	84
Bald Eagle	58
Rough-legged Hawk	58
Turkey Vulture	50
Osprey	45
Northern Goshawk	10
Prairie Falcon	9
Swainson's Hawk	9
Merlin	6
Broad-winged Hawk	6
Ferruginous Hawk	5
Peregrine Falcon	4

Total number of species and individuals counted during observation at the MPG Ranch in Florence, MT, fall 2011.



Number of Red-tailed Hawks counted at the MPG Ranch in Florence, MT during raptor migrations observation, fall 2011.

The results of this study highlight an aspect of raptor ecology that often goes unobserved, and serves as a good reminder to turn your eyes skyward in the fall!

Living with Wildlife

By Fred Weisbecker, Conservation Chair and BAS VP

Living with wildlife is often a challenge. Northern Flickers pecking holes in the eaves of your home, squirrels in the attic, pack rats in the storage shed, animals eating up your garden and bushes, deer running into your car on the highway causing thousands of dollars in damage; it can get pretty frustrating. As a game warden I realized shortly after I retired that I had just spent thirty years apologizing for the irritating things that wildlife did to humans. Somehow we find a way to forgive them and move on.



Courtesy Karen Griffing

Northern Flicker.

The Bitterroot Valley as well as some other communities in the rural west are now trying the ultimate challenge, living with large carnivores! There is rarely a day that goes by without a front page article about a human /wolf or grizzly bear encounter in the local newspaper. Each story is a little different but they all show that we are poorly prepared to co-exist with them. If we are going to pull this grand experiment off, humans are going to have to be better prepared both mentally and physically. Most of us have no idea what to expect or do when we have a close encounter with a bear, a wolf or a mountain lion.

Like stories that always end with "and alcohol was involved," most grizzly mauling articles end with "and the hiker or hunter did not have bear spray". One could say the Bitterroot Valley is a place where the suburbs literally bump up against a wilderness. With that in mind, anyone in the valley can meet one of these large carnivores at any time. One example is the

Darby police cam capturing photos of mountain lions walking down main street.



Courtesy Karen Griffing

Bear, Yellowstone NP.

Americans' relationship with wildlife has changed dramatically over the last two hundred years. We have gone from seeing the natural world as a thing to subdue and conquer to recognizing and conserving all species as part of a complete ecosystem.

As this relationship evolves humans will have to change some of their ways. That said we do live in a real world so there will have to be compromises made on both sides of the issue. The Bitterroot Valley and Western Montana will continue to be on the front line of this grand experiment. Hopefully we can get it right. As they like to say, "Montana is the last best place."

Would you like to see the newsletter in **COLOR**? Visit www.BitterrootAudubon.org and click the link to download the current newsletter or visit the archives.

You can sign up to have an e-copy sent to your email inbox by contacting Susie Duff, our Membership Chair at 961-5455 or sduff1@aol.com. Please include "Newsletter" in the subject line.

News and Notes

Call for Photos-Bitterroot Audubon is seeking images of birds for a new feature in our newsletter: *Bird Shots*. If you have taken a great photo and would like to submit it for consideration, please email the jpeg image with a brief description (who took the photo, what is the subject, where the photo was taken, and any interesting details) to BASeditors@gmail.com.

Highway Clean-up-Thank you to all members who participated in the highway 93 clean-up. Your efforts are greatly appreciated, and the highway looks great!

Float Trip Raffle-In the spirit of supporting our community, Hannah Spencer (river guide and birding enthusiast) and Samantha O'Byrne (Sam's Spade

proprietress and birding enthusiast) have joined to co-sponsor a raffle for a guided scenic float and bird-watching trip for two on the Bitterroot River in 2012. All proceeds will go directly to the Bitterroot Audubon Society, the local chapter of the National Audubon Society. Tickets are available at \$5 per ticket or 5 for \$20, and can be purchased from Bitterroot Audubon Society board members, at the meetings in January and February, at the Christmas Bird Counts, or from Sam's Spade Garden Tools & Wares located at 111 South 4th Street in Hamilton, MT. The drawing will be held at the store on March 1, 2012.

Hawk Migration-The Hawk Migration Association of North America is looking for Citizen Science Volunteers to monitor over-wintering raptors. Kate Stone is coordinating this effort in the Bitterroot Valley. Participants generally commit to identifying and counting hawks along a 30-mile route, four times in the winter season. If interested in participating in this project, please contact Kate (381-1115) to be assigned a route. More information is available at the following website: <http://www.hmana.org/wrs.php>.

Bird Shots



Courtesy Ashley Jensen

Blue Jay, MPG Ranch, Florence, MT, October 2011.

Calendar of Events

Dec 2011-Feb 2012-Bitterroot River float trip raffle tickets on sale.

Dec 17-Hamilton CBC, Teller Wildlife Refuge Slack Barn, 7:30 AM

Dec 23-Big Hole CBC, call Kate Stone (381-1115) to register

Dec 31-Stevensville CBC, Stevensville Ranger Station, 7:30AM

2012-Montana Bird Festival, Kalispell

BITTERROOT AUDUBON
PO BOX 326
HAMILTON MT 59840-0326

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EMAIL: contactus@bitterrootaudubon.org

WEBSITE: www.BitterrootAudubon.org

Chapter Only Membership

The Bitterroot Audubon Chapter Only Membership is \$15/year. These members will be supporting local chapter activities, receive 9 issues of the newsletter, and enjoy Chapter benefits. To join as a Chapter Only Member, complete this form.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Check this box to receive full color email-only newsletters delivered to your inbox.

Send this application with \$15 to:



Bitterroot Audubon Society
PO Box 326
Hamilton, MT 59840-0326

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Become a member of the **National Audubon Society** and **Bitterroot Audubon** [Chapter Code C1ZN580Z]. You will receive *Audubon* magazine, *Bitterroot Audubon Newsletter* and a membership card. *Introductory membership is \$20.*

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Send this application and your check to:



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