



SacajaweaAudubonNews

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

Calendar at a Glance

April 9th	Bird Notes Due
April 14th	SAS Meeting
April 26th	Madison Valley IBA Bird Survey
May 3rd	Headwaters State Park IBA Bird Survey
May 23rd	MT Audubon Bird Festival Nominations Due
June 6th-8th	Wings Across the Big Sky Festival



Merlin Magic in Helena

Monday April 14th, 2014 at 7:00 p.m.
 Hope Lutheran Church
 2152 W. Graf Street (off of South 19th) in
 Bozeman

During the spring of 2012 and 2013, Dan Ellison watched merlin pairs nesting on the east side of Helena. His observations provided photo opportunities of nest preparation, catching and delivering prey, feeding chicks and encounters with a variety of adversaries. This program will focus on merlin behavior in the urban environment, nesting activities and protection of the nest and chicks. Dan's presentation is based on observations on 90 consecutive days in 2013 including daily notes and photos.

Dan Ellison grew up in the Bitterroot Valley, graduated from the Naval Academy and served on active duty for 26 years as a Navy pilot. After returning to Montana in 1999 and settling in Helena, he worked in state government including Chief Financial Officer at MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks. He also served on the executive committee with Montana Trout Unlimited. In 2009 Ellison was elected to the Helena City Commission. His personal time is spent fly fishing, bird watching, and photographing wildlife. He is a life member of Trout Unlimited and belongs to several other natural resource conservation organizations including Audubon, National Wildlife Federation and the Yellowstone Association.

Photo by Dan Ellison

Volunteer for IBA Bird Surveys

Madison Valley IBA – April 26th

April 26th (Saturday) we will conduct a bird survey on the Madison Valley IBA. This is an exciting time in the valley with up to 20 species of waterfowl on Ennis Lake, 52 Common Loons counted last year, large flocks of avocet and of course lots of Sandhill Crane and Long-billed Curlews around. If you can help, email Paulette at bigskyepples@msn.com or call 580-6186. We will meet at the Ennis Pharmacy Café in Ennis by 7:45 am. Come early if you would like to eat breakfast there. We should be finished by 1 pm.

Headwaters State Park IBA - May 3rd

Saturday, May 3rd we will conduct an IBA (Important Bird Area) Survey for the Headwaters State Park in Three Forks. The Missouri Headwaters has a variety of habitats that supports a wide range of bird species. Early nesters of raptors, waterfowl, and songbirds are seen and heard in May. This early season count is important to survey the breeding populations as well as catching migrants heading north.

If you can help, email Martha at marthacoll@msn.com or call 586 9478. We will meet at the Headwaters State Park entrance kiosk at 8:00 am. We will finish up around noon at the boat landing across from the limestone cliffs.



Bird Festival Coming to Bozeman

Montana's largest gathering of bird enthusiasts is coming to Bozeman this June! The Wings Across the Big Sky Festival offers exciting field trips in and around the Gallatin Valley, plus cutting edge research, conservation news, and fun social events. The festival, sponsored by Montana Audubon and Bozeman's own Sacajawea Audubon Society, has programs to interest beginning birders and bird lovers, as well as those actively engaged in birding. Everyone is welcome!

The keynote speaker, John Marzluff, will discuss his research on the communication and social organization of crows, including the idea that human and crow cultures have co-evolved. Marzluff is a Professor of Wildlife Science at the University of Washington, and his latest book, *Gifts of the Crow: How Perception, Emotion and Thought Allow Smart Birds to Behave Like Humans* (co-authored with Tony Angell) explores how their large

brain, huge for its body size, allows crows to think, plan, form lasting relationships and—behave like humans. His research on crows was used in the documentary "A Murder of Crows," and his research on ravens was featured in PBS's Nature program "Ravens!"

The Bird Festival kicks off Friday evening with hors d'oeuvres and an evening program starting at 4:30. Saturday and Sunday are filled with field trips, guided by experts to local birding hot spots. There are 39 field trips to choose from over the two days, ranging from a family bird walk at Cherry River Fishing Access to tours of local hot spots like Headwaters State Park, a Sweet Grass county prairie birds tour, and a tour of Yellowstone's Northern Range (often called "America's Serengeti").

Saturday field trips return by noon in time for the Saturday afternoon presentations on birds and their habitats, including Montana's Osprey and Toxins, Sage-Grouse Conservation, Bird Migration in the Middle East, A New 'Field Guide to Birds in a Changing Climate,' Bridger Raptors, and Birds, Beetles, and Burns. John Marzluff will give the keynote address, *Gifts of the Crow*, on Saturday afternoon.

There is an exciting raffle for a chance to win a Texas Coast Birding Extravaganza trip valued at over \$4,000. It includes two full days of birding with local experts, three days of luxury accommodations near downtown Houston, and airfare!

You won't want to miss the banquet on Saturday night. There will be a fun Silent Auction, an unforgettable Dessert Auction, and awards for Conservationist of the Year, Citizen Scientist of the Year, Educator of the Year, and a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Festival headquarters and lodging are at the Best Western Plus GranTree Inn, Bozeman. Rooms are \$99 per night and can be reserved by calling 406-587-5261.

Be sure to register early and sign up for field trips as these popular tours fill quickly. For more information, contact Cathy Erickson, festival coordinator at 406-443-3949.

Reminder! Nominations for *Wings Across the Big Sky* due in May!

Each year Montana Audubon recognizes individuals who work for the conservation and protection of birds and other wildlife by presenting **Awards** at the Saturday evening banquet. We are currently seeking nominations in the following categories: Lifetime Achievement Award, Educator of the Year, Conservationist of the Year, Citizen Scientist of the Year, and Special Achievement Award. To make a nomination, download a nomination form from www.mtaudubon.org/about/awards.html. Nominations are due at the office by May 23, 2014. Mail completed forms to *Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena MT 59624*.



Spring Arrivals!



Springtime has arrived in the avian world. The species drought is over! Already bluebirds are being seen, gulls are returning, and a few Sandhill Cranes have shown up. It's time to get out there and start birding in earnest!

With that in mind I've compiled a list of the returning species and their earliest dates of arrival based entirely upon Madison/Gallatin County eBird records. Anyone who can better the existing record in 2014 (limited to [this](#) list of birds in Madison and Gallatin Counties only) **AND** enter it into eBird* will be a "winner". We will print a list of the "winners" in our newsletter and on the website, and give special recognition to those individuals at our meeting. What could be better than recognition, fame, and notoriety? So I want you all to get off of that sofa and get out there and start looking at what's in your yard, down the street, across town or at Ennis Lake.

*If you are not familiar with eBird, it's an online database for bird sightings entry that is VERY user friendly. It provides an opportunity to record the birds you see, keep track of your bird lists, explore dynamic maps and graphs, share your sightings and join the eBird community while you contribute to science and conservation. If I can do it, so can you! Just go to their website, create an account and voila you're an eBirder! The instructions are pretty simple but be sure to record accurate information regarding date, time and location of your sightings. Just go to <http://ebird.org/> to get started.

Birds to Watch for in April

April arrivals (and departures) in Madison and Gallatin Counties

Based solely on current eBird data.

Common Loon – April 1	White-crowned Sparrow – April 21
American Avocet – April 1	Franklin's Gull – April 22
Caspian Tern – April 1	White-throated Swift – April 23
Swainson's Hawk - April 4	N. Rough-winged Swallow – April 23
Say's Phoebe – April 4	Pied-billed Grebe – April 24
Greater Yellowlegs – April 9	Western Grebe – April 24
Williamson's Sapsucker – April 10	Solitary Sandpiper – April 24
Long-billed Curlew – April 11	Lesser Yellowlegs – April 24
Violet-green Swallow – April 12	Burrowing Owl – April 25
Sage Thrasher – April 12	Spotted Towhee – April 25
Yellow-rumped Warbler – April 12	Spotted Sandpiper – April 27
Yellow-headed Blackbird – April 12	Bank Swallow – April 28
Blue-winged Teal – April 13	Cliff Swallow – April 28
Black-necked Stilt – April 13	Rock Wren – April 28
Horned Grebe – April 13	Swainson' Thrush – April 28
Tundra Swan <u>departs</u> – April 15	Chipping Sparrow – April 28
Brown-headed Cowbird – April 15	Brewer's Sparrow – April 28
Red-necked Grebe – April 17	Grasshopper Sparrow – April 28
Loggerhead Shrike – April 18	Rough-legged Hawk <u>departs</u> – April 29
Sora* – April 19	Wilson's Phalarope – April 29
Pacific Wren – April 19	Common Tern – April 29
Vesper Sparrow – April 19	Gray Catbird – April 29
Barn Swallow – April 20	Calliope Hummingbird – April 30
White-faced Ibis – April 21	Lincoln's Sparrow – April 30
Willet – April 21	
Marbled Godwit – April 21	
Savannah Sparrow – April 21	

* Occasionally overwinter. New arrivals only!

Bird Notes

The first **Mountain Bluebirds** arrived very early this year. On February 27th, Tom Forwood spotted 2 Mountain Bluebirds at the Cobblestone fishing access on the Madison River, south of Three Forks. Four days later, Mary Griffith saw a single Mountain Bluebird off of Theisen Road, north of Belgrade.

On the evening of March 6th, Loreene Reid saw a flock of **Snow Geese** at one of the ponds on the Valley View Golf Course. In the Gallatin Valley it is fairly unusual to see Snow Geese during the spring migration, unlike the fall migration when large flocks can be heard flying high over the valley. Around the first of March, as Rick Sanders was driving on Cottonwood Road west of Bozeman, he saw a **Peregrine Falcon** fly overhead.

A bonus for all the participants on the March 8th raptor field trip was the single **Sandhill Crane**, heard then seen one mile east of Manhattan. That same day Martha and Hobart Collins saw a single Sandhill Crane at Headwaters State Park. Locally, this is one of the earliest arrival dates for returning cranes. The same day that Tom Forwood saw the bluebirds at the Cobblestone fishing access, he also watched a flock of 14 **Ring-billed Gulls** flying north along the Madison River.

Noticeable in their absence this past winter, were rosy finches. Lori Micken, who lives west of Livingston on the Bozeman Hill, has been feeding rosy finches at that location for more than thirty years, and this is the first winter that she has not seen a single rosy finch. Typically she has at least 2-300 **Gray-crowned Rosy Finches** coming to the feed station. Lori isn't alone in noticing this year's absence of finches. To the best of my knowledge, every other person in this area has not seen a rosy finch all winter or just a few early in the winter. In most winters, these people have flocks of hundreds of Gray-crowned Rosy Finches throughout the winter. What environmental factor could explain this mass exodus from Montana's valleys this year? It will be interesting to see what happens in the second half of March, when the usual spring influx of rosy finches occurs in southwestern Montana.

-John Parker

Thank you to all our sharp-eyed birders for reporting your great sightings. Please report your Bird Sightings by the 9th of the month to John Parker at 586-5863 or birdsightings@sacajaweaudubon.org



Bird of the Month –
Long-billed Curlew
Numenius americanus
Length: 23" Wing Span: 35" Weight: 1.3 lbs

The month of April signals the return of many migratory birds to our state, including species in the shorebird family. One of those is the Long-billed Curlew. The Long-billed Curlew is the largest shorebird in the world and one of only 12 shorebird species that breed in Montana. They nest primarily in short-grass or mixed-prairie habitats as well as agricultural fields. The male uses graceful flight displays, resonant calls, and ritualized fighting to establish a breeding territory. The female will select one of several scrapes made by the male, usually near an object like a dirt mound or a cow patty. The pair then deepens and lines the scrape with grasses, twigs, pebbles, bark, and dry dung. The male and female share incubation duties and both will aggressively defend their nest. However, the female abandons her brood 2-3 weeks after hatching, leaving their care to the male. Despite this behavior, the same male and female often pair up again the following year.

The long decurved bill for which they are named ranges from 5 ½ to 6 ½ inches in length, and is over a third of the curlew's total body length. It is specially adapted for probing for earthworms and other deep-burrowing prey. The sexes are similar in appearance, but the female has a longer bill with a more pronounced curve at the tip. The curlew's large size, long, decurved bill and buffy cinnamon color help distinguish it from all other North American shorebirds. It's interesting to note that the Long-billed Curlew has also been known as the "candlestick bird", and that Candlestick Point in San Francisco was named after this indigenous bird and subsequently Candlestick Park. There are many collective nouns for a group of curlews, including a "curfew", "game", "head", "salon", and "skein".

Photo by Lou Ann Harris

Abstract of SAS Board Meeting Minutes, March 3, 2014

President's Report. Loreene Reid reported that the Galanis Family has offered to once again host our summer planing session at the Yellowstone Ranch Preserve. The weekend of August 8-10 was tentatively set. Loreene summarized Richard Keigley's visit with YNP's superintendent, park biologists, and an interpretive staff member, promoting Richard's concern to change the Park's education program regarding habitat conservation. Richard felt the presentation was very well received. The same presentation will be made to the SAS board, committee chairs, and others interested on the evening of April 4th [place and time TBA]. Bridger Bowl has proposed a partnership with Sacajawea Audubon to manage the educational aspects of the Raptor Festival this fall. Leo Freeman will chair an ad hoc committee to meet with Bridger Bowl personnel.

Reports of Chairs. Bird Festival: Festival chair Lou Ann Harris updated successes in obtaining sponsorships, most recently by Northwestern Energy, Holcim, and Confluence. A gift of two season's passes from Bridger Bowl was also applauded. First Security Bank has expressed interest in our educational program and would welcome a September proposal. The Festival Brochure is being mailed this very day, with online registration commencing on March 5th. Diane Gresham is seeking volunteers to provide a dessert for the dessert auction. Sharon Hanton is soliciting volunteers to serve at the Festival. [See the last page of this *Newsletter* for contact information.]

Education: Richard Keigley will provide habitat educational activities for Robin Hompesch's Bozeman High class when it makes a Spring field trip to YNP.

Conservation: The Holcim trail project at Sappington is moving forward, and a surveyor is willing to provide his services. The Gallatin Valley Land Trust has received a grant, supported by a SAS testimonial, to proceed with a conservation easement on the Fink property near Headwaters State Park. The Story Mill Park application was approved by a City sub-committee and will now go before the City Commission, probably on March 24th. At least nine SAS members attended the hearing, with several providing supportive testimony.

Field Trips and Bird Sightings: Peter Norlander's "Owl Prowl" has been rescheduled for March 15th. [See February *Newsletter* for particulars.] Paulette Epple proudly reported that the Gallatin Valley led the state with most species (72) and the most checklists (155) for the recent Great Backyard Bird Count. Paulette also reported that Robin Wolcott has created a list of known early bird arrivals for March to post on our website. Robin will be asked to prepare a like list for April. Members are encouraged to report early migrants to eBird in order to better the current record. Those who do so will be acknowledged in the *Newsletter* and on our website.

Newsletter: Discussion centered on avoiding costly professional services by asking SAS members to address and fold the newsletters.

Membership: We have exhausted our supply of SAS brochures. It was moved, and passed unanimously, that we print 500 updated brochures at a cost of \$110.

New Business: Hope Lutheran Church's meeting facilities are no longer available on National Holidays. As our October 13th general meeting date falls on Columbus Day, our October meeting has been moved to Tuesday evening, October 14th, 7 p.m., same room.

Announcements: The next SAS Board Meeting will be on Monday, April 7, 2014.





Sacajawea Audubon Society
 P.O. Box 1711
 Bozeman, MT 59771-1711

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Mailing Address

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 15th of the month preceding the month articles will appear. Please send to: **Mary Cloud Ammons, 503 Bozeman, Bozeman MT 59715** or newsletter@sacajaweaudubon.org.

Change of Address: Please notify Sally MacDonald, 223-9167 or membership@sacajaweaudubon.org 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/>

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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	Jeff Safford	587-3782	jeffsafford@sacajaweaudubon.org
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Chapter Rep. to State	Sharon Hanton	586-9500	
Webmaster	Lou Ann Harris	600-3585	louann@sacajaweaudubon.org

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

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_____ \$20 First Time Member

_____ I would like to receive the chapter newsletter by E-mail only.

Mail your check and application to:

Sacajawea Audubon Society
 Attn: Membership
 P.O. Box 1711, Bozeman, MT 597711711
 (N51)

Montana Audubon: 406-443-3949; PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624; mtaudubon@mtaudubon.org;
www.mtaudubon.org For direct contact: shoffman@mtaudubon.org
 Montana Bird Hotline: 406-721-9799 to report unusual or out-of-season birds

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