

BITTERROOT BIRD ALLIANCE



OCTOBER 2024

NEWSLETTER

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Photo by Micki Long

Clark's Nutcracker

October Program: Restoring Whitebark Pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) Ecosystems in the Face of Climate Change

By Dr. Robert E. Keane



Robert E. Keane is a Research Ecologist Emeritus with the USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station at the Missoula Fire Sciences Laboratory since 1994. His most recent research includes 1) Developing ecological computer simulation models for the exploring landscape, fire, and climate dynamics, 2) Conducting basic research

in wildland fuel science, and 3) Investigating the ecology and restoration of Whitebark Pine. He received his B.S. degree in forest engineering from the University of Maine, Orono; his M.S. degree in forest ecology from the University of Montana, Missoula; and his Ph.D. degree in forest ecology from the University of Idaho, Moscow.



Photo by Micki Long

Board member Pam Murphy looking at the needles of a Whitebark Pine, which has 5 needles to a bundle.

Abstract: The combined effects of mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) outbreaks, fire exclusion policies, and the exotic disease white pine blister rust (caused by the pathogen *Cronartium ribicola*) have caused a severe decline in high elevation Whitebark Pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) forests across western North America. Predicted changes in climate may exacerbate this decline by (1) accelerating succession to more shade tolerant

conifers, (2) creating environments unsuitable for whitebark pine, (3) increasing the frequency and severity of mountain pine beetle outbreaks and wildland fire events, and (4) facilitating spread of blister rust. In this presentation, we will discuss the ecology of this valuable ecosystem to provide a context for restoration. We'll look at the unique relationship of the pine with an amazing bird species, and its role of providing food for wildlife. We will also discuss the factors that are contributing to Whitebark Pine's decline. Last, we will cover some important ways that we can restore this valuable species to the high mountain ecosystems.

Please join Dr. Keane and members and friends of Bitterroot Audubon to learn more about Whitebark Pine Ecosystems and Climate Change. This Bitterroot Audubon program will take place at our meeting, **which will be held at 7PM on Monday, October 21st in the Education Building adjacent to the Slack Barn at Teller Wildlife Refuge at 1180 Chaffin Lane in Corvallis.**

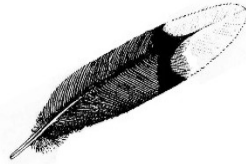
Letter from the President

By Micki Long, BAS President

Happy October! October is my favorite month, as autumn really starts to spread across the landscape. I love seeing Steller's Jays standing out against a red or orange background. I also love the return of Accipiters to the trees surrounding my yard. I rarely get Cooper's Hawks, but Sharp-shinned Hawks are nearly daily visitors until spring, when their visits are more sporadic. Last fall and winter I was lucky enough to have American Goshawks, adult and juvenile. I also get to share in my president's letter, as I do every fall, two of my favorite autumn poems. I share every year because something about them really moves me. These two brief poems are by Izumi Shikibu (974? - 1034?), from the ancient court of Japan:

What color is
this blowing autumn wind,
that it can stain
my body
with its touch?

As I dig for wild orchids
in the autumn fields,
it is the deeply-bedded root
that I desire,
not the flower.



Maybe these poems inspire you to search out (or write) poems for our 3rd Poets in the 'Root event on October 26. See the flyer elsewhere in this newsletter—the event is great fun, and you'll learn something too. If you are someone who bemoans that passing of summer and the loss of many birds to migration, maybe Audubon's advice can help. They offer five ways to tap into the joy and peace of nature, regardless of the season:

<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/five-ways-connect-nature-and-boost-your-mood-no-matter-your-schedule> And surely you will enjoy some pumpkin pie or bread before too long!



Photo by Micki Long

Steller's Jay.

I will also confess that I love October because my birthday is towards the end of the month, and who doesn't love their birthday month? My mother usually visits for my birthday, and she will be with me at our October presentation, which just happens to be about Whitebark Pine and its relationship to the Clark's Nutcracker (my favorite species, as you know). There is an article elsewhere in this newsletter about the presentation; I hope to see you there, and I may bring a birthday cake to share!

As the weather turns cooler and you spend a bit more time indoors, think about taking one of Cornell Lab of Ornithology's online classes. I've taken a few in the past, and their offering now are pretty tempting: <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org> A course on owls is even on sale this month: <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/product/the-wonderful-world-of-owls/>

You may have heard the October 3rd NPR story about the American Ornithological Society's decision, last year, to rename any birds named after humans rather than arguing over each individual name. The AOS's decision was covered in a previous newsletter. The

NPR story is about the controversy the decision has created. The NPR story includes a link to the six bird names chosen for a pilot project (sorry for the super long URL): https://www.npr.org/2024/10/03/nx-s1-5137123/birders-argue-plan-change-birds-named-people?utm_term=nprnews&utm_campaign=npr&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social

I hope to see you all at Teller on the 21st. Looking ahead, you may want to read books by two authors who will be presenting for us. First, pick up Sophie A.H. Osborn's *Feather Trails*; Sophie is presenting at our November 18th meeting. Second, get a copy of Diane K. Boyd's *A Woman Among Wolves*; I picked one up at Chapter One just this morning. Diane is presenting at our March meeting. I've already finished Sophie's book and am excited to start on Diane's.

Happy reading and happy birding!

Black Swifts in the Bitterroot Valley

By Will McDowell

Black Swifts are the largest and least common swift species in North America. They breed in disjunctive, mostly remote mountain regions of the western US and Canada, including Colorado, California, Washington, Idaho, and northwestern Montana, as well as a small area of western Mexico, and other scattered mountain regions around the Caribbean. In western Canada, they are now listed as "endangered," with documented declines of 50 percent since 1973.

In Montana, most of the known nesting areas are in Glacier National Park, where these swifts nest behind waterfalls. The Black Swift also has been documented breeding in Lincoln, Missoula, Flathead, and Lake counties, as well as in Ravalli County canyons west of Victor. In all these places, they are difficult to see, and an encounter with a Black Swift is unpredictable, and usually a red letter day for birders.

In 2023, two Missoula birders noted Black Swifts foraging over the marshes at the headquarters of Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge in the late evening (7:30pm to 9pm) on July 25, 26 and 28. In 2024 small groups of Black Swifts (1-5) were seen on the evening of July 25, and then six different evenings from August 3 to August 14, often for prolonged periods of time (up to 45 minutes with swifts in view) and often low enough for great views. According to *Birds of Montana* by Jeff Marks, this corresponds to the period in which Black Swifts are feeding their

AWESOME HIGHWAY CLEANUP

By Skip Horner

Our semi-annual highway cleanup will take place on Tuesday, October 22nd, at 4PM. We'll meet and park on the west side of Bell Crossing and clean miles 60 to 62 north and south from there. Bitterroot Audubon's name is on those big highway signs, even though we're Bitterroot Bird Alliance now, so come out and help us and the highway look good. Bring your own gloves. We'll supply high-visibility vests and stout plastic bags.

Questions? Call Skip at 406-369-5367.

young. Interestingly Black Swifts are known for gathering flying insect food all day, then feeding their young once daily when they arrive at their nest sites near dark—usually the only time they are seen at their nests after incubation is over.

The Black Swifts seen at Refuge headquarters this summer were usually feeding with swallows, nighthawks, and sometimes Vaux's Swifts, all swooping over the marshes and ponds north and south of the headquarters. Significant hatches of mayflies and other insects were noted by several observers. The eBird data also suggests that Black Swifts were seen in the same late evening time frame in late July and early August in 2016, 2019, 2021. Bitterroot birders may be able to gather better information about the regularity of this "Black Swift feeding frenzy" in future summers. But right now, these swifts are already far to the south, heading towards remote winter range in the skies over the western Amazon, where they winter on the wing before reappearing in western Montana in mid- to late May.



*Photo by Alex Kearney
Black Swift at Lee Metcalf Refuge.*

Photo Recap: Bitterroot Bird Alliance at Apple Days

By Kate Stone



Photo by Kate Stone

Pollinator advocates Becky and Bill Peters spread wisdom and pollinator love to passersby!



Photo by Kate Stone

Young explorers Quinn and Evan Curtis try to guess the birds in the bags based on their song.



Photo by the longer-armed Kate Stone

Becky has more fun than Kate in the BBA booth at Apple Days!

Calendar of Events

- Monthly:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, 3rd Saturday of each month, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.
- Oct 21:** BBA Meeting/Program; Restoring Whitebark Pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) Ecosystems in the Face of Climate Change, By Dr. Robert E. Keane. Teller Wildlife Refuge Slack Barn, 1180 Chaffin Ln, Corvallis, MT, 7PM., 7PM.
- Oct 22:** Highway Clean-up, 4PM, see announcement in this newsletter for details.
- Oct 26:** "Poets in the 'Root," Explore the Arts, 701 Main Street, Hamilton, MT at 1-3PM, See flyer in newsletter for details.
- Oct 26:** Willow Planting at Lee Metcalf NWR. See flyer in newsletter for details.
- Nov 18:** BBA Meeting/Program; details TBA, 7PM.

Montana Audubon 2024 Citizen Science Report Now Available

By Lauren Smith

Thank you to everyone who volunteered to help with Montana Audubon's Citizen Science survey projects this year- you make this work possible!

This year, 53 volunteers took part in surveys for three different projects: the pilot year of Western & Eastern Screech-owl surveys; Long-billed Curlew surveys; and Chimney Swift surveys. Learn more about each project in Montana Audubon's 2024 Citizen Science overview report, which is now available on Montana Audubon's website:

<https://mtaudubon.org/2024-citizen-science-report/>.

Questions? Email Gwynne at gwynne@mtaudubon.org.

Please Excuse Our Mess! We are working to update all of our print and online materials to BITTERROOT BIRD ALLIANCE! And soon we will have a new logo!





Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Photo by Micki Long



POETS IN THE 'ROOT

OCTOBER 26 1:00 - 3:00

This is a free event and refreshments will be served

Nature in nearly all its 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 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 person or another person gives an explanation (5 min 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 poetry or offer nature interpretation. Most will read poems by others, but if you're a poet, we'd love to hear your own work.

Master Naturalists can earn credit towards their certification!

If you would like to read please register <https://www.explorethearts.art/teen-adult/poets>

Sponsored by Bitterroot Bird Alliance, Blue Heron Nature Tour,
the Natural History Museum and proudly hosted by



explore
the **ARTS**

701 Main Hamilton

Volunteers Needed!

October 5th and 26th
Stevensville, MT



Sign up [here!](#)

Spaces are limited – sign up early!

Bitterroot Trout Unlimited is coordinating two volunteer events this fall on Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge, as part of a major project to improve the Bitterroot fishery!

Saturday October 5th willow cutting collection: Help us collect willow cuttings from a site on the Refuge. Cuttings will be planted into newly constructed streambanks, providing stability and shade.

Saturday October 26th Planting: We need help getting 550 trees and shrubs in the ground before snow flies!

Your work will help improve riparian habitat for fish, songbirds and other wildlife along 1/2 mile of creek!



2024 Citizen Science Report

Overview

- This year, Montana Audubon had 53 volunteers across 3 citizen science projects, resulting in 66 surveys conducted across Montana.
- We hosted trainings for Long-billed Curlew and screech-owl surveys, and we were able to host an in-person Chimney Swift training in Havre in collaboration with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. We were also able to host an in-person screech-owl training and survey demonstration as a Master Naturalist course at Montana Wild this past spring with the Montana Discovery Foundation.

2024 Citizen Science projects



Western and Eastern Screech-owl Surveys

These nocturnal cavity-nesting owls depend on old growth trees in riparian areas. This year, we started a pilot project to survey for these birds throughout the state to assess their conservation needs.



Long-billed Curlew Surveys

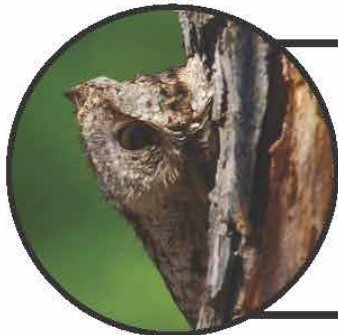
For 10 years, we've been working with many partners to learn more about Long-billed Curlews to protect the grasslands and agricultural lands they need for breeding.



Chimney Swift Surveys

We partnered with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks throughout eastern Montana to discover where Chimney Swifts are active and breeding, often in towns and near buildings with large chimneys.

Eastern Screechowl. Photo by Tyler Pockette



**We would like to extend a sincere
THANK YOU
to all of our wonderful volunteers,
partners, and to the L.E.A.W Family Foundation, who
made these surveys possible!**

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Chapter Only Membership

The Bitterroot Bird Alliance 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:

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NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION



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