



SacajaweaAudubonNews

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

January 2014

Calendar at a Glance

Jan 13th	SAS Meeting
June 6th - 8th	Wings Across the Big Sky Festival

FOR YOUR CALENDAR: *Wings Across the Big Sky*
June 6-8, 2014 Bozeman, Montana

The time to begin planning for **Montana Audubon's Wings Across the Big Sky Festival**, co-hosted by **Sacajawea Audubon Society**, is June 6-8 in Bozeman. For more information contact MT Audubon's Bird Festival Coordinator, Cathie Erickson: cerickson@mtaudubon.org.



Imagine—A New Story Mill Community Park

Monday January 13th, 2014 at 7:00 p.m.
Hope Lutheran Church
2152 W. Graf Street (off of South 19th) in Bozeman

Join us January 13th at 7 pm to hear about the proposed Story Mill Community Park located on approximately 50 acres adjoining the old Story Mill in northeast Bozeman. **Maddy Pope, project manager with The Trust for Public Land, and Martha Collins, a Sacajawea Audubon member, will discuss this exciting planned park.** TPL is proposing to sell the land to the City to become the newest and largest community park using funding through the new Trails, Open Space and Parks bond fund. The long-term vision for the new park would include both an active park area for public enjoyment and recreation and a protected nature sanctuary for wildlife and to serve as an outdoor classroom. The property's wetland complex already supports a wide array of birds and other resident wildlife. Highlights this past season have included nesting sandhill cranes, a family of great horned owls, kingfishers, dippers, snipe, and a plethora of nesting songbirds. The project includes an ambitious restoration and monitoring project that would increase wetland acres and restore floodplain connections to provide habitat and water quality enhancements.

Over the past year, Sacajawea Audubon has gotten involved with TPL conducting bird surveys, putting up nesting boxes, and leading birding walks at the site. Come learn more about this partnership and how you can help support this exciting project!

Bird of the Month –

Black-capped Chickadee
Poecile atricapillus
Length 5.25" Wing Span 8"
Weight 0.39 oz



Possibly one of Montana's most endearing bird species due to its love of bird feeders, natural curiosity of humans, acrobatic foraging behavior, and ability to survive bitter cold. The **Black-capped Chickadee** is a non-migratory bird that has developed the ability to live year-round in cold climates by lowering their body temperature at night, entering regulated hypothermia to save energy. They will also roost individually in a cavity to conserve heat. **Chickadees** cache food and have an exceptional memory for relocating those hiding places later on.

Chickadee calls are complex, communicating information on identity and recognition of other flocks as well as predator alarms and contact calls. The more *dee* notes in the familiar *chick-a-dee-dee* call, the higher the threat level.

Other bird species that associate with chickadee flocks respond to chickadee alarm calls. **Black-capped Chickadees** will eat a variety of food, including seeds, berries, insects, spiders and the fat of dead animals and fish. In winter, they obtain much of their fluid requirements from food, although they drink water when available and will also eat snow.

To the human eye, the sexes generally look alike, however males are slightly longer in wing and tail and heavier in body mass. Males also have brighter white feathers and deeper black feathers, and the area of the black bib is larger.

Bird Notes

Before the real cold weather arrived, several rare birds were discovered on this area's lakes. Then during the extreme cold early in December, a pair of songbirds rarely seen in the winter sought the food and cover available in a couple of Bozeman yards.

The rarest bird(s) of the fall were the **2 Black-legged Kittiwakes** that were at Ennis Lake. These two birds represent Montana's 5th and 6th state records and the first new sightings for the species in the last 23 years. The first kittiwake (an adult) was discovered November 10th by Scott Dean, and last seen 19 November. The second kittiwake, (an immature bird), was seen November 19th by Timothy Barksdale and several others. The adult kittiwake was seen multiple times while it was at Ennis Lake, but the immature bird was seen only that one day, and not in association with the adult.

While searching for the kittiwake at Ennis Lake November 12th, Tom Forwood and I saw an immature **Long-tailed Duck** along the north shore. There have been surprisingly few sightings of Long-tailed Ducks over the years in this area, even though they are seen with some regularity in the Great Falls area. So I was doubly excited to see a second **Long-tailed Duck** (adult female) at Harrison Reservoir November 15th. Huge numbers of waterfowl at Central Park Pond late in November provided great opportunities for bird watching. On November 27th, I was at the pond when **2 Greater White-fronted Geese** flew in to mingle with the other 5,000 birds there. Two days later, Paulette Epple was able to find **3 Cackling Geese** among the multitudes.

Several **Blue Jays** were still in the area during the past month. Janne Hayward had a Blue Jay around her house in south Bozeman during the middle of November. Later in November, Tom Nicholson had a Blue Jay come to his yard on 6th Street in Livingston.

A **Hermit Thrush** was weathering the extreme cold December 4-6th, at Bob and Anne Waters's house on Bozeman's south side. There are only about a half dozen winter records for Hermit Thrush in Montana. This thrush was subsisting on Virginia Creeper berries, and some supplemental cranberries that the Waters put out for it.

Equally rare during Montana's winter months, was the **Chipping Sparrow** that was coming to Paulette Epple's yard. This sparrow first arrived on December 4th, and continued its forays into the yard to feed on the millet under the feeders, till at least the 11th.

-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

2013 Bridger Raptor Migration Project Highlights

(By Steve Hoffman, Executive Director of Montana Audubon)



On November 2nd Kalon Baughan and Bret Davis ended their second consecutive season of scientific raptor migration counts atop Bridger Bowl. What a spectacular final day of the season it was, with 31 Golden Eagles, 11 Bald Eagles, and one each of Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, and Merlin (the final bird of the season)! The final tally for this, the 23rd straight season of monitoring raptor migration at the site, was 2,315 raptors of 17 species (6.9 raptors/hr).

The long-term data collected at the Bridger site helps scientists learn more about raptor migration patterns as well as regional and continental raptor population trends. The Bridger project is also designed to monitor widespread environmental changes, using these apex predators as insightful barometers of ecological health.

The count season began as usual on September 1st, but due to inclement weather the total number of observation hours was greatly reduced (to only 335.7). Bret & Kalon recorded only 1,131 Golden Eagles, which is down substantially from the past two years. *The Bridger migration site consistently records the largest concentration of autumnal migrant Golden Eagles known in the lower 48 states!* Recent Golden Eagle count totals atop the Bridgers have varied from 1,000 to 1,450 eagles/season, with up to 250 on a big migration day (during the first two weeks of October).

It is noteworthy that the counts of Golden Eagles at this and many other western sites have shown steady declines since the late 1990's. The cause of these persistent declines is unknown at this time, although these and other findings have stimulated additional government-sponsored Golden Eagle surveys and studies.

For the other migrating raptors counted along the Bridgers, when comparing 2013 counts to the long-term averages, counts were higher this season for: Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Red-tailed & Broad-winged hawks, American Kestrel, Merlin and Peregrine Falcon. Below-average numbers were recorded for: Northern Harrier, Northern Goshawk, Golden Eagle and Prairie Falcon. Average numbers were tallied for: Sharp-shinned & Cooper's hawks, Rough-legged Hawk and Bald Eagle.

This long-term project is a partnership between Montana Audubon and HawkWatch International, with funding from the US Forest Service (Gallatin National Forest), NaturEner USA (a Spanish-based windpower company with multiple wind farms in Montana), Sacajawea Audubon Society, Bridger Bowl Ski Area, and individual donors. *THANKS to all!*

THE NATURE LIBRARY

By Mike Becker



Robert Frost is a poet who knows winter and its iron-cold landscapes. In fact, Montana's open spaces and forests have much in common with his stony New Hampshire farm. We nature readers find many things to enjoy: His hikes, his wood-chopping, his haying and apple-picking, his flowers, his love of the seasons' passing, his rural neighbors, his phoebes weeping at an old farmhouse door. The New England landscape he writes of, and the woods he loves to get lost in, however, appear quite benign, but the birch trees and snowy woods and the isolated farm houses with cramped and crazed lives within belie the popular view of him. As one critic observes, "Robert Frost is not a lollipop!" The dark woods in the poem "Come in," for example, hold mysterious thrush music in "the pillared dark" that tempts him to come in and lament; the woods in his most famous poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" are "lovely, dark and deep" on the solstice's "darkest evening of the year." (Note the comma, the woods are lovely because they are dark and deep.) Why not give it all up, lay our burden down, pack it in, relinquish?

"The Onset" is a fitting selection for this month and our tough winter this year. It is an invitation in two parts. He begins in despair as autumn turns to full-fledged winter:

*Always the same, when on a fated night
At last the gathered snow lets down as white
As may be in the dark woods, and with a song
It shall not make again all winter long
Of hissing on the yet uncovered ground, 5
I almost stumble looking up and round,
As one who overtaken by the end
Gives up his errand, and lets death descend
Upon him where he is, with nothing done
To evil, no important triumph won,
More than if life had never been begun. 11*

In cold inevitable couplets he depicts the surprise and the perennial shock of the onset, the finality of it all: He even adds an extra rhyme which ends the stanza, dully, conclusively, hopelessly.

But to this grief Frost counterbalances in the triumphant second half of the poem the defeat of Nature's forces of death and despair:

*Yet all the precedent is on my side:
I know that winter death has never tried
The earth but it has failed: the snow may heap
In long storms an undrafted four feet deep 15
As measured against maple, birch, and oak,
It cannot check the peeper's silver croak;
And I shall see the snow all go downhill
In water of a slender April rill
That flashes tail through last year's withered brake
And dead weeds, like a disappearing snake.
Nothing will be left white but here a birch,
And there a clump of houses with a church. 23*

Like a good lawyer Frost speaks of precedents and probabilities. Like a good preacher he speaks of besting the archetypal snake of Eden's loss, whose presence had been tipped off earlier (l. 5) in the "hissing" sound of the first snow on the warm autumn earth. To strengthen his hopefulness amid winter's bright whiteness, Frost rather shrewdly ends with more white—with white birches and houses, and, as if to enhance his argument by sheer length adding one more line to the first stanza's total, with a traditionally white New England church and its enduring human community.



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

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

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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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