

# Bitterroot AUDUBON



MARCH 2022

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 36, NO. 7

## Loons, Diving Birds of the North

By Donna Love

Donna Love has been the secretary of the Montana Loon Society for 25 years. Her first introduction to loons was in 1996 when she moved to the lakeshore of Seeley Lake for her husband's work with the Forest Service as the District Ranger on the Seeley Lake Ranger District. That first summer, when she heard the loons calling at night, she'd close the window, saying, "What's that!" She thought it was coyotes across the lake. Her husband said, "It's just the loons."



Courtesy Donna Love

In the spring of 1997, on an evening walk, she met the president of the Montana Loon Society, Lynn Kelly, for the first time. Lynn was checking on the loon nest that could be seen from the Seeley Lake wildlife viewing blind. After visiting with Lynn, Donna agreed to watch the nest and report to Lynn when the chicks hatched. Later, she attended the Seeley Lake Loon and Fish Festival and learned more about loons. She was hooked. In the fall of 1997, Donna attended the Montana Loon Society Board Meeting. Donna said, "I made the mistake of taking a pen and a notebook to the meeting." Lynn asked her to take minutes, and that's how she became the secretary of the Montana Loon Society.



Courtesy Donna Love

By 2000, Donna's background in art education and her work as a substitute teacher led her to develop a children's loon presentation. That became the basis for her first book, *Loons, Diving Birds of the North*, in 2003. That was followed in 2006 by *Awesome Ospreys, Fishing Birds of the World*. Donna has written eleven more books, which are mostly nature books for children. In 2009, *Henry the Impatient Heron*, received a "Mom's Choice Award." In 2012, *The Glaciers are Melting!* was Montana's Book of the Year. In 2019, Donna independently published her most recent children's book, *Audubon, John James' Birds and Words*, a 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading level book about the life and art of John James Audubon. Donna credits her successful writing career to the loons on Seeley Lake.

**You are invited to a Zoom meeting.**

**When:** Mar 21, 2022, 7:00 PM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

**Register in advance for this meeting:**

[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0vd-ivrzojGdcInG6YdzsgLQbvU2CenH9a](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0vd-ivrzojGdcInG6YdzsgLQbvU2CenH9a)

After registering, you will receive a confirmation

email containing information about joining the meeting. **Important: Please register before 5 p.m. on the day of the program, and join the meeting before 7:15, as no one will be allowed in after that time.**



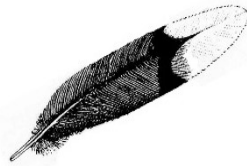
*Courtesy Washington State Loon Conservationists and Photographers, Daniel and Virginia Poleshook*

## Letter from the President

*By Micki Long, BAS President*

When do you start to feel like spring is really coming? As my friends hear from me every year, the poet Shelley writes, “If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?” from “Ode to the West Wind.” But that’s a little abstract; more tangible are the increasing arrivals of migrating birds who stay with us just for a little while or until fall. If you receive eBird’s Rare Bird emails, you know that Turkey Vultures and Say’s Phoebes returned a little earlier than usual. In my yard, I see Black-capped Chickadees, Northern Flickers, Mourning Doves, and Pileated Woodpeckers pairing up. A handsome Spotted Towhee has been hopping along fence lines and under shrubs, kicking leaves away in a search for overwintering insects. And there are few daytime moments when I don’t hear male Red-winged Blackbirds singing and calling, waiting for their mates to arrive and find a good nesting spot in cattails along the creek.

In another sign of spring, Bitterroot Audubon’s Raptor Guardians/Peregrine Watchers are gearing up to head into the canyons, set up scopes, and look for Peregrines! April is a good month to start, as you may see courting activities near clifftops. While we’ve already had a Zoom orientation/refreshers (thanks Jay Sumner of Montana Peregrine Institute and Dave Lockman, retired Forest Service Biologist), we have plenty of materials to get you



started. In addition to providing data to both Montana Peregrine Institute and the Forest Service, Guardians/Watchers have a great excuse to sit in a canyon, observing and absorbing their surroundings, for a few hours anywhere from two to several times during the breeding season. I’ll send you info if you want to learn more—and finding out more does not obligate you to participate!

As we get ready to see more birds than we have in the cold, windy days of winter, it’s also a good time to remember that birding can sometimes annoy and disturb the objects of our interest and affection. Disturbance can be especially harmful during breeding season. One spring, I was birding with an acquaintance in Arizona. She started playing bird calls. I asked her not to do so during breeding season, but her desire to find that elusive Rufous-capped Warbler overwhelmed her principles. I was pleased that we didn’t see the bird that day (and happy that I had seen it a few days earlier, without playing calls). There are many guides to ethical birding available online, including one published by the American Birding Association (<https://www.aba.org/aba-code-of-birding-ethics/>) and another by eBird (<https://ebird.org/pnw/news/birding-ethics-guidelines-for-respecting-birds-their-habitat-and-each-other>). Audubon has published additional guidelines for those of us who like to photograph birds (<https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/audubons-guide-ethical-bird-photography>).

Happy Spring Birding!



*Courtesy Sophie Osborn  
A beautiful spot to watch for Peregrine Falcons.*





*Photos courtesy Micki Long*

*Spotted Towhee and Pileated Woodpeckers.*

## **Why Eagle Populations are in Decline: Part 2 – Rodenticides**

*By Judy Hoy and Kate Stone*

As we reported in the February BAS newsletter, the most common sources of eagle fatalities include collisions, either with vehicles or with structures, especially wind turbines and power lines, poisoning by lead or by rodenticides and electrocution by contacting power lines. Also, like any other animal, eagles can succumb to diseases but this factor is not something people usually have control over. Unlike the other dangers to eagles, poisoning by lead and by rodenticides can hopefully be somewhat mitigated by education and in the case of rodenticides, banning those deadliest to eagles and other wildlife.

Many of the most used rodenticides are anticoagulant rodenticides (ARs), which means that they retard or inhibit the coagulation (clotting) of

the blood of the animal that ingests it. What are called second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs), are more potent than the first-generation compounds. A lethal dose can happen with a single ingestion of an SGAR. The SGARs registered for use in the United States include brodifacoum, bromadiolone, difenacoum and difethialone.

The liver of dead eagles is often tested for rodenticides. In a 2021 study of rodenticide levels in eagles, 303 were examined, and the livers from 116 bald eagles and 17 golden eagles were tested for ARs (Niedringhaus, et al., 2021). The authors stated, “The percentage of AR exposure (i.e., detectable levels but not associated with mortality) in eagles was high; ARs were detected in 109 (82%) eagles, including 96 (83%) bald eagles and 13 (77%) golden eagles.”

Many thousands of wild birds, including eagles, owls, other raptors, corvids and wild mammal predators such as mountain lion, martin, fisher, badger and others, as well as pets, have been collateral damage in the use of rodenticides (Khuly, 2021; Elliott et al., 2014; Lovett, 2012; Erickson, 2004). Besides eagles, most hawks and owls are especially susceptible to being poisoned by ARs (Murray, 2020; Mendenhall and Pank, 1980). The poisoning of hawks and owls appears to be widespread, likely throughout the United States (Stansley, et al., 2014). The obvious solution to this unnecessary loss of life would be to ban all ARs from being used or sold. Some ARs are beginning to be restricted (Lovett, 2012). However, since banning all of them is unlikely, public education on how to use ARs more responsibly would hopefully help save many predatory birds and mammals, including much loved pets, from unnecessary deaths.

## **Metcalf in March**

*By Laurel De Groot and Kate Stone*

On March 1, we received an email from Kate Stone, asking if we could come to the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge that morning. Some ten people met at the refuge visitor's center area at 9:30. Reporter Heidi Meili and videographer Kevin Maki from NBC Montana were creating an article on Trumpeter and Tundra Swans in the refuge. The team began by interviewing a few people about why they thought swans were important and what the refuge meant to them.



*Courtesy Laurel DeGroot*

*One of many Trumpeter Swans flying over the ponds at Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge.*

When it was my turn, I said, “Birds need help. The odds of surviving migration are low, especially for waterfowl. There are so many human-made obstacles that they meet with that it's amazing any come back.”

Then the group divided into two trucks. A hybrid of bouncing through puddles in the trucks and walking on the muddy road gave us wonderful scenery and at least three stunning views of the over 2,800 acres of the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge. Those three-and-half hours were a rare, even a once-in-a-lifetime, experience. On a dirt road usually inaccessible to the public, we saw a remarkable number of ponds surrounded by fields and wetlands, with swans and other waterfowl. The total of Trumpeter Swan adults and juveniles and Tundra Swan adults was over 25.



*Courtesy John Henry DeGroot*

*A group of Trumpeter Swans dwarf a pair of Ring-necked Ducks.*

Of course, we didn't see just swans. We saw (or heard) Goldeneyes, a Redhead, an American Tree Sparrow, Mallards, a Pileated Woodpecker, Mergansers, a Great Blue Heron...the list goes on! We also witnessed a rainbow, which was barely floating on a steady, gentle drizzle.

I had no idea the refuge was as big as it was; I just knew what I had seen from walking the trails. Then I learned that it was a relatively small size for refuges in Montana; the Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge is 55,000 acres! We were also disappointed that we didn't get stuck in the mud that frequented the trail. It would have been much more interesting that way....

Photography was a big part of the expedition. The filming by Kevin Maki was happening almost every minute, but many people were taking still shots. Heidi was taking pictures with her phone, Kate with her camera, and me and my brother with ours. I took some of my best bird pictures ever and am thrilled.



*Courtesy Laurel DeGroot*

*NBC Montana cameraman Kevin Maki scopes the area.*

Being able to see that off-limits area was an enriching (and awesome!) experience. One of my favorite parts of the visit was when the rain stopped and sun was filtering through golden clouds to the south. I also had never been that close to flying swans. Really, I loved it all; this was a field trip I won't forget.



*Courtesy Jen De Groot*

*John Henry DeGroot shares his excitement of swans with NBC Montana host Heidi Meili.*



## Welcome Back Waterfowl!!

By Judy Hoy and Kate Stone

Mark your calendars: Bitterroot Audubon will be welcoming back waterfowl and wonderful birders on Saturday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>. We'll meet on the dike west of the Visitor's Center from 10 am to 1:30 pm. We'll help the public with bird identification and observing the waterfowl, other birds, and mammals that use the refuge wetlands. This special event is for everyone. For more information or questions, check the Bitterroot Audubon Website: [www.bitterrootaudubon.org](http://www.bitterrootaudubon.org).

## Wild Wings Snow Geese Migration Festival

By Kate Stone

The community of Choteau is resurrecting their festival celebrating spring snow goose migration March 25-27. They will host guided tours of Freezeout Lake, talks with local biologists, bird-themed art exhibitions in town, and bring back the Old Trails Museum's Wild Game Feed. For more information and to reserve a space on a tour, please visit the Dropstone Outfitting website [www.dropstoneoutfitting.com](http://www.dropstoneoutfitting.com) or visit the Facebook page listed in this flyer. Bird tourism is very important to rural economies- let's show this community that we support them!



The flyer features a light blue background with a white scalloped border at the top. At the top, the text 'WILD WINGS' is written in a large, stylized font, with 'CHOTEAU' in a smaller, decorative font below it. Two white geese are shown in flight, one on the left and one on the right. Below the geese, the dates 'March 25-27' are printed in a large, bold font. Underneath the dates, a blue banner contains the text 'Celebrate the Spring Snow Goose Migration!'. Below the banner, the text 'Events schedule, tour, & reservation info at: facebook.com/wildwingschoteau' is displayed. To the left of this text is a QR code. To the right of the QR code, the text 'Pre-register at visitchoteau.com/wings-registration' is shown. At the bottom of the flyer, a blue banner reads 'A special Thank You to our MANY local businesses for your support and contributions!'. Below this banner are several logos for local businesses: a bird logo, '3 RIVERS', 'V', 'MONTANA', 'MUSIC FESTIVAL', 'NORTH 40', and 'MYSTERY RANCH'.

## Calendar of Events

- Mar 20:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.
- Mar 21:** **ZOOM** Audubon Meeting/Program: *Loons, Diving Birds of the North*, 7PM; Zoom Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Mar 25-27:** Wild Wings Snow Geese Migration Festival, Freezeout Lake, Choteau, MT
- Apr 17:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.
- Apr 18:** **ZOOM** Audubon Meeting/Program: details to be announced, 7PM; Zoom Board Mtg. 5PM.
- Apr 23:** Welcome Back Waterfowl Day, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 10AM-1:30PM
- May 16:** **ZOOM** Audubon Meeting/Program: details to be announced, 7PM; Zoom Board Mtg. 5PM.
- June 3-5:** **Save the Date** for the Wings Under the Big Sky Festival, Lewistown, MT.

## Calling All Pollinator Gardeners! – That’s YOU!!

By Becky Peters

If you are considering starting a native garden for pollinators, boy do I have a treasure trove of information to pass on to you! Please email me, Becky Peters, at [rpeters@montana.com](mailto:rpeters@montana.com), subject line: Pollinator information. I really have almost too many links and reading material to send you, sorry. I have gotten obsessive about it. Here at Bitterroot Audubon, we are adamant to plant more natives, so that we have more pollinators, so that we have more food and shelter for birds! Nature knew how to do this, now we just need to help out and put back more of what was taken away. Native plants are less invasive and have evolved with our pollinators. So just to help get you started with planting native species here are some links to look up:

1. A film from our MPG Ranch in Florence will be presented at the International Wildlife Film Festival April 23-30, 2022, at the Roxy Theatre in Missoula. This Film is called **Westward Wings** and is about the “imperiled western population of Monarch butterflies” with Maggie Hirschauer. She studied their migration in the Bitterroot Valley. I can’t wait to see it! <https://www.mpgranch.com/research/2021-bitterroot-monarch-project-update>

2. This site is a treasure trove of information for our area. You'll find a book list, recommended species for our area, info on landscaping with native plants, list of local nurseries, websites, etc.  
<https://www.mtnativeplants.org/missoula-west-central-montana-native-plant-landscaping/>  
 One book that I would add to the list is the highly recommended **Nature's Best Hope** by Douglas Tallamy, Timber Press
3. Here's a 13-page guide created by our own Clark Fork, Montana Native Plant Society. It will have hints about how to get started and also includes which plants to avoid.  
<https://www.mtnativeplants.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Clark-Fork-Chapter-Native-Plant-Landscaping-West-Central-Montana.pdf>
4. And be sure to go to Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center:  
<https://www.wildflower.org/plants-main>  
 You can put in Montana at the "Plants in Your State" link. It is fantastic. You can choose which plants you want for bloom time, color, amount of sun, deciduous or evergreen, soil moisture, etc. and it will come up with a list just made for your site.
5. And this article is exactly why BAS is pushing for everyone to plant native species in our valley: <https://www.audubon.org/news/why-native-plants-are-better-birds-and-people>

### **Skalkaho Bend Park and Free Roaming Dogs**

*By Becky Peters*

We love our new park at Skalkaho Bend Park, but I am worried. There have been many reports of dogs roaming free all over the place down there. Now, as a dog owner who wants her rambunctious dog to run his heart out, I perfectly understand. However, the city has many reasons to want the dogs on leash at a city park: little kids do not want to be scared or knocked down by my dog, (big people don't either), people don't want to step on dog poop (I don't either), and here is another of my worries – I don't want dogs digging up the plants and tender flowers we just planted for the pollinators and birds. I know the milkweed down there is unprotected. Yikes! Another major worry some of us have is for any birds that might nest on the ground in the tall grasses there. The dogs will undoubtedly chase the parents away and cause a lot of energy expenditure at a time when the parents should be taking care of

their young, and much more, the dogs could harm the eggs and newly hatched chicks. So, help us out – keep your precious dog leashed according to the city ordinance and ask others to do likewise. Please tell them why. I will be meeting with the Director of our Hamilton City Parks and the newly hired Hamilton Police code enforcement officer. Perhaps we can brainstorm some solutions. Thank you, Becky Peters

### **Bitterroot Audubon shirts available!**

*By Kate Stone*

After a decades'-long respite, Bitterroot Audubon has our next generation of t-shirts available for purchase! These shirts feature a triptych of artwork by local artist and conservation celebrant Karen Savory. Enjoy a Common Raven, Great Horned Owl, and Black-capped Chickadee nestled on a Midnight Navy-heather background. If you enjoyed the shirts from the Bitterroot Valley Winter Eagle Project, these new shirts are the same style and sizing, printed for us by Garage Tees in Missoula.

We hope to have these shirts available for in-person purchase at programs and the Farmer's Marker later in 2022. In the meantime, you can order one from our website for \$20 and we will mail it to you.

Please thank Karen for donating her art to this cause and support her by visiting her website:

[www.simplysavoryart.com](http://www.simplysavoryart.com)



## What's the story, Story?

By Jim Story

**Question:** Which bird groups migrate the farthest?

**Answer:** Of all the birds in North America, the 20 million shorebirds undertake the most impressive migration. Nearly 70% of the shorebirds breed in the Arctic and winter in Central and South America, a distance of up to 7,000 miles, and they make the long trek twice a year! Some fly at high elevations (10,000 ft.), and some, like the Hudsonian Godwit, apparently make the long journey nonstop. Recent studies have shown that sanderlings, sandpipers and many other shorebird species form huge concentrations at key areas along their flyways. These areas serve as critical “refueling” areas, where the birds replenish their energy reserves for continuation of their flight. Five of these areas support over a million shorebirds annually: Alaska's Copper River Delta, Washington's Gray's Harbor, eastern Canada's Bay of Fundy, Kansas' Cheyenne Bottoms, and the beaches of Delaware Bay in New Jersey and Delaware. More than 80% of the entire population of some of the species gathers at one or more of these five sites. These high concentrations in just a few widely-spaced areas makes these species extremely vulnerable should anything happen to the sites.

Fortunately, efforts are underway to protect these extremely important stopover sites. The National Audubon Society along with other groups has established the *Pacific Americas shorebird conservation strategy*, a plan to protect these key habitat species thereby “ensuring that all of our species of shorebirds are protected or restored, and that shorebirds continue to have stable populations that are capable of sustaining themselves into the long-term future.”

(Sources: Ehrlich et al. 1988, The Birder's Handbook; Senner et al. 2016. Pacific Americas shorebird conservation strategy. National Audubon Society. New York, New York, USA. Available at: <http://www.shorebirdplan.org>.

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).

## News and Notes

**2022 Long-Billed Curlew Citizen Science Surveys (April 8-May 7; May 8-May 31):** Are you ready to hear the 'currlleeee' of the Long-billed Curlew?

Well, grab your binoculars and get ready, because curlew season is just around the corner! These charismatic shorebirds will be trickling back into the state in less than two months and we need your help finding as many as possible in and around the Mission, Blackfoot, and Helena Valleys!

Since 2013, volunteers have recorded curlew sightings in these three Montana valleys and this data helps inform statewide habitat models as well as highlight important tracts of intact grassland that are in need of conservation. We are hoping to revamp our efforts on this project, so please share this opportunity with anyone you think will be interested! As a species specific survey, this is a great time for aspiring citizen scientists and veteran birders alike to contribute to the conservation of a treasured Montana bird species.

Please email Peter Dudley at [peter@mthoodubon.org](mailto:peter@mthoodubon.org) for more information and to sign up!

**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.



# Bird Shots



*Cedar Waxwing.*

*Courtesy Laurel DeGroot*



*Prairie Falcon.*

*Courtesy Carol Babel*



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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: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Send this application with \$15 to:



Bitterroot Audubon Society  
PO Box 326  
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### NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION



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