



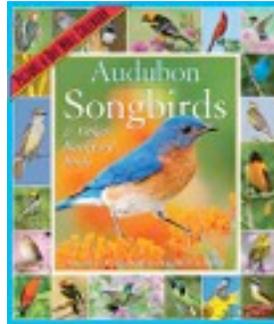
# SacajaweaAudubonNews

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

November 2013

## Calendar at a Glance

- Nov 9th Start of ProjectFeederWatch  
Report your bird sightings to John!
- Nov 11th SAS Meeting
- Nov 15th Deadline to submit articles to newsletter



## 2014 Audubon Calendars

The 2014 Audubon Calendars feature eight beautiful themes and are printed on FSC Mix paper from responsible resources. New this year is the Birds of Paradise calendar presenting detailed photographs of exotic species in their native habitats. Learn more at [http://bit.ly/Audubon2014\\_2](http://bit.ly/Audubon2014_2).



## Eyes on the Skies: Results of the 23rd Bridger Raptor Migration Count

*presented by Hawkwatch International Founder, Steve Hoffman and field researcher, Bret Davis.*

**Monday November 11th, 2013 at 7:00 p.m.**

**Hope Lutheran Church**

**2152 W. Graf Street (off of South 19th) in Bozeman**

The Bridger Ridge provides viewing of the largest Golden Eagle migration in the lower 48 states. Data obtained over the last 23 years has provided scientists with important information about trends in raptor populations. As well as providing the latest results and amazing photos of raptors, Bret will share the experiences he and fellow field researcher Kalon Baughn had, living on top of Bridger Bowl for three months!

Thanks to the generous support of Sacajawea Audubon Society and other supporters, September 1<sup>st</sup> marked the start of the 23<sup>rd</sup> consecutive season of raptor migration research along the crest of the Bridger Mountains. These majestic birds use the energy-saving updrafts created by strong winds along the crest of the Bridgers to migrate south, often within close proximity to the viewing platform. 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.

Funding for the 2013 count was provided by the USDA Forest Service (Gallatin National Forest), NaturEner USA (a wind power company with multiple projects in western Montana), Sacajawea Audubon Society (Bozeman-based Audubon chapter), and individual Montana Audubon donors.

The Sacajawea Audubon Society meets the second Monday of the month (September through May) at 7:00 p.m., at the Hope Lutheran Church, 2152 W. Graf Street (off of South 19th) in Bozeman. We invite the public to attend our meetings and participate in our field trips.



## Bird Notes

The peak of the fall migration this past month brought a number of exciting birds through this area. The East Gallatin Recreation Area (EGRA) is nearly always a productive location for birding, and especially so during migration. On September 16<sup>th</sup>, Tom Forwood had what looked on first glance to be an Eastern Kingbird, morph into an **Eastern Phoebe**. Only the eighteenth record for Montana, this rarity was at the marsh off of Boylan Road for at least six days before moving on. While scanning the lake at the EGRA September 27<sup>th</sup>, I was surprised to see four immature **Black-crowned Night-Herons** fly through my field of view. The herons subsequently flew to the north of the park, and joined two adult Black-crowned Night-Herons and twelve Great Blue Herons, roosting in a stand of cottonwood trees.

A female **Harlequin Duck** was spotted on the Gallatin River near Deer Creek, by Andrew Guttenberg on September 26<sup>th</sup>. Harlequins are rarely seen during their westward migration from Yellowstone Park to the Pacific Northwest.

Typically a pelagic species, Sabine's Gulls are only sporadically found inland. So it was a thrill for Robin Wolcott and me to find a single immature **Sabine's Gull** at Harrison Reservoir on September 28<sup>th</sup>.

Before the advent of the Bridger Hawk Watch site, little was known about the White-throated Swift migration in this area. Now with a growing number of sight observations along the Bridger Range, we're getting a more complete idea of the swift's passage through the region. Migrant swifts are being seen throughout the month of September, with the peak movement occurring the second week of the month. And just this past October 2<sup>nd</sup>, while on top of Drinking Horse Mountain, Lou Ann and John Harris had 4 **White-throated Swifts** flash by them at eye level. Their sighting establishes a new late record in this area for White-throated Swifts.

The juvenile **Black-billed Cuckoo** that Rab Cummings photographed on the morning of September 30<sup>th</sup>, near Highland Blvd. in Bozeman, turned out to be a ten minute wonder. Up until the early 1970's this species was considered a fairly common breeding bird along the lower stream corridors in this area, but in the last thirty years they have only been detected a handful of times locally.

While birding near Mayor's Landing in Livingston October 2<sup>nd</sup>, Forrest Rowland was able to photograph a young **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**. This close relative of the Red-naped Sapsucker has only been documented in Montana fourteen times previously.

Nashville Warblers are only seen occasionally here in southwest Montana, as they move south from their breeding grounds to the northwest. So, it was a treat for Paulette Epple in Bozeman, and Peter Norlander in Livingston, to each see a **Nashville Warbler** on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

-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)



## Embrace the Winter - Count Your Feeder Birds for Science

*Project FeederWatch starts November 9, 2013*

If you feed birds you can be a citizen scientist and record your birds in Project FeederWatch, a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders. Start November 9<sup>th</sup> or join in later in the season as the counts continue through early April. FeederWatch data help scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Last year's data documented record setting eruptions of Red-breasted Nuthatch, Common Redpoll, and Pine Siskin.

Sign up for the program or renew your account at [www.feederwatch.org](http://www.feederwatch.org)

- Then:
- 1) Put up a feeder
  - 2) Count the birds that visit
  - 3) Send your data to scientists

Project FeederWatch is a program of Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.



## Bird of the Month - Golden Eagle

By, David Cronenwett

In late summer, when trudging up Pine Butte, I can see and feel waves of heat wash across the baking prairie. Only vegetation near the fen wetland is green this time of year; almost nothing stirs and the landscape seems lifeless, waiting patiently for autumn rain. But on many unbearable days like this, I've been startled by the unexpected appearance of a large, dark creature silently riding thermals off the Butte. The unmistakable Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*; Family *Accipitridae*) is certainly one of the most iconic and noteworthy birds in Montana. They will soar over open grasslands for hours in their quest for prey and are always a spectacle to behold. Because I live along the Rocky Mountain Front flyway, they are rarely far from view.

Montana offers excellent habitat for breeding and wintering Golden Eagles. GPS technology has given biologists astonishing information about the migration behavior of these birds. Missoula-based Raptor View Research Institute tracks individual birds across vast areas of North America. This spring, a female Golden Eagle named "Elaine", fitted with a satellite transmitter, flew from her wintering grounds near Livingston, Montana to breed in the northern Brooks Range of Alaska. That is a journey of well over 2000 miles and one that will be repeated on the return trip in autumn. Like other raptors, Golden Eagles tend to follow topographical features like mountain ridges when migrating and do so ahead of low pressure systems when pulses of hundreds or thousands of individuals can be spotted along flyways. *Accipitrids* make these journeys in the daytime when the wind conditions they depend upon are more reliable. It has been theorized that because birds of prey migrate during daylight hours, much of the avian world does so under the cover of night.

Current data suggests a decline of Golden Eagles across the West. In addition to the usual culprits (habitat loss, poaching, etc.) a particular and surprising malady is affecting the population. In several studies, analysis of eagles and other scavenging birds point to elevated blood lead levels, coinciding with rifle hunting seasons and available gut piles on the landscape. Lead poisoning is devastating to raptors and other wildlife, causing potentially severe neurological damage. The solution is to use non-lead ammunition, which is available by several manufacturers. Though more

expensive, the price will decrease if more hunters purchase it. Public outcry over this issue could spur legislation making "green" bullets mandatory in the future, just as it did for waterfowl hunters.

Wherever the Golden Eagle has interacted with humans, it has received our full attention and awe. Falconers around the world prize its hunting ability. These are large birds with nearly seven-foot wingspans, capable of taking down sizeable mammals like foxes and coyotes in addition to rodents. They have been documented pulling bighorn sheep, mountain goats and other ungulates off of cliffs to their deaths as a hunting strategy. Talons of Golden Eagles are as large as an adult man's hand and are strong and lethal. While preferring mammals, they can readily consume large birds if the situation arises.



In the West, most Native peoples consider the Golden Eagle sacred. Its dual nature as worldly predator and as one who soars high in the realm of the Creator, make it something of an intermediary between worlds; a unifier of heaven and earth. Eagle feathers are very holy to traditional Blackfeet people and are used along with other parts such as bone whistles, in ceremonies like the Sun Dance. In prehistoric times, the only way to acquire an eagle was to construct a "catch pit" on a prominent roosting spot and lure the beast in with a bit of carrion. A great deal

of patience was required for this endeavor. When a Golden came down to investigate, the concealed person would have to bravely reach up to capture and break the bird's neck.

To subsistence hunters, feathers were one of the scarcest resources in the vastness of the Plains. Even lithic material like chert and obsidian for projectile points, is easier to find or obtain via trade. Not only did Golden Eagles give itself to the spiritual lives of Native people, but also to their entire economy, since arrows will not fly without *fletching* and the best was likely made of eagle feathers. It is difficult for us to understand now but in many ways, the human cultures of Montana's past rested on the back of the Great Raptor.

*David Cronenwett is a Writer, Naturalist and Wilderness Survival Instructor from Choteau, Montana. He can be reached at: [dcronenwett@hotmail.com](mailto:dcronenwett@hotmail.com)*

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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 [newsletter@sacajaweaudubon.org](mailto:newsletter@sacajaweaudubon.org).

**Change of Address:** Please notify Sally MacDonald, 223-9167 or [membership@sacajaweaudubon.org](mailto: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 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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Mail your check and application to:

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

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