



SacajaweaAudubonNews

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

December 2013

Calendar at a Glance

- Dec 9th SAS Meeting
 Dec 13th Application due to MT Audubon Wildlife Fund
 Dec 14th-26th Christmas Bird Count



**Little birds on the prairie:
Complexities for conservation in
ecosystems presumed to be simple**

*Presented by, Kevin Ellison,
Ph.D., Grasslands Ecologist*

**Monday December 9th, 2013 at 7:00 p.m.
Hope Lutheran Church
2152 W. Graf Street (off of South 19th) in Bozeman**

Since their numbers were first estimated in the 1960's, grassland birds have been in decline. Today, grassland birds are more imperiled than any other habitat-based group in North America. Obvious threats include large-scale changes in land use, including livestock production, crop production, oil and gas extraction, water use, fire suppression, and exurbanization. Kevin Ellison of World Wildlife Fund has worked on several of these issues and is now focused on working with ranchers to identify win-wins for sustainable ranching and ecosystem management. Kevin comes from a background of studying the evolution of cowbirds and their hosts in response to brood parasitism, the behavior of grassland birds and their potential nest predators near wooded tree rows and their removal, the relationships between birds and bison, grassland bird migration, and the application of key grassland bird species as indicators for grazing management that benefits other wildlife as well. Kevin will present an overview on these topics and looks forward to attempting to answer any related questions you may have. Kevin has enjoyed participating in the Sacajawea CBC, surveying the Lindley Park to Sunset Hills section since 2008.

Links to some of Kevin's papers and some cowbird footage:

<http://scholar.google.com/citations?user=EnCxWUAAA&hl=en>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kzY-0axHPs>

Christmas Bird Count Schedule

Come join the fun in one of our area's Christmas Bird Counts. The Christmas counts, started in 1900, are an opportunity for beginning and expert birders to get together and enjoy this holiday tradition.

Bozeman Saturday, December 14th

Compiler: John Parker 586-5863

Meet at Perkins Restaurant, 2505 West Main, Bozeman
7:00-7:30AM

West Yellowstone Sunday, December 15th

Compiler: John Heinie (w)646-7001 (h) (406)640-0124 Meet at the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center West Yellowstone at 8:30 AM

Livingston Sunday, December 15th

Compiler: Sally MacDonald 223-9167 or at

smacbirder@msn.com Meet at the Best Western Inn 1515 W Park St (Copper John's) between 7:00-7:30 AM

Ennis Wednesday, December 18th

Compiler: Robin Wolcott 406-581-5418 Meet at Yesterday's Café in the Ennis Pharmacy, By 7:30 AM or sooner for breakfast

Three Forks Thursday, December 26th

Compiler: Dennis Flash 406-539-1145 Meet at Bair's Truck Stop (Flying J at the South side of the Belgrade Interchange) at 7:00 AM

For more information, contact the count compilers. Please Contact the area compiler before the count, as this will give them the opportunity to plan and organize the count before the count day. Participation in all counts is free.



Bird Notes

Mid October to early November in southwest Montana is a transitional period, from lingering and late migrants to the hardier winter holdovers, and the migrants from the far north. Also, some of the elevational migrants start showing up in the valleys and at area feeders. During the night of November 6-7, Tundra Swans were heard and seen flying over Helena and Livingston. The following day Lou Ann Harris and I went to Harrison Reservoir, and were awestruck to see over 4,000 swans resting along the shoreline around the lake. The vast majority of the swans were **Tundra Swans**, but there were also several hundred **Trumpeter Swans** in the mix. Within this sea of white swans, were over 600 **Snow Geese**.

The **Osprey** that Lou Ann Harris saw along the Yellowstone River, near Emigrant, must have thought the fishing was good enough to linger beyond the normal departure time. Lou Ann saw the Osprey, November 2nd, which equaled the late record date for the species in this area. Two days later, Jackie Wilson saw an Osprey at the same location, extending the late record. Typically **Dunlins** are a coastal migrant, rarely seen in the interior west. So it was very exciting for Ed Harper and me to find a single **Dunlin** October 30th, at Harrison Reservoir. Five days later, Ed found a **Greater Yellowlegs** at the Black's Ford pond by the Madison River west of Bozeman. On October 17th, Ed found yet another exceptionally late migrant, when he spotted a **Common Nighthawk** flying to the south from Davis Pond in northwest Bozeman.

At least two **Blue Jays** were frequenting the Sundance Springs subdivision, in Bozeman throughout October and into November. On the opposite side of Bozeman, Paulette Epple had two Blue Jays visiting her yard near Story Mill. Paulette also had a **White-breasted Nuthatch**, visit her yard on October 12th. Another White-breasted Nuthatch turned up on the south side of the Story Hills, October 31st, at Harold Brown's yard along Rocky Creek. The **Gray Catbird** seen November 2nd, by Nancy Neiley along the Sourdough Nature Trail was quite late. A couple of late **Spotted Towhees** were reported in the Gallatin Valley. On October 12th Ron Farmer saw a Spotted Towhee in his yard near Sypes Canyon. The Epples also had a Spotted Towhee coming to their yard in mid October, and then on October 16th, Paulette spotted two towhees in the yard. **White-throated Sparrows** make a good showing this past October, with multiple observations around Bozeman. Hotspots for this species included the East Gallatin Recreation Area, Sourdough Nature Trail, and several trailheads in the south Gallatin Valley foothills.

All this talk about late and lingering birds, what about early arrival? On November 1st, Lynn and Beth Kaeding had a single **Common Redpoll** visit their feeder, northwest of Bozeman. Not only is this the early record for our area, but as of November 9th, it was only one of five reported in the lower 48 states (ebird), and the only one west of the Mississippi.

-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 conundrum@imt.net

2013 Mountain Bluebird Trail Report



This is the first of what I hope will be an annual report of the monitored bluebird trails around the Gallatin Valley. For those of you not familiar with the project: there are three bluebird trails maintained and monitored by Sacajawea Audubon volunteers, each made up of roughly 80-100 nest boxes. The boxes are checked every two weeks during the nesting season beginning in late April, and data is collected on nest status, number of eggs, number of young, etc. Two of us are federally licensed bird banders and band young bluebirds in the nest as well as an adult female or two. The banding information is sent to the Bird Banding Lab in Maryland. Through banding it's possible to learn that some of the adult females return each year to nest, sometimes to the exact same box.

Now on to the summary: The Pass Creek/Rocky Mountain Rd. trail had good success this year. This trail is monitored by Janne Hayward and myself, along with help from Diane Gresham, Gay Brynie & Nancy Heymann. A total of 234 Mountain Bluebirds fledged out of 86 boxes used, which is a 69% success rate. Some of the boxes hosted other species, including Tree Swallow, House Wren and Mountain Chickadee. We banded a total of 266 bluebirds, most of those being nestlings. A highlight from the season was seeing so many bluebird fledglings with their parents hanging around the boxes. We always assume when we find a dirty empty nest that it was successful, but it's nice to actually see the young bluebirds out flying around. The Sedan trail also had a good season. Monitored by Tove Hunter, Markie Nathan and Jinny Goodman, they fledged 164 bluebirds, 115 tree swallows and 10 house wrens out of a total of 80 boxes. The highlight of the season was the sheer abundance and beauty of wildflowers, including our state flower, the bitterroot. The third bluebird trail located on Trail Creek Rd. is split between Gallatin and Park counties and is monitored by Roger and Noreen Breeding. They reported 116 bluebirds fledged out of 32 boxes used.

A big thank you goes out to Roger McCormick at the Bozeman Sr. Center Woodworkers club who builds and repairs all our bluebird boxes! Thanks also to all the volunteers who have helped out on this project.

- by Lou Ann Harris

Montana Audubon Offers Grants for Wildlife



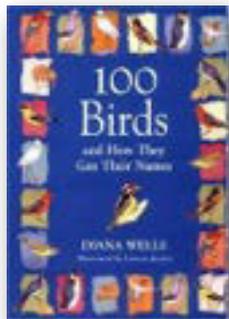
Montana Audubon will be offering grants totaling more than \$1,700 to fund projects that benefit wildlife. Preference will be given to research and education projects benefiting nongame wildlife and their habitats. The funds can be used for mileage, supplies, equipment, printing, and communications.

Applications must be postmarked on or before Friday, December 13, 2013. Grant recipients will be announced by February 7, 2014. Project guidelines and the grant application can be requested from: Audubon Wildlife Fund, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624; by phone: (406) 443-3949; or from our website at: <http://www.mtaudubon.org/about/grants.html>.

THE NATURE LIBRARY

"100 Birds and How They Got Their Names"

By, Diana Wells



Have you ever been perceived as "gullible," or, worse yet, been called a "booby"? For birders, such words are the unkindest cut of all since they derive from our beloved avian friends and their habits. A handsome older book, *100 Birds and How They Got Their Names* by Diana Wells (Algonquin Books, Chapel Hill, 2002), has captivated me again recently, and I want to share a few

gems with you this month.

The pleasure of this book comes from discovering the often obscure name origins of our common species and also the many fascinating tidbits from history and bird folklore. A lot of our birds have some rather weird names, you know—a "godwit," you say? Or a "limpkin," or a "dowitcher"?! These three can be easily explained, --godwit in Icelandic means just a "good" bird to eat, limpkin for all its morose crying is named only after its "limping" gait, and the dowitcher after the "Deutchers," the Germans (or Dutch) who especially loved them at the table. Others, like the magpie or the jay or the Knot, can't really be pinned down at all, but the author has great fun trying. She notes also that many of our American birds were merely named after European ones, our robin being the best known example, from "Robert," a diminutive. (Roger Tory Peterson has said that in Britain, for example, one-third of the birds are the same as ours, and one-third are very similar to our own.)

Most bird names seem to derive from their calls and cries and, it seemed to me upon finishing the book, from their (sadly) culinary qualities. Under the former, we can list the kittiwake, the phoebe, the owl, the coot, and the shrike (from "shriek"), and many others. The chickadee in Cherokee is "tsikilili," (plausible if you say it slowly). The flicker would

fit here too although I prefer the beautiful Greek and Latin name source "golden chisel." In the food group we find such birds as the bunting, in Old English "plump shape" like the "baby bunting" in the nursery rhyme, and the puffin, the "puffed up" extremely fat and delicious downy chick. To this we can add of course the goose, grouse, woodcock, snipe, etc.—the "snite," by the way, was deemed a table bird in the 17th Century quite "unpleasant to the taste," and "apt to engender melancholy"! (In passing, did you know that cocker spaniels hunted "cockers," our little "woodcocks" or timberdoodles?) The book is full of such interesting reading.

Let me close with some quirky selections of my own from her text. The lowly but lovely-in-the-sunlight "grackle" always struck me as a strange name; in fact Wells shows there's no very folksy pedigree: its Latin name is "gracula." Disappointing. The ocean-going "petrel," though, is a dandy: probably its name derives from St Peter who tried to walk on water in a storm—and whose name in Latin is "petra" or rock (of the new Christian church). Another birding truism is found in the source of "warbler," from the Old German word "wirbill," which meant "whirlwind," or the "act of turning oneself around"; birders craning and straining their necks for a warbler wave high up in the tops of an exciting May woodland might easily think it referred to themselves! The "starling" derives from "star," we're told: In the winter it does have a speckled or "starry" plumage, and in the air does look star-shaped from below (I still don't like them). Finally, Jenny "wren" comes from the Anglo-Saxon "wroene," meaning "lascivious." At one time in English history and in 18th-Century literature prostitutes were called "wrens." I'll let my more experienced and worldly readers explore the ornithological rationales for this piece of etymology.

—Mike Becker



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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/>

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- National, State and Chapter Audubon Membership
- National Audubon Magazine
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- Admission to National Audubon sanctuaries
- Support of National Audubon conservation efforts

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

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