

# Bitterroot AUDUBON



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NEWSLETTER

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*Courtesy B.J. Worth*

*Harlequin Ducks.*

## **“To be at One with the Birds”**

*By B.J. Worth and Josh Covill*

What does a retired Hollywood aerial stuntman, B.J. Worth, have in common with an avian child prodigy, Josh Covill? **Love of Birds and Documenting their Behaviors, Songs and Habits to Share with Other Bird Lovers!**



*Courtesy B.J. Worth*

B.J. Worth was drawn to nature at an early age and was particularly captivated by birds' ability to fly. While studying Zoology at the University of Montana, he began learning how to sky dive. He excelled at jumping out of “not so perfectly good airplanes under the guidance of highly animated smokejumpers!” With his BS in hand, he soon found himself skydiving around the world – for 35

years! He gained notoriety as an accomplished athlete, filmmaker and aerial stunt performer – check out the dive from the Eiffel Tower in the James Bond movie, “A View to a Kill.” After a highly successful career, he returned to his bio-roots and birds and brought with him his filmmaking skills. Since 2000 B.J. has pursued birding with utmost enthusiasm. He has enriched his hobby by videotaping more than 900 species of birds doing what birds do.



*Courtesy Josh Covill*

Josh Covill began “birding” before he was ten. He was identifying birds and recording their behavior, calls, songs and habits to memory. With his parents' encouragement and Dan Casey's tutelage, he became a highly respected birder at an early age. He became active in the birding community and

attended his first Young Birders' national convention at 14 years old. Before entering high school, he was leading birding walks in the Flathead Valley. His gift of identifying birds is uncanny and he continually is among the leading birders no matter the habitat, season or location. You will see his name at the top of many eBird checklists and always leading on Montana eBird's lists. Josh has become not only an excellent photographer but an accomplished video editor as well. If you ever get a chance to have Josh lead a field trip you will be impressed by his ability to teach birders on any level.



Courtesy B.J. Worth  
Painted Bunting.

Both B.J. and Josh are founding members of an organization called Wings in Nature (WIN) founded in 2017 by Birding enthusiasts from many areas of study – with several of them ranked among eBird's top Montana Birders. These individuals joined together to establish tools and materials for public educators, back-yard birders, landowners, state agencies and more with events and workshops. WIN's mission is to safeguard bird populations by inspiring our awareness and enthusiasm for birds, bird behavior, bird research and birding activities. Their conservation activities help facilitate collaboration within like-minded communities. One of the strategies being used is to develop and distribute audio/visual tools so that birders can pursue their passion more effectively and share their birding experiences more easily.



Courtesy B.J. Worth  
Raptor in flight.



Courtesy B.J. Worth  
Harlequin Duck pair.

B.J. and Josh are board members of WIN and together they have been working on various multi-media bird related projects. Two of their projects are: **“Birds in Motion”** and **“Winged Harlequins.”** **“Birds in Motion”** is an ambitious perpetual project to produce a video anthology of bird behavior for all the birds regularly occurring in North America. Using B.J.'s original 800 videos as a basis for this project, B.J. and Josh have been traveling around North America recording behavior of as many bird species as possible. The current plan is for WIN to launch **“Birds in Motion”** in May, 2018. **“Winged Harlequins”** is a 30-minute documentary featuring Harlequin Ducks and the species' collective response to threats facing its global population. Josh and B.J. have traveled to coastal sites along the Pacific Northwest in the US and Canada to record the behavior of these small colorful sea ducks on their wintering grounds. The courting behaviors of young males are particularly interesting as they fiercely challenge one another to woo the available females with whom they will create life-long pair bonds. They also sought out biologists to share their experience focused on monitoring population trends. They are also studying and recording Harlequins in western Montana.

Bitterroot Audubon Society is excited to have these two energetic and creative people present the above two projects as well provide a “show-and-tell” with the specialized camera equipment they use to capture their vivid sequences – now recorded in 4K video. We are sure to be amazed by the breadth of and depth of their work.

**Join Bitterroot Audubon Monday, February 19th at 7:00 P.M. at the Bedford Building Community Room, 223 S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Hamilton for this exciting program. Audubon related announcements will precede the program & refreshments will be served. Please note the change in location. The public is invited. For more information, contact Kay at 360-8664.**

## Letter from the President

By Becky Peters, BAS President

February – the month of Love.



And we do love the birds!!

So which bird do you love the most? Which one pleases you the most when you catch sight of it? Maybe it's a family of birds you cherish, maybe it's one specie's song, maybe it's a rare bird you've only seen once, maybe it's one you see every day or it might be your totem animal. Whichever one it is you probably can tell friends about that bird's many fine qualities, it's coloring, it's character. Many of you know mine is the Cedar Waxwing and I truly melt if I get to hold one at a bird banding trip. And then there are the Hummingbirds!! Bill had to drag me out of the Desert Museum's Hummingbird House in Tucson after 2 hours!

Some people admire a bird because of its bravado, or its abilities to do fantastic feats – fly the farthest, fly the highest, fly the fastest! Whichever bird it is, ask yourself why that bird is so important to you. Can you remember where and when you first saw it? We never forget when a bird makes us feel that connection with nature and its beauties! Here are some websites you might like to look over about our amazing birds that we love so much. Enjoy:  
<https://www.doi.gov/blog/flight-fancy-12-amazing-birds>

A list of Australia's Best Birds:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/24/open-thread-what-is-australias-best-bird-and-what-is-the-worst>

And then there's the bird that China hated too much - The Story of the Most Common Bird in the World. Why do we love what is rare and despise what is all around us?

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-story-of-the-most-common-bird-in-the-world-113046500/>

So whichever bird it is I hope we are all doing something about losing the migratory bird protection. The Interior Department has quietly rolled back an Obama-era policy aimed at *protecting migratory birds*, stating in a solicitor's opinion that it will no longer prosecute oil and gas, wind, and solar operators that accidentally kill birds. They are needing lots of our loving right now! The Migratory Bird Treaty Act protects more than 1,000 species of birds. Thanks Liz Cheney!!

## It's curlew season again in the Mission Valley!

By Amy Seaman

Are you ready to hear the 'curllleeee' of the Long-billed Curlew? Well, grab your binoculars and get ready, because this charismatic shorebird needs you. Montana's curlews will be trickling back next month and we want to keep tracking them in and around the Mission Valley!

We know that Montana and the Mission Valley harbor the very important grassland and wetland habitat that curlews rely on during breeding and migration. This species offers the perfect opportunity to involve citizen scientists, like you, to collect more details on local curlew hotspots. We are reaching out to ask you to join our great network of conservation partners in the Mission Valley by choosing an available survey route and getting out into the field!

It's easy. Survey routes consist of early morning road-side stops repeated every half mile. At each stop, you will get out of the car for five minutes and look and listen for curlews. Along the way you will collect important data on the time, habitat, and presence or absence of curlews. And, the great thing is that you only need to look for one big-beautiful-bellowing bird. So all you have to do is choose a route and catch up on Curlew identification and you are all set to go!

## Calendar of Events

**Feb 16-19:** Great Backyard Bird Count.

**Feb 17:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 10AM-12PM.

**Feb 19:** Audubon Meeting, Bedford Building, Hamilton, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.

**Mar 17:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 10AM-12PM.

**Mar 19:** Audubon Meeting, Location TBA, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.

**Apr 16:** Audubon Meeting, Location TBA, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.

**Apr 21:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 10AM-12PM.

**2018:** Welcome Back Waterfowl day. More details to be announced.

**Jun 8-10:** 19<sup>th</sup> Annual "Wings Across the Big Sky Festival." Kalispell, MT. More details to be announced.

The best way to get involved is to visit our website and view the routes available in the Mission Valley and Flathead Indian Reservation:

<http://missionvalleycurlews.weebly.com/>.

There you will find survey details such as the protocol, data sheets, and route maps. You can also contact Amy or Janene if you would like us to send you a route packet. Feel free to take a partner, do a route more than once, or do more than one route. The Curlews are just waiting to be found!

To brush up on your Curlew identification before heading into the field visit Montana Audubon's webpage: <http://mtaudubon.org/birds-science/long-billed-curlew-initiative/> for a link to the Curlew's call and much more. Also visit Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All about Birds: [http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Long-billed\\_Curlew/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Long-billed_Curlew/id).

Surveys can start as early as April 8<sup>th</sup>, so get those taxes done early!

For more information contact Amy Seaman: [aseaman@mtaudubon.org](mailto:aseaman@mtaudubon.org), 406.210.9449

### **What's the story, Story?**

*By Jim Story*

#### **Question: Why are gulls so hard to identify?**

**Answer:** Juvenile gull chicks, when fledging, have a distinctive brown, streaked plumage. As the birds mature, the plumage patterns change, and these changes differ among species. Some gull species develop adult plumage and breed when they are two years old, while other species do not become adults until they are three. Some of the larger gull species don't mature until they are five years of age. Adult gulls usually have different breeding and winter plumages. Overall, each gull species often has five or more color patterns, which makes gull identification extremely challenging. (info from Birder's Handbook).

*Local birding expert Jim Story answers your questions about birds and their habits. Jim welcomes your questions at [jstory4689@gmail.com](mailto:jstory4689@gmail.com).*

### **Disturbing Trends in Bald Eagle and White-tailed Deer Populations**

*By Judy Hoy*

Terrance Ingram, Director of the Eagle Nature Foundation, is concerned about the lack of immature Bald Eagles and a declining population in the states where he and his colleagues have counted

eagles. He reported to me their recent January 2018 count of Bald Eagles in Missouri. They counted Bald Eagles for three days, from the Wisconsin border to St. Louis on the Mississippi River for two days, and then back up the Illinois River on the last day. They only found 375 Bald Eagles total, and only 15% (56) were immature, which is the lowest number they have ever counted. They have counted as many as 6,000 eagles with 30% of them being mature (4200 immature). They have been seeing fewer eagles, especially immature eagles, for several years and Terrance finds this trend concerning. He is one of the most knowledgeable people in the U.S. with regard to Bald Eagles, having been instrumental in bringing the Bald Eagle back after they were decimated by DDT. If he is concerned, maybe Audubon should be!

Regarding White-tailed Deer in Ravalli County, I have been examining as many fawns as I can each year since 1996. All data collected up to 2010 was reported in our 2015 study. (Hoy J, Swanson N and Seneff S. The High Cost of Pesticides: Human and Animal Diseases. *Poult Fish Wildlife Sci.* 2015; 3:132. doi:10.4172/2375-446X.1000132). I recently analyzed the data from 2011 through 2017 and found a disturbing trend in the sex ratio in the years from 2014 through 2017 at 37 males (37M) to 63 females (63F) per 100 fawns. Prior to that, the sex ratio had gone from highly skewed in favor of males (60M to 40F) from 1995-2001, eventually returning to closer to normal (52M to 48F) and just slightly in favor of males at 56M to 44F from 2011 through 2013). Interestingly, the under-bite on both sexes has decreased to 40% on fawns examined from 2014-2017, down from 72% with under-bite on fawns examined from 2011-2013. We haven't figured out why. The prevalence of malformed male genitalia (the subject of our 2002 study) increased and remained alarmingly high (81%) throughout the entire 2011-2017 period. In addition, hunters and deer watchers have noted that many male fawns do not grow antler buds at 5 or 6 months old as they used to, but do grow them as a yearling. Many now have such short little stubs for antlers at a year and a half old that they are mistakenly shot for females. If these trends continue, eventually, these factors will have a significant effect on the number of male deer, the antler size and consequently the sale of out of state deer licenses and many businesses that depend on deer hunting, such as guiding, taxidermy, etc.

## The Birds need you Feb. 16 to Feb. 19 and you don't have to go anywhere!

*National Audubon Society*

“The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org). Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world.

Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](http://Cornell Lab of Ornithology) and the [National Audubon Society](http://National Audubon Society) learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. Last year, more than 160,000 participants submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded.

The 21st annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 16, through Monday, February 19, 2018. Please visit the official website at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org) for more information and be sure to check out the latest [educational and promotional resources](#). For more on the results of the latest GBBC, take a look at the [GBBC Summary](#) On the [program website](#) participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during and after the count. Be sure to check out the [Explore](#)

[a Region](#) tool to get an idea of what you can expect to see in your area during the next GBBC.”

For questions and comments, please contact the National Audubon Society or Cornell Lab of Ornithology: [citizenscience@audubon.org](mailto:citizenscience@audubon.org)

## News and Notes

### Chapter Members Renewal Deadline

If you are a BAS chapter-only member, your membership fee (\$15) is due. Please send payment to:

**Bitterroot Audubon Society**  
**PO Box 326**  
**Hamilton, MT 59840**

### 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).

### Bitterroot Audubon is on Facebook

If you use Facebook, please look for Bitterroot Audubon and “Like” us!

### Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT

New to birding? Beginner Bird Walks at the refuge sponsored by Bitterroot Audubon and Five Valleys Audubon are held the third Saturday of each month. Meet at the Refuge Visitor's Center this fall on February 17<sup>th</sup>, at 10AM for a two-hour bird walk. Bring binoculars if you have them. Contact the refuge at [\(406\) 777-5552](tel:(406)777-5552) for more information.

## Bird Shots



*Harris's Sparrow.*

*Courtesy Kate Stone*

# **Save the Date!**

*June 8 - 10, 2018*

*Red Lion Hotel, Kalispell*



Montana Audubon's 19th annual Wings Across the Big Sky bird festival is coming to Kalispell in June 2018! Our longstanding community event draws birders and wildlife enthusiasts from around the state and beyond, to celebrate Montana's birds and the landscapes they inhabit. The festival is co-sponsored by the **Flathead Audubon Society**.

Visit our website for festival updates: [mtaudubon.org](http://mtaudubon.org)

- ***Field trips to Glacier and other breathtaking areas in the Flathead region***
- ***Silent Auction: bid on a private tour to an amazing Montana destination!***
- ***Birding & conservation Presentations***
- ***Evening Banquet, Dessert Auction and More!***

BITTERROOT AUDUBON  
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### Officers

President	Becky Peters*	369-5210
Vice-Pres.	Mike Daniels*	
Secretary	John Ormiston*	363-5464
Treasurer	Jim Story*	493-9813

### Directors & Committee Chairs

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Programs	Kay Fulton*	
Website	Kate Stone*	381-1115
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\* 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



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