

Bitterroot AUDUBON



DECEMBER 2020

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 35, NO. 4

2020 Stevensville Christmas Bird Count

By Dave Lockman, Compiler

Greetings Stevensville Christmas Bird Count (CBC) participants! The 56th Annual Stevensville CBC will go ahead as scheduled on **Saturday, December 26, 2020**.

Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 we'll have to do things differently this year. Our first priority is keeping everyone safe. We won't be able to gather as a group in the morning or for lunch, and we shouldn't be carpooling with anyone outside existing familiar or social "pod" groups. Counters should practice appropriate social distancing and/or wear masks. Have fun, but be safe!

Folks wanting to participate as field observers should contact me (Dave Lockman, 406-381-7679; stevicbc@gmail.com). We'll work with the area leaders to try to be sure that we cover as much of the circle as we can without too much duplication of effort. So if you have a particular route you've done before and would like to do again, great! If you've always wanted to check out a new area, or if you have access to bird on private land, perfect! But please contact me so we don't have everyone packed into one area while others go uncounted.

Other than the Covid-19 precautions, nothing has changed for folks participating as feeder watchers, and you can operate as normal. Just remember, counts in your yard should be reported as feeder counts. If you also go driving somewhere, those birds should be reported separately for the count area they were observed in. As last year, Susan Nelson (815-482-3734; snelson600@aol.com) will be coordinating the feeder watcher efforts.

I can provide electronic versions of the tally forms and maps, or I can mail them to you if you give me enough lead time. They haven't changed since last year, so many of you already have them.

Wishing you a safe holiday season, and I hope you can all participate in the Stevi CBC again this year!

2020 Hamilton Christmas Bird Count

By Mel Holloway, Compiler

Because of the COVID-19 outbreak, this year's Hamilton Christmas Bird Count, the 121st, will be conducted according to guidelines provided by the Audubon Christmas Count Committee to run a COVID-19 safe and socially distanced CBC, if local rules allow. **Email notices have been sent to past participants in the Hamilton count**, and because of the requirements, new participants are not being encouraged this year.

1. Cancel all in-person compilation gatherings.
2. Social distancing and/or masking are required at all times in the field.
3. Carpooling may only occur within existing familiar or social "pod" groups.
4. Activities must comply with all current state and municipal COVID-19 guidelines.

For Christmas Bird Count History:

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/history-christmas-bird-count>

2020 Big Hole Christmas Bird Count Cancelled

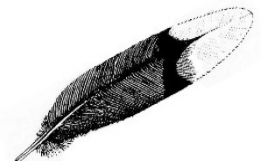
By Kate Stone, Compiler

I'm sad to report that I have cancelled the Big Hole CBC for 2020-21. Stay safe, bird close, and I'll share some sweet potato fries from The Crossing with you next year!

Letter from the President

By Micki Long, BAS President

Hi everyone, Thanksgiving is behind us; I hope you all enjoyed the day, even if enjoyment took a different form this year. Now it's



December, so Happy Holidays! Some of our traditions will be skipped this year; some will be modified. And we can create new traditions. As of this writing, my daughters and granddaughter plan to be with me, after a period of isolation. We will keep my decades-old tradition of hiking and birding in the woods on Christmas morning. We will count birds for Project FeederWatch, and I may participate in the Christmas Bird Count (see announcements elsewhere in this newsletter). I will persuade/force my family to watch my favorite and THE BEST Christmas movie—*The Bishop's Wife*, with David Niven, Loretta Young, and the handsome and debonair Cary Grant. The movie was made decades (okay, one decade) before I was born, but I've loved it since I first saw it 40 years ago. Other traditions are much more recent. For example, we will dissect owl pellets, looking for delicate rib bones and hoping to find a skull from an unlucky mouse. And I will attempt to bake a yule log cake again; this tradition is in its infancy, only one-year-old.

Last year, we also started what I hope will be another tradition. Since my daughters were toddlers and up until last year, we would cut down a tree and transformed it with lights and cherished ornaments. Last year, we filled a terra cotta pot with sand, stuck dead, downed branches into it, and then decorated with lights and ornaments--though we couldn't find the box with the cherished ornaments! I have since found the box, so this year, our "tree" will have more ornaments. I think we'll also add more branches for a fuller look. As you can see, the first version belongs in a Charlie Brown TV special.



On a completely different topic, I recently read two interesting articles on the Audubon website, one that discusses yet another negative aspect of this pandemic and another that gives me hope. The first is a sobering explanation of how the "surge in vaccine production and testing could affect migrating shorebirds, especially the threatened *rufa* Red Knot." See <https://www.audubon.org/news/how-race-covid-19-vaccine-jeopardizes-east-coast-shorebirds>.

The second article discusses what we can expect (or at least hope for) from a Biden Administration regarding the environment, climate change, and protections for birds and other wildlife. Conservation groups would like a Biden Administration to reverse the Trump Administration's focus on fossil fuels and its weakening of important laws, like the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, among others. See <https://www.audubon.org/news/what-bidens-presidential-win-means-birds-and-environment>.

I hope you all have a wonderful and safe holiday season.

Support Audubon Adventures Program

By Betsy Ballard

Bitterroot Audubon Society board members will be contacting teachers and homeschoolers in the Bitterroot valley for grades 3 through 5 this fall to see if they are interested in a gift of Audubon Adventures curriculum. These curriculums are graciously available through the donations from Bitterroot Audubon Society members. If you would like to donate, the total cost of one printed classroom kit is \$45.95, smaller kits are \$7 or \$19.40. Any amount that you can donate is appreciated. **You can mail donations to the Bitterroot Audubon Society at PO Box 326, Hamilton, MT 59840.** The link below has information about the printed and online materials that are available. Thank you in advance for your help!

<http://audubonadventures.org/Purchase.htm>

ZOOM Holiday Happy Hour!

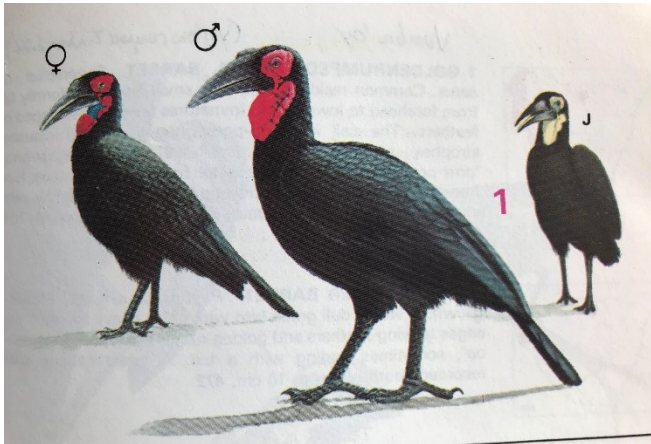
By Micki Long

Last December, Bitterroot Audubon held its first Annual Holiday Party. With plenty of food, drink, and good company, everyone seemed to have fun, even the slightly sore loser who disagreed with the

CORRECT answer I gave for the Raven vs. Crow ID trivia question. Of course, Covid-19 precludes an in-person party. Instead, we will have a Zoom Holiday Social Hour, at 5 p.m. on December 21st. We can also toast the solstice and the lengthening daylight hours that will follow. Grab a festive beverage and some snacks and join us for just a few minutes or the entire hour (and we can stay longer if we want). Look for an email Zoom invite from Micki around the 14th; you will also find the invite on our website and Facebook page around the same date. But mark it on your calendars now! Holiday headgear and/or Christmas sweaters optional. We hope to see you then.

Remarkable Birds of the World #4: Southern Ground-Hornbill (*Bucorvus leadbeateri*)

By Skip Horner



Field guide plate of Southern Ground-Hornbill from Newman's "Birds of Southern Africa."

These social, shaggy-black, goofy-looking, turkey-size birds are endemic to East and Southern Africa. They wander around at a measured pace in loose formations of three to more than twelve birds, appearing thoughtful, even confident, but judgmental. They sport bare red wattles around the eyes and neck, a long heavy decurved bill with a small casque on top, and stout black legs. When disturbed they prefer to lope off in an ungainly stampede, rather than to fly. They only fly into low branches to roost or to mate, where they indulge in a wide range of social preening and sunbathing. Omnivorous, they eat almost any living thing, from termites to hares to snakes, or even eaglets from their nest. Inside their bulky wattled throat is an extra air-sac used to amplify their distinctive deep, reverberant, far-carrying call. Just at dawn it sounds like a tuba band warming up, somewhere out there in the distance, deep in the bush: "Oomp-ooomp-

ooompa. Oomp-ooomp-ooompa. Ooomp-oomp." "What is that?", we're inclined to ask over our first cup of coffee, standing next to the campfire, staring out into the morning mist. The sun has yet to appear over the crest of the acacia trees and already the band is warming up. Unconcerned with people, they saunter earnestly past camp, wings folded behind them, heads bowed slightly forward, searching for prey as if preoccupied with a court case. They ignore us. Confident, they are.

Calendar of Events

- Nov-Apr:** Project Feeder Watch, see Micki Long's November "Letter from the President" for more details.
- Dec 21:** ZOOM BAS Holiday Party, 5-6PM. See email invite from Micki Long.
- Dec 26:** Stevensville Christmas Bird Count. Contact Dave Lockman to participate (406-381-7679; stevicbc@gmail.com)
- Dec:** Hamilton Christmas Bird Count. See email from Mel Holloway (if applicable) to participate.
- Jan 18:** ZOOM Audubon Meeting/Program, details to be announced, 7PM, Zoom Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Feb 15:** ZOOM Audubon Meeting/Program, details to be announced, 7PM, Zoom Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Mar 15:** ZOOM Audubon Meeting/Program, details to be announced, 7PM, Zoom Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Apr 19:** ZOOM Audubon Meeting/Program, details to be announced, 7PM, Zoom Board Mtg. 5PM.
- May 17:** ZOOM Audubon Meeting/Program, details to be announced, 7PM, Zoom Board Mtg. 5PM.

Riparian Exclosure Update

By Kate Stone

In spring of 2018, Bitterroot Audubon provided financial support to John Schneeberger for fencing materials to protect riparian vegetation on land west of Hamilton. In June of 2018, John put up six exclosures along two creeks and split efforts between protecting aspen and cottonwoods. After three growing seasons, John has seen tree growth in four of the exclosures. He moved the other two to new areas; one was not showing any aspen sprouting after two years and the other was flattened by falling cottonwood branches. We still have some fencing materials and funds available to support similar work. If you would like help protecting native vegetation on your property, please get in

touch (contactus@bitterrootaudubon.org)! Thank you John and landowners Nick and Elizabeth Hallett.



Courtesy Kate Stone

Exclosures, June 2018 and September 2020.

What's the story, Story?

By Jim Story

Question: Why can birds fly?

Answer: Birds have evolved many adaptations that enable them to fly. The development of feathers and wings are the most obvious features. Other physical features include the fusion and/or elimination of some bones, and the “pneumatization” or hollowing of bones to make them lighter in weight. Many of the hollow wing bones have internal strut-like reinforcements to keep the bones from buckling.

To further reduce weight, the reproductive organs of birds (testes, ovaries, oviducts) remain tiny for most of the year, only enlarging during the breeding season.

A bird's respiratory system is proportionately larger and much more efficient than ours, since flight is more demanding than walking or running. A bird devotes 1/5 of its body volume to its respiration system, compared to 1/20 in mammals. The lungs of birds are relatively small but are interconnected with a system of large air sacs, which, in turn, are connected with air spaces in the hollow bones.

A bird's heart is large, powerful and has the same basic design as that of a mammal. Its circulatory system is much more complicated than reptiles and is well suited to flight.

The flight muscles of most birds are red in color due to the presence of many fibers containing red oxygen-carrying compounds. The muscles are richly supplied with blood to enable sustained flight.

Finally, the nervous system of birds is very complex to enable the required quick navigational movements. (The Birder's Handbook)

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

Montana's 67th Legislature Set to Convene January 4th

By Amy Seaman, Director of Policy & Science, Montana Audubon

The 67th Montana Legislature is setting up to be like no other. Marching towards the session's January start date with an increasing Covid-19 pandemic and a major shake-up in the make-up of our elected officials makes it hard to know what to expect. And while the current situation means that our physical presence in the Capitol halls may be limited, we are not backing down from the challenge. This summer gave us a crash course in running citizen science programs remotely and helping activate our organization's voices will be no different. We are ready to research, organize, testify, and lobby, remotely or not, to defend Montana's wildlife, wildlife habitat, and bedrock environmental laws.

Though there will likely be considerable reduction in federal pressure to reduce the powers of foundational laws like the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Clean Water Act, we already know that a number of state-level challenges to our primary conservation issues are coming. Like challenges we saw in 2019, this includes efforts to halt the continuation of the Habitat Montana program (a Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks habitat protection program), and challenges to the state Greater Sage-grouse conservation program, conservation easements, keeping public lands in public hands, and increasing clean energy and climate change solutions.

Affecting state policy in a normal year isn't easy. And we won't be able to rely on tactics like packing the Capitol halls to show our support for important issues. But, we are ready for the challenge! Fortunately, heading into this year's session we are bolstered by our new Conservation & Legislative Assistant, Carmen Borchelt. Carmen will join us December through April after a short, well-deserved, break following the completion of her term as our 2020 Big Sky Watershed Conservation Corps member.

Together we are going to fight challenges to conservation, support sufficient budgets needed protect our wildlife, support our access to public lands, and support our right to a clean and healthful environment. We will work tirelessly to bring you, our fellow advocates, the information you need to raise your voice. During the session we will maintain an active “Action Alert Network” and make sure to help you navigate all of the logistical challenges we are sure to encounter this session.

As always we will need your help to succeed with the important legislative work that lie ahead. And you can start today in three primary ways:

- 1) sign up for our action alert network by visiting www.mtaudubon.org,
- 2) donate to our critical efforts to defend Montana’s wildlife
- 3) make your voice heard when important issues come up!

With January approaching we will be in contact more, preparing to charge forward with our legislative motto “*Go, Fly, Win!*” We hope you join us!

News and Notes

Bird Walks at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT

CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19 UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

Virtual Programs One silver lining of the pandemic is that so many organizations are creating and sharing virtual programming that anyone with an internet connection can attend, regardless of physical distance. Some of our members asked if we could compile and share virtual programs of interest. We're working hard to post these programs to our website. So please check there. We'll also share via our Facebook Page. We may also

intermittently send emails to let you know of upcoming opportunities. If you see something you'd like to share with our membership, please let us know: contactus@bitterrootaudubon.org.

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

Bird Shots



Hairy Woodpecker.

Courtesy Mel Holloway

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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:



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