

# Bitterroot AUDUBON



FEBRUARY 2024

NEWSLETTER

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## Rewilding

By Dr. Daniel Kinka

American Prairie's vision is to fully restore the shortgrass prairie ecosystem in 5,000 square miles of Montana's Northern Great Plains. As such, the American Prairie Ecosystem must contain ecologically meaningful populations of all non-extinct, native species present in the reference ecosystem (i.e., the Upper Missouri River ecosystem, circa 1800), with management focused on maximizing the integrity, complexity, and resilience of the system. We operate under the guiding principle that there is both an inherent and practical value to restoring and conserving biodiversity at all levels, as well as preserving environmental factors that maintain biodiversity, like habitat connectivity and natural disturbance. Rewilding of this kind not only jumpstarts latent ecological processes and restores wildlife abundance, it also speaks to a sense of wonder and inspiration that can only be found in a wilder world. In this presentation I will provide an overview of American Prairie's rewilding efforts, and how we plan to expand them.



*Courtesy Daniel Kinka*

February's Bitterroot Audubon Society  
speaker: Dr. Daniel Kinka.



*"When the Land Belonged to God" by C.M. Russell*

Dr. Daniel Kinka is American Prairie's Wildlife Restoration Manager. His primary responsibilities include restoring and monitoring wildlife on the Reserve and managing the wildlife-friendly ranching program "Wild Sky." He also acts as a liaison to scientists conducting research at American Prairie, other non-governmental organizations, agencies, and other external entities. He joined American Prairie in 2018, shortly after completing his doctoral degree in ecology at Utah State University. In graduate school, he studied the use of livestock guardian dogs to promote coexistence between large North American carnivores and ranchers. Originally from Florida and the Washington DC area, Daniel has enjoyed living "out west" since 2010. In addition to restoration ecology and applied science, Daniel harbors a deep passion for science communication, having worked as a science reporter for Utah Public Radio, publishing in High Country News, and serving as a National Geographic Society Fellow.

This program is via Zoom. Please register at least 30 minutes before the meeting (by 6:30PM) on February 19<sup>th</sup>. Please join the meeting before 7:15 or you will not be allowed in.

You are invited to a Zoom meeting on February 19, 2024 at 7PM. You must register in advance for this meeting using the following link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/join/joinMeeting?meetingid=9876543210&meetingpassword=1234567890> After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

### Letter from the President

*By Micki Long, BAS President*

Happy February! The president of the college where I spent my career hated February, and every year, he used his version of a president's letter to moan and groan about February. That always irritated me and told me that he wasn't an outdoor person. We lived and worked in the Lake Erie snow belt, and I loved all that snow (approximately 100 inches a year in my driveway). There were so many nearby places to cross-country ski or snowshoe! Granted, I didn't go out much when the temps hit -20F here last month. But I think that we birders can go out and find interesting birds, animals, and habitat to enjoy in almost any weather—or we can look out the window at our backyard birds. So I don't hate or even dislike any month!



*Courtesy Micki Long*

*Juvenile American Goshawk*

So far this winter, my yard has been visited often by hawks, two of accipiter species, Sharp-shinned most often, and Goshawks three times. Just once a Cooper's Hawk has hunted here this winter. "Sharpies" are here approximately four days a week. They fail more often than they succeed. though a European Starling, a Northern Flicker, and a few California Quail have met their demise. I've seen a

Sharpie"mantling over its prey a couple of times. Many of you know the term, but some may not. Mantling is when a raptor spreads its wings over its prey, most likely to protect it from other birds. The photo I took of a recent sharpie kill is a little gruesome, so I've included one from last year.



*Courtesy Micki Long*

*Sharp-shinned Hawk mantling over its kill.*

Given all the failed New Year's resolutions in my past, I've generally given up setting myself for more failure. But I did decide to participate in Naturalists with Brushes, a very friendly, welcoming group. I attend sessions in Hamilton, but there are some in Missoula too. I have found, not surprisingly, that I learn more about birds, trees, the moon, and various other elements of nature when I journal about them. For a long time, I put off joining in. I'm so glad I'm going now and encourage you to try it. For more info, see:

<https://www.northernrockiesnaturejournaling.org/coljournalwithus>

From February 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>, birders around the world and here in Ravalli County, will participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count, a citizen-science project run jointly by Audubon, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Birds Canada. Grab a friend or two and bird in some of your favorite places. More info and instructions for participating:

<https://www.birdcount.org>



*Courtesy Janice Miller, Last Chance Audubon*

## Welcome Back Waterfowl Day!

By Micki Long

Mark your calendars: Bitterroot Audubon will be welcoming back waterfowl and wonderful birders at Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge on Saturday, April 20, 2024. We'll meet on the dike west of the Visitor's Center from 10AM-1:30PM. We'll observe the waterfowl, other birds, and mammals that use the refuge wetlands; we'll help the public identify what we see. This special event is for everyone. Bring binoculars, a scope (if you have one), and warm clothes.



Courtesy Micki Long

BAS member Robin Dewey at a previous Welcome Back Waterfowl Day at Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge.

## Peregrine Falcon Monitoring in the Bitterroot

By Marrea Matthews

Once again it is time to make room on your calendar for Peregrine Falcon Monitoring in the Bitterroot (PEFA) monitoring. The first monitoring for occupancy generally occurs between late March to early May. Last year, most reports of occupancy occurred in April.

Dave Lockman, retired BNF Wildlife Biologist, will conduct monitoring training via Zoom March 13, 2024 at 4PM. Dave established the Watch Territories of the Bitterroot and Sapphire Mountains decades ago and has continued working closely with Jay Sumner and the Montana Peregrine Institute.

*Further, limited data indicate that the migratory destinations of many Peregrines lie south of the American border in regions of the world where regulation of pesticides, including the*

*chlorinated hydrocarbons, is virtually unknown. Plainly, immediately identifying any major downward flux in populations is crucial, lest infamous history repeat itself.*

—Jay Sumner

If you are interested in volunteering with the monitoring project or know someone who might be interested, please contact Marrea Matthews [mmatthews5@aol.com](mailto:mmatthews5@aol.com)

## Stevensville Christmas Bird Count 2024

### Summary

By Deb Goslin

The 59<sup>th</sup> annual Stevensville Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on December 30, 2023 was warmer and drier than normal with no snow cover, no fog and at least some open, still water for waterfowl. At my feeder, bird activity was close to normal in early December and seemed to taper off later in the month and remained low in the mild weather.

Stevensville's 64 participants found 81 species on count day and a Great-tailed Grackle during count week (the first ever for this CBC). This compares with a low of 61 species in 1991, and a high of 89 species in 2012. The five highest species counts have been since 2003. Counters tallied only 7,906 birds (compared to 12,674 in 2022). Birders reported that raptor numbers seemed noticeably lower, and we only reported three Rough-legged Hawks this year (with 41 in 2022). Statewide numbers of raptors also reflect this low count.

Unusual write-in species this year include: one Snow Goose, one Ferruginous Hawk, two Virginia Rails, one Canyon Wren, two Chestnut-backed Chickadees and two Yellow-headed Blackbirds. We were able to find all the waterfowl on our list except for the Pied-billed Grebe. Photos were taken of a "prairie" Merlin in the Willoughby area and 50 Bald Eagles were found. One Lewis's Woodpecker was found in the river bottom and only one Clark's Nutcracker was found near Victor (a high of 58 were counted in 1992).

The most plentiful species observed was Canada Goose at a count of 1,260, second was California Quail at 1,024, and House Sparrows coming in third at 1,003 individuals. No Gray Partridge and no owl species other than 18 Great Horned Owls were observed. All three species of Nuthatches were well represented along with six Brown Creepers.

Waxwings were elsewhere on count day as we had only three Cedars and no Bohemians counted. Birders counted six Townsend Solitaires and four American Robins (compared with 41 and 15 respectively in 2022). Just two American Dippers were counted and winter finches were scarce but we did have twelve Pine Grosbeak.

The actual tally numbers for all count circles can be found on the National Audubon website. Thanks to all the participants and we hope to see you on December 28, 2024!

### Wings Across the Big Sky Festival- Field Trip Highlight

By Lauren Smith, MT Audubon

This bitterly cold weather has us dreaming of the warmer days to come... so this particular Festival field trip jumped out at us—maybe thinking warm thoughts about visiting Warm Springs will keep us from getting too cold?

Typically difficult to access, the Warm Springs Ponds Complex field trip will visit areas not generally open to the public. This tour will traverse areas of riparian, wetland, and lake/stream habitats in the Deer Lodge Valley. Expected bird species will include: various waterfowl and grebes, Black-crowned Night Heron, Great Blue Heron, Wilson’s Snipe, Wilson’s Phalarope, Osprey, Bald Eagle (nesting), Marsh Wren, Willow Flycatcher, and numerous sparrow species. The trip will be mostly driving interspersed with short walks on mostly level ground.

More festival information – including registration details – is coming very soon!



### Climate Watch Surveys start January 15, 2024

By Lauren Smith, MT Audubon

Mark your calendars! National Audubon’s Climate Watch program is back from January 15<sup>th</sup>-February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Each survey focuses on three target species: Pygmy Nuthatch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and White-breasted Nuthatch.

Interested in participating? Montana Audubon has a step-by-step guide on our website to help you sign up: [Get ready! Climate Watch surveys start Jan. 15, 2024!](#)



## Calendar of Events

**Monthly:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, 3rd Saturday of each month, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.

**Jan 15-Feb 15:** Montana Audubon’s Climate Watch Survey; see article for details.

**Feb 16-Feb 19:** Great Backyard Bird Count; see President’s letter for details.

**Feb 19:** Audubon Meeting/Program; Rewilding, presented by Dr. Daniel Kinka. 7PM via Zoom.

**Feb 24:** “Poets in the ‘Root,” Teller Wildlife Refuge in Corvallis, MT at 1PM.

**Mar 18:** Audubon Meeting/Program; details TBA. 7PM via Zoom.

**Mar 31:** Peregrine Falcon Monitoring training, via Zoom. See newsletter article for details.

**Apr 20:** Welcome Back Waterfowl Day, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT, 10AM-1:30PM.

**May 31-Jun 2:** Wings Across the Big Sky birding festival, Carroll College, Helena, MT. Details TBA.



*Art by Deb Goslin*

## Poets in the 'Root Save the Date!

Nature in nearly all manifestations has inspired poets since there were poets! And at least since the Roman poet Horace wrote *Ars Poetica* or the *Art of Poetry* in 19BC, literature, including poetry, sought to both instruct and delight.

Poets in the 'Root combines these two aims in an uncommon but simple way. One person reads a favorite poem or part of a poem that uses an element of nature to convey its message (I have a list if you want recommendations). Then, the same or another person gives an explanation (5 minutes max) of some aspect of that nature element. The explanation focuses on nature interpretation, not literary interpretation. Listeners get a bit of poetry and a bit of natural history.

Anyone can volunteer to read poetry and/or offer the nature interpretation. This is a fun way for Master Naturalists to earn credit towards their certification. Free and open to the public.

The program will be held at the Teller Wildlife Refuge in Corvallis, on Saturday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, at 1PM. We'll have refreshments, including coffee, tea, wine, and snacks!

Bitterroot Audubon, Teller Wildlife Refuge, and the Montana Natural History Center are sponsoring this event.

To volunteer, ask questions, or get a list of poems, please contact Micki Long at [mickilong@gmail.com](mailto:mickilong@gmail.com)

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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.

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