



# SacajaweaAudubonNews

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

September 2011

## Calendar at a Glance

- Sept 1st 97th Anniversary of the Passenger Pigeon extinction
- Sept 9th Bird Sightings to John Parker
- Sept 12th SAS September Meeting-Note new location below
- Sept 17th SAS Fall Migration Field Trip

## HEADWATERS IBA COUNTS-A SUCCESS!

This year's surveys of the Headwaters Important Bird Area were a success with 16 volunteers identifying 75 species during counts in March, April and May. Data from each count has been submitted to Montana Audubon's IBA database. Thank you to all our citizen science volunteers and we'll see you next spring!

-Annie Sisk  
Headwaters IBA Coordinator

## Resilient Habitat Campaign Targets Greater Yellowstone Ecoregion

Monday September 12, 2011 at 7:00 p.m.  
Hope Lutheran Church  
2152 W. Graf Street (off of South 19th) in Bozeman

Zack Waterman of the Sierra Club will speak on the club's Resilient Habitats Campaign for the Greater Yellowstone Ecoregion. The Resilient Habitats program is based around the idea that climate change is going to definitely affect the vitality and future health of the few wild places we have left. Given this reality, it's important that we plan for the future and manage our public lands in ways that will help the ecosystem live and survive in the warmer years ahead. For example, climate change has already fueled the die off of the whitebark pine species, which also happens to be a major food source for the grizzly bear. The industrialization of public lands is also a concern. The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, the last large nearly intact ecosystem in the nation's and the planet's northern temperate zone.

Zack has years of experience working in conservation, most recently in Texas. He also interned in the White House. He studied rhetoric at the University of North Carolina. He enjoys international travel and fly fishing. He moved to Bozeman this spring. Now an organizer for Sierra Club's Resilient Habitats Campaign for the Greater Yellowstone Ecoregion, Zack Waterman works out of Sierra Club's new office at 424 East Main Street, Suite 202B, Bozeman.

## President's Comments: Welcome to Sacajawea Audubon.



A recent trip to Cincinnati reminded me of the importance of the education and conservation work of Audubon. I visited the Passenger Pigeon Memorial, once Martha's home. Named for George Washington's wife, Martha had lived her entire life at the Cincinnati Zoo. As part of the zoo's pioneering captive breeding program, Martha was hatched there in 1885. She was a passenger pigeon, *Ectopistes migratorius*.

The passenger pigeon once numbered in the millions, "countless numbers" and "infinite multitudes" according to colonists. In 1813 John James Audubon described a flock of passenger pigeons that took three days to pass overhead: "the air was literally filled with pigeons; the light of noon-day was obscured as by an eclipse." Due to overhunting and habitat destruction, the numbers declined rapidly in the last half of the 19th century. The last confirmed sighting of a wild passenger pigeon was in 1900. The passenger pigeon went extinct on September 1, 1914, the day Martha died. She was 29 years old, and she was the last of her kind, the last of her species, the last passenger pigeon.

As members of Audubon, we are working to conserve birds as living species, not memorials.

**Again, Welcome!**

*Anne Millbrooke*

President  
Sacajawea Audubon Society

## Bird Notes

We'll be talking about this past spring and early summer for a long time. Without a doubt, the lingering snow and cool weather had an even more dramatic impact on the local bird populations. The plants leafed out and flowered anywhere from two to four weeks later than average. That certainly compressed the time available to many birds to set up territories, and successfully complete their breeding cycle. A good illustration of the delay in altitudinal movement were the **Western Tanagers** that remained at lower elevations until the first week of July (two weeks later than what is typical). Some people in Livingston and Gardiner observed as many as 25-50 tanagers in their yards at one time.

The bird of the summer had to be the **Mississippi Kite** seen by Ray and Linda Forrest, near Pine Creek in Paradise Valley. The Forrests discovered and photographed this beautiful bird on June 29<sup>th</sup>. The only other record for this species in Montana occurred nine years previously in Garfield County.

Once again, the Sourdough Nature Trail was a hot spot for finding rare and exciting birds. At the top of the list was the singing male **Northern Parula** that Lou Ann Harris found on June 10<sup>th</sup>. Amazingly, this Parula was the 17<sup>th</sup> Montana record, and the third seen within 35 miles of Bozeman during the past year. A number of people observed two fledging **Saw Whet Owls** in the woods along the trail during early June. Again this year at least one and possibly two male Rose-breasted Grosbeak were seen and heard through much of June along the Sourdough trail.

A **Northern Mockingbird** passed through Mitch Hurt's yard, 12 miles south of Livingston, on May 28<sup>th</sup>.

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, Neal Miller and Kathryn Hiestand spotted a beautiful male **Nashville Warbler**, in their yard southwest of Bozeman.

-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)



### Fall Migration Field Trip

**Saturday, September 17**  
**Meet at 7:45 am at the Museum of the Rockies. Carpool and leave at 8 am.**

September is the peak of fall migration with an amazing diversity of birds passing through Montana. This field trip will take advantage of the many birding opportunities in the Headwaters State Park and Three Forks area. The trip will last from 4-5 hours, so bring whatever refreshments or other equipment you will need.

**For more information contact the trip leader, Robin Wolcott, at 582-0070.**

### Conservationist of the Year: Steve Hoffman

A member of Sacajawea Audubon since 2004, Steve Hoffman received Montana Audubon's Conservationist of the Year Award at the annual Montana Bird Festival in Glasgow in June 2011.

Steve is a wildlife biologist with government and non-profit experience. Since 2006, he has served as executive director of Montana Audubon.

The award recognizes his effectiveness at growing Montana Audubon by adding a director of bird conservation and a director of development, establishing climate change work as a priority, facilitating the opening and staffing of the Audubon Conservation Education Center in Billings, and working with the various chapters in the state.

**Congratulations, Steve!**

### Montana Audubon Recognizes Ron Farmer

Ron Farmer received Montana Audubon's Lifetime Achievement Award at the annual Montana Bird Festival in Glasgow on June 6, 2011.

The award recognizes a volunteer who has dedicated extraordinary effort, time, and energy to Audubon. The citation mentioned Ron's "hundreds — if not thousands — of hours of volunteer time, and his decades of commitment to Audubon," including writing Sacajawea Audubon's articles of incorporation and constitution, serving as treasurer for many years, hosting the chapter's program meetings and board meetings for years, leading field trips, serving on various committees, and participating in the Board of Directors.



**Congratulations, Ron!**

## Mice and Squirrels and Voles...Oh My!

### The Raptor Food Chain

We see them soaring over fields and perched on telephone poles, keeping those hawk eyes (or eagle eyes, owl eyes, falcon eyes, etc.) peeled for prey. It is a rare and glorious occurrence for us (and the birds) when we witness a successful hunt. Just last week, we were out with a Sacajawea Audubon member, driving the rural roads around Bozeman. She was showing us some eagle, hawk and owl nests that she had discovered while checking Mountain Blue bird boxes, when we noticed a red tailed hawk sitting on a pole. The raptor stooped effortlessly off the pole, right in front of the car, across the road, and snatched a ground squirrel. We watched as he carried the lunch to the nest, where undoubtedly the female was sitting on eggs. We could hear her loud red-tailed screams as he flew towards the nest. This particular red tailed hawk made hunting look easy, but generally about one in ten attempts are victorious. For this reason, it is so important to understand a bit about the diet of a raptor, and how we can help birds of prey bring home the bacon.

Besides ground squirrels, what do raptors eat? How do they fit in to the larger picture of the ecosystem? As with most predators, it starts at the most basic plants and animals. Insects, snails, worms and slugs find their food in the debris and soil. Mice, voles, rats, rabbits and

ground squirrels eat the plants and seeds. Birds, weasels, shrews, and moles eat the insects, worms, and mice.

Raptors prey on a variety of creatures, depending on the type of raptor. At the top of the food chain, eagles and large owls rule the roost. Bald eagles eat fish, geese, ducks, small mammals and carrion, while the golden eagles prefer jackrabbits, ground squirrels, insects, birds, reptiles and carrion. Owls really have an appetite for small mammals, and because they do not have a great sense of smell, they will even prey on stinky skunks. Large hawks (the *buteos*) feed on mice, voles, insects and ground squirrels as well as game meat, while the smaller forest hawks (*accipiters*) especially like birds and mice. Falcons use their speed to kill birds, but may also eat small mammals. Northern Harriers can be seen flying or hovering close to the ground in search of mice and small critters. And the odd ducks of the raptors, osprey and vultures have their own eccentric diets. Osprey eat mainly fish, and are designed to dive into the rivers for them, use their especially curved talons and velcro-like foot pads to hook and hold on to them until they find solid ground to satisfy their sushi addiction. And last, but not least, the turkey vultures perform their duties as the clean-up crew, finishing off animals

that met their final fate from old age, illness, or motor vehicles.

As top predators, raptors are in the business of balancing out the populations of other creatures, many of which are considered pests to humans. What can humans do to help? Simply put, let birds of prey do their job. Avoid poisoning ground squirrels, mice and other small critters. Just as most of us go for the easiest food source (grocery store), so do the raptors. Birds of prey want to be successful in a hunt, without expending precious energy. To them, the poisoned ground squirrel is easy prey, and little do they know that it is deadly prey for them. The food chain really is a cause and effect cycle for all of us. And by thoughtfully considering the bigger picture we will have more opportunities to observe these incredible hunters in action, snatching up the critters that we often think of as pests.

The Montana Raptor Conservation Center is a non-profit organization focused on the rehabilitation of injured birds of prey. If you would like to help feed the birds, please consider cleaning out your freezers and donating elk, deer, antelope, and bison. Burger and spiced meats are not accepted.

*-Cynthia Zyzda*

*Montana Raptor Conservation Center*

## Harrison Reservoir Is Newest IBA

The Harrison Reservoir is now formally an Important Bird Area, the 40th IBA in Montana. The area has a diversity of species, including transient waterbirds, breeding waterfowl, and migrating shorebirds. The fall and spring migrations are when the most birds visit the reservoir. John Parker of this chapter has organized and conducted surveys of the area since 1993. According to his research:

"Over 155 species of birds have been documented in the Harrison Reservoir IBA area; they include 30 species of waterfowl, 3 species of loon, 6 species of grebe, 12 species of raptors, 29 species of shorebirds, and 12 species of gulls and terns. Of these birds, 27 of these species are of conservation priority, with at least 23 of those using the IBA area on an annual basis."

Congratulations to John on an important job well done, and **THANK YOU, JOHN!** Thanks also to everyone who participated in any of the surveys, and thanks to Amy Cilimborg of Montana Audubon for helping John prepare the nomination.

The international IBA program, administered in the United States by the National Audubon Society, identifies, monitors, and protects sites critical to the conservation of birds. Sacajawea Audubon Society monitors the Madison Valley IBA, the Missouri Headwaters IBA, and now also the Harrison Reservoir IBA.



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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).

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

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