



# SacajaweaAudubonNews

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

**March 2012**

## Calendar at a Glance

March 3rd	Raptor Field Trip
March 9th	Bird Sightings to John Parker
March 12th	March SAS Meeting
March 24th	Owl Prowl Field Trip
June 8th-10th	Wings Across the Sky Bird Festival

*A Haiku*

*High in Cottonwoods  
Silent wings through the Branches  
Grey finds Jack Rabbit.*

*-Peter Norlander*

## Winged Predators: Raptors of Yellowstone

**Monday March 12th, 2012 at 7:00 p.m.**  
**Hope Lutheran Church**  
**2152 W. Graf Street (off of South 19th) in Bozeman**

Katy Duffy of Yellowstone National Park will present a program on "Winged Predators: Raptors of Yellowstone" at the Sacajawea Audubon Society's meeting March 12, 2012. From frequently seen red-tailed hawks to rarely encountered boreal owls, numerous diurnal and nocturnal raptors inhabit the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Duffy will discuss raptor ecology and identification tips along with the role of citizen science in the new Yellowstone Raptor Initiative.

Katy Duffy is the current interpretive planner for Yellowstone National Park. She previously worked as Yellowstone's south district interpretive ranger and as a interpretive ranger in Grand Teton National Park. She has studied and banded raptors in Wyoming, Montana, New Jersey, Alaska and Israel. She has an M.S. in ecology from Rutgers University.

The Sacajawea Audubon Society meets the second Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m., at the Hope Lutheran Church, 2152 W. Graf Street (off of South 19th), Bozeman. Audubon invites the public to attend its meetings and participate in its field trips, listed on the chapter's website at [www.sacajaweaaudubon.org/](http://www.sacajaweaaudubon.org/).

## President's Comments: Respect Our Wild Neighbors

In this winter of snowy owls, amid debates over pipelines, fracking, and coal, we are reminded that our pollution is changing the climate and influencing the behavior of wildlife.

The snowy owl lives northernmost of all North American owls. Shielded from the Arctic cold by dense plumage, snowy owls normally feed on seabirds caught over Arctic ice or feed on rodents snatched from the tundra — up to 1,600 lemmings per year per owl, according to Cornell University's Ornithology Lab.

The snowy owl is a traveler. Across continents, they travel to find productive feeding grounds, but their southern travels usually take them no farther than the northern states, and most stay in the Arctic year round.

But this winter many snowy owls — many more than usual — took seasonal residence farther south.

Whether the current irruption of snowy owls is related to climate change, to an abundance of young owls, a crash in the lemming population, or other natural cause, it reminds us that we share this Earth with our wild neighbors.

Monitoring birds in Important Bird Areas, participating in Christmas Bird Counts, and sharing our appreciation of birds and habitat are ways in which members of Audubon respect our wild neighbors.

*Anne Millbrooke*

**President**  
**Sacajawea Audubon Society**

## Bird Notes

This winter has been superlative for finding birds in our area. It started in mid December with at least ten new species added to the cumulative lists of this area's Christmas Bird Counts. It's hard to recall another winter when so many out of range or out of season birds have been discovered.

The rarest bird to turn up this year is the **Great-tailed Grackle** that Nick Hajdukovick identified February 2<sup>nd</sup>, at the Gallatin Valley Mall in Bozeman. Previously seen only twice before in Montana, the "Taco Bell" grackle has attracted birders from across the state.

A pair of **American White Pelicans** that were first noticed at Central Park Pond in mid December were last reported at the pond January 21<sup>st</sup>, by Larry and Ellie Akins. This is the first time pelicans have been documented in January in this part of the state.

On February 5<sup>th</sup>, Matt Dresser spotted a **Glaucous Gull** on the Madison River, near the Red Mountain campground. While Glaucous Gulls are somewhat regular at Fort Peck Reservoir and around Polson, this is only the third record for southwestern Montana.

A **Snowy Owl** was discovered by Peter Norlander January 21<sup>st</sup>, near the Black Bull golf course northeast of Four Corners. Many other Snowy Owls were continuing to be seen across the northern part of the state through the month of February.

The **Varied Thrush** that Eric Rock saw in Yellowstone Park January 27<sup>th</sup> was an exceptional find. The thrush was foraging along one of the hot water runoff channels near Liberty Cap at the base of the terraces in Mammoth.

Another coup for Nick Hajdukovick was the **Green-tailed Towhee** he found along the "M" Trail (off of Bridger Drive, near Bozeman) February 1<sup>st</sup>. Green-tailed Towhees are commonly found at this location in the summer, yet this is only the fourth time this species has been found in Montana during the winter. The only Green-tailed Towhee documented to have over-wintered in Montana was one mile east of Bozeman, during the winter of 2006-07.

On February 5<sup>th</sup>, while looking for the towhee on the "M" Trail, Nate Kohler, Tamie Parker, and John Parker got terrific views of a **White-throated Sparrow**. Most likely this was the same bird that Ed Harper saw at the same spot during the Bozeman Christmas Bird Count.

About 30 **Gray-crowned Rosy Finches** spent a few hours at Marcia Leritz's feeders, near Sypes Canyon, on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. March and April are the months that Rosy Finches are most likely to be seen at lower valley locations. As these early migrants arrive at their high elevation breeding grounds, they are frequently displaced to lower elevations by spring snow storms.

On January 15<sup>th</sup>, Beth and Lynn Kaeding had a single **Common Redpoll** come to their feeders, north of Bozeman. Then on February 6<sup>th</sup>, Mike Becker had more than 25 Common Redpolls visit his feeders near Harrison.

I'm looking forward to hearing about the first arriving bluebirds in the coming month.

-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 Bird Festival

### Greening the Festival

**Greening the festival.** Montana Audubon is dedicated to lessening our impact on the planet and the annual bird festival is no exception. We continue our efforts to become a carbon neutral organization, and in doing so, we plan to both reduce and "offset" the impacts from this year's festival.

One of the best ways to reduce our carbon footprint is by carpooling. The festival transportation committee is working diligently toward that aim so that field trips and pre-festival workshops are covered by group transportation (vans, buses, or SUVs). This committee will also facilitate carpooling once festival participants have registered and confirmed their field trips. We'd very much like to hear from anyone who wishes to volunteer their minivan/SUV as a lead field trip vehicle, or recommend a person or organization with an available van or bus. Please contact Kathy Ross at [mtkat@montanaport.net](mailto:mtkat@montanaport.net). If we could halve the number of cars coming to the festival, we would cut ~20 tons of carbon dioxide from the festival's footprint!

In order to "offset" the waste we cannot reduce outright, we support carbon sequestration programs. What better place to embark on afforestation than at our Audubon Conservation Education Center in Billings? For a \$15 donation we will plant two trees that will sequester more and more carbon dioxide as they mature. The more trees we plant, the more carbon we can offset. Look for that option when you register.

At the hotel we plan to offer shade-grown coffee and compostable plates and cups when washable dishes are not available. Last but not least, remember to bring from home your refillable water bottle and coffee to-go mug!

**Festival registration.** Begins the first week in April. Look for the registration brochure to arrive in your mailbox at the end of March. For additional updates, visit <http://www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival.html> and "like" us at <http://www.facebook.com/MontanaAudubon>.

## To Nest or Not to Nest...



A nest has several connotations to the world of humans. We know of the idea of "nesting" or setting down our roots in a place, and many parents understand the "empty nest" syndrome when young adult children leave home. The idea of the nest conjures up the notion of home, and for newly hatched birds of prey, it is the first home they know.

It is breeding and nesting time for some of our fine feathered raptor friends in our area. You have probably noticed bald eagles pairing up. Or you may have heard the night time hooting calls of great horned owl pairs in courting.

Most raptors mate for life and will only choose a different mate if theirs dies. Bald eagles are no exception to this. They usually nest in the same area each year and do their tidying and spring cleaning repairs early, around January or February. Bald eagles have huge nests that are easily spotted when the trees are bare. And because they are used over and over, the nests can seem

extraordinarily large. Bald eagles build them with branches and sticks, along with adding grasses or mosses and whatever may be handy in the region. When the pair mates, the female generally has one to three eggs and incubates them for about a month. The female spends much of her time on the nest, but will switch off with the male.



While the baldies do the beak breaking work to build their nests, the great horned owl takes another strategy. Great horned owls do not migrate in the winter. They are fully equipped with feathers down to their talons and keen hearing to find critters under the snow, so they stick around in the snowy season. And instead of scoping out the

perfect tree in which to build a nest, they will take over a nest from another raptor or crow or find a hollow tree. Yes, that's correct. Great horned owls will often proclaim squatter's rights. Since they do not seek out warmer climates in winter, they get the first pick of nests and they breed fairly early in the year. With two to four eggs, the hatching begins approximately a month later.

In our widely technological age, we are lucky to be able to get in the internet and watch some of these amazing raptors as they prepare the nest, sit on eggs, and raise their young. Next month, I will touch on the nestlings and their development. In the meantime, enjoy the nesting and breeding season via the internet and learn even more about the interactions of these predators.

Report an injured raptor quickly! Call the Montana Raptor Conservation Center at (406) 585-1211.

Article by Cynthia Zyzda  
Photos by Becky Kean

## Raptor Field Trip

Join us on Saturday, March 3rd for a morning searching for raptors, along the roads of the northern Gallatin Valley. On this early spring trip the focus will be on finding raptors, but there should be some other interesting birds along this route. The trip ends early in the afternoon at Central Park Pond. We will meet at the Museum of the Rockies at 8:30 am, and leave at 8:45. Be sure to dress for the weather and bring any necessary drinks or snacks for this 4-5 hour trip. If you have a spotting scope that you can bring, that would be helpful. For more information call John Parker at 586-5863.

-John Parker



## Owl Prowl Field Trip

Come join us for an Owl Prowl with Sacajawea Audubon this winter.

The Owl Prowl will be held on Saturday March 24<sup>th</sup> and will be held in the Battle Ridge Campground area (up at the top of the Bridger Mountains). We will hope to hear (and maybe find) Boreal Owls, possibly Northern Saw-Whet, possibly Great Gray Owls. We will meet at the City Hall Parking Lot (on Rouse) at 7:30 PM. **Snowshoes** will be required for this trip and there will be an 6 person maximum. Please call Peter Norlander 222-4646 to sign up. There will be a short discussion of owl lore, prior to leaving by car to the trail.

Please note that due to increased human activities in past locations for the Owl Prowls have inhibited owl breeding and nesting behavior. Please contact Peter Norlander if you have any questions ([norlander@q.com](mailto:norlander@q.com), 222-4646). Please dress appropriately for **Nighttime** Winter/Cold Spring weather with snow boots or warm waterproof boots (no sneakers). You may bring binoculars and a flashlight. **Snowshoes will be required** for this night time excursion.



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

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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/>

### *Mailing Address*

#### **SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

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[shoffman@mtaudubon.org](mailto:shoffman@mtaudubon.org)

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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Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \$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

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