



## President's Comments: Christmas Bird Counts

Christmas bird counts may date from the medieval love song "The Twelve Days of Christmas." This popular English song derived from a French song about lovers during the Christmastide. A lover in the song sent daily gifts: one partridge on the first day, two turtle doves on the second, and three French hens on the third. These were game birds, food. On the fourth day the four calling birds were actually colly, black as coal — in other words, blackbirds. The fifth day brought five golden rings, ringed-necked birds, possibly the ring-necked pheasants that had been introduced from Asia. The sixth day brought six domesticated geese-a-laying, and on the seventh day seven swans swam into the song.

Began Christmas Day 1900, the Audubon tradition is to count birds for conservation purposes. Members of Audubon and the public collectively conduct a wild bird census that is used to assess the health of populations and to inform conservation decisions. Please join one of the Christmas bird counts in our area.

By the way, a favorite holiday tradition of mine comes from Finland where the holiday feast cannot begin until birds have come to enjoy treats set out for them.

Happy Holidays!

*Anne Millbrooke*

SAS President

## Bird Notes!

Here in southwestern Montana, the area's lakes and reservoirs are a great place to be during the late fall migration. As most of the songbirds have already moved further south, these bodies of water offer the opportunity to study and enjoy seeing hundreds of birds at a time.

On the October 23<sup>rd</sup> Sacajawea field trip to Ennis Lake, the participants got to see around 50 species of birds, including 15 species of waterfowl. Definitely one of the highlights was watching **Common Loons** in various stages of molt, diving and catching fish under and around the Ennis Lake bridge. In that same area we were able to closely compare **Eared and Horned Grebes** in their winter plumages. At the Meadow Lake fishing access Paulette Epple located an **American Tree Sparrow** which for many of us, was a first for the season.

At Harrison Lake on October 21<sup>st</sup>, Chris Nixon, Lou Ann Harris and I were very surprised to see **3 Cattle Egrets** on the far shore. The egrets were actively feeding on insects both on the ground and snapping them out of the air. Three days later at Harrison, Andrew Guttenberg discovered another uncommon visitor to southwestern Montana...a **Pacific Loon**.

As they were driving around the Gallatin Valley photographing raptors November 5<sup>th</sup>, Jeff Pentel and Don Bryant got some great looks and photos of a juvenile grey phase **Gyr Falcon**.

During the first week of November, Irene Wuls had a **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, casing her northwest Belgrade yard for the finches and sparrows coming to the feeder.

Gail Richardson was thrilled to see a flock of about **150 Sandhill Cranes** November 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. What a grand sight to see such a large late season flock of cranes feeding and frolicking in a stubble field several miles south of Livingston.

The week of November 8<sup>th</sup>, Lori Micken counted **25 Evening Grosbeaks** on and off her feeds outside of Livingston. Also, on November 16<sup>th</sup>, Lori officially declared winter with **10 Grey-Crowned Rosy Finches**.

On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, Mark Donahue spotted a **Nashville Warbler** in among the lilacs in his Gardiner yard. Never a very common migrant in our area, this individual warbler was especially notable for being seen on such a late date...

-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)



## News from the Montana Raptor Conservation Center

Over 2500 visitors found their way up the mountain to Bridger Bowl for the annual Raptor Fest in October where they had an opportunity to come face to face with a variety of education birds and to make the climb up the Bridgers to witness the fall migration. A flock of organizations and their volunteers met the public, answering a host of questions that ranged from what is that to how long do they live. A line up of stimulating speakers provided interesting talks for both the novice and practiced birder.

The Montana Raptor Conservation Center, one of several organizations hosting the event, came to the event with displays, photo albums of our successfully relaunched clients, a quilt with life-sized raptor silhouettes, raffle tickets, hands-on displays, and most popular of all, live education birds. Raffle ticket sales (including a season ski pass and many other notable prizes) help defray the centers operating costs. This year red Vulture hats and tee shirt sales nearly sold out, helping our cause.

MRCC's Education Birds are an annual favorite at this event. All of our education birds acted as ambassadors to birding and raptor education over the weekend. These birds, all rehabilitated to healthy lives, are not releasable. Instead they work year-round in educating the public about raptors and their roles in the environment. Because they are critical to the center's success, MRCC

would like to introduce you to these important members of our education staff:



SAMMY, a Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), weighing 3 pounds and sporting a 54 inch wingspan today, was blown out of her nest as a nestling during a severe storm near Amsterday MT in June, 1993. Abandoned and suffering from the loss of an eye in the fall, she came to MRCC. Red-tailed hawks are the most common and sidespread of hawks in North America and demonstrate many plumage variations across the country. Some Red-tailed hawks migrate away from Montana, while others remain year-round. Sammy, like all of the Education Birds, is displayed by permission of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Permit #PRT-810728).



PILGRIM, a female Turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), evokes

comments than any other of our raptors owing to her red, bald pate. With a 70 inch wing span, she had a run-in with a power line near Whitehall MT in October, 1993. Even with repairs, she could not sustain the soaring flight required of vultures in the wild, and joined the Education staff. "Pill" now cleans up carefully refrigerated wildlife contributions rather than the carrion found along

roadsides and landscapes. Since she can not migrate south to enjoy thermal-driven flight over warmer climes, she spends her winters indoors, posing in a window to catch some sun on her ray absorbing black feathers.



CHACO, a Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), weighs in at 1 and ½ pounds. Chaco was found as a fledgling outside of Great Falls in September of 2001 with a congenitally deformed left humerus which prevents him from flying. Since his species annually migrates to Argentina, Chaco found himself at MRCC rather than flocking south for the winter. He is named for the Argentine Provenca where his species concentrate for the winter.



BU, a Great-horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*), weighs in at 3 pounds and has a 48 inch wingspan. Bu,

short for the owl's genus name *Bubo*, imprinted on his human caretakers during a critically formative period in his nestling youth. He arrived at the MRCC sometime later in August of 1999. Great-horned owls have a poor sense of smell and are, therefore, able to consume skunks with little olfactory inconvenience.

### Save the Date!

Join Audubon Nebraska for the 41st Annual Rivers and Wildlife Celebration **March 17-20, 2011**, in Kearney, Nebraska. Gather with wildlife enthusiasts from around the world to celebrate the annual migration of 500,000 sandhill cranes and millions of waterfowl through central Nebraska. Celebration highlights include: sunrise and

sunset visits to crane viewing blinds along the Platte River, day-long and half-day excursions to local wetlands and lakes to view migrating waterfowl and native Nebraska wildlife, the Wild Experience Room with live animal demonstrations and nature related fun for the whole family.. For more information and to register visit: [www.nebraska.audubon.org/RWC.htm](http://www.nebraska.audubon.org/RWC.htm)



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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). Send announcements for upcoming activities to **Jennie Chaiet, jenniechaiet@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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**Mail this application and your check to  
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For direct contact: [shoffman@mtaudubon.org](mailto:shoffman@mtaudubon.org)

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

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