

# Bitterroot AUDUBON



MAY 2014

NEWSLETTER

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## Declining Populations of Long-eared Owls in Western Montana

*By Denver Holt*

Denver Holt, the Founder and President of the Owl Research Institute (ORI) and the Ninepipes Wildlife Research Center, is a nationally recognized authority on owls. People come from all over the country to participate in his workshops. John Ormiston, one of the founders of Bitterroot Audubon (BAS), stated, "When Denver gives a talk about owls, he literally turns into one!" Denver has researched owls and their ecology since 1978 and has published over 90 papers and technical documents. He has co-authored numerous books on birds and owls and his research has been featured in newspapers and magazines around the US. His work has also been recognized on several television programs. In 2011 he worked with the PBS Documentary film crew featuring the breeding ecology of the Snowy Owl at his research site in Barrow, Alaska.



*Courtesy Daniel Cox/Denver Holt*

In 2007 Denver presented his research on the Snowy Owls at one of Bitterroot Audubon's meetings and now he has agreed to return and share the long-term research (27 years) he has been doing on Long-eared Owls in Western Montana. The ORI studies on open country species of owls prove that populations can fluctuate widely on an annual basis- sometimes drastically. If using data from only a few research seasons, one could misrepresent the status and health of local and large scale populations. By conducting long-term research and monitoring at local and large geographic areas, more accurate and realistic information can be obtained thus leading to realistic conservation and management decisions.



*Courtesy Kate Stone*

*Long-eared Owl.*

**To learn everything you ever wanted to know about Long-eared Owls, come join Bitterroot Audubon Monday, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 P.M. At the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, on Wildfowl Lane just north of Stevensville. For more information contact Kay Fulton, 642-3794.**

## Letter from the President

By Kay Fulton, BAS President

Here we are May, 2014 and the last newsletter until September. That feels a little like the end of the year but, in fact, it is the beginning of yet another wonderful Birding Season in Montana. I hope you all have a great season. Be sure to get your name and e-mail on the field trip list and watch for announcements in the newspaper for bird related events. Of course, just get out and enjoy the out of doors. I want to share a few things before I say, "See ya later!"

**Montana Junior Duck Stamp Winner:** Carson Collinsworth from Whitefish won the Best of Show for the second year in a row. Bob Danley at the Lee Metcalf Refuge coordinates the competition for Montana. This year there were 198 entries. Carson's picture was then entered in the national competition and was in the top 10 out of 29,000. Carson has once again agreed to allow BAS to include his picture in our forthcoming 2015 Calendar.

**2015 CALENDAR!** And speaking of the new calendar, be sure and save up your money for a few of what promises to be another outstanding calendar. They are expected to go on sale July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend at the Farmers' Market!

**THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE BAS BOARD MEMBERS!** We have a great group of people putting in huge amounts of time and energy to arrange for field trips, citizen science projects, educational experiences for children and adults, programs, the scholarship program, membership, and communication via the newsletter, website and Facebook. Please consider working with this team next year.

See Ya Later! Kay

## 2014 Welcome Back Waterfowl Day

By Judy Hoy, Welcome Back Waterfowl Day Coordinator

Everyone who came to welcome back waterfowl on March 29 was privileged to join in celebrating the 50th birthday of the Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge. Even with cool rainy weather, we had a good time watching the waterfowl and other birds, eating birthday cake, and visiting with friends.

Participants reported observing a total of 44 bird species. Birds seen include several Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, a large number of Canada Geese, Bald



Eagle, Golden Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, and American Kestrel, several Sandhill Cranes, Killdeer, Great Blue Herons on or near their rookery and Ring-necked Pheasant. Ducks observed included one or more Common Merganser, Hooded Merganser, Wood Duck, Ruddy Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Barrow's and Common Goldeneye, Canvasback and Green-winged Teal. There were many Mallards, Northern Pintail, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler and Ring-necked Ducks feeding in the ponds on both sides of the road. A large number of American Coots were also present. With so many ducks feeding on the ponds, it was not surprising that a beautiful Peregrine Falcon was perched in a snag where it could also observe the ducks.



*Courtesy Mel Holloway  
Judy Hoy presents her rehabilitated Northern Saw-whet Owl to Welcome Back Waterfowl participants.*

Other birds seen included Mourning Dove, Eurasian Collared-Dove, House Finch, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, American Robin, Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallow, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, European Starling, Common Raven and Black-billed Magpie.

Thank you to the staff of the Lee Metcalf Refuge for putting up shelters to protect viewers and their scopes and for providing great snacks and birthday cake. A special thanks goes to Bob Danley for doing the publicity and to Kate Stone for all of her help, her table and a shelter. Thanks also to the BAS members who braved the cool sprinkles and occasional strong breeze to help participants with finding and identifying the birds. Most of all, thank you to everyone who came to celebrate the Lee Metcalf Refuge for providing wildlife with vital habitat and all of us with great opportunities to view the beautiful waterfowl and other wildlife that use the refuge. The establishment of the Lee Metcalf Refuge 50 years ago was a wonderful and insightful gift to all.

## **Celebrate Sage- May 31, 7-noon**

*By Kate Stone*

Sagebrush ecosystems have been the target of removal and misinformation throughout their exposure to human development. The Bitterroot Valley has over 10,000 acres of sagebrush cover, yet this ecosystem has received little attention.

Join staff from the MPG Ranch to help survey the bird diversity in some of our remaining sagebrush landscapes. Participants will learn to identify the songs of two sagebrush-dependent Species of Concern in Montana: Brewer's Sparrow and Sage Thrasher. They will also learn some of the songs of other species typical of sagebrush systems, including Vesper Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, and Clay-colored Sparrow. Our goal will be to break into small groups and survey as many sage patches as we can in one morning. Interested participants can sign up to survey additional patches on their own. We will use Ebird to report and document our findings. To register and for more information, please contact Kate Stone (381-1115, krostone@hotmail.com).



*Courtesy Kate Stone*

*Male Brewer's Sparrow.*

## **Audubon Adventures, An Extra Special Thanks!**

*By Leslie Nyce, Education Chair*

Every year Bitterroot Audubon members generously support the Audubon Adventures Program by sponsoring classrooms around the valley. This year was no exception. Ten classrooms (grades 3-5) were able to receive wonderful educational materials focusing on "Sharing Our World With Birds". The specific lessons were about Hummingbirds, Seabirds and Birds of Prey. The Birds of Prey student magazine even included two photos from a very well known Bitterroot Valley resident and founder of

Raptors of the Rockies, Kate Davis. Way to go Kate! We would like to send an EXTRA SPECIAL thanks the following sponsors: Zetha Scheytt, Meta Harper, Judy & Bob Hoy, Becky & Bill Peters, Christine Coffin, Rosan Stover, and Barb & John Ormiston. We truly appreciate your help in educating the youth of the Bitterroot Valley!

## **Rehabbing Wildlife in Ravalli and Missoula Counties in 2013**

*by Judy Hoy*

In 2013, wildlife rehabbers, Brooke Tanner, Kristi Swisher, Ellen Henry, Adele Coon and Judy Hoy collectively received 230 birds that were injured or orphaned. Of those, 127 were released back to the wild, 103 died or were euthanized because of injuries and 6 were transferred to other rehab centers. The most common injuries to adult birds are impact by cars or window strikes and by being bitten by a cat. Many young birds fall from nests or the nests are damaged or destroyed in some way. Please do not chop down trees after nesting season begins.

Several birds and small mammals were received with developmental malformations. Birds included a Canada Goose hatchling with a malformed leg bone, a Mallard hatchling with neurological damage, a European Starling fledgling with pure white leucistic feathers, and two hatchling Northern Flickers and a hatchling Rufous Hummingbird with underdeveloped upper bills. Four Red Squirrels, four Yellow Pine Chipmunks, and several Fox Squirrels were received for care. Most of the male rodents had reproductive malformations. A young Columbian Ground Squirrel was observed in the wild with cleft palate. As many birds depend on rodents for food, the increasing malformations in rodents is concerning.

In 2013, similar to 2012, after the thick smoke began coming to the Bitterroot Valley from the forest fires in California and Idaho several malformed young hatchling Rock Pigeons were found dead with severely underdeveloped upper facial bones, with extremely short upper bills and one with crossed bills. Several pigeon eggs were observed with very thin shells. The pigeons that hatched after the smoke stopped were normal, as were the egg shells. Interestingly, many adult songbirds of a variety of species with short upper bills and some that had crossed bills were photographed by bird watchers in 2013. Osprey and Bald Eagles received for care were tested for heavy metals by the University of Montana researchers because of high lead and mercury levels.

We would like to thank everyone who donated to the Bitterroot Audubon Wildlife Rehabilitation Fund, which pays for food and medicine, with a special thank you to the MPG Ranch for their generous donation. The fund currently needs donations to pay for food and medicine for birds received in 2014. An especially big thank you goes out to all the people who cared enough to rescue injured or orphaned birds and bring them to rehabbers. Thank you to the Bitterroot Audubon Society for assisting with the funding and to all who made 2013 a successful year. If you find a bird that needs help, call Judy Hoy at 777-2487 or if you live near or south of Hamilton, call Adele Coon at 363-4330.

***Wings Across the Big Sky***  
**June 6-8, 2014 ~ Bozeman, Montana**

**IT IS NOT TOO LATE** to register for **Montana Audubon's *Wings Across the Big Sky Festival*** in Bozeman, Montana on June 6-8, 2014. Please send in your print registration form, go online to [www.mtaudubon.org](http://www.mtaudubon.org) and sign up, or call the Helena office (406.443.3949) and register! Checks can be made out to 'Montana Audubon' and can be mailed with registrations to: Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena MT 59624. You may also email any questions to [cerickson@mtaudubon.org](mailto:cerickson@mtaudubon.org) or [mtaudubon@mtaudubon.org](mailto:mtaudubon@mtaudubon.org).

We will be meeting at the **Best Western GranTree Inn** in Bozeman. We have available rooms blocked until May 20, 2014. Please call 1-800-624-5965 to reserve your room and be sure to mention that you are part of the Montana Audubon *Wings Across the Big Sky Festival*.

Sacajawea Audubon has planned a fun Friday night kickoff including an ever-popular bird identification event; then at the Saturday social hour prior to the banquet, you can hone your bird call skills while trying to stump fellow birders!

If you're a camper, consider staying in one of the many campgrounds near Bozeman. Check out the website at <http://www.allstays.com/Campgrounds/mt-bozeman-campgrounds.htm> for camping sites, both private and public. There is also camping at the Gallatin County Fairgrounds. Check them out at [http://www.gallatin.mt.gov/Public\\_Documents/GallatinCoMT\\_Fairgrounds/FacilityRental/OpenCamping](http://www.gallatin.mt.gov/Public_Documents/GallatinCoMT_Fairgrounds/FacilityRental/OpenCamping). Right across the main street from the hotel is a Wal-Mart and they allow fee camping in their parking lot (no hook-up.)

We still have room for you on the **Field Trips** Saturday and Sunday, even though some of them have been filled. Call the Helena office and someone will be

happy to help you choose an available fun trip.

We have a great variety of speakers for Saturday afternoon presentations. We'll have talks that focus on our local forests -- researcher Vicki Saab will talk about birds, beetles and burns, and talks that take us around the world --Forrest Rowland will share his knowledge and images of bird migration in the Middle East. We'll also share conservation stories and highlights, and you can learn more about how we at Montana Audubon think Greater Sage-Grouse and other sage associated species will be around for our grandkids, and what Montana bird species might be moving north as the climate changes. And given that the Bridger Mountains are just outside Bozeman, Steve Hoffman will share the latest golden eagle migration stories from that long-term study site. There will be six great talks - the challenge will be choosing which ones to attend!

Each year Montana Audubon recognizes individuals who work for the conservation and protection of birds and other wildlife by presenting **Awards** at the Saturday evening banquet. We are currently seeking nominations in the following categories: Lifetime Achievement Award, Educator of the Year, Conservationist of the Year, Citizen Scientist of the Year, and Special Achievement Award. To make a nomination, download a nomination form from [www.mtaudubon.org/about/awards.html](http://www.mtaudubon.org/about/awards.html). Nominations are due at the office by May 23, 2014. Mail completed forms to *Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena MT 59624*.

## News and Notes

**Victor Community Garden - still open for registration.** Many 20' x 20' plots to rent with full sun exposure, deer proof fence, using organic methods and compost, with mulch, tools and watering provided. The cost is \$35 for the whole season. The location is on 5th, just west of Victor. Call Jill at 642-3601 or email at [jill@sustainablelivingsystems.org](mailto:jill@sustainablelivingsystems.org) for questions, and to receive a registration form. Jill Davies - Director, Sustainable Living Systems, P.O. Box 53, Victor, MT 59875. [www.sustainablelivingsystems.org](http://www.sustainablelivingsystems.org)

**Highway Cleanup** Our semi-annual highway clean-up project will take place on May 20 at 4PM. Meet on the west side of Highway 93, near mile marker 64, south of Stevensville. Please come out and help us pick up! We'll supply orange vests and trash bags for everyone, but bring your own gloves.

## Youth Conservation & Education Expo

When: Saturday, May 10, 2014

Where: Teller's Slack Barn, 1180 Chaffin Lane, Corvallis, MT 59828

Details: FREE to attend! Meander through the Slack Barn and the surrounding grounds to visit educational booths and interactive trailers from approximately 30 national and local conservation organizations.

## Call for Montana Audubon Award

**Nominations!** Please nominate a deserving person for their work for conservation and/or Audubon! We are now seeking nominations for awards that will be given away at Montana Audubon's June annual meeting in Bozeman. The awards acknowledge individuals who exemplify a commitment to birds, other wildlife, and habitat conservation. This year awards will be given for Conservationist of the Year, Environmental Educator of the Year, Special Achievement, Citizen Scientist of the Year, and Lifetime Achievement Award.

To nominate your candidate, please visit our website at <http://mtaudubon.org/about/awards.html>. To be considered for this year's award, nominations must be submitted no later than May 23, 2014. Nominations can be submitted by email or mailed to Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624, or by fax: (406) 443-7144. Questions? Contact Janet Ellis at [406-443-3949](mailto:jellis@mtaudubon.org) or [jellis@mtaudubon.org](mailto:jellis@mtaudubon.org).

## Bitterroot Audubon Society is going GREEN

*By Sara Ashline and Karen Griffing, BAS Editors*

Beginning Fall 2013, Bitterroot Audubon began delivering monthly newsletter electronically. If you haven't already done so, please send us your email address to receive your newsletter via email. Starting this fall, we'll be sending the newsletter electronically only, and it is always available at [www.bitterrootaudubon.org](http://www.bitterrootaudubon.org). For those without computer access, we will continue to mail you an individual copy of the newsletter; please send a note to **Bitterroot Audubon, PO Box 326, Hamilton, MT 59840** requesting this service. Please send your email address to Susie Duff at [audubonmembership@gmail.com](mailto:audubonmembership@gmail.com) to begin receiving your newsletter electronically

**Bitterroot Audubon is on Facebook!** If you use Facebook, please look for Bitterroot Audubon and "Like" us!

**Annual Election** Officers and board members will be elected at the BAS annual meeting on May 19.

**Call for Photos** Bitterroot Audubon is seeking images of birds for a 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, to [BASeditors@gmail.com](mailto:BASeditors@gmail.com).

**Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT** New to birding? Beginner Bird Walks at the refuge sponsored by Bitterroot Audubon and Five Valleys Audubon are

## Calendar of Events

**May 17-** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, 10AM-12PM, Call 777-5552 for more information.

**May 19-** Audubon Meeting, Forest Service/DNRC Building, Hamilton, 7PM, **Board Mtg. 5PM**

**May 10-** Youth Conservation Expo, Teller's Slack Barn, 1180 Chaffin Lane, Corvallis, MT 59828. Free to the public.

**May 20-** Highway Cleanup, 4PM, Meet on the west side of Highway 93, near mile marker 64, south of Stevensville.

**May 23-** Nominations for Montana Audubon's Conservationist of the Year, Environmental Educator of the Year, Special Achievement, Citizen Scientist of the Year, and Lifetime Achievement Award.

**May 31-** Celebrate Sage Field Trip, contact Kate Stone (381-1115, [kroestone@hotmail.com](mailto:kroestone@hotmail.com)) to register.

**Jun 6-8-** Wings Across the Big Sky birding festival, Bozeman, MT

held the third Saturday of each month. Meet at the Refuge Visitor's Center on May 17th at 10AM for a two hour bird walk. Bring binoculars if you have them. Contact the refuge at [\(406\) 777-5552](tel:4067775552) for more information.

## Bird Shots



*Courtesy Sara Ashline*  
Banded Rufous Hummingbird in flight.

BITTERROOT AUDUBON  
PO BOX 326  
HAMILTON MT 59840-0326

### Officers

President	Kay Fulton*	642-3794
Vice-Pres. & Conservation Chair	Fred Weisbecker*	375-9317
Secretary	John Ormiston*	363-5464
Treasurer	Jim Story*	961-4689

### Directors & Committee Chairs

IBA Program	Sherry Ritter	777-7409
Website	Kate Stone*	381-1115
Field Trips	Sherry Ritter	777-7409
Education	Leslie Nyce* <a href="mailto:bas4education@hotmail.com">bas4education@hotmail.com</a>	
Newsltr Eds &	Sara Ashline* <a href="mailto:baseditors@gmail.com">baseditors@gmail.com</a>	
Distribution	Karen Griffing*	961-0181
Hospitality	Rosan Stover	
Membership	Susie Duff*	961-5455
Publicity	Dave Lockman	777-2929
Rep. to MT		
Audubon	Becky Peters*	
At large	Judy Hoy*	777-2487
Scholarship	Skip Horner*	642-6840
At large	Campbell Massey	381-0197
At large	Alex Shaffer*	

\* Board Member

EMAIL: [contactus@bitterrootaudubon.org](mailto:contactus@bitterrootaudubon.org)  
WEBSITE: [www.BitterrootAudubon.org](http://www.BitterrootAudubon.org)

## Chapter Only Membership

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_  
State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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:



# Audubon

Membership Data Center  
PO Box 422250  
Palm Coast FL 32142-2250