



# SacajaweaAudubonNews

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON BUILDS ON AN INTEREST IN BIRDS TO PROMOTE THE CONSERVATION OF OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT THROUGH ENJOYMENT, EDUCATION AND ACTION.

January 2012

## Calendar at a Glance

Jan 9th	January SAS Meeting
	Bird Sightings to John Parker
Feb 7th	Public Comment due to BLM on Greater Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy
June 8th-10th	Wings Across the Sky Bird Festival

## BIRDING THE NET INSPIRES MILLIONS

Pelicans flying across computer screens and "spokesbirds" giving clues on Twitter enticed over 9,500 people to play *Birding the Net*, competing for the grand prize of a cruise for two to the Galapagos Islands courtesy of Lindblad Expeditions. Audubon's innovative social media campaign was glimpsed by an even larger audience, earning 91 million web site impressions. Get your exclusive *Birding the Net* screensaver and capture the fun and beauty of the game's virtual birds. You can download the screensaver at: <http://www.audubon.org/birdingthenetscreensaver>.

## Bird Conservation and Monitoring Efforts in Montana

Monday January 9th, 2012 at 7:00 p.m.  
Hope Lutheran Church  
2152 W. Graf Street (off of South 19th) in Bozeman

Join Sacajawea Audubon Society for our first presentation of 2012. For this January program we will be welcoming Steve Hoffman, the Executive Director of Montana Audubon since 2006. This program will feature the latest information on priority bird and bird habitat conservation efforts in Montana. Steve will describe recent research findings and new program initiatives conducted by Montana Audubon and its many partners. Grassland, wetland/riparian species and habitats, as well as the Important Bird Area Program will be emphasized. Species specific updates for the Long-Billed Curlew, Greater Sage Grouse, Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, and various waterbirds of special concern will be reviewed.

Steve Hoffman has dedicated his entire 30-year career to wildlife conservation. He began as a wildlife biologist for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in southern Arizona and later worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Albuquerque as an endangered species specialist. After 10 years of government service, Steve launched Hawkwatch International, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to research and conservation of hawks, eagles, and other birds of prey. In 2004 Steve moved to Bozeman to serve as Executive Director of Predator Conservation Alliance. Steve has authored more than 30 scientific papers on raptor biology and conservation, endangered species management, and coyote ecology and has given hundreds of presentations on various wildlife conservation and bird identification topics to varied audiences across the U. S.

## Happy New Year! From the SAS President!

On June 20, 1782, the Continental Congress selected the Bald Eagle as the symbol of the United States. The occasion for this decision was the design of the new nation's Great Seal, a pictorial sign to seal and authenticate international documents. The seal was needed for the peace treaty then under negotiation with Great Britain.

A couple years later Benjamin Franklin privately lamented the adoption of the Bald Eagle. He accused the Bald Eagle of "bad moral Character" and laziness because the bird took its fish from hawks that did the work--the fishing. According to Franklin, the Bald Eagle is "like those among Men who live by Sharping & Robbing," and he is "a rank Coward," fleeing from even the little kingbird.

Franklin's choice for the nation's symbol was the wild turkey, "a true original Native of America." "He is besides, though a little vain & silly, a Bird of Courage," Franklin added.

As individuals, we may be like Franklin's turkey, a little vain and silly, but as members of Audubon we are a force of courage in protecting birds and bird habitat. Thank you for being part of our efforts.

Happy New Year!

*Anne Millbrooke*

President  
Sacajawea Audubon Society

## Bird Notes:

During November in southwest Montana, we experience the final transition from fall to winter. This transformational phase is best exemplified with the arrival, and passage, of several species of birds from the far north. On November 14<sup>th</sup> I saw my first large flock of **Bohemian Waxwings**, along Sourdough Road. In the following two days several people in Livingston were thrilled by the huge movement of **Snow Geese** overhead, especially during the night of November 15-16.

Throughout November, Mitch Hurt had been noting the movement of Sandhill Cranes through Paradise Valley. On the very late date of November 26<sup>th</sup>, Mitch saw **3 Sandhill Cranes** lingering in a pasture in the valley.

Lou Ann Harris could hardly believe it when a **Peregrine Falcon** flew over her yard, northwest of Bozeman on November 18<sup>th</sup>.

While on the north side of the MSU campus, Andrew Guttenberg came across a mixed flock of birds that included seven species. Among the flock were **4 Golden-crowned Kinglets** and a single **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**.

In last month's article I wrote about an extremely late **Wilson's Warbler**, which was seen near Broadway in Bozeman. Well, talk about serendipity, as on November 15<sup>th</sup> Jackie Wilson saw a Wilson's Warbler in her yard on Plum Street. Then on December 1<sup>st</sup>, while scouting

around northwest of the Village Downtown, Paulette Epple found the Wilson's Warbler yet again. Previously the late date for this species of warbler in Montana was November 12<sup>th</sup>. I'm assuming that all of these sightings are of the same bird, as they all were within a quarter mile of each other. Even with the close proximity of these sightings, what are the chances that three people would independently discover this bird?

During the fourth week of November there was a small outbreak of **White-throated Sparrows** south of Bozeman. On November 19<sup>th</sup>, Byron Butler had a White-throated Sparrow coming to his feeder, near Leverich Canyon. Six days later we had 2 White-throated Sparrows in our backyard, near the mouth of Hyalite Canyon.

On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, Mary Keck had a **Spotted Towhee** scratching around under her feeder in north Bozeman. Even though this towhee seemed quite tame, it only stayed for the day. In Bozeman, there have only been two instances of Spotted Towhees frequenting a feeder over the course of the winter in the last forty years. Keep watching those feeders!

-John Parker

Thank you to all our sharp-eyed birders for reporting your great sightings. Please report your Bird Sightings by the 9<sup>th</sup> of the month to John Parker at 586-5863 or [conundrum@imt.net](mailto:conundrum@imt.net)

## 2012 Wings Across the Big Sky

### Featuring Keynote Speaker Peter Sherrington

It's not too early to begin planning for your June vacation. During winter, when birds are sparse, it's easy to dream of long summer days and abundant birds. Where you will find plenty is in beautiful Flathead Valley. Come join us for **Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, this year co-hosted by Flathead Audubon Society, June 8-10 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Kalispell.**

However, while birders and outdoor enthusiasts plan for summer, raptor experts were keeping track of spectacular fall migrations, and are now crunching the numbers from those counts. **Peter Sherrington is one of those experts, and we're thrilled to have him as our keynote speaker this year!** Peter is a geologist/paleontologist who in 1992 gave up a career in the oil industry to study Golden Eagle migration in Alberta's Rocky Mountains. He is the founder and Research Director of the Rocky Mountain Eagle Research Foundation and currently lives in the hamlet of Beaver Mines, Alberta. After Saturday morning's field trips you will want to join us for Peter's lunchtime keynote, "Twenty Years of Golden Eagle Migration Studies in the Alberta Rockies: the Big Picture Begins to Emerge."

In addition to our keynote topic, we are keeping with our theme, "Birding and Conservation: The Crown of the Continent," by featuring two pre-festival workshops on Friday, June 8<sup>th</sup>. *As for field trips we have 28 planned!*—14 each on Saturday and Sunday—guided by knowledgeable birders and naturalists familiar with the species and their habitats in the Flathead Valley, Glacier National Park and the surrounding area. Stay tuned for more on these next month!

For more information please contact Montana Audubon Bird Festival Coordinator, Larissa Berry at [lberry@mtaudubon.org](mailto:lberry@mtaudubon.org) or 406-443-3949, or any Board Member of Flathead Audubon Society.

## A Snowy Glimpse...



By now, we all have our long johns and layers easily accessible, and our cupboards stocked with tea and hot cocoa. The ground and sky are often the same white haze, making the horizon almost indistinguishable at this time of year. Many animals, unlike us, use the snow as camouflage to either assist in hunting or hiding. And when we are consciously looking into that white landscape, we may even get a rare glimpse of one of the most beautiful owls in North America- the snowy owl. At the Montana Raptor Conservation Center, a snowy owl is certainly a rare patient, but so far in 2011, there have been two admitted. Typically we hear about them spending the winter in the Flathead Valley, but one of the injured came from Broadview, north of Billings, and the other south of Four Corners. These winter visitors are a treat to behold, although we would much rather see them doing their jobs in the wild than sustaining an injury. The first snowy admitted this year had been caught in a barbed wire fence. Owls typically get caught in them while

pursuing prey, and then twist in the barbs trying to escape. The damage is usually severe. The second had been hit by a car, and was emaciated from being on the ground for some time with the injury. Unfortunately, it is often human-related activities that cause raptor injuries, but that is why the Montana Raptor Conservation Center exists. Hopefully by mitigating some of these circumstances, we are able to conserve populations of birds of prey.

One benefit of seeing these incredible creatures up close is that we may better understand their unique adaptations. Their round heads look like a soft helmet. A snowy owl's feathers are very dense, and I must admit, they are incredibly soft. It is no wonder that they need special gear to keep them toasty warm, as they breed in the most northern parts of North America, in the tundra. A snowy's white feathers are accented with grey to brown barring/spotting, with females displaying the most barring and spotting. Adult males may appear almost completely white. The intense white of their heads makes their golden yellow eyes pop out even more. And these are definitely one of

the owl species that has leg warmers- feathers all the way down to the talons.

When snowy owls are in their breeding grounds up north, they have a favorite meal- the lemming. Sounds appetizing! It's a good thing that lemmings breed quickly and often, but as with many creature populations, one depends on another. When lemmings are abundant, snowy owls produce more young, and when they are scarce, there are less snowy owls. But what do they eat when they visit us for the winter? They are much more varied in their diets, and will consume small mammals and birds. And contrasting many owl species, you may see them during the day.

So while you are cozy and warm, sipping your cocoa on a wintery day, be sure to look keenly in the fields, because you may just be lucky enough to encounter an elegant snowy owl looking for lunch.

If you find an injured bird of prey, please report it quickly! MRCC is a non-profit raptor rehabilitation and education organization in Bozeman. (406) 585-1211 Find us on Facebook!

Article by Cynthia Zyzda  
Photo by Becky Kean

## BLM Announces Protection Plan for Sage Grouse

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service announced Friday the development of a new range-wide conservation strategy for the Greater Sage-Grouse affecting 47 million acres of public lands. This is an essential step in providing long-term protection for the iconic western bird, which has suffered extensive losses in recent decades, and offers conservationists a real opportunity to address the extensive habitat impacts of oil and gas drilling, wind energy development, and livestock grazing.

The proposal, which will affect BLM and Forest Service land management in portions of Colorado, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Montana,

California, Idaho, Nevada, and Oregon, is now under public review and a 60-day comment period ends on February 7, 2012. It is expected that the new plan amendments, which are being divided into eastern and western regions, will strengthen sage grouse protections to better balance conservation and industrial use.

The Federal Register notice announcing the planning effort is available online at <http://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2011/12/09/2011-31652/notice-of-intent-to-prepare-environmental-impact-statements-and-supplemental-environmental-impact>.



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**Sacajawea Audubon Society**, affiliated with the National Audubon Society, meets on the second Monday of each month, September through May.

**Sacajawea Audubon News** is sent to all Sacajawea Audubon Society members monthly September through May. Deadline is the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month preceding the month articles will appear. Please send to: **Mary Cloud Ammons, 503 Bozeman, Bozeman MT 59715** or [mcammons@gmail.com](mailto:mcammons@gmail.com).

**Change of Address:** Please notify Sally MacDonald, 222-5752 or [smacbirder@msn.com](mailto:smacbirder@msn.com) if your address changes. When you move or are away, newsletters are returned to us for an extra fee.

Find more at the **Sacajawea Audubon Society Website** at: <http://www.sacajaweaudubon.org/>

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Montana Bird Hotline: 406-721-9799 to report unusual or out-of-season birds

#### **Membership Application**

**National Audubon Society**  
 (Includes chapter membership)

- National, State and Chapter Audubon Membership
- National Audubon Magazine
- Monthly Sacajawea Audubon newsletter September through May by surface mail or E-mail
- Admission to National Audubon sanctuaries
- Support of National Audubon conservation efforts

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Mail your check and application to:

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