

Bitterroot AUDUBON



OCTOBER 2017

NEWSLETTER

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The Eagle Has Landed: Bitterroot Valley Winter Eagle Project

By Kate Stone and Adam Shreading

We've all seen it—a huge group of eagles congregating on a carcass in a wintry farm field. Our valley hosts a HUGE overwintering eagle population, but how huge is it? Raptor View Research Institute began capturing eagles at the MPG Ranch in 2011, with the primary goal of using satellite transmitters to learn about the habitat use and migration paths of adult, overwintering Golden Eagles. With time and over 100 captures of both Golden and Bald Eagles, this project evolved to also encompass auxiliary marking (e.g., wing tags, colored leg bands) both species. With these markers, we've amassed an impressive archive of eagle re-sightings in the Bitterroot Valley and other locations, including Washington and British Columbia. To increase our ability to re-sight marked eagles locally, we joined forces with Bitterroot Audubon and private landowners to deploy more than 20 carcasses and camera stations on private lands during the winter of 2016-2017. Thus the Bitterroot Valley Winter Eagle Project was born.



Courtesy Kate Stone

Mature Bald Eagle and Black-billed Magpies at a camera station.

The goals of the project are:

1. Increase detections of marked eagles,
2. Develop areas for researchers to trap safely,
3. Develop information on the use of working lands in supporting eagles and other wildlife,
4. Encourage dialogue between farmers/ranchers and scientists,
5. Engage people in a Citizen Science project



Courtesy Kate Stone

Bald Eagles and Common Ravens at a camera station.

In this talk, we'll share the stories of some of the eagles and other wildlife "captured" on camera, the people who welcomed biologists and deer carcasses onto their private land, and how we're working to leverage the data collected for positive conservation outcomes for wildlife and people. Not only did we re-sight previously marked eagles at our stations, we also documented many other wildlife species—from bobcats to moose—using private lands. We currently have over 3,000 volunteers from all over the world tagging our pictures on the crowd-sourcing website Zooniverse. We also raised enough funds within the community to purchase and successfully deploy a "community" satellite transmitter. We'll be continuing this project this winter, and there are several ways you can get involved!!



Courtesy Kate Stone

Mature Bald Eagle and Black-billed Magpies at a camera station.

Kate Stone is an ecologist at the MPG Ranch and Citizen Science Coordinator for Bitterroot Audubon Society. She is well known for her many Citizen Science projects, which range from involving high school students in a study of night-time acoustics of migrating birds to over 100 people of all ages monitoring eagle and osprey nests in the Bitterroot Valley. Adam Shreading is a biologist for the Missoula-based Raptor View Research Institute. Through these organizations Kate and Adam have developed several collaborative research projects aimed at linking scientific information with community engagement.

If you've purchased a winter eagle t-shirt, please wear it to this presentation!



Courtesy Kate Stone

Adam Shreading and Kate Stone, Bitterroot Valley Winter Eagle Project researchers.

Join Bitterroot Audubon to learn the fascinating findings of the Winter Eagle Project to date, see some amazing pictures and videos and hear about future plans Monday, October 16th, 7:00 P.M. at the Forest Service/Natural Resources Building, 1801 North 1st (north end of Hamilton, west side HWY 93). Enter the building on the west side. The Public is invited. Contact Becky Peters for additional information (369-5210).

Letter from the President

By Becky Peters, BAS President



It's that time of year again where Bill and I can bring out our feeders hoping that the local bears have had their fill of our apples and gone into the hills. Last fall we made sure to stop putting out the suet for the Clark's Nutcracker. They not only were eating us out of house and home but a bird expert warned us that they may not be storing their food the way they need to if we were so willingly supplying them. They still come through, but not in the hordes that we had, and we miss their noisy visits.

We all know how important it is for our feathered friends to be caching their seeds right now – black-oil sunflower seeds, peanuts, corn. Observe your chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers, jays and crows. The chickadees and nuthatches will be wedging the seeds into the bark of trees usually up high. Crows and ravens sometimes cover their cache on the ground or behind structures.

Much has been studied about birds caching. Fifteen bird families are known to cache in one form or another. Nelson and Beckman of Illinois have reported about the hippocampus (memory) of the Parus atricapillus'—Black-capped Chickadee. These mighty mites boast a brain twice the size of a pea, 0.60 grams. But with that astounding brain size they can store around 100,000 food items in 100,000 different sites. Their hippocampus is larger than birds that don't cache food. They remember the orientation of nearby trees and boulders, even your feeders. Plus, their hippocampus size fluctuates, it peaks in the fall and decreases in the spring. Maybe they aren't really remembering but re-foraging their territory. Some scientists believe that chickadees and nuthatches set up their caches as fast food places for a quick snack as well as for the long term. So even if they are using astounding spatial memory or if it is just reward behavior, we get to observe

their antics! In the meantime, start your fall/winter observations with a visit to Cornell Lab's Project Feeder Watch at feederwatch.org. They need your input.

HIGHWAY CLEAN-UP! OCTOBER 26. 4PM. BELL CROSSING! NEW LOCATION!

By Skip Horner

Join us for our semi-annual highway clean-up. A busy summer on the highway means plenty of trash out there, so please come out to help our valley stay attractive.

Meet on Bell Crossing Road, on the west side off Hwy. 93, at 4PM on Thursday October 26.

This is the same place we cleaned up this Spring, but not the same as previous years.

We have a new section of highway this year.

We supply high-visibility vests and trash-bags for everyone. Bring your own gloves.

MPG Ranch Raptor Migration, Fall 2017

by Eric Rasmussen

Everyone in the inter-mountain West, and especially the Bitterroot Valley locals, will never forget the overnight transition from our smoky, hot summer to autumn rain and drastically cooler temperatures a couple weeks ago. For a small group of raptor enthusiasts standing on the foothills of the MPG Ranch, that Alaskan cold front also brought another spectacle that will not be soon forgotten—migrating raptors. During the last two weeks, counters at MPG tallied 3,756 raptors of 15 species! The Bitterroot Valley is host to this annual event from September through October, with pronounced flights during cold storm-fronts that blanket the mountains in rain or snow. Unlike many “typical” hawk watch sites that rely on fair weather along mountain ridge tops to conduct surveys, the MPG Ranch site relies on foul weather to push the birds from valleys farther north—funneling them right into the Bitterroot Valley. When the right weather happens during the peak of our migration (approximately the last two weeks of September), it is the perfect storm of falcons, hawks, eagles, and vultures filling the sky.

The count became really fun when nearly half of those birds came in just two days! On 9/21 a staggering 969 raptors flooded south before an area-wide rain day on 9/22. The day following, 9/23, counters were again treated to 655 raptors waiting their turn—much like a migration traffic light. Well,



Courtesy Kate Stone

A Turkey Vulture kettle rising over the town of Lolo, MT on Tuesday, September 26th, 2017.

the light has been green for many species. Common and expected species are at some of the highest season totals we've had since our start in 2011. Totals at the end of September include Red-tailed Hawk (811), American Kestrel (252), and Sharp-shinned Hawk (320). We've also had a couple birds that surprised us over the years. We consistently get the uncommon Broad-winged Hawk (71 so far this year) during our peak period, with 23 alone during our big day this year. The big driver of our count, however, is the lower-flying Turkey Vulture (1,970). These birds make up nearly half of our current season total of 4,245, often forming kettles of 50-100 on warm, rising air pockets called thermals. It's these thermals, which form intense yet brief invisible escalators during the ever-changing, partly-sunny, rain shadowed valley skies, combined with N-NW winds that raptors then glide south on once the thermal escalator reaches its pinnacle, that provide epic days for our team of counters. You can view past season totals, compare seasons, and follow our count as it unfolds at:

https://www.hawkcount.org/month_summary.php?r_site=723



Courtesy Kate Stone

Friends of Bitterroot Audubon enjoyed the spectacle of migrating raptors on a field trip to the MPG Ranch on Monday, September 25th, 2017.

What's the story, Story?

By Jim Story

Question: *Can chicks communicate while in the egg?*

Answer: The occurrence of acoustic communication between chicks in the egg, and between the chicks and their parents was reviewed in a 2010 paper (Rumpf and Tzschentke, 2010). The scientists reported that considerable communication occurs between Muscovy duck chicks in the egg and their mother, and between the unhatched chicks. The chicks make a rhythmic clicking sound by ventilation of the lungs. The clicking sound was shown to be essential in coordinating the synchronous hatch of the chicks. While unhatched chicks are also known to make vocal sounds, there was no evidence that such communication aided in hatch timing. How these communication techniques work in other bird species remains to be determined.

Local birding expert Jim Story answers your questions about birds and their habits. Jim welcomes your questions at jstory4689@gmail.com.

Montana Audubon Names Executive Director

By Montana Audubon, Helena, MT (July 19, 2017)

Montana Audubon announces the appointment of Larry Berrin as its new Executive Director. An avid birder, Berrin has dedicated his career of more than 25 years to conservation science and environmental education in multiple states including Pennsylvania, Vermont and Oregon. Montana Audubon is a leader in wildlife conservation in Montana and one of the largest conservation organizations in the state.



“The Board of Directors of Montana Audubon are proud to announce the appointment of Larry Berrin as our next executive director,” stated Fred Weisbecker, President, Board of Directors. “After an exhaustive search, he was our unanimous pick.

We all look forward to Larry leading the organization, working with staff and active Audubon chapters on bird conservation, nature education, and policy work, promoting birds and habitat protection.”

Berrin comes to Montana Audubon from Asbury Woods Partnership in Erie, Pennsylvania. As President & CEO, he led a major acquisition of the 205-acre Asbury Woods and Nature Center, which included securing over \$1.3 million in government grants, representing some of the largest acquisition grants ever awarded to Erie County. During his tenure, he helped launch a \$4.5 million capital campaign with \$3.6 million raised to date.

Previously, Berrin served as Principal Executive/Manager at the Oregon Department of Forestry where he managed the Tillamook Forest Center and focused on legislative policy, partnership development, grant management and fundraising initiatives. Berrin has also served as Branch Director for Discover Your Northwest in Central Oregon at the Deschutes National Forest. In this role, he was responsible for managing multiple visitor centers, retail operations, recreation sites and programs reaching over 150,000 visitors and 10,000 students per year. He also led the effort to develop the 1.3 million-acre Deschutes Children’s Forest, the first of its kind in the northwest.

Earlier in his career, Berrin served as State Education Director in Vermont for the National Audubon Society where he was the recipient of that organization’s 2001 ACE Award in the category of Team Achievement.

“I’m so excited to be joining such a talented staff and an equally dedicated Board of Directors to help build on our conservation legacy in Montana,” said Berrin. “I look forward to enhancing our role as a

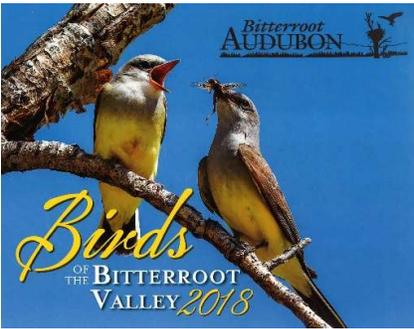
Calendar of Events

- Oct 16:** “Eagle Project” by Kate Stone, Audubon Meeting, Forest Service/DNRC Building, Hamilton, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Oct 21:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 10AM-12PM.
- Oct 26:** Hwy. 93 Clean-up, 4PM, Bell Crossing Rd.
- Nov 18:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 10AM-12PM.
- Nov 20:** “Sea Turtle Conservation Project” by Kathleen Sheard, Audubon Meeting, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.

leader in the conservation of native birds, other wildlife and natural ecosystems and continuing to expand our impact through our policy work in Helena, conservation education programs at the Montana Audubon Center in Billings, grassroots efforts in communities throughout the state, and partnership opportunities with volunteer-run, National Audubon chapters.”

2018 Bitterroot Audubon Calendar

By Becky Peters



It is with great pleasure that Bitterroot Audubon presents - tah dah! - our 4th calendar! Our 2018 edition of the world-renowned Bitterroot Audubon calendars is equally as breathtaking as our 2013, 2014 and 2015 editions! Once again we have a totally unique calendar complete with over 42 stunning photos of birds of the Bitterroot, taken by 17 very talented Bitterroot photographers, with 17 adorable drawings by Stevensville 4th graders. Be sure to purchase a calendar for your home and for others. BAS uses the proceeds from the calendar sales to support and promote education and conservation activities for all inhabitants of the Bitterroot and to provide scholarship funds for a

Bird Shots



Courtesy Mike Daniels

Burrowing Owl in flight, 2017.

qualified environmental studies university student in Montana. So be sure to support your local Audubon so that they can support the Birds of the Bitterroot. Only **\$15!!** The calendars can be purchased at the Hamilton Farmer's Market, Robbins, Bitterroot Drug, Hamilton Gifts, Art Focus, Wine Cave, Chapter One, and O'Hara Commons; also at the Stevensville Farmer's Market and Valley Drug, and at Bitterroot Audubon meetings. You can purchase them (for a bit more) online as well:

bitterrootaudubon.org/support-us Thank you!

News and Notes

Call for Photos Bitterroot Audubon is seeking images of birds for a feature in our newsletter: *Bird Shots*. If you have taken a great photo and would like to submit it for consideration, please email the jpeg image, with a brief description, to BASeditors@gmail.com.

Bitterroot Audubon is on Facebook If you use Facebook, please look for Bitterroot Audubon and “Like” us!

Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT New to birding? Beginner Bird Walks at the refuge sponsored by Bitterroot Audubon and Five Valleys Audubon are held the third Saturday of each month. Meet at the Refuge Visitor's Center this fall on October 21st, and November 18th, at 10AM for a two-hour bird walk. Bring binoculars if you have them. Contact the refuge at [\(406\) 777-5552](tel:4067775552) for more information.

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Chapter Only Membership

The Bitterroot Audubon Chapter Only Membership is \$15/year. These members will be supporting local chapter activities, receive the full color e-newsletter, and enjoy Chapter benefits. To join as a Chapter Only Member, complete this form.

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____
Email: _____

Send this application with \$15 to:



Bitterroot Audubon Society
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NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION



Audubon

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