



# Sacajawea Audubon News

*Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS) builds on an interest in birds to promote the conservation of our natural environment through enjoyment, education, and action.*

SAS Monthly Program & Membership Meeting: Monday, January 12

## Understanding The Mysterious Great Gray Owl - Ghosts of the Forest

Presented by Arcata Leavitt



*Great Gray Owl by Forrest Roland.*

What is known about the elusive Great Gray Owl locally? They are known as the “*Ghosts of the Forest*” throughout their range here in the intermountain west and the boreal forests and wooded bogs of the far north. Though not our heaviest owl, *Strix nebulosa* is our largest owl, and many would say most impressive. Their enormous size and silence, combined with the glare from their piercing yellow eyes captivates the onlooker. Those lucky enough to encounter a Great Gray Owl are unlikely to ever forget. Their sheer size and distinctive eyes make them unlikely to be mistaken for their smaller dark-eyed cousins, the Barred and Spotted Owls (where their ranges overlap). Have you been lucky enough to see one of these forest ghosts? Come and share your ghost story.



*Arcata Leavitt,  
2nd recipient of the  
Sacajawea Audubon Society  
Bob Moore Scholarship*

Join us as **Arcata Leavitt**, the **2nd recipient of the Sacajawea Audubon Society Bob Moore Scholarship**, informs us about the research she is conducting, and you are funding, so that we may know more about these secretive creatures.

Arcata Leavitt is a master's student in the Becker Lab at Montana State University studying Great Gray Owls (*Strix nebulosa*) in southwest Montana. Her research is part of a collaboration with Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, the US Forest Service, and MSU to evaluate Great Gray Owl nesting habitat characteristics and investigate

the efficacy of using bioacoustic monitoring to locate nests and evaluate productivity. This effort aims to provide wildlife managers with tools to target survey and conservation efforts and improve our understanding of this enigmatic species. Arcata received her B.S. in Fisheries and Wildlife Science from Oregon State University, and before coming to MSU she worked with songbirds, small mammals, and loons in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

**The in-person meeting will be held Monday, January 12, 2026 at Hope Lutheran Church**, 2152 West Graf (off S. 19th). A social begins at 6:30 PM; the program begins at 7:00 PM. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own reusable cups.

For virtual attendance, please register at [sacajaweaaudubon.org/](https://sacajaweaaudubon.org/). Attendees—whether in person or virtual—are encouraged to share their bird sightings at this and every monthly program.

SAS monthly programs are free and open to the public, featuring a special guest speaker the 2nd Monday of each month, September through May. For more information, contact Chris Nixon at [programs@sacajaweaaudubon.org](mailto:programs@sacajaweaaudubon.org).

### Help Carry on Bob Moore's Legacy

To honor Bob's lifelong commitment to teaching, mentorship, and fostering a deeper understanding of the natural world, the **Sacajawea Audubon Society Bob Moore Memorial Scholarship** was established at Montana State University. This scholarship supports graduate students in the Department of Ecology whose research protects avian communities and the fragile ecosystems they depend on—especially within the Greater Yellowstone region and Montana.



*Scanning the QR code will direct you to the scholarship fund's donation page on the MSU Alumni Foundation website.*

## A MESSAGE from SAS PRESIDENT, CHRIS NIXON



### Holiday Success!

2025 was a great year for SAS! We finished the year with a beautiful holiday program and a festive party. **Thanks to all of the SAS volunteers who made our December holiday program at the Emerson Center for the Arts and Culture such a success.**

Attendees enjoyed socializing and visiting almost 20 displays of our projects.

Uschi Carpenter presented a beautiful program of her stunning bird photos and poetry along with a history of Sacajawea, and a call to action to conserve our birds. She also generously donated \$5 from each of her calendar sales to Sacajawea Audubon Society. The **biggest thank-yous** go to **Brooke Everest** for having the inspiration and organizing the event and her supporting committee of **Cathy Stamm, Janet Winnie, Loreene Reid** and **Amy Crowder**. Thanks to **Edis Kitrell** for opening the program with her music and **Cedar Mathers-Winn** for being our emcee.

Congratulations to Sadie Pease and Nora Miller, winners of the two Bridger Ski Season Passes.

And thanks to each of you who attended and made the program such a wonderful gathering! **Thanks to all of our members who made 2025 a successful year. Membership is the heart of our organization. Please make certain to renew and stay involved!**

Some of our biggest accomplishments of 2025 were erecting the three Motus towers in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (See page 6), completing the 34th year of the Bridger Raptor Project, and impacting the City of Bozeman Wetland Codes.

Happy New Year! We look forward to a productive 2026! May it be filled with birds!

## Sacajawea Audubon Society Upcoming Events!

- 06 Jan:** SAS Board of Directors Meeting - Virtual
- 12 Jan:** SAS Membership Meeting - Understanding The Mysterious Great Gray Owl - Ghosts of the Forest- Hope Lutheran Church
- 20 Jan:** SAS Wildlife Trivia Night - Lockhorn Cider House
- 21 Jan:** SAS Book Club meeting- Hope Lutheran Church
- 29 Jan:** World Wetland Day Program

**01 Feb:** World Wetland Day Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve Snowshoe Tour

**13 - 16 Feb:** Great Backyard Bird Count

**10 March - 9 May:** Master Naturalist Course

To see additional details including locations, please visit: [sacajaweaudubon.org/events](https://sacajaweaudubon.org/events)

### Partner Events

**14 Jan:** Ted Turner and Friends – Stories From the Wild Edge of Co-Existence  
visit [gallatinvalleyearthday.org](https://gallatinvalleyearthday.org) or [yellowstonian.org](https://yellowstonian.org) for more information.

## NEW SAS MERCHANDISE

A fun way to show your support! All proceeds directly benefit Sacajawea Audubon Society and our efforts for birding conservation, education and recreation in southwest Montana.

**Purchase at:**  
SAS Meetings and Events  
**Cost:** \$10.00

### SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY LEADERSHIP

President	Chris Nixon, <a href="mailto:pres@sacajaweaudubon.org">pres@sacajaweaudubon.org</a>
Vice President	Doug McSpadden, <a href="mailto:vicepres@sacajaweaudubon.org">vicepres@sacajaweaudubon.org</a>
Treasurer	Loreene Reid, <a href="mailto:treas@sacajaweaudubon.org">treas@sacajaweaudubon.org</a>
Secretary	Mikaela Howie, <a href="mailto:sec@sacajaweaudubon.org">sec@sacajaweaudubon.org</a>
Membership	Loreene Reid, <a href="mailto:membership@sacajaweaudubon.org">membership@sacajaweaudubon.org</a>

### NEWSLETTER CONTACTS

Amy Crowder and Chris Nixon, [newsletter@sacajaweaudubon.org](mailto:newsletter@sacajaweaudubon.org)  
Newsletter Design: Amy Crowder [amy@vandycreative.com](mailto:amy@vandycreative.com)

For a complete list of board members and activity leaders, visit: [sacajaweaudubon.org/our-board](https://sacajaweaudubon.org/our-board)





# BIRD NOTES

.....by John Parker

It's mid-December, well into the winter season, and the fields are showing green instead of being covered in whiteness. What an amazing stretch of warm weather that has enticed a surprising number of birds to linger well past their normal departure dates.

This past fall was also notable for the seemingly low numbers of waterfowl moving through this area during the fall migration. There were two late season sightings worth mentioning. On November 21st, Andrew Guttenberg spotted four **Long-tailed Ducks** on Hyalite Reservoir. The following day, Hilary Turner had four **Greater White-fronted Geese** at the McAllister pond north of Ennis.

There was a substantial late movement of **Sandhill Cranes** in November and into December. On November 26th Bill Akin watched 23 Sandhill cranes as they moved south over Pine Creek Bridge in Paradise Valley, then three days later, Don Profota watched 55 cranes fly over his house south of Bozeman. 3 Sandhill Cranes were seen by Stephanie Nelson, Lou Ann Harris and John Parker near the Meadow View Cemetery south of Manhattan on December 3rd. Then on December 13th, while on another raptor survey, Cherie Barth and John Parker saw another 3 Sandhill Cranes fly to some fields west of Gallatin Gateway. Any cranes in December are quite unusual, but 2025 has been different with such an extended snow free period. Prior to the last three years there had been only a handful of December Sandhill Crane sightings in this area, including a couple of injured birds. There does seem to be a strong correlation between lack of late fall / early winter snow cover and late season cranes.

On December 7th, Josiah Kiehl saw a single **American White Pelican** on a pond next to the Interstate east of the Three Forks interchange.

The most surprising bird for this period was the **Burrowing Owl** that Kevin Cox saw along Bench Road south of Manhattan on December 1st. There is only one other Burrowing Owl reported during the winter period (Dec-Feb) in Montana; a single owl seen near Dillon during the winter of 2006-07.



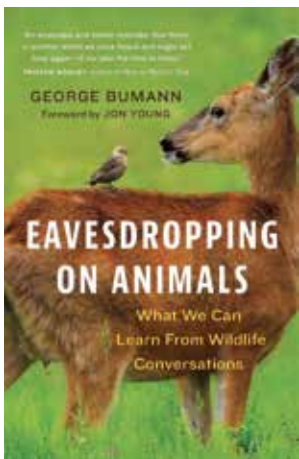
*This Burrowing Owl was spotted along Bench road south of Manhattan. Photo by Kevin Cox.*

It's always a fun surprise to have a **Pacific Wren** anywhere in southwest Montana, and a winter encounter is especially cheering. So, it must have been a happy day for Jason Gregg when he heard a Pacific Wren up the Bear Canyon Trail south/southeast of Bozeman on December 1st.

In Gardiner, Katy Duffy and Howard Weinberg had a **Yellow-rumped Warbler** lingering around their yard from November 26th to December 2nd.

## JANUARY BOOK CLUB NEWS

Join us January 21st to discuss **Eavesdropping on Animals: What We Can Learn from Wildlife Conversations** by George Bumann. Bumann shares the fascinating stories and insights he has gained from studying wildlife around the world



for more than forty years, the last twenty of which have been spent leading popular programs on animal language and intelligence in Yellowstone National Park. He shares tips, tricks, and advice for readers living in urban, suburban and rural areas and clearly shows us that you don't need an exotic vacation or a biology degree to have transformative wildlife encounters. Listening to and observing creatures in your own backyard, on nearby trails,

### SAS BOOK CLUB SCHEDULE

We meet on 3rd Wednesdays from Sept.-Nov. and Jan.-April at Hope Lutheran Church, Room 123 from 6:30 pm to 7:45 pm. You may also join us virtually. To join us online please notify Elisabeth Swanson in advance of the meeting at: [elsswa@gmail.com](mailto:elsswa@gmail.com) or (406) 570-8325. You can find a list of this spring's book selections on the Sacajawea Audubon Society website.

**February 2026 – What an Owl Knows: The New Science of the World's Most Enigmatic Birds**  
By Jennifer Ackerman

and in local parks, seashores, fields, and forests can lead to extraordinary experiences and a profound sense of belonging.

With his lyrical, jaunty and compulsively readable style, Bumann reminds us that humans once relied on the calls of wild animals to understand the natural world and their place within it and that we can regain this ability and experience “an inescapable sense of awe.”



SACAJAWEA  
AUDUBON  
SOCIETY

# INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE UPDATE: JANUARY 2026

THE WETLAND PRESERVATION PROJECT (WPP) was initiated to accomplish Sacajawea Audubon Society's mission to protect and restore increasingly rare wetland and riparian habitats in our region, and to provide educational opportunities and enjoyment for generations to come.

## ACT NOW TO PROTECT WETLANDS!

*When we understand the problem and take action together, conservation works.*

**A**s you are aware, there is a proposed change in the definitions of the **Waters of the US**. There are significant changes proposed in this rule change—changes that could remove most wetlands in the US from federal protection. There are also changes or removal of long-standing definitions that have been in practice for over 50 years to protect our nation's water resources. There are a lot of details in the ~200 page proposed rule (PR). **You must provide public comments to this PR by January 5!**

Visit [bozemanwetlands.org](https://bozemanwetlands.org) for comment suggestions.

*How to submit comments:*

**Online:** Through [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) under docket ID, [EPA-HQ-OW-2025-0322](https://www.regulations.gov).

**Deadline:** Written comments must be submitted by **January 5, 2026 • 11:59 PM EST.**

**THE TIME IS NOW!!**

## WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2026

*Wetlands and Traditional Knowledge:  
Celebrating Cultural Heritage*

**W**orld Wetlands Day 2026 shines a light on the deep connection between wetlands and the communities who have cared for them for centuries.

Traditional wisdom teaches us how to live in balance with nature. In many cultures, wetlands are sacred places—woven into stories, rituals, and spiritual beliefs. This year's theme reminds us to respect and learn from this knowledge as we work toward stronger wetland conservation today.



*World Wetlands Day Local Celebrations*

## WORLD WETLANDS DAY PROGRAM

**Date:** Thursday, January 29, 2026 • 6:00 PM

**Location:** Emerson Cultural Center

The Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve is hosting this special World Wetlands Day program showcasing the work of local organizations dedicated to protecting Montana's wetlands and riparian areas. Together, these groups help keep ecosystems healthy while honoring cultural heritage and traditional stewardship.

## CAMPFIRE CELEBRATION & SNOWSHOE TOUR

**Date:** Sunday, February 1, 2026  
1:00–3:00 PM

**Location:** Indreland Audubon  
Wetland Preserve  
Meet at the Kingfisher  
Pavilion

Join us for a winter celebration of our local urban wetland! Enjoy a campfire, hot drinks, snacks, and whatever birds and wildlife the wetland has to offer.

Guided snowshoe tours will depart at 1:30, 2:00, and 2:30 PM, depending on group size. Snowshoes and binoculars will be available to borrow. This is a rare opportunity to explore areas of the wetland normally inaccessible to the public, meet fellow community members, and learn more about this important preservation project.



*2025 participant enjoys the snowshoe tour and campfire celebration of World Wetlands Day at the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve.*

**RSVP, maps, and directions:** [BozemanWetlands.org](https://BozemanWetlands.org)



## KNOW YOUR WILD MONTANA!

**E**ver wonder what that flower is? How old are these rocks? What bird is singing? **Join our upcoming Bozeman Master Naturalist course**, and learn not just their names, but the stories they have to tell.

Through classroom and outdoor instruction, this **8-week course** will deepen your experience and understanding of the fascinating landscape we call home. We will explore the local plants, mammals, birds, geology, and more. You will build a deeper connection with the land, meet other nature-



### Registration Open for Spring Master Naturalist Course

**8-week Course Provides Montana Master Naturalist Certification**

**Dates:** March 10 - May 9, 2026; April 18 & May 9

**Time:** Evening classes (classroom & field),  
Tues / Thurs, 5:30-7:30pm  
Two Saturdays in the field, April 18 & May 9

**Location:** Classroom sessions will be held at Hope Lutheran Church; Field locations will vary.

**Certification requirements:**

- Attendance for 40 class hours
- 6 hours volunteer service
- Research and presentation on topic of choice

**Tuition:** \$450.00 SAS members / \$475.00 Non members  
Scholarships are available!  
Contact Cedar at  
[thuja.sp@gmail.com](mailto:thuja.sp@gmail.com)

**Class size is limited to 15 participants**

*Click or Scan the QR code to register!*



enthusiasts, and join a state-wide community of Master Naturalists! Only offered twice a year.

**Course is led by Cedar Mathers-Winn**, a naturalist, biologist, and educator based in Bozeman. He earned his Master's degree studying communication in birds at the University of Montana. He is also a certified wildlife tracker by



CyberTracker North America. Cedar has taught career biologists, professional guides, writers, artists, educators, and curious people of all shapes and sizes. Cedar uses the everyday subtleties of nature to reveal worlds of wildness, hidden in plain sight.



*Cedar Mathers-Winn, Bozeman Master Naturalist Course Instructor*

## Great Backyard Birdcount 2026

*Join the world in connecting to birds  
February 13–16, 2026.*



*A Dark Eyed Junco enjoys a backyard birdbath. Photo by Katie LaBarbera.*

**S**pend time in your favorite places watching birds—then tell us about them! In as little as 15 minutes notice the birds around you. Identify them, count them, and submit your counts to help scientists better understand and protect birds around the world. If you already use eBird or Merlin, your submissions over the 4 days count toward GBBC.

See [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) for more details. Watch the video on this website to learn more about the count.



## THE POWER OF THE TOWERS - WILDLIFE TRACKING SYSTEM

2025 GOAL ATTAINED—THREE GALLATIN VALLEY MOTUS TOWERS INSTALLED

By Ben Goodheart

It has been a highly productive month in our partnership with the American Bird Conservancy through our joint Motus Wildlife Tracking System project. Despite rain, snow, wind, and even blizzard conditions in late November, we **successfully installed three Motus towers** that now cover much of the Gallatin Valley and fill a critical gap in the Motus “fence” being built across Montana.

These towers will allow us to detect migratory birds that breed in the Gallatin Valley or pass through during their spring and fall

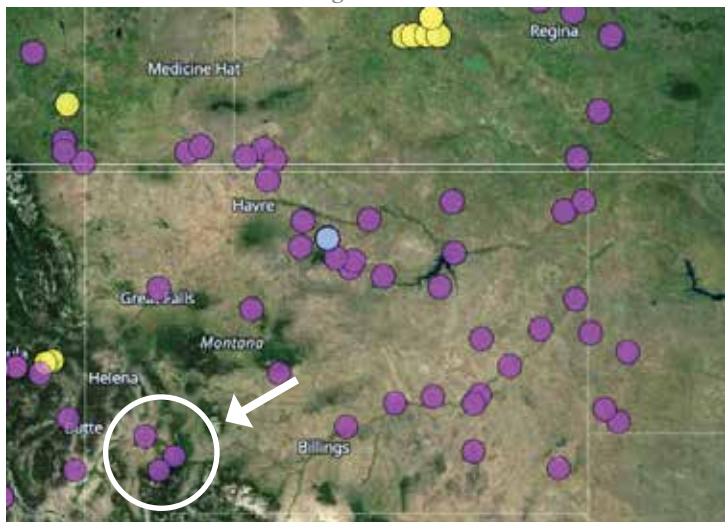
migrations. The data collected are invaluable to researchers, conservationists, and land managers, helping them identify and protect important breeding habitats and migratory stopover sites for a wide range of avian species.

*Plans are underway to install a fourth tower. Stay tuned for updates on the fourth tower installation and opportunities to participate in bird tagging.*

Our three towers span the full length of the Gallatin Valley. The first was erected at **Headwaters State Park**, with permission from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. This tower will detect migratory species moving along the Missouri River and its tributaries near Three Forks, as well as breeding birds using nearby riparian areas and adjacent grasslands.

The second tower was installed above the **Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve** with the generous permission from the Barnard family, offering an exciting

*The three Motus towers installed in the Gallatin Valley helped to fill a critical void in the avian tracking Motus network.*



*One of the newly installed and live Motus towers stands tall above Headwaters State Park near Three Forks.*

opportunity to detect birds crossing Bozeman Pass during migration, along with breeding individuals using the preserve and portions of the East Gallatin River.

The third tower was erected with the generous permission of the **Turner Ranch**, along the Gallatin River south of Four Corners. This tower covers the Gallatin River corridor and adjacent grasslands in the southern Gallatin Valley.

**All three towers are now live**, and detections from each can be viewed in real time at [Motus.org](https://Motus.org). We expect our first detections to begin during spring migration in 2026. **Plans are also underway to install a fourth tower**, with the location still to be determined. In addition, we will begin tagging birds in 2026 to track their migratory movements and breeding ranges.

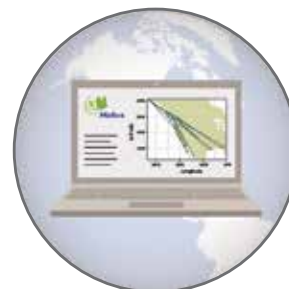
Stay tuned for updates on the fourth tower installation and opportunities to participate in bird tagging—and, as always, keep an eye on the Motus website to follow the remarkable birds that rely on the Gallatin Valley for migration and breeding.



**Radio tags are put on animals.**



**Towers collect data from tags.**



**Data are processed and used for research and conservation.**



# SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY ANNUAL CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP

## Join the Flock, Fly High Together!

Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS) encourages everyone who enjoys our field trips or our monthly programs or supports our conservation work to join our local chapter. Even if you belong to National Audubon Society, we need your support through a Local SAS Membership.

**100% of your Local Membership dues directly support SAS education and conservation programs.**

**January – December 2026**

*Membership dues covers an individual or nuclear family*

**Basic Membership.....\$25**

**Supporting Membership.....\$50**

**Student Membership.....\$10**

**Additional Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

☐ Bridger Raptor Study

☐ Indreland Audubon  
Wetland Preserve

☐ Story Mill Park Bird  
Feeding Station

☐ Wherever is Needed

Sacajawea Audubon Society **Newsletter** is sent by email.

☐ Check here to receive a **paper copy**.\*

*\*We do not share your information except with National Audubon Society, so your contact information is safe with us.*

☐ Please check this box if you do **NOT** want your information shared with National Audubon Society.

☐ **YES!** Include another **\$20** to join National Audubon Society.

**Choose your membership level above,  
and THANK YOU for considering an additional donation.**

**Mail this form and your check to:**

Sacajawea Audubon Society, Attn: Membership  
PO Box 1711, Bozeman, MT 59771-1711

**or Visit:** [sacajaweaaudubon.org/membership](http://sacajaweaaudubon.org/membership) to [join](#) or [renew](#) your membership online.

**Name(s) :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

PO Box or Physical Address

City

State

Zip

**Phone:** (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

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

Jan. '26 Newsletter

**F**or more than 50 years, Sacajawea Audubon Society has embraced the mission of protecting birds and the places they need here in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem of Montana. Your support makes it possible for us to stand up locally for birds and other wildlife and to defend a healthy habitat, and stable climate, they—and we all—need.



**Even if you belong to the National Audubon Society, we need your support through a local Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS) Membership.** As an SAS member, you'll enjoy the benefits of a member while knowing that your annual dues are used locally, for conservation right here in your own backyard.

### SAS Local Membership Gives You Many Benefits

- **Protect** one of the last remaining large, nearly intact ecosystems in the northern temperate zone.
- **Enhance** bird-friendly communities in Montana with our bird-friendly landscape program.
- **Contribute** to important environmental education programs about birds, wildlife and habitat.
- **Connect** with vital partnerships between other nonprofit environmental groups, citizens and local governments.
- **Advocate** for environmental issues locally and regionally.
- **Participate** in activities at the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve environmental study area.

### SAS Members Enjoy:

- **Free** monthly keynote speaker meetings.
- **Free** birding hotspots guide – info on birding the Gallatin Valley & beyond.
- **Free** monthly member e-newsletter (published 9 times a year).
- **Member-only discounts** on education, programs and events.
- **Savings on purchases** and access to member-only sales.
- **Participation** in many citizen science projects.
- **Free** guided birding field trips.



**YOUR MEMBERSHIP MATTERS!**

**Thank You To Those Who Have Renewed Your SAS Local Membership for 2026!**



**Sacajawea Audubon Society**  
**P.O. Box 1711**  
**Bozeman, MT 59771-1771**

*Change Service Requested*

**Sacajawea Audubon Society**, affiliated with the National Audubon Society, meets on the second Monday of each month, September through May.

**Sacajawea Audubon Society's Monthly Newsletter** is available electronically to all Sacajawea Audubon Society members, September through May.

**Deadline for article submission** is the 10th of the month preceding the month the articles will appear. Send articles electronically to [newsletter@sacajaweaaudubon.org](mailto:newsletter@sacajaweaaudubon.org).

**Change of Address:** If you have a change of address or are away, please notify [membership@sacajaweaaudubon.org](mailto:membership@sacajaweaaudubon.org). Undeliverable mailed newsletters are returned to us for an extra fee.

Find more at the **Sacajawea Audubon Society** website at [sacajaweaaudubon.org](http://sacajaweaaudubon.org)

**WETLANDS: SACRED.  
LIFE-SUSTAINING.  
A TIMELESS LEGACY.  
OURS TO PROTECT.**

**ONE WITH WETLANDS.**

[WorldWetlandsDay.org](http://WorldWetlandsDay.org)  
[Bozemanwetlands.org](http://Bozemanwetlands.org)

**World Wetlands Day**  
January 29, 2026  
February 1, 2026

Wetlands and traditional knowledge:  
Celebrating cultural heritage

**CONSERVATION  
EDUCATION  
RECREATION**

Don't sleep on **MEMBERSHIP.**  
**Our local endeavors depend on you!**  
**Renew:** [sacajaweaaudubon.org/renew](http://sacajaweaaudubon.org/renew)  
**Join:** [sacajaweaaudubon.org/join-sas/](http://sacajaweaaudubon.org/join-sas/)