

# Bitterroot AUDUBON



SEPTEMBER 2020

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 35, NO. 1

**NO MEETING, BITTERROOT AUDUBON PROGRAMS  
POSTPONED UNTIL LATER DATES, TO BE ANNOUNCED!**



Ham



Max and George



Walnut



Ham

## Keep that cat inside!

By Kate Stone

It's been seven years since a ground-breaking paper estimated that domestic cats kill 1.3-4.0 billion birds and 6.3-22.3 billion mammals annually in the United States, more than collisions with buildings, communication towers, vehicles, and pesticide poisoning (Loss et al, 2013). In the years since, I've watched with interest the response, or lack thereof, amongst cat owners in my friends and family circle. Subsequent research suggests that cat owners as a group are pretty lame. It turns out cats range farther than their owners realize, kill more creatures than their owners realize, and bring back to the house just a fraction of what they kill. When presented with this information, cat owners at first suggest their cat is not an offender. Even when faced with evidence from their individual cat (thanks, kitty cams!!), they proceed to deny or deflect the issue, make excuses for the situation, and ultimately decide not to change anything about their own (or their cat's) behavior (McDonald et al., 2015). I'm unsure how to combat such a denial of information. Many cat owners I know are currently bemoaning our culture's inability to acknowledge facts and science, from

everything from climate change to Covid-19. But do these bird-loving people open the door for kitty to go outside, knowing or in denial of the consequences? Yes! Or is it that they don't care? Or care enough?

If you're a cat owner, then please listen to me. If you let your cat outside, it is most definitely killing birds and other wildlife. It may be a recently fledged robin, an exhausted Wilson's Warbler just returning from Bolivia, or a perfectly healthy but busy momma bluebird. You are also putting your cat at increased risk of injury and death, from everything from other cats, domestic dogs, native wildlife, and of course vehicles. It takes two minutes to peruse any local community page on Facebook to be baffled by the sheer number of cats missing on a daily basis. So do your cat and our birds a favor: put some personal effort into making a change. Cats can and do have a high quality of life when kept inside, offered "catios", trained on a leash, or made to wear a BirdsBeSafe collar. Bonus: they look adorably ridiculous in these collars, and they're a great conversation starter.



Lark



Pipit- note the cat "tunnel"



Walnut

*Cats throughout western Montana enjoy the catio life. You can work with a local contractor, or keep the budget low by re-using materials from Home Resource in Missoula or the Habitat for Humanity ReSale shop in Hamilton.*

Many bird advocacy and other conservation organizations are loathe to take on the topic of cats killing birds, likely out of fear of alienating a huge donor base. For people wanting more information, including supporting research and action items, please visit the American Bird Conservancy's website for information on their "Cats Indoors" campaign. And as a cat lover and a bird lover, thanks to everyone out there already making an effort to keep your cat inside!! I'd love to have pictures of your cat enjoying its "best" life in a catio or wearing a BirdsBeSafe collar to add to our collection. Enjoy this photo montage of some local cats, living a joyous life!

Thanks to Lauren Smith, Claire Adam, Janeen Curtis, and Kylie Paul for providing pictures!



Walnut

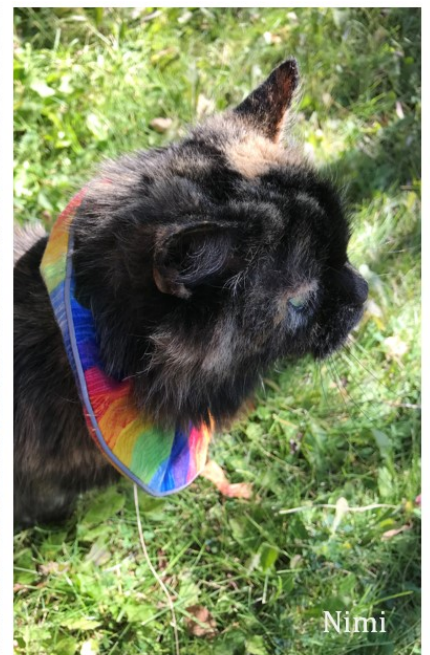
*Take some time and train your cat on a leash! They're great for walking, or while doing some supervised hanging out.*



George



Walnut



Nimi

*Not up for a catio? For \$10 you can purchase a BirdsBeSafe collar that will greatly reduce, but not eliminate, the risk of your cat killing birds.*

## Letter from the President

By Micki Long, BAS President

I'm writing this 'Letter from the President' on the last day of August. A gentle rain is falling, washing away the smell of the Lake Como fire. Though I see temperatures in the 80's in the week ahead, transition is in the air. There may be no more summer heat by the time you read this. The sense that autumn is upon us motivated me to move my bird seed from the deck to the shed, and while I was out there, in my spare "closet," I grabbed a couple of warmer jackets. Texting my firewood supplier is on my to-do list for today. And I don't bake much during the hot summer, but now I'm looking over my favorite recipes, deciding if the Spelt, Maple, and Pecan Loaf or the Chocolate Soda Bread should be first.

There have been so many transitions or changes in our lives since Covid-19 upended the ways we relate to one another. If I'm watching TV, I find myself reflexively cringing when I see characters hugging! And Bitterroot Audubon has not met as a group since February. I miss seeing you all! It will come as no surprise that we are not having a member meeting in September or, more than likely, any in the foreseeable future. The Board will have a Zoom meeting this month, and we'll discuss how BAS will function while Covid-19 remains a threat. We hope to find ways to remain a strong community of birders, to turn these tough times into something beneficial for our group.

Throughout my life, I've used two strategies for dealing with tough changes. As I know BAS can do, I have tried to turn these challenges into something positive, something that makes me stronger and happier. The other approach I've used is to fight negative change, to fight for leaders, laws, regulations, programs, and policies. Being an Audubon member is one way I fight to stop or minimize negative changes to the habitats on which birds and other wildlife depend. Through Audubon, I also work to improve habitats and to educate people about the natural world, threats to it, and how they can help protect it.

Of course, one of the most serious challenges facing habitats, wildlife, and humans is climate change. We read or hear almost daily about the impacts of a rapidly warming world. One of the impacts I somehow missed when research was widely



A few Board members enjoyed watching Becky Peters open all the cards you sent to thank her for years of hard, inspiring work as President of Bitterroot Audubon. She was so surprised and moved—and some cards elicited lots of laughter (you know who you are). In the time of Covid, our cards took the place of big hugs. Thanks, everyone who sent cards!

publicized last December is to the body size of birds. How did I miss this? In short, birds are shrinking, and many researchers believe climate change is the cause. An explanation of these findings is in this Audubon article:

<https://www.audubon.org/news/north-american-birds-are-shrinking-likely-result-warming-climate>

Big changes may also be in store for mammals. In a Molli class I took last year, retired UM Professor Kerry Foresman said that, eventually, bears may not hibernate; they won't need to because a warmer world will provide food throughout the year. Not hibernating will shorten the bears' life, as their organs will not rest for several months each year. The life of another beloved animal, the pika, will become more difficult, as the plants on which they depend may no longer grow in higher portions of boulder fields.

Can I stop climate change? Can Audubon stop climate change? No, but when our efforts join with those of other individuals and groups, we can protect key habitats and species. And, through citizen science, like our Christmas Bird Counts and Cornell Lab's Project Federwatch, we can help scientists understand what is happening to birds and work toward mitigating the impact of climate change. Do I sound too optimistic? The title of one of my favorite songs, "No Surrender" (Springsteen), captures my attitude towards challenges.

I hope I haven't worn you out with this excessively long Letter because we have some great articles in the rest of this newsletter! I know you'll enjoy pieces by Sherry Ritter, Deb Goslin, and Kate Stone, Becky Peters, and Jim Story. Happy Reading!

### **Goodbye Migratory Birds!**

*By Sherry Ritter*

When migratory birds arrive in the spring, you definitely notice. Every few days, there are new species of birds showing up to sing, display, and flit around in the trees and fields. But it's different in the fall. Unlike the fanfare when the spring birds arrive, fall birds just fade away.

By the time you read this newsletter, most of the Bitterroot's migratory birds will have taken off toward their wintering areas. Fortunately, there are a few species that you can still find in our area.

Watch for late-migrating warblers, bluebirds, Ruby-crowned Kinglets and young sparrows moving through the valley, eating seeds, berries, and insects to fatten up before flying south. Look for them in riparian areas of the Bitterroot River where there are dense shrubs for food and cover. Fields next to riparian areas add additional food sources, so check them also. Warblers shed their bright breeding plumages in the fall, resulting in what birders call "Confusing Fall Warblers" that can be hard to identify. Young Chipping, Lincoln's, and White-crowned sparrows also are hard to identify this time of year. It helps to have a good field guide that depicts breeding vs. non-breeding and adult vs. juvenile plumages.

Ponds at Lee Metcalf NWR are good places to look for swallows foraging as late as early November. There you can find Cinnamon and Blue-winged teal and Wood Ducks into October; Canvasbacks stay even longer. Look along shorelines for a few late-season shorebirds like Long-billed Dowitchers, Spotted Sandpipers, and Pectoral Sandpipers.

Some birds that breed in alpine areas can be found in the valley bottom in October and early November. Look for American Pipits catching insects from river log perches and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches moving in feeding flocks through fields.

Then there's my favorite, the American Dipper. Dippers are altitudinal migrants, most of them breeding along tributary streams. However, once

## **Calendar of Events**

**Sep 14:** BAS virtual board meeting, 4:30PM

**Sep 21:** Audubon Meeting/Program **CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19.**

those streams start freezing up, many pairs move down to the Bitterroot River where they defend winter feeding territories. There's just no prettier winter sound than the song of an American Dipper.

So, bid a sad farewell to our summer breeders who have already left, but keep birding to find some interesting stragglers. Unless you too are a migrant, continue to enjoy the hardy birds who, like you, will spend their winter right here in the Bitterroot.

### **Do you have a Sit Spot?**

*By Deb Goslin*

*"August 16, 2020 – 8:30 am, 52 degrees, a calm, quiet, cloudless day.*

*I sit on the inner bank of the creek bend today, the part that was scoured this past spring and is still barren- but for early, crispy, fallen leaves of alder and cottonwood. Morning sun backlights and dramatizes a hatch of small insects barely skimming the water in a pool just above the riffles. Sparkling droplets of water splash two feet in the air when they hit a particular rock. Sunlight illumines crimson roots of alder just below the water surface. Above water surface lush green moss clings to all roots, rocks and soil – shaded by dense alder leaves all day. I hear the quiet babble of low water and I feel the cool, moist air near the creek. No birdsong today, just the whir of kingfisher wings - startled by my presence as it follows the winding creek. Suddenly, a loud SNORT-STOMP from across the creek! The backyard doe snorts at me again- the backlit spray encircles her like a cloud. Turning away, she gathers her fawn and crosses the creek upstream coming toward me – just 25 feet away!" ~Deborah Goslin*

If you are a birder or photographer, you may have noticed that wildlife becomes accustomed to your silent presence after a few minutes. What if you had a "sit spot" that you'd visit on a regular basis over time? It might enable you to observe obvious and subtle changes through the seasons. A quiet sit spot may also enable you to develop a better

understanding of the “more than human world.”

Imagine what you might learn from closely observing the same tree or shrub through the seasons and at different times of day. Instead of having to identify them all, what if you approach your quiet time with a sense of innocent curiosity? What might you learn about the insects, mammals, or birds that use this tree? What is a day like in the life of that particular insect, tree, or bird? I wonder what you may learn if you use more than your senses of sight and hearing? What are the textures of plants near you, or how does the smell of the air change over seasons? What relationships are you building with those other living things?

What you may not realize is when you sit quietly in nature, your physical health—not just your attitude—is improving. Increasingly, research shows that humans directly benefit from inhaling the organic compounds given off by trees, shrubs, and even decaying vegetation and grass. These “phytoncides” from green plants have been found to lower the heart rate, lower blood pressure, lower the stress hormone cortisol, and increase activity of the immune system. Some studies show that the benefits of 30 minutes of sitting or moving very slowly through nature can linger for several days afterwards. And 3 hours of it can last a week. Imagine – preventive medicine in your back yard! <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/14/8/851/htm>

I invite you to find a sit spot in your yard or perhaps at a natural place you visit on a regular basis. Bring a folding chair for comfort, and perhaps some paper for notes and sketches. If you are interested in a lengthier Forest Bathing/Therapy experience, you just happen to have the first certified Forest Therapy Guide in Montana. Feel free to contact Deborah at [naturespeake@gmail.com](mailto:naturespeake@gmail.com) or 406-214-7879.

*"The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself."*  
- Henry Miller

**Thank you to the BAS members!**

*By Becky Peters*

I recently had the pleasure of sitting down (6' feet apart of course!) with Micki Long, Susie Nelson, Kay Fulton and Sara Ashline and going through some precious cards from BAS members to me

about my “retirement” from BAS President. Well done Micki on organizing this! I loved reading all of your notes and I will save them for those “attitude adjustment” moments. I was lucky enough to have a fantastic Board who has always worked to make Ravalli County a healthy habitat for our avian friends. This is nothing new as BAS has always been gifted with dedicated Board members for over 30 years. They established a wonderful non-profit organization that has been a reputable environmental guide for our county’s residents, be they two legged or two-winged! Remember - we are always open to new BAS members and new BAS Board members if you are ever interested!!



*Courtesy Micki Long*

*Becky Peters opening cards for her “card shower,” served as BAS President 2016-2020.*

## **The New Skalkaho Bend Park and Bitterroot Audubon**

*By Becky Peters*

I hope you have all seen the news about Bitter Root Land Trust and how they organized the purchase of the land at Skalkaho Bend and then transferred it to the city of Hamilton in order for it to become a new park for the city. If you would like to see more about the process watch the YouTube video: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=oqKX6XsnL3Q> (esp. 8 minutes in, we talk about how BAS volunteers helped on planting the new vegetation at the Bend). We are very grateful to a committee of plant experts who met with BRLT and the City of Hamilton and shared their guidance. They came up with such valuable, educated advice on what is

appropriate to plant that the area is now on its way to establishing itself as a major revegetation area. Master gardeners with their years of experience are, and will be, of tremendous value as we meet the goals of the various planting phases needed throughout the years. The next group of BAS volunteers that came to help the Bend were more than 20 of us that planted in stages throughout the day on May 12<sup>th</sup>. We made sure to wear our masks, use our own tools and stay 6' away from each other. It was great to see each other and work on the rebirth of an area to become a healthy habitat for our community and for our native pollinators. Volunteers will always be needed to weed the area and in the future to plant even new vegetation for our pollinators. Let Becky Peters know if you would like to be involved in activities coming up: [rpeters@montana.com](mailto:rpeters@montana.com)

### **More Pollinator Gardeners Needed**

*By Becky Peters*

Last winter we started gathering people who would commit to concentrating on planting native shrubs, trees and/or forbs around their homes. I have so much information about pollinators and what they need and what is appropriate to plant for our area that I am happily overwhelmed. I also have met with Master Gardeners in our valley and learned several things that can help us all: 1. They speak a different language to each other, and it is very efficient. 2. They not only ooze an accumulation of knowledge; they patiently share it to help on this project for BAS. The long story short is that Bitterroot Audubon is wanting to find people throughout our valley who will work on planting for our pollinators, NOW!! The desperation is real. The sadness about the numbers of pollinators lost is real. If you are interested in being sent information about native plants for around your home please contact me, Becky Peters [rpeters@montana.com](mailto:rpeters@montana.com) We need you wherever you live!

### **Migratory Bird Treaty Act Changes**

*By Micki Long*

In 2017, the Department of the Interior's top lawyer, Daniel Jorjani, severely weakened the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) by declaring it did not prohibit the incidental taking (killing) of birds covered by the Act. That change to a century of interpretation was seen by many conservation groups, including Audubon, as a grave threat to the 1093 species (as of April 2020) protected by the

MBTA. In October of 2018, Audubon joined other conservation groups and eight states in suing over Jorjani's ruling. On August 11th of this year, in a victory for conservation groups (and birds), U.S. District Judge Valerie Caproni struck down Jorjani's legal opinion and restored the MBTA's incidental take powers.

"Incidental take" refers to the unintentional but foreseeable and avoidable injury or death of birds, often as a result of industrial activities. A well-known example is the avoidable Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, which, according to the Cornell Lab, killed a million birds. British Petroleum was held responsible for the spill and was fined billions of dollars. As part of the settlement, "\$100 million in fines stemming from the MBTA were directed toward the restoration of damaged habitat"

(<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/explainer-whats-at-stake-in-the-2020-rollback-of-migratory-bird-treaty-act-protections/>).

Thanks to the MBTA, industry has an incentive to find ways to protect birds not just from oil spills but also from open waste pits, unmarked transmission lines, open pipes marking mining claims, and unprotected pesticide residue and other avoidable hazards.

The Trump administration is expected to appeal Judge Caproni's decision. This is a good time to contact your federal legislators with your support for the restored powers of the MBTA.

For more information, see:

<https://www.audubon.org/news/court-strikes-down-trump-administration-policy-let-companies-kill-birds>

While the MBTA is over one hundred years old, it was not the first U.S. attempt to protect birds. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website offers an interesting timeline of bird conservation history in our country, starting in 1799 and including publication of the first birding guide in 1832; the first Bird Day, in 1894; and a proposal for a Christmas Bird Count instead of a Christmas bird hunt, in 1900. For more, see <https://www.fws.gov/birds/about-us/timeline.php>

## What's the story, Story?

By Jim Story

### **Question:** Can parent birds “teach” their young?

**Answer:** No. There is no evidence that birds “teach.” Young birds instinctively know how to fly and find food once they have left the nest and are on their own. But, although birds don’t “teach,” they can “learn.” In fact, information to date suggests that most animals don’t/can’t “teach.” We often hear the narrator of a nature program incorrectly say

things like, “The mother bear teaches her cubs how to hunt for food.” In reality, the mother bear doesn’t “teach,” but the cubs do “learn” by observing their mother. Some recent studies suggest that some animals (i.e., chimpanzees) may be capable of teaching, but it is very rare.

*Local birding expert Jim Story answers your questions about birds and their habits. Jim welcomes your questions at [jstory4689@gmail.com](mailto:jstory4689@gmail.com).*

# Bird Shots

Bird Walks at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT

**CANCELLED DUE TO COVID-19 UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.**

**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](mailto:BASeditors@gmail.com).

**Bitterroot Audubon is on Facebook and Instagram**

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



*Tree Swallow, Covallis, MT.*

*Courtesy Carol Babel*

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### Officers

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At large	Betsy Ballard*	
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	Michele Falivene (Mimi)*	
	Becky Peters*	

\* Board Member

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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  
PO Box 326  
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