

Bitterroot AUDUBON



MAY 2024

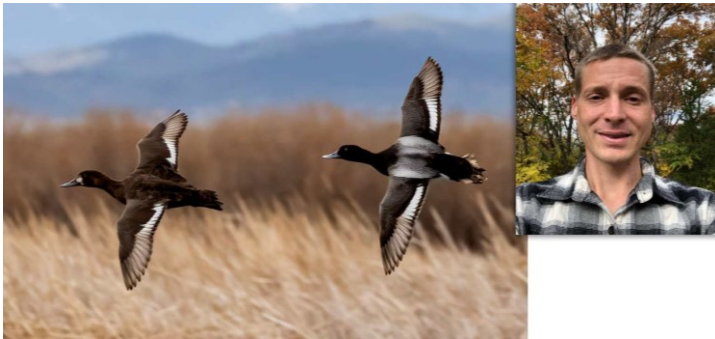
NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 38, NO. 9

Long Term Data on White-throated Dippers

By Betsy Ballard

Dr. Thomas Riecke will be the presenter for the May Bitterroot Audubon Society meeting. Long-term monitoring datasets have revealed that passerines are becoming smaller-bodied and longer-winged globally. In this talk, he'll use long-term data on White-throated Dippers color-banded near Zurich, Switzerland by Dr. Johann Hegelbach (University of Zurich) to explore the impacts of body size and wing length on survival and reproduction. Smaller-bodied, longer-winged dippers survive and reproduce at greater rates during warmer years. He'll also use these data to explore the consequences of mating strategies (i.e., monogamy v. polygyny) and age on reproductive success.



Presenter portrait credit Thomas Riecke; Lesser Scaup photo credit Bob Martinka.

Dr. Thomas Riecke's interest in birds began while growing up in Dallas, where the metropolitan area alone has over 300 species of birds. Across Texas, species counts may number twice that many.

After completing his Master's degree, Dr. Riecke left the subtropical climes of eastern Texas to start PhD research on the Yukon-Kuskokwim River Delta in Western Alaska, where he worked with a population of Brant that had been observed for decades by his advisor at the University of Nevada, Reno, Dr. James Sedinger. Dr. Sedinger started

collecting data on this Brant breeding colony in 1984; he and his colleagues have continued observations through the present. The project just celebrated its 40th field season. Unfortunately, over that course of time, the researchers have watched the Brant population decline, largely due to changing habitat conditions.

At UM, Dr. Riecke will continue to collaborate on work with the Brant population in the Yukon delta, and is now also applying techniques used in his work in Texas, Alaska and the Swiss Alps, to systems here in Montana, where he and his students have started a research project on Lesser Scaup in the Centennial Valley. More generally, Dr. Riecke will serve as an invaluable resource for Montana's wildlife ecology community.

Please join Dr. Riecke and members and friends of Bitterroot Audubon to learn more about white-throated dippers adaptations and the impacts of body size and wing length on survival and reproduction. This Bitterroot Audubon program will take place at our meeting, **which will be held at 7PM on Monday, May 20th in the Education Building adjacent to the Slack Barn at Teller Wildlife Refuge at 1180 Chaffin Lane in Corvallis.**



Credit of Thomas Riecke
White-throated Dipper.

Letter from the President

By Micki Long, BAS President

This is a great time of year for birders! Early migrants are showing up, and there have been and will be more “birdy” events, sponsored both by BAS and by other organizations. I have had some great experiences already this spring. Two of these experiences complicate my assertion that birding is like quiet meditation for me. The first was dramatic, traumatic, and exciting: I was at a raptor count at MPG Ranch. We were on a low, small bluff above the flood plain and Bitterroot River. A large white bird flew down to the river but was out of sight from our observation spot. So I walked down to the end of the bluff with a couple others, and we had a great view of the river and the bird, which was a Snow Goose. Suddenly, a Bald Eagle swooped in; during the ensuing few minutes, we watched the goose try hard to evade the eagle. Back and forth, from bank to bank, flew the pursued and the pursuer. The eagle was moving like the Sharp-shinned Hawks I see chasing birds in my yard. And, in the end, the eagle captured the goose. I hope there were little eaglets in a nearby nest, waiting for lunch.

The chase scene along the river ended in death for one bird. The other riveting adventure took place high in a canyon, as friends and I were monitoring Peregrines for Bitterroot Audubon’s Raptor Guardians/Peregrine Watch program, which is tied to the Montana Peregrine Institute. Instead of watching a death scene, we were treated to a courtship display. Female and male Peregrine Falcons circled above the canyon and above our own perch at the edge of a rocky outcrop. The male suddenly dived at astonishing speed, flew up very close to us, and then dived again. Soon, we hope, the pair will be incubating eggs on a nesting ledge nearby. We will be back in the summer, looking for fledglings. New life! At times I struggle a little with the fact that death is as much a part of nature as are those courting peregrines; tiny goslings swimming with their parents; and juveniles of various species chasing mom or dad around, begging to be fed. I know, Lord Tennyson: “Nature, red in tooth and claw.” But, as evidenced by all the new life emerging each spring and summer, she is also fruitful and nurturing.

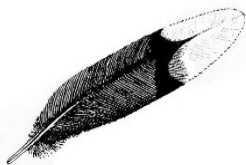


Photo credit Micki Long

Fellow Peregrine Monitors Joe Hinnebusch and Sophie Osborn.

And now for an eBird tool that can help you find migrants this spring! Go to eBird.org and click the “Explore” button. Then, scroll down past the “Explore Species” and “Explore Regions” boxes to “More Ways to Explore.” Click on “Bar Charts.” I was curious about when I can expect to see different warblers here in the valley, so I followed the simple directions, choosing Montana and then Ravalli County. I scrolled down to the warblers and voilà!



This bar chart, along with an article from Cornell Lab of Ornithology titled “5 Tips for Spring Warbler Watching,” should help me find some of the elusive birds in the next few months.

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/5-tips-for-spring-warbler-watching/#>

This very short poem by Naomi Shihab Nye seems appropriate when thinking about warblers:

Lying While Birding

Yes Yes
I see it
so they won't keep telling you
where it is

And finally, some announcements, recommendations, and reminders. First, save the date for another Poets in the 'Root event. If you were at the first one, in February, you know that this approach to poetry and natural history is fun and interesting. The summer version is on June 15th, from 1-3, at O'Hara Common's outdoor space. You'll see a flyer elsewhere in this newsletter.

Three new books about birds have caught my eye lately: *Backyard Bird Chronicles*, by Amy Tan; *The Birds That Audubon Missed: Discovery and Desire in the American Wilderness*, by Kenn Kaufman; and *Feather Trails*, by our own local author Sophie Osburn.

Our new name will be announced at the May program meeting (see elsewhere in newsletter for program info). We'll send an email after the meeting, so check your email if you cannot attend the meeting. And we hope to have some hats, caps, and swag adorned with the new name at the O'Hara Commons Farmers Market, 4-6 pm on Wednesdays. We will be there every other Wednesday, starting June 12.

This is my longest letter, by far! I apologize. There won't be another until September, so you'll get a break! I hope to see you soon.

SAVE THE DATE

wings across the big sky MONTANA AUDUBON

MAY 31 -
JUNE 2, 2024

Carroll College,
Helena MT

Bald Eagle | Photo by Janice Miller,
Last Chance Audubon

Photo credit Janice Miller, Last Chance Audubon

Calendar of Events

Monthly: Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, 3rd Saturday of each month, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.

May 7-May 31:

Citizen Science opportunity sponsored by Montana Audubon: Long-billed Curlew surveys. See newsletter article for details.

May 20: Audubon Meeting/Program; Long Term Data on White-throated Dippers, By Dr. Thomas Riecke. Teller Wildlife Refuge Slack Barn, 1180 Chaffin Ln, Corvallis, MT, 7PM.

May 31-Jun 2:

Wings Across the Big Sky birding festival, Carroll College, Helena, MT. See newsletter articles from Montana Audubon as details and announcements are shared. The registration period is open.

Jun 1: Summer Field Trip at Big Creek Ranch, 8AM. See newsletter article for details.

Jun 9: Raptor Day at the Mansion, Daly Mansion, Hamilton, MT, 1-4PM. See flyer in newsletter for details.

Jun 15: "Poets in the 'Root," O'Hara Commons, 111 S. 4th Street, Hamilton, MT at 1-3PM, See flyer in newsletter for details.

Summer Field Trip at Big Creek Ranch: June 1, 2024 at 8AM

By Jill Davies

The Big Creek Ranch, owned by the Langton family for seven generations, has a wonderful variety of year round and migratory birds. Please join Jill Davies and Gretchen Langton for a walk around the ranch on Saturday, June 1, 2024 at 8AM. We ask folks to meet at 2977 Mittower Rd West to begin. Mittower is a county road just north of the Big Creek Bridge, off Highway 93, 3 miles north of Victor. Mittower Road goes West and then North. Please stay West. When the Big Creek Ranch sign comes into view, 2977 Mittower is on the right. Pull in and park on either side of the driveway. We will begin near the house with the American Goldfinches, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Nuthatches (three varieties), Chickadees and Great Horned Owls. We can then walk through the towering Ponderosa Pines along Big Creek where the Great Blue Herons and the Belted Kingfishers feast, and the Clark's Nutcrackers, Stellar Jay's and Northern Flickers holler at each other. Then we'll

HELP WANTED: Support Wild Skies Raptor Center

I am looking for volunteers to help design & make the 2'x3' information posters that we plan to have at the Wild Skies event at the Daly Mansion on June 9th. If you are interested in helping, please contact me, Estelle Shuttleworth at: je@shuttleworthje.com

make our way out into the meadows and hopefully catch site of our resident Great Grey Owls and American Kestrels hunting voles. The Killdeer will no doubt be showing us their broken wings and the fat American Robins and proud Western Meadowlarks will make lovely background music. And we may hear the Sandhill Cranes in the field next door and the geese overhead making their way to the refuge. We often have Bald Eagles peering down into the chicken yard wondering at the odds. Usually, a Murder of Crows isn't too far off and we can't avoid the European Starlings or the Turkey Vultures. We feel lucky to live in a place with such bird bounty and we are excited to share this experience with the BAS folks.



*Photo credit Elise Chavez
Great Grey Owl at Big Creek Ranch with St. Mary's Peak in the background.*

Wings Across the Big Sky Festival—Field Trip Highlight—Lake Helena WMA Canoe/Kayak

This field trip will consist of a relatively short walk that will encounter shrub passerines – including Savannah Sparrow - and associated species. We will then embark in canoes and/or kayaks for several hours enjoying marshland, cattail, and sandbar/mudflat habitats.

There will be a wide variety of waterfowl, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, Sora, Virginia Rail, White-faced Ibis, gulls and terns, possibly including

Black Terns and Bonaparte's Gull. We will also likely encounter pelicans, swallows, Bald Eagle, Wilson's Snipe, and phalaropes. During the first week of June (2022 & 2023), White-rumped Sandpiper, commonly a late migrant, was documented here.



Participants are encouraged to bring their own canoes/kayaks and PFDs, but local chapter members will endeavor to provide help with these if needed.

This trip is offered on both Saturday and Sunday- but space is limited, so register today!

Find more festival info, and register online, on our website: <https://mtaudubon.org/events/wings/>



Long-billed Curlew Surveys Are Back!

The warm and sunny days of Spring are fast approaching, and with that comes the familiar “cur-lee-ee” of the Long-Billed Curlew, an icon of America's prairies. The Long-Billed Curlew depends on Montana's grasslands for breeding, and continues to decline across its range due to loss of this habitat to development of agriculture and infrastructure. With this decline, more research is needed to assess the health and conservation needs of the population, so we need your help surveying these charismatic shorebirds in three locations: Mission Valley, Helena Valley, and Blackfoot Valley! Two survey windows will be available for citizen scientists to participate in this unique effort: **April 8th - May 7th**, and **May 8th - May 31st**.

Interested in participating? Email Gwynne at gwynne@mtaudubon.org and visit our [citizen](#)

[science website](#) for more information!



Photo credit Skip Horner

A well camouflaged Great Grey Owl.

BITTERROOT AUDUBON, O'HARA COMMONS AND SUSTAINABILITY CENTER,
BLUE HERON NATURE TOURS, & MONTANA NATURAL HISTORY CENTER'S
MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM PRESENT

POETS IN THE 'ROOT



June 15, 1:00-3:00

At O'Hara Commons, 111 S. 4th, Hamilton

Free and Open to the Public

Nature in nearly all manifestations has inspired poets since there were poets! And at least since the Roman poet Horace wrote *Ars Poetica* or *The Art of Poetry* in 19 BC, literature, including poetry, has sought to both instruct and delight.

Poets in the 'Root combines these two aims in an uncommon but simple way. One person reads a poem or part of a poem that uses an element of nature to convey its message. Then, the same or another person gives an explanation (5 minutes max) of some aspect of that nature element. The explanation focuses on nature interpretation, not literary interpretation. Listeners get a bit of poetry and a bit of natural history.

Anyone can volunteer to read a poem and/or offer nature interpretation. Most will read poems by others, but if you're a poet, we'd love to hear your own work. This is a fun way for Master Naturalists to earn credit towards certification.

We'll have snacks, iced tea, and wine. Please bring your own chair.

Want to volunteer? Have questions? Contact Micki Long at mickilong@gmail.com

Art by Deb Goslin

Raptor Day at the Mansion



WILD SKIES RAPTOR CENTER PRESENTATION and FUNDRAISER

Meet some of our Ambassador Birds!

***Raptor Rehabilitation -
from Rescue to Release***

JUNE 9, 2024 Time: 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Daly Mansion Lawns, 251 Eastside Hwy, Hamilton, MT

**Free event , but donations welcomed
*Bring your own water bottles and chairs***

Wild Skies
RAPTOR CENTER 



BITTERROOT AUDUBON
PO BOX 326
HAMILTON MT 59840-0326

Officers

President Micki Long* mickilong@gmail.com
Vice-Pres. Mike Daniels*
Secretary Pam Murphy*
Treasurer Jim Story*

Directors & Committee Chairs

IBA Program & Conservation Programs
Micki Long*

Website Kate Stone*
Instagram Caity Johnson*
Education Betsy Ballard*
Nwsltr. Ed. & Distribution Sara Ashline baseditors@gmail.com
Hospitality Roberta McElroy
Membership Becky Miller*
Publicity Dave Lockman 406-381-7679
Rep. to MT
Audubon Mike Daniels*
Scholarship Skip Horner* 406-642-6840
Aud. Adv. Betsy Ballard*
Field Trips Open role
At large John Ormiston*

* Board Member

EMAIL: contactus@bitterrootaudubon.org

WEBSITE: www.BitterrootAudubon.org

INSTAGRAM: @bitterroot_audubon
and on Facebook!

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



Renew or Sign up
for your
National Audubon Membership at
Audubon.org