

Bitterroot AUDUBON



DECEMBER 2022

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 37, NO. 4

It's Christmas Bird Count Time in the Bitterroot

By John Ormiston, Compiler

For birders, Christmastime means it's time to clean the binoculars and spotting scopes, find the warm field clothes and be sure to find the bird guide. It's Christmas Bird Count time in the Bitterroot and nationwide. For the 123rd time citizen scientists will go to the field to count as many as possible of the birds occupying a 7.5-mile radius, 177square mile circle. Compilers will report the results of nearly 2,000 count circles across the U.S. and another 500 in Canada, Mexico and Central America. Bitterroot Audubon sponsors three annual counts around Hamilton, Stevensville and in the Big Hole Valley. The 36th Hamilton CBC occurs on December 17, the 60th Stevensville count on December 31 and the 13th Big Hole count in the first week of January depending on weather. The Stevensville count, started in 1963, is one of the two oldest in Montana. Yellowstone Audubon in Billings initiated their count the same year or in 1964.

We welcome participation of anyone interested in learning more about winter birds in the Bitterroot. We especially like beginning birders who will always be paired with more experienced folks who know the area and the birds. The groups gather at about 7:30 AM with the intent of getting to the field by daylight about 8:00. Hamilton counters gather at The Teller Education Barn (for the 36th time) and Stevensville birders meet at the Stevensville Ranger Station. Big Hole counters meet at the Wisdom Restaurant for breakfast and proceed to the field from there (call Kate Stone 406-381-1115 for details). The Hamilton group honors a 35-year-old tradition by meeting back at The Teller for lunch featuring homemade chili and Oreos, and of course some delectable Christmas goodies. The counts are serious endeavors, but congenial birders interested in sharing their knowledge with beginners makes

the atmosphere competitive and lots of fun.

Hamilton counters see an average of 67 species with a high count of 78 in 2013. The Hamilton area averages nearly 7,500 birds seen, many of them waterfowl on the Mansion Pond where open water remains available every year. We've recorded 133 species in the Hamilton circle.

Feeder watchers, folks who identify the species and count the birds out their windows or in their yard, annually add around 5 species not seen in the field at each of the Stevensville and Hamilton counts. If you live within 7.5 miles of either the Hamilton Airport or the Stevensville Ranger Station you could help with this citizen science project. Call John Ormiston, 406-360-9530 (Hamilton); or Dave Lockman (Stevensville), 406-381-7679 to participate as a feeder watcher. Susan Nelson, 815-482-3734, will compile feeder watcher birds for both counts.

Please take the opportunity to enjoy a day out with a great group of people and help the effort to count all the birds in 3 official National Audubon Christmas Bird Count Circles.

The 58th annual Stevensville Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for Saturday, December 31, 2022.

By Dave Lockman, Compiler

What a way to end the year! Please join us for a fun day (or morning) of meeting new folks and finding birds in our local winter wonderland. It's a big area and we need all the help we can get. Experience is helpful, but certainly not required. Field observers will meet in the basement conference room of the Stevensville Ranger Station between 7:30 and 7:45 AM to form small teams and get area assignments. Birders who live in the Count Circle (anywhere within 7.5 miles of the Ranger Station) can opt to get up at their leisure and count the birds on their

property. Both types of counters are critical to a successful count. You don't have to spend all day counting birds, any time you have is helpful.

Bird counters on last year's Stevensville CBC found 13,462 birds of 80 different species, which was about average for the last 10 years. We didn't find any new species, so our cumulative species total remained at 158 over the 57 years of the count. We've found some pretty wild birds in the past, including the 2000 sighting of what is still the only Vermillion Flycatcher ever reported in Montana, a Brambling in 2014 and a Northern Mockingbird in 1997. There are always some interesting birds out there just waiting to be discovered, so come and help us find all the common and unusual birds hiding in our winter landscape. Please contact me at 406-381-7679 or stevicbc@gmail.com for more information if you're interested in being a field observer, or Susan Nelson at 815-482-3734 or snelson600@aol.com if you'd like to participate as a feeder watcher.

Christmas Bird Counts; The importance of Feeder Watchers

By Susan Nelson

We are coming up on the two CBCs held every December in our Bitterroot Valley. The Hamilton count is Saturday, Dec. 17 and the Stevensville count is Saturday Dec. 31. As always, we need participants to join in and help observe and count the birds they see or hear. Our count areas are divided into sections that fan out 7.5 miles from a central point, (Ravalli County Airport for Hamilton count and Stevensville Forest Service Station for Stevensville). A driving route or trudging through the snow with other birders is always a great day for me. But those who would rather sit with a hot cup of tea or glass a wine and watch their feeders for a half hour or several hours can be extremely helpful in keeping a tally of what you see on those days. You can also split you time up with some feeder watching time and time observing on your property or in your area. As this is a 24-hour count, you can also take advantage of the owling time in those dark and twilight hours. And on Dec 17, just a few days before the winter solstice, we will have 8:37 hours of daylight, and over 15 hours of owling time!! On the 31st for the Stevensville count, since the days are now getting longer, you will lose out on total owling time by 4 minutes! But that will give you an extra 4 minutes at the feeder!!

If you are within this circle, your home is "technically" covered by the team that is driving or hiking your section. But you can provide a much more accurate snapshot of the immediate area by being right there for a period of time. Your data will be compiled right along with those "boots on the ground" folks and help give a glimpse of bird populations and diversity of species that day. It is all conjecture, but when loaded in to the big picture, trends begin to emerge over the long term as to the health of our Bitterroot populations.

I will send out protocol information and a data sheet for you to "fill in the blanks" as to your own personal bird count that day. If you don't know if you are in the count circle I can tell you if you are. Please email me at snelson600@aol.com or call or text me at 815-482-3734. We would really appreciate your help. Thank you!



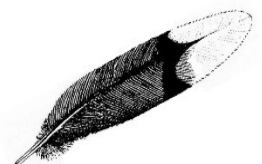
" I NEVER GET TIRED OF WATCHING THEM. "



Letter from the President

By Micki Long, BAS President

Happy Holidays, everyone. Regardless of your traditions, I hope you have a wonderful holiday season. Maybe your traditions include



taking part in the Hamilton Christmas Bird Count, on December 17th and/or the Stevensville Christmas Bird Count, on December 31st. I like to take a morning hike with visiting family members after we open presents on Christmas morning. The rest of the day, we like to eat, play card or board games, eat some more, watch a movie, and then eat some more!



As I participate in Cornell Lab and Birds Canada's Project Feederwatch (<https://feederwatch.org>), I've been looking at my feeders even more than usual. I have had an unusual number of Northern Flickers, and I know a few others who have also seen many of these birds. (Some Northern Flickers in the area seem to be intergrades; an intergrade is the product of two subspecies or subspecies groups.) The bright orange/red undersides of their tail feathers really stand out against a snowy background. I'm curious about why I (and others) have more Northern Flickers this year—do the snow and cold have anything to do with the abundance? Regardless of the cause, I'm really having fun watching these beautiful birds—even if they are just sitting in a tree.



Courtesy Micki Long

Some of you have, no doubt, seen the 2011 movie *The Big Year*, starring Steve Martin, Owen Wilson, and others. And there are many books available describing Big Years undertaken by various birders. One I've read and recommend is *Kingbird Highway*, by Kenn Kaufman. Another is called *Warblers and Woodpeckers*, by Sneed Collard III, who will present during our January BAS meeting! As you will read elsewhere in this newsletter, we are undertaking a chapter-wide Montana-focused Big Year. We'll have activities tied to the Big Year count throughout 2023.

We'll be using eBird for this Big Year project, and to help birders who have not used eBird or want a refresher, eBird pro Eric Rasmussen will present a workshop on January 9, at 3 p.m. Eric will set up an eBird group for us, and you'll just have to share your eBird lists with that group.

Use the following link to register for this workshop: Register in advance for this meeting:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ1vf-mrrzIsHtMr0etOS9Wcm06xfO_GETAC

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

See you in January!

Calendar of Events

- Dec 17:** Hamilton Christmas Bird Count, Teller Wildlife Refuge, 7:30AM.
- Dec 17:** Hamilton Christmas Bird Count, Feeder Watch
- Dec 31:** Stevensville Christmas Bird Count, Stevensville Ranger Station
- Dec 31:** Stevensville Christmas Bird Count, Feeder Watch
- Jan 16:** Audubon Meeting/Program: TBA, Audubon Meeting, Location TBA, 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Jan-Aug:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, 3rd Saturday of each month, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.

Citizen Scientists Needed for Grey-crowned Rosy-Finch feeder surveys!

By Amy Seaman, MT Audubon

Do you feed birds during the cold winter months, or know of a friend or family member that does? If so, we at Montana Audubon encourage you to join us

and contribute to a large Grey-crowned Rosy-Finch study spanning at least 8 western states!

This coming winter Montana Audubon is once again partnering with Utah's Sageland Collaborative on the multi-state Grey-crowned Rosy-Finch Project in an effort to better understand Rosy-Finches' population status, distribution, survival rates, demography and migratory tendencies, all of which are poorly understood. Grey-crowned Rosy-Finches breed around cliffs and snowfields in our highest elevations, and are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

That is why Montana Audubon and the Sageland Collaborative are members of the Grey-crowned Rosy-Finch Working Group, which was created in order to foster collaboration among Rosy-Finch researchers, managers, and other interested parties, with the ultimate goal of developing conservation strategies for Rosy-Finches and their habitat. Before devising effective conservation strategies for these remarkable, hardy little birds, we first need to better understand their life-history, population status and distribution.

This is where you come in!

While population studies of Grey-crowned Rosy-Finches in their remote, difficult-to-access summer breeding habitat are extremely challenging, these birds move to lower elevations when the snow flies, and regularly visit bird feeders in many parts of western and central Montana. We are looking for birdwatchers that are interested in helping with our Rosy-Finch conservation efforts by doing as little as watching their- or a friend's- feeder for 20 minutes, only once a month, from December to April, and reporting their observations. Even if you rarely or never see Rosy-Finches at your feeder, your contribution will be valued!

While time commitment for this important project is fairly minimal, we are asking interested individuals to join us for an hour-long training webinar on November 15, from 7 to 8 pm. If you are interested but cannot attend this live training session, no problem, a video recording of the presentation will be available online the following day!

You can register for the online training by clicking on the link below, or contacting our Avian Specialist Bo Crees (bcrees@mtaudubon.org) or Volunteer Coordinator Cassidy Dinkel (cassidy@mtaudubon.org) for more information!

We hope to hear from you soon!

Rosy-Finch online training:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_EG4jZqbOT8ayfityjv8ZCg

Support Audubon Adventures in the Classroom

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 and shipping is \$45.95. Individual topic and homeschool kits are available for lesser cost. You can mail donations to the Bitterroot Audubon Society at PO Box 326, Hamilton, MT 59840. Donations by December 12 would be most helpful. The link below has information about the printed and online Audubon Adventures materials that are available. Thank you in advance for your help! <http://audubonadventures.org/>

Holiday Adopt-A-Raptor!

By Kate Stone



Courtesy Wild Skies Raptor Center

Still looking for a meaningful holiday present for someone in your life? For \$50- \$80, you can "adopt" a raptor from Wild Skies Raptor Center. Your donation will help cover food and care costs for a variety of education birds. Donations of any amount are always appreciated! You can donate by visiting www.wildskies.org or mail a check to: P.O. Box 3676, Missoula, MT 59806

If you'd like to support Wild Skies with material donations, we could also use:

- Gas cards
- Old towels, sheets, blankets
- Pet carriers- medium and large dog size
- Lumber- dimensional, full and partial sheets of plywood, tall fence pickets and/or 1x8 reclaimed wood suitable for making a privacy fence

- Postage stamps- standard and postcard
- Gift Cards: Lowe's, Costco, Home Depot, Walmart

Items like stamps or gift cards could be mailed. Or contact one of our Bitterroot Board Members if you have any questions or to arrange a pick up of any of the items listed above- Kate (381-1115) or Estelle (381-0474). Thanks so much!

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.

News and Notes

Call for Photos: Bitterroot Audubon is seeking



Bitterroot Audubon's

BIG YEAR

2023

Let's see how many total species our chapter members see **in Montana** from 1/1/23 until 12/31/23.

We'll count by using eBird and sharing our lists to a group eBird account.

Eric Rasmussen will present a workshop on using eBird for beginners or those who need a refresher, on Jan.9 at 3 p.m.

You must register in advance for this workshop:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlvf-mrrzlsHtMr0etOS9Wcm06xfO_GEtAC

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the workshop.

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and on Facebook!

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
Hamilton, MT 59840-0326

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION



Renew or Sign up
for your
National Audubon Membership at
Audubon.org