



# Sacajawea Audubon News

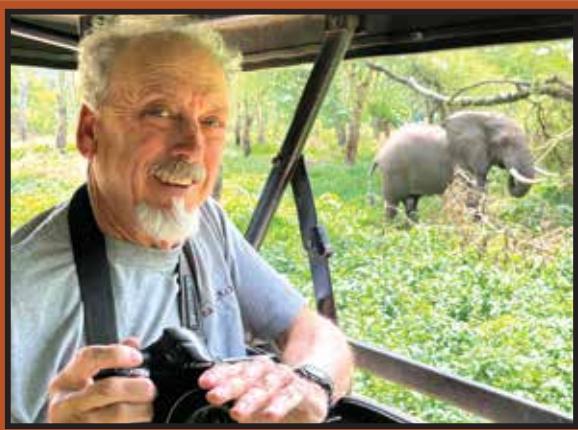
*Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS) builds on an interest in birds to promote the conservation of our natural environment through enjoyment, education, and action.*

SAS Monthly Program & Membership Meeting: Monday, February 9

## The BIRDS of East Africa

*(and OK, a Few Other Animals, Too!)*

with Jack Kirkley, Ornithologist & Emeritus Professor of Biology, UM - Western



**J**ack Kirkley earned his bachelor's degree in zoology at Ohio Wesleyan University in 1975, and his master's and doctoral degrees in biology-ecology at Utah State University in 1985. Jack retired in 2021 after his 36-year career as a biology professor at UM-Western in Dillon.

Jack is an ornithologist who has specialized in the study of birds of prey. For 30 years, Jack has conducted studies on the ecology of American Goshawks in southwestern Montana. He also studied the physiological ecology of long-distance migration in Swainson's Hawks, a species which migrates each fall to Argentina. From 2014-2018, Jack opportunistically studied a small colony of nesting Great-tailed Grackles in Dillon, where he documented the first confirmed instances of nesting by this species in Montana, as well as the first DNA-confirmed hybridization of a Great-tailed Grackle with a Common Grackle.



(left) Yellow-billed Oxpecker, (top right) Long-crested Eagle and (bottom right) Green-headed Sunbird. Photos by Jack Kirkley.

**P**rofessor Jack Kirkley and his wife, Brenda, took wildlife-viewing safaris in East Africa during the summers of 2024 and 2025. Their travels included the Serengeti Plains of Tanzania and the mountain forests of southern Uganda, guided by expert naturalists with exceptional birding skills and deep knowledge of the region's remarkable wildlife.

Birdwatching in East Africa offers a unique experience to observe a wide variety of birds in stunning natural settings. Many national parks and reserves are designated to protect bird.

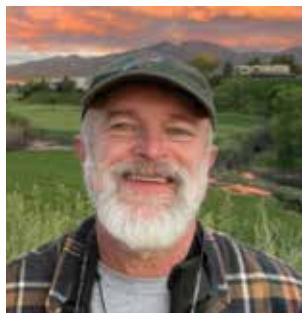
Jack's presentation will showcase the spectacular diversity of birds they encountered along the way—and yes, he'll also share images of a few other fascinating animals as well. Lions and leopards and apes... oh my!

**The in-person meeting will be held Monday, February 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/](http://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)

## MESSAGE from PRESIDENT, CHRIS NIXON



Please join us in welcoming **Brad Frazee** as our new SAS **Treasurer**. Brad was appointed in September 2025 to serve as chair of the SAS Finance Committee (*see Oct. 2025 SAS News, page 3*). He has been working diligently for the last four months with our previous Treasurer, **Loreene Reid**. As of 2026, the transition of leadership is complete.

**Loreene Reid** has served as our SAS Treasurer for **FOUR YEARS**. During those years, **Loreene helped us navigate financially through the incorporation of our two Limited Liability Corporations**— The Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve LLC and, the Sacajawea Wetland Mitigation Bank LLC. SAS continues to grow in complexity and with that comes more complex financial dealings. **A HUGE THANK YOU to Loreene** for steering us through this massive venture! Loreene remains on the SAS Board of Directors and continues to serve as Treasurer of the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve.

**Arron Clausen** was elected to the SAS Board of Directors back in May of 2020 and immediately served on our **SAS Wetland Preservation Committee and Nominations Committee**. During that time he brought great insight to the SAS Board and most importantly of all, with his wife Sonja, welcomed their daughter Mira into the world! He has now stepped down from serving on the SAS Board of Directors but has accepted appointment to serve on the **Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve Board of Directors**. He will serve as **Natural Resource Specialist**. We are glad that Aaron's expertise with wetland work and that his botanical skills remain available to meet the needs of Sacajawea Audubon Society and the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve. A big **THANK YOU to Aaron** for his past and continuing service to SAS!

I want to encourage each of you to take part in this month's **Great Backyard Bird Count, February 13 - Feb 16!** This event is for everyone, regardless of their birding skill level, not just for the super birders with a direct line to the bird gods! In fact there are two special online training sessions to help you with your birding skills, confidence, and understanding of how to take part. **See page 8** for how to attend those online training sessions.

Consider enrolling in our upcoming **Master Naturalist Course** (*See page 7*) and/or **Wetland Naturalist Course** (*See [bozemanwetlands.org](http://bozemanwetlands.org) for information or registration*). Both will open your eyes to better view, your ears to better hear, and your other senses to more deeply experience and engage with the world around us.

Though we face many challenges - the world is big and beautiful and it is still filled with birds. Get out and enjoy it!



## Sacajawea Audubon Society Upcoming Events!

- 01 Feb:** World Wetland Day Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve Snowshoe Tour
- 05 Feb:** SAS Board of Directors Meeting - Virtual Only
- 05 & 11 Feb:** Webinar – How to Participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count - [act.audubon.org](http://act.audubon.org)
- 09 Feb:** SAS Monthly Membership Meeting - Hope Lutheran Church
- 13-16 Feb:** Great Backyard Bird Count
- 17 Feb:** SAS Wildlife Trivia at Lockhorn Cider House
- 18 Feb:** SAS Book Club at Hope Lutheran Church

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

**12 &14 March:** Raptor Identification Workshop

*To see additional details including locations, please visit: [sacajaweaaudubon.org/events](http://sacajaweaaudubon.org/events)*

## Partner Events

- 11 Feb:** Solar Power for Crops and Cows (A Gallatin Valley Earth Day Event)  
Museum of the Rockies, 7pm & livestreamed  
Register in advance for the webinar: [gallatinvalleyearthday.org](http://gallatinvalleyearthday.org)

## SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY LEADERSHIP

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

## Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve

President Frank Marchak, [Frankm@bozemanwetlands.org](mailto:Frankm@bozemanwetlands.org)  
[Bozemanwetlands.org](http://Bozemanwetlands.org)

## NEWSLETTER CONTACTS

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

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

## Wrap up of 2025 Christmas Bird Counts



# BIRD NOTES

.....by John Parker

**W**hat a crazy winter it's been. The warmth of this most unusual winter definitely had a major impact on this winter's Christmas Bird Counts. With little or no snow cover, ground foraging birds were able to disperse widely, making detection more difficult. Who would have imagined Ennis and Hebgen Lakes almost completely open during the third week of December. As some of you may know, southwest Montana this past December was the warmest on record, by a wide margin. Bozeman's temperature for December was nearly 13 degrees warmer than average. And then there was the extreme wind event affecting the entire western U.S., which coincided with the Ennis and West Yellowstone counts on December 17th and 19th, respectively.

### ENNIS COUNT

As I mentioned above the most notable thing about the Ennis count was the **horrendous winds**; and **Ennis Lake being open for the first time since the count was initiated in 1960**. The total species count was 53, which is about 10 fewer than normal. Open water does have its upside, attracting waterfowl and gulls. **New to the count** this year was both a single **Western Grebe**, and the day before the "official count" was a **Lesser Black-backed Gull**. **New high counts included:** Common Merganser (154), Hooded Merganser (15), Ring-billed Gull (83), American Herring Gull (1), and American Robin (315).

### WEST YELLOWSTONE COUNT

The West Yellowstone count was also **extremely windy**, so very little bird activity was recorded. The **open water on Hebgen Lake** had *"a couple of thousand"* ducks on the water. But the great distance, high winds and waves made identification difficult if not impossible. This was very unfortunate, as there is no doubt that many new species and high counts would have been likely. Participants did identify **one new species** though, **Ring-billed Gull** (2). A **Golden Eagle** and a **Belted Kingfisher** were unusual for the count.

### BOZEMAN COUNT

Fortunately, the wind calmed and the Bozeman counters were able to enjoy milder conditions on December 20th. Total species were down a little from the last several years, at 63 species. **The most unusual birds of the day**, both of which were seen for the second time, were **Ferruginous Hawk** (1), and a new high count of **Lesser Goldfinch** (2). **New high counts** included **Rock Pigeon** (1716), **Hairy Woodpecker** (39), **Northern Flicker** (172), **Clark's Nutcracker** (142), and **House Finch** (1520).

### YELLOWSTONE COUNT

The Yellowstone count, centered near Gardiner, was conducted the following day with **rainy weather all day**—probably the first time that's happened. Even with the rain, 35 people joined the count, which was an exceptional turnout. **Unusual birds included:** a **Mourning Dove**, **Cedar Waxwings**, and **Horned Lark** which hadn't been seen in a few years. They also had a Count Week **Yellow-rumped Warbler**.

### LIVINGSTON COUNT

Livingston also held their count on December 21st, with rain in the afternoon, but fairly mild conditions with little wind. The Livingston count total species number of 53 was also down a bit this year. **Golden-crowned Kinglet** (3), **Cedar Waxwing** (67), and **Red Crossbill** (49) were the birds of some note this year.

### THREE FORKS COUNT

On the morning of December 27th, the people attending the Three Forks count and driving from the east had to brave blizzard conditions. Once daylight arrived, the storm abated and the rest of the day was surprisingly mild. Open water once again was a contributing factor for the birds seen that day. **New to the count** were **Snow Goose** (20) and **California Gull** (3). **New high counts included:** Cackling Goose (8), Trumpeter Swan (45), American Wigeon (43), Wild Turkey (77), Greater Yellowlegs (1), and Ring-billed Gull (112).



Ring-billed Gull (l) and California Gull (r). Photo by John Parker



# INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE

# UPDATE: FEBRUARY 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.

## *Call for Volunteers:* JOIN THE IAWP BUSY BEAVER PROGRAM IN 2026

**T**he Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve (IAWP) is gearing up for another exciting field season, and we're inviting community members to get involved through the **Busy Beaver Program**. In 2026, volunteers will play a vital role in several monitoring efforts that help us understand current conditions at the wetland and build a strong scientific foundation for upcoming restoration work.

**Water Monitoring** will focus on establishing baseline hydrologic data prior to restoration. Volunteers will assist with **weekly measurements of water levels in three piezometers** located throughout the preserve. These consistent measurements are critical for tracking groundwater conditions and understanding how the wetland responds over time.



Busy Beavers Emma Narotzky and Sarah Paulson collecting data at the Indreland Preserve.

**Bumble Bee Surveys** will take place through multiple sampling events across the growing season. These surveys help document pollinator diversity and abundance, providing insight into wetland health and habitat quality while contributing to broader conservation efforts focused on native bees.

**New for 2026:** IAWP is launching a **Phenology Monitoring Program** in partnership with the National Phenology Network. Volunteers will help observe and record **seasonal and cyclical natural events**—such as plant flowering, leaf-out, and animal activity—within the wetland. These observations

are especially important for understanding how climate influences plant and animal life over time.

Each of these volunteer opportunities involves **different levels of training**, but **no previous experience or scientific background is required**. Training and support will be provided for all participants.

If you're interested in contributing to wetland science, restoration, and stewardship, we'd love to have you join us.

We look forward to seeing you out in the field!

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**For questions or to get involved,**  
contact **Frank Marchak** at [frankm@bozemanwetlands.org](mailto:frankm@bozemanwetlands.org).

*The Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve Busy Beaver program ensures this wetland remains a valuable scientific and recreational resource for our community.*



# FONDLY REMEMBERING ELISABETH SWANSON

I know most of you have heard/seen the heartbreaking news that Elisabeth Swanson passed away Monday January 12, 2026.

For over five years now Elisabeth has volunteered with SAS and Co-led the **SAS Book Club**. Elisabeth stepped up and started co-leading our SAS Book Club in November of 2020 through May 2021 (at that time co-leading with Sherry Staub). Then Elisabeth continued to co-lead the Book Club along with Hilary Johnson (from November 2021 until the present). She and Hilary have been very dedicated to keeping the Book Club going and have made it a great asset to those who take part in the monthly Book Club discussions.

Elisabeth was very supportive of the **Bridger Raptor Count** and the **Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve** beyond being just supportive of SAS and the natural world in general.

I feel fortunate that I had just spoken with Elisabeth the Wednesday evening before her passing. She pointed out we seemed to have developed a tradition of having a yearly check-in and check-up in early January of each year.

Before moving to Montana, Elisabeth had been an Interpretive Ranger with Everglades National Park (in the early 80's). So we shared a former connection with the NPS and determined during our conversation that we knew a few of the same people



Elisabeth Swanson, pictured 2nd from the left with her fellows from the Gallatin Valley Democrats.

from our Park Service days, even though she preceded me with NPS by about 10 years.

She told me that she had stepped up last May to **Co-chair the Gallatin County Democrats** and was dedicating a great deal of time in that capacity.

Elisabeth will be greatly missed by those of us with Sacajawea Audubon Society and by all who knew her.

**We greatly appreciate all the years of dedication and sheer enjoyment that Elisabeth contributed to SAS.**

## FEBRUARY BOOK CLUB NEWS

Our wonderful leader, **Elisabeth Swanson**, died suddenly on January 12th of an aneurysm. She will be sorely missed for so many reasons. She loved to read widely and her intellectual bent brought depth to our discussions. Elisabeth wasn't only thoughtful in discussions, she was thoughtful toward others, making sure that everyone felt welcome with her smile and genuine interest in them. She was fun, positive and patient. Her attention to details and computer skills kept the book club organized and allowed participants to attend virtually. We are so lucky to have known her.

**Elisabeth was slated to lead the discussion of February's book; so we will carry on in her spirit.** The February book selection is **What an Owl Knows: The New Science of the World's Most Enigmatic Birds**, by Jennifer Ackerman. Both Jennifer Ackerman, whose books we have read in previous years, and this book have received numerous awards.

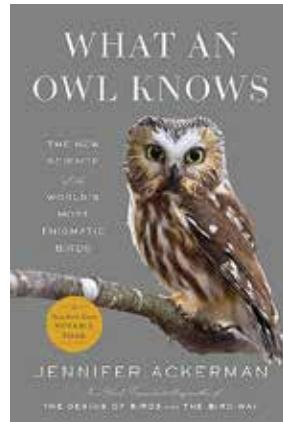
With their forward gaze and quiet flight, owls are often a symbol of wisdom, knowledge, and foresight. But what does an owl really know? And what do we really know about owls? This book tells the extraordinary story of how we've come to understand owls, their biology, brains, and behavior, and explores many of the surprising new scientific discoveries: how owls talk to one another, how they 'see' sound, how they court

### 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. If you have any questions please call or email Hilary Johnson at: [ralphhilary@gmail.com](mailto:ralphhilary@gmail.com) or (406) 599-1446. To join us online please notify Sarah Paulos in advance of the meeting at: [Sarahmarilynpaulos@gmail.com](mailto:Sarahmarilynpaulos@gmail.com).

You can find a list of this spring's book selections on the Sacajawea Audubon Society website.

**March 2026 – The Bedside Book of Birds: An Avian Miscellany**  
by Graeme Gibson



their mates in wild and outlandish ways and fiercely protect their nests, how they migrate huge distances and survive the radically changing conditions of our planet.

To write the book, Ackerman joined scientists in the field and brings this research alive with her own personal field observations. The result is an awe-inspiring exploration of owls across the globe and through human history.

## TALES FROM THE BLUEBIRD TRAIL - 2025 PROJECT IN REVIEW



By: Lou Ann Harris

**2025** was a good year for our nesting Mountain Bluebirds. Out of 179 monitored nest boxes, a total of 513 bluebirds fledged, compared to 353 last year. This happened even with 15 less nest boxes available. We banded a total of 245 bluebirds; 219 nestlings and 26 adult females.

We also recaptured 15 adult female bluebirds on the nest, the oldest being at least 6 years old. This female bluebird has quite a story. She was banded in 2020 as an adult in the same box (#63). We have recaptured her 5 years in a row, starting in 2021. Every year we have found her in box #63, except 2022 when she nested in #62. We assumed "her" box, #63, was unavailable that year. Talk about site fidelity. As far as we can tell, she has raised a total of 31 young during her years on our trail. Amazing! A bluebird of that age is exceptional and we hope she makes it back again next year.

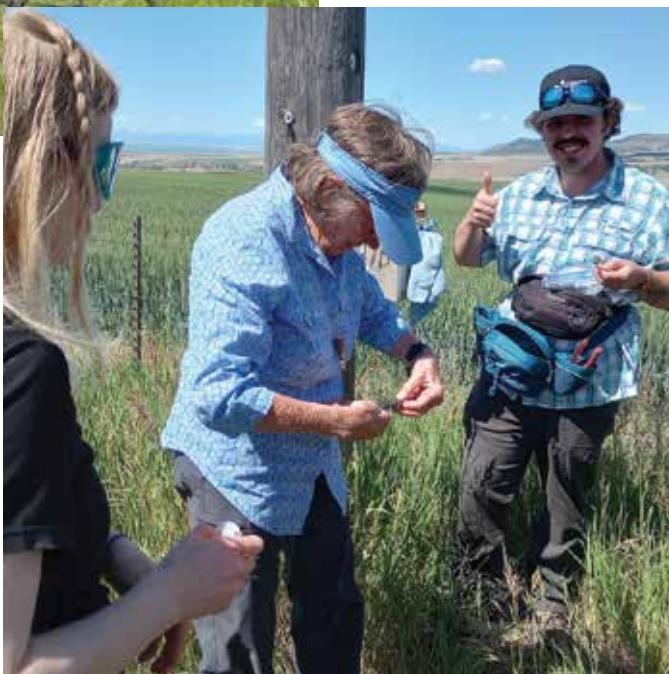
Tree swallows had a successful year with 126 fledged. One House Wren nest produced 6 fledglings. Only two house sparrow nests were found this season, which was encouraging.

We hosted the MSU Field Ornithology class again in late June, led by [Ben Goodheart \(SAS Board Member\)](#). One of the students who attended the field trip, [Lucy Stewart](#), ended up

helping us several times and she got some great field experience handling and banding bluebirds. [Caleb Carr](#), who manages the Wild Birds Unlimited store in Bozeman, was again a solid

volunteer, as was [Trace Homan](#). Trace is a skilled carpenter and helped with repair and replacement of some of our boxes. He also learned how to band birds and monitor the boxes.

We had seven participants for the annual SAS chapter field trip in late June. They saw everything from bluebird eggs & nestlings, to tree swallow eggs and nestlings. Everyone got to hold a bluebird nestling. Smiles all around!



**Thanks to our trail monitors:**  
[Roger & Noreen Breeding](#),  
[Brittany Visscher](#), [Janne Hayward](#), [Caleb Carr](#), and  
[Stephanie Nelson](#).



# 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:** \_\_\_\_\_ Feb. '26 Newsletter

## YOUR MEMBERSHIP MATTERS!



## 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!**



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

worlds of wildness, hidden in plain sight.

**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



**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)

## Webinar: How to Participate in the 2026 Great Backyard Bird Count

### Free Live YouTube Events!

**Thursday, February 5, 2026**

3:00 p.m. ET / 2:00 p.m. CT / 1:00 p.m. MT / 12:00 p.m. PT

**Wednesday, February 11, 2026**

7:00 p.m. ET / 6:00 p.m. CT / 5:00 p.m. MT / 4:00 p.m. PT

Join Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) team members and special guest Julia Zarankin for a lively, beginner-friendly webinar on the joy of backyard birds, with tips for participating in this global community science event.

**Register Here:** [act.audubon.org](http://act.audubon.org)

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