

Bitterroot AUDUBON



FEBRUARY 2011

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 25 NO. 6

A TRUE BIRDER/NATURALIST – BOB DANLEY *By Kay Fulton*

Imagine one person who has a “Life List” (list of birds) of 640 species, has life lists of butterflies and dragonflies, and has studied vegetation including grasses and wildflowers, as well as a wide variety of invertebrates, and various mammals. Then imagine that this person is able to take all of that information



and share it with others via education programs, field trips, workshops, lectures, and/or just impromptu discussions and you will begin to know Bob Danley, the Outdoor Recreation Planner for the Lee Metcalf National

Wildlife Refuge in Stevensville. His enthusiasm for nature is truly catching and motivating.

Bob’s knowledge is based on his early years in Illinois and Wisconsin, college studies, 12½ years with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the last 8 years at Metcalf), and traveling all around the lower 48 states looking for birds, butterflies, and dragonflies. Bob’s trips include Cape May, Puget Sound, Mojave Desert, Texas, Patagonia, Chincoteague, and others. His most recent trip was to the Lower Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival in November, 2010.

With all of this behind him, Bob has recently begun exploring new ways to feed his passion for nature via the internet, blogs, social media, and photography which means “less dreaming and waiting for exotic places to go, and more time and opportunity for discovery of other fauna on a daily basis.”

Using his photography and skill navigating the internet, Bob will share his journey of “*finding life in its variety of form and color*” with the Bitterroot Audubon Chapter at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, February

21st at the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge (Wildfowl Lane, north of Stevensville). The public is invited. Contact Kay Fulton for further information.

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

The 14th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count runs from February 18th – 21st. You can sign up to count one day or as many days as you choose during the four day period. Free, and open to all ages, this is a great way to learn about and help the birds in your backyard and community. You do not need to be an expert birder to participate. Every single bird you identify counts, every chickadee, crow, or eagle, whether it is one or 100. Your participation and information can make a difference!

Last year our area submitted 58 individual lists of observations, with Stevensville leading the way with more than half of those. I hope that this year we’ll have even greater participation. Join family and friends or just spend time alone in an outdoor adventure identifying and counting in your backyard, local park, school, wildlife refuge or nature center. Go to <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/howto.html> for more information about how to participate on your own. At this website, you’ll learn how to enter your data, learn about the results, enter the photo contest with prizes and get information and pictures of birds you might see in your local area.



There is a wealth of birding information at this web site just waiting for you to explore!

EVERY BIRD COUNTS—EVERY BIRDER COUNTS.

Letter from the President

By Peter Allen

Red-winged blackbirds at the feeder this morning hint that winter will not be forever, but it's much too early to think that spring is just around the corner. The long-range forecast indicates a long, cool spring, but that doesn't keep Helen from starting the garden seeds in the relative warmth of the garage.



Nevertheless, I must get to some of those tasks best done in winter – like cleaning out all the nest boxes. Trying to do so in other seasons has sometimes led to startling encounters with wasps and other vespids. If I leave it too late in the spring, the birds may be here before their houses are ready. I'll move some of them, too, as we decided last year that proximity to the hen house might be making one of the nest boxes less attractive to bluebirds, and one box is definitely too attractive to house sparrows.

Oh darn! The red-wings have emptied the bird feeder – I must go and fill it again.

Stevi Christmas Bird Count Results

By Dave Lockman, compiler

The 46th annual Stevensville Christmas Bird Count took place on January 2, 2011. Twenty-five field observers and 32 feeder watchers combined to try to find all the birds in the “count circle,” which includes all the habitat within a 15 mile diameter circle centered at the Stevi Ranger Station. The temperature at dawn was only 5 degrees above zero, but warmed to about 15 degrees in the afternoon. Skies were mostly cloudy, with light snow in the afternoon. Low water levels in many of the ponds on the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, combined with single-digit temperatures for several days before the Count, limited the amount of open water, which, in turn, seemed to reduce the number of waterfowl species in the area from usual levels.

Counters worked hard and managed to tally 10,562 birds representing 79 different species. The species count was a little lower than the average of 82 or so that we've found the last few years, but should still be the second highest in Montana following the Big Fork CBC. We didn't add any new species this year, so the cumulative species count for the 46 years of the Stevi CBC remains at 153. Unusual species found this year

included a White-crowned Sparrow at the feeders in front of Earth and Wood, and a covey of eight Northern Bobwhites at a feeder in the Groff Lane area. We set new records for the number of Bald Eagles, California Quail, Eurasian Collared-Doves, Northern Flickers, Pileated Woodpeckers, Black-billed Magpies, Common Ravens and Dark-eyed Juncos. The large increases in the tallies for California Quail and Eurasian Collared-Doves help document that populations of both these recent arrivals in the valley are well-established and growing rapidly. Thanks to all those who contributed part or all of their day for making the Stevi CBC so successful again this year!



Stevi CBC data shows that some species that we now think of as very common such as house finches and mourning doves didn't occur here during the winter until the mid 1980s. Our data also shows that wintering raptors were uncommon around Stevensville as recently as the early 1980s, a dramatic contrast with the large numbers of Bald Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks and Rough-legged hawks that can be easily viewed today along local roads. In contrast,



other species such as Evening Grosbeaks, which used to be quite common here, are now rarely seen during the winter. On a broader scale, analysis of CBC data has recently shown that the winter ranges of many bird species have shifted northward by several hundred miles over the last 50 years, which may be another response to the effects of climate change.

Birding Tours with Montana Audubon

Where would you like to go birding? Montana Audubon recently sent a flyer with lots of upcoming tours, but space precludes printing it all here. Tours are offered to places as near as Freezeout Lake or Centennial Valley and as far away as Gambia or Peru. [Http://www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/tours.html](http://www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/tours.html) has the details or you can call the Montana Audubon office (443-3949) for information about all tours.

Of course, we should keep in mind the annual bird festival, to be held this year in Glasgow. See <http://mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival.html>.

Email Newsletters Coming

By Peter Allen, Editor

Having considered the opinions of all those who responded to our recent articles, along with the costs of printing and mailing newsletters, the board of directors has decided to offer email delivery of our newsletters to those who request it. We will continue to send a printed newsletter to all members except those who specifically request email delivery. Those who do will get faster delivery, and can enjoy the photos in color. They can print the newsletter on their own printers if they choose, and know that they are helping to keep down our costs and use of paper.

E-newsletters will come via email in the form of a pdf file, which can be read on virtually any computer, since most have Adobe Acrobat reader. The average size of the last 10 newsletters has been 223 kb, so the files are fairly small and won't take too long to download.

For a while, at least, we expect to continue our use of a bulk mailing permit for the postal deliveries. We may eventually get to the point that it is no longer the cheapest way, but, for the moment, it is.

No change in your newsletter delivery will occur unless **you** request it. Send your request to President@BitterrootAudubon.org if you would like to receive your newsletter electronically instead of via the U.S. mail.

Birds Treated by Wildlife Rehabbers

by Judy Hoy

In 2010, area rehabbers received a total of 149 injured or orphaned birds for care. Of those, 81 were released, 66 died or were euthanized because of injuries, and 2 are now being used for education by *Raptors of the Rockies*. One of those was a beautiful male Long-eared Owl found with a broken wing at the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge. The owl was brought for rehab by refuge personnel and the bone set and splinted. The bone healed nicely, but because of the extent of soft tissue damage the young owl was not able to fly well enough for release on the refuge. Because Long-eared Owls make great owl ambassadors, Kate Davis has given it a home and a job.



The number of malformed young of the year birds received was slightly lower than in 2009, with 17% having malformations, including three with malformed leg bones, three with underdeveloped craniofacial features including very short or malformed upper bill and five with interrupted feather growth so they couldn't fly when they fledged. There was an increase in adult birds with malformations, 6% had underdeveloped feathers or bill. We do not see many adults with malformations because young birds with developmental malformations usually die not long after fledging, eliminating them from the population. Birds with short upper bill, a definitive symptom of hormone disruption, included a Northern Flicker hatchling, a Red-breasted Nuthatch fledgling, an adult Belted Kingfisher, an adult Northern Flicker and an adult California Quail.

Return of the Buffalo

By Fred Weisbecker, Conservation Chair

There is currently a discussion going on to return wild buffalo (bison) to some of Montana's larger wildlife management areas. The plan is to use disease-free buffalo that move out of Yellowstone National Park. The buffalo's return would mark the end of a long conservation effort to return all the animals and birds we drove to the edge of extinction in a time of ignorance and greed. State wildlife commissions and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have worked hard applying wildlife management principles to bring back everything from deer and elk to turkeys and otters. The buffalo is literally the last species left on the list.

As with all reintroductions this one presents its own problems. The fear of brucellosis and the challenge of keeping these large animals from straying from management areas are now hot topics in several committees in the legislature. The captured buffalo would be kept in quarantine enclosures until certified brucellosis-free and then transferred to yet undetermined state lands with buffalo proof fencing.

Obviously we have saved the really controversial animals to restore last, wolves included. These critters definitely challenge our ability to adjust our habits and coexist with our wildlife neighbors. The return of the buffalo, even if only to a fraction of its former range, can truly be said to be the end of a hundred year effort to restore native wildlife to Montana.