Sacajawea Audubon News

Sacajawea Audubon builds on an interest in birds to promote the conservation of our natural environment through enjoyment, education, and action

Monday, February 10th, 2020 Program:

"Birds, Burns, *and* Beetles of Rocky Mountain Forests" *with* Vicki Saab

Hope Lutheran Church, Fireside Rooms
6:30 pm Social, 7:00 pm Program

Join Sacajawea Audubon Society for a revealing presentation on the relationships between fire, bark beetles, and birds. Wildlife biologist Vicki Saab will talk about how birds co-evolved with wildfire and bark beetle outbreaks in western North American forests. Several bird species directly benefit from the ephemeral habitats generated by these forest disturbances. Learn how important fire and beetle-killed trees are to cavity-nesting species and how our changing climate is increasing the frequency and severity of these events. Vickie will also discuss a new mapping tool being used by the Forest Service to locate suitable nesting habitat and make informed decisions on locations for salvage logging.

Vicki Saab is a research wildlife biologist with the Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Research Station and Affiliate Faculty at Montana State University. For nearly 30 years she has conducted research on songbirds and woodpeckers in relation to fires, bark beetles, and land management activities in the Interior West. A primary focus of her work has been evaluating effects of post-fire salvage logging and forest restoration activities on birds and identifying appropriate measures for bird conservation. Vicki has had the good fortune to study a variety of birds during her long career, including waterfowl, raptors, grouse, songbirds, hummingbirds, and finally graduating to woodpeckers! She received graduate degrees from the University of Colorado and Montana State University.

Sacajawea Audubon Society programs are free and open to the public. Our programs feature a special guest speaker the 2nd Monday of each month, September through May, at Hope Lutheran Church, 2152 West Graf (off of S. 19th). Join us for a social at 6:30 pm, announcements at 7:00 pm, followed by the program.

Calendar *at a* Glance
FEBRUARY 2020

6	SAS Board Meeting at the Lehrkind Mansion
10	SAS Monthly Program
14–17	Great Backyard Bird Count
March 8	SAS Book Group Discussion
June 5–7	Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival

BIRD NOTES

by John Parker

This past season's Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) were very well attended, with several of this area's seven counts having the highest participation ever. With the large numbers of birders in the field, there was excellent coverage for the various count circles. Generally moderate weather was certainly a plus for most of the counts, although the Livingston count had to deal with high winds. This past fall there has been much discussion about the huge invasion of Blue Jays into this region, and this areas CBC's confirmed the magnitude of this invasion, with all of the circles recording new high counts for this "eastern" species.

The Bozeman count was held on the first day of the official count period, December 14. Bozeman had a new count high with a total of 73 species seen. Three new species were added to the cumulative species total, with the addition of **Bufflehead**, **Western Tanager**, and **Black-headed Grosbeak**! The Western Tanager was only the second one ever recorded in Montana during the winter, and the Black-headed Grosbeak was only the fourth time the species has been documented in the winter. A **Purple Finch** was seen for only the second time on the count, and for the first time in 45 years. The count also set a new high total of 24,589 individual birds seen, and 9,341 **Bohemian Waxwings** certainly padded the total. There were new high count numbers for 21 species, and several near record highs for several species that are always abundant. Some of the most notable increases for new high counts were **Wood Duck** (18 to 45), **Wild Turkey** (44 to 86), **Red-tailed Hawk** (81 to 129), **Pileated Woodpecker** (1 to 4), **Northern Flicker** (75 to 126), **Steller's Jay** (20 to 38), and **Blue Jay** (10 to 57).

Western Tanager by Robin Wolcott.

The Ennis count was held on December 18, with somewhat windy conditions, but the counters still managed to find 64 species of birds. New high counts were **Redhead** (3), **Common Goldeneye** (445), **Blue Jay** (23), **Common Raven** (159), **House Finch** (209), and **House Sparrow** (540). Noticeably absent on count day were any accipiters or falcons. The only species that have been observed on all 60 counts are **Mallard**, **Common Goldeneye**, **Bald Eagle**, **Black-billed Magpie**, **Black-capped Chickadee**, and **House Sparrow**.

As I noted before, the wind had a major effect on Livingston's count, but even so they managed to find 58 species on December 21. Livingston had high counts for **Lesser Scaup** (27), **Pied-billed Grebe** (2), **Gray Jay** (3), and **Blue Jay** (12).

The participants on the December 22nd Yellowstone/Gardiner count enjoyed a very nice day with temperatures ranging from 30–42 degrees. With these mild conditions the 27 bird counters found 38 species of birds, which is 4 more that the count average. This count set new high count records for **American Robin** (79), **Cedar Waxwing** (90), **Green-tailed Towhee** (2), and **Evening Grosbeak** (95). They also had **Blue Jay** for Count Week.

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SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY

INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE

UPDATE: FEBRUARY 2020

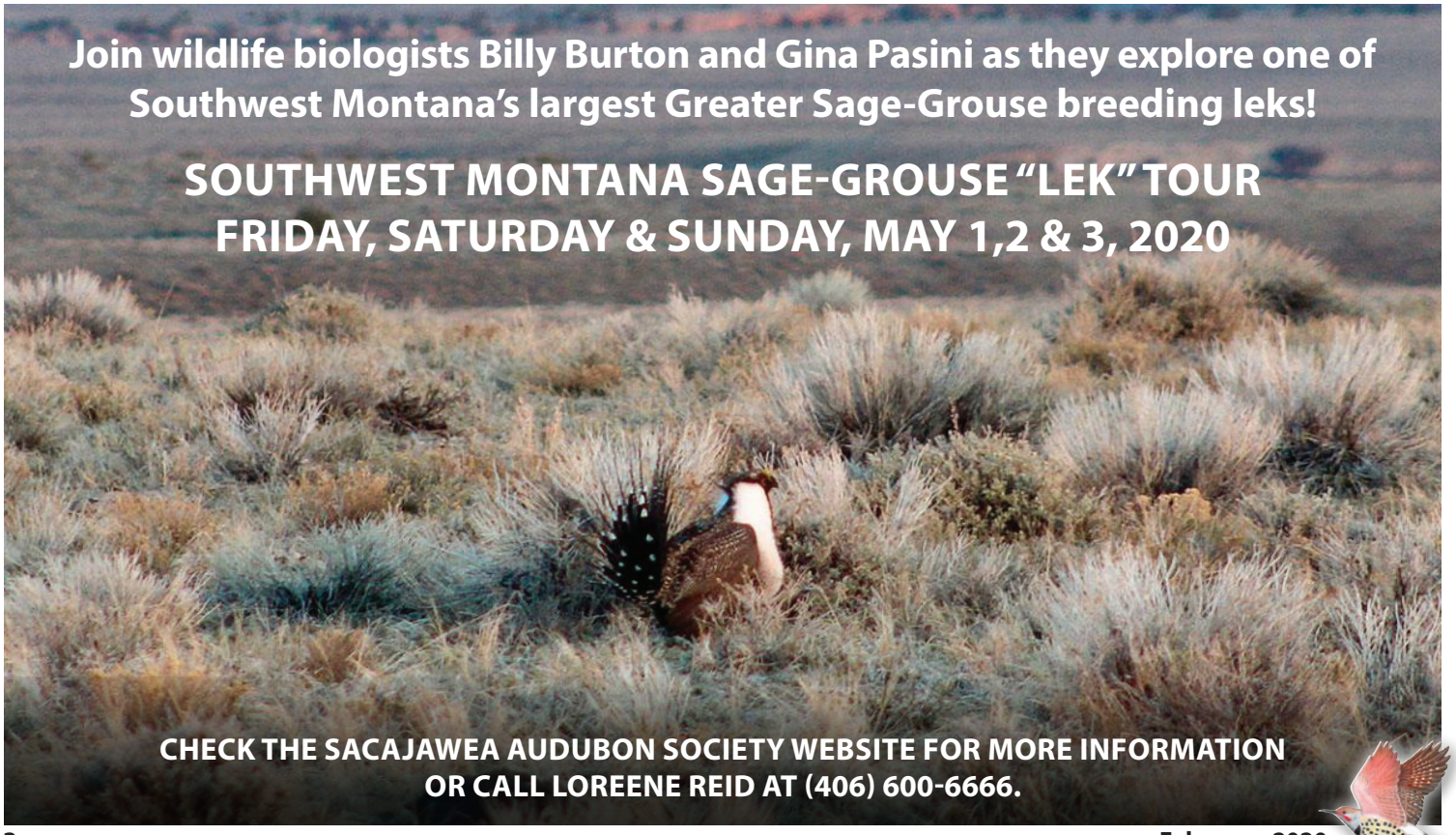
DREAM BIG

We envision the wetlands as a gateway to conservation. The IAWP will provide unique opportunities for experiencing wildlife through use of strategically placed, non-obtrusive blinds and observation points, and "windows in the wetlands" to view aquatic activity.

A nature center in Bozeman has been a community dream for decades. SAS plans to turn this dream into a reality by building an innovative, sustainable nature center of architectural importance in close proximity to the restored wetlands. Its size and scope will be dictated by community support and its location.

There is tremendous potential for building trail connectivity and safe wildlife corridors within and adjacent to the IAWP in the future.

Nature Center illustration by Jakub Galczynski.



Plants for Birds:

Dotted Gayfeather

(Dotted Blazing Star)

- **Scientific Name:** *Liatris punctata* (Asteraceae Family)
- **Height:** 1–2 feet
- **Hardiness:** Zone 3
- **Wildlife Value:** Attracts pollinators, provides nectar for hummingbirds and seeds for finches and sparrows

Dotted gayfeather is a gorgeous native perennial, producing flashy, feathery blooms of purple and pink late in the summer and fall. Highly recommended for pollinator gardens, gayfeather is a favorite of many native bees, including bumble bees, and many Lepidopterans, including monarch butterflies and the rare Pawnee montane skipper. The flowers are favorites of hummingbirds and the seeds are relished by pine siskins, chickadees, American goldfinch, and sparrows. Insectivorous birds are attracted as well since they are drawn to the insect life the plant supports. Dotted gayfeather needs little watering and with its attractive blooms, this species makes the perfect plant for the low maintenance garden.

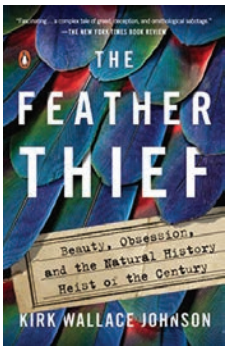
Liatris punctata commonly occurs in plains and prairie habitat type but is also found in other habitats such as sagebrush, pinyon-juniper, and mountain foothills. In the plains and prairies it grows with several grasses such as the wheatgrasses, Scribner's panic grass, and tumble grass, along with wildflowers like heath aster and golden rod. Interestingly, it is the host for the hemiparasitic wholeleaf Indian paintbrush.

Dotted gayfeather has several human uses. Native Americans have used it for food and medicinally to cure ailments and improve health. Gardeners love it as a cut flower as it retains its color well. It is also a favorite for dried floral arrangements.

Plant gayfeather in a dry sandy area of your garden 1 to 2 feet apart. It needs full sun and well-drained soil but is tolerant of alkaline conditions. This is a long-lived, highly drought-tolerant plant and when established needs infrequent but deep watering. It grows solitary stems 1 to 2 feet high, which cluster together. It can be started by seed and readily seeds itself, but is also widely available commercially as seedlings. When getting it started in the garden, be patient as first year growth is dedicated to its extensive tap root. It can take a year or more to establish its full bloom size.

Dotted gayfeather is a low maintenance plant needing little care and minimal watering. It provides bright, long-lasting color to the garden and late season food to birds and insects, thus is an excellent choice for the xeric, bird-friendly garden.

~ Leslie Eddington



SAS Book Club

February's Book Club Selection is "The Feather Thief: Beauty, Obsession, and the Natural History Heist of the Century." The book has been described as: "One of the most peculiar and memorable true-crime books ever" by *The Christian Science Monitor* and "A rollicking true-crime adventure and a captivating journey into an underground world of fanatical fly-tiers and plume peddlers..."

Both SAS and MOSS book clubs are reading the same book so you have two opportunities to discuss this book. The SAS Book Club meets monthly on the 3rd Wednesday, Feb. 19th, from 4–5:15 at Pilgrim Congregational Church. The MOSS book club meets on the 2nd Wednesday, Feb. 12, 6–7:15 pm at MOSS. The SAS group will be facilitated by Ann Banks and the MOSS group by Jess Haas.

Questions? Contact Sherry Staub at (563) 370-0757 or mayawindsong@gmail.com.

Sacajawea Audubon 2019 Bluebird Trail Summary

By Lou Ann Harris and Janne Hayward, SAS Bluebird Trail Project Coordinators

It was a somewhat successful Mountain Bluebird nesting season in 2019. A total of 434 bluebirds fledged from boxes on our 6 monitored trails. 166 boxes were used (by bluebirds) out of 275 available. The remainder were used by tree swallows, house wrens, and—unfortunately—house sparrows.

On the Pass Creek Rd./Rocky Mountain Rd. trails, we banded a total of 271 birds, 245 nestlings and 26 adult females. We also recaptured 14 adult female bluebirds, one of which was originally banded in 2015 as a nestling. This makes her 4 years old. You wonder about the stories she could tell on her travels back and forth from the Gallatin Valley to wherever she winters (probably in New Mexico or northern Mexico). That is 7 1/2 roundtrips so far for a bird that weighs a little more than a pencil. It's just amazing!

Predation of nests had mixed results. The Rocky Mountain Rd. trail had a total of 16 predated nests (down from 29 last year), including a female bluebird who died defending her 5 eggs from an unidentified predator. The Pass Creek trail had 38 nests predated (up from 28 last year). The causes were again varied: snakes, raccoons, weasels, kestrels, and house sparrows.

We had lots of visitors on the trail this year, including MSU Freshman Sarah Fry. Sarah is majoring in Fish & Wildlife and was looking for some field experience, which we were happy to give her! The annual bluebird field trip was well-attended after being cancelled last year. One of the highlights of the season was recapturing two different females in July, each in the same boxes where we caught them in May, on second clutches of eggs. We've never had this happen in 12 years of monitoring. From what we have read, the female will often move to a different nest location for a second clutch, mating with a different male. In this case, we assume they each mated with the same males for both clutches.

Thanks to all our 2019 bluebird box sponsors:

Donna Alexander, Jeannie Badenoch, Ondrej Ball, Glenda Barnes, Gina Carolan, Julie Catanese, Mary Ann Childs, Peggy Osbourn & David Cole, John Edwards, Audrey & Joel Evers, Patty Fraser, Leo Freeman, Paul Gore, Janice Hand, Virginia Jakobe, Beth Kaeding, Kathryn Kelly, Nancy Kittle, Ronna Leon, Sunny Mavor, Lisa Miklush, John & Lynn Mugaas, Debi Naccarto, Stephanie Nelson, John & Tamie Parker, Eva Patten, Margaret Perryman, Adele & Sandy Pittendrigh, Pam Poulsen, Chris Raaum, Scott Radford, Mary Lee Reese, Star Reierson, Adam Richardson, Nancy Rivera, Emily Robinson, Rick Sanders, Bob Schleicher, Joyce Seipel, Shiela Skinner, Erna Smeets, Suzan Strobel, Bob Swinth, Judy Tsiang, Mike Vivion, Ellie Weber, Mary Lou Wild, and Carol Zeglen.

Above: Sarah Fry holding a Mountain Bluebird, ready for banding. Below: Mountain Bluebird nestlings. Photos by Lou Ann Harris.

Kestrel Nest Box Project: More Success In 2019

By Paulette Epple, Project Coordinator

Have you ever noticed that you don't see as many kestrels around as you did in the "good old days?" You're not alone! American Kestrels were once considered the most abundant bird of prey in the United Stated but their population has actually declined by more that 50% since the 1960s; there is no simple explanation for this reduction. Sacajawea Audubon's Kestrel Nest Box Project grew out of a desire to help support the local kestrel population by providing quality nesting with our boxes and to gather nesting data to contribute to the American Kestrel Partnership as they study the problems facing kestrels.

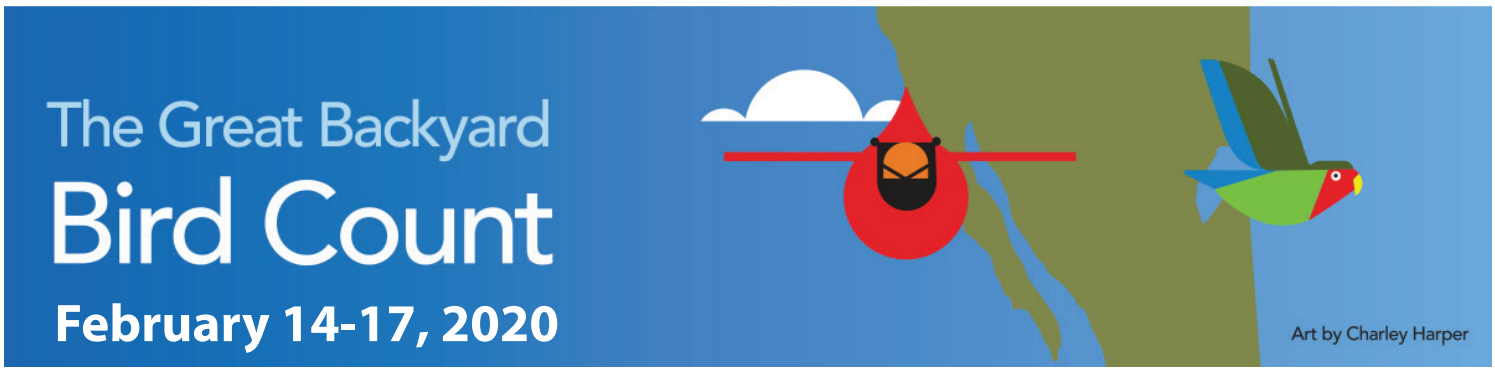
The 2019 season saw our kestrel reproduction success rate rebound after a very poor year in 2018. This year we saw an average number of boxes used (15) and 55 young successfully fledged. Although 3 nesting attempts failed for various reasons, 100% of the nestlings that hatched survived and fledged. We were able to band 50 of the nestlings this year and 2 of the incubating adults. Below is a chart comparing some of the data gathered through the years.

YEAR	2016	2017	2018	2019
Occupied Boxes	9	16	18	15
Eggs Laid	42	76	76	68
Eggs Hatched	33	60	47	55
Nestlings Fledged	30	58	34	55
Hatching Success (eggs hatched/laid)	79%	79%	62%	81%
Fledging Success (fledglings/hatched eggs)	91%	97%	72%	100%
Number of 5-Egg Clutches	6	13	10	11

Each year Sacajawea Audubon monitors 70 to 75 boxes. Thirty-six of these boxes have been occupied for at least one season. We know that the habitat was fully suitable to support a breeding pair at 30 of these boxes where at least 3 or more young survived and fledged. Since kestrels are considered philopatric, or have a tendency to return to the area where they were raised, one would assume that kestrels would frequent the same boxes many years in a row and that the young might return to take up residence in nearby territories using other nearby boxes. The number of occupied boxes in our project area should be growing, but it is not. Instead boxes are often used successfully one year only to sit empty for the next few years. This would seem to indicate the likelihood of high mortality during migration and on wintering grounds, with birds not making it back to their home territories.

Huyen Bui holds a young Kestrel for banding. Photo by Paulette Epple.

We will continue to do what we can to benefit the kestrels, providing nest boxes, monitoring nesting success, banding young, and collecting genetic material, all in cooperation with the American Kestrel Partnership. Our thanks goes out to the many private landowners that host our boxes and to all the Audubon volunteers that contribute their time to help with this project. Special thanks to these volunteers that have taken on the responsibilities of cleaning and monitoring groups of our boxes: Glenda Barnes, Hobart Collins, Martha Collins, Connie Cowett, Steve Dubois, Geoff Pampush, John Parker, Richard Seiler, Becky Ward, and Kevin Ward.



The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at birdcount.org. Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard or anywhere in the world.

Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing and how to protect them and the environment we share. Last year, more than 190,000 participants submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded.

On the program website participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during and after the count. Be sure to check out the Explore a Region tool to get an idea of what you can expect to see in your area during the next GBBC. Visit GBBC at birdcount.org. *(Source: National Audubon Society)*

Bird Notes *(cont. from page 2)*

The Three Forks count was conducted the day after Christmas, with very favorable conditions with sunny skies and no wind. The 65 species seen that day were only four species short of the all-time high count. Two new species of birds were added to the Three Forks count this year: **Spotted Towhee** and **Yellow-headed Blackbird**. New high counts were recorded for **Northern Goshawk** (3), **Red-tailed Hawk** (52), **Ferruginous Hawk** (1), **Northern Flicker** (96), **Blue Jay** (9), **American Crow** (117), **Brown Creeper** (5), and **Rusty Blackbird** (4). An incredible 26 **Short-eared Owls** were counted by several different teams. This shattered the previous high count of 4 for Short-eared Owls.

The January 4th Ruby Valley count day was generally pleasant, other than the fast-moving wall of snow which blew through the valley mid-afternoon. The 63 species seen that day was one species short of the all-time high species count. Four new species were added to the count this year: **Barrow's Goldeneye**, **Sandhill Crane**, **Steller's Jay**, and **Purple Finch**. There were new high counts for 15 species, including 19 **Great Horned Owls** and 13 **Blue Jays**. The 7 Sandhill Cranes discovered on the count is likely the highest number of cranes ever seen on a Montana CBC.

Two other birds seen recently, but not on any of the Christmas Bird Counts, are worth noting. On Christmas Day, Lou Ann Harris discovered a **Hermit Thrush** near the north end of the Gallagator Trail in Bozeman. While walking the dike between the Yellowstone River and Sacajawea Park in Livingston on January 7, Jerry Berner spotted a **Greater Yellowlegs**. Jerry had seen another yellowlegs at this same location during the winter a couple of years ago.

American Avocet *Bob Martinka photo*

Montana Audubon will host its 21st annual **Wings Across the Big Sky** bird festival at the **Yogo Inn, in Lewistown** on **June 5th–7th, 2020**! This longstanding event rotates around the state each year and celebrates Montana's native bird species, typically drawing hundreds of wildlife enthusiasts from across the state and beyond. Front and center will be two days of field trips to destinations in stunning Central Montana, along with traditional festival on-site activities such as our Friday keynote speaker, interactive Saturday afternoon presentations, Montana Audubon Conservation Awards, Cakes for Conservation auction, and more.

NEW THIS YEAR! We are excited to announce we are planning an optional, pre-festival grassland science conference Thursday and Friday, June 4th and 5th, also to be held at the Yogo Inn. More information will be forthcoming as planning proceeds. Visit the "Outreach" section of Montana Audubon's website: www.mtaudubon.org or call (406) 443-3949.

Monthly Meeting Hospitality Reminder!

If your name (first or last) begins with the same letter as the month....i.e. February—all you "Franks," "Fredas," "Filmores," and "Fishers"—please consider bringing any sort of snack (sweet or savory). If your name does not align with the letter of the month....or any month for that matter...please just feel free to bring a snack whenever the "spirit" moves you! And thank you from all of us who enjoy the delicious treats provided each month.

In an effort to reduce waste: please consider bringing your own mug to the meeting! We have been using paper cups exclusively, but still feel we can take it to the next level of sustainability! By doing this we will accomplish two of the three "R's" in the recycle paradigm—"Reduce" and "Reuse"—by reducing the need to purchase paper cups (also saving $) and reusing our own mugs!!

We will still have cups available if you forget....but we appreciate your efforts to set a good example.

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Board of Directors:

President	Lou Ann Harris pres@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Vice President	John Edwards johnedwards@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Secretary	Emma Narotzky sec@sacajaweaaudubon.org
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Member at Large	Billy Burton billyburton@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Member at Large	Travis Kidd education@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Member at Large	Debi Naccarto debinaccarto@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Member at Large	Stephanie Nelson stephanienelson@sacajaweaaudubon.org

Committee Chairs & Project Leaders:

Conservation Chair	Paulette Epple conservation@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Education Chair	Travis Kidd education@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Bird Sightings	John Parker birdsightings@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Field Trips	John Parker birdsightings@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Newsletter	Stephanie Nelson newsletter@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Monthly Program	OPEN programs@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Website	Stephanie Nelson stephanienelson@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Membership	Loreene Reid membership@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Hospitality	Sherry Staub hospitality@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Wetlands	Karin Jennings wetlands@sacajaweaaudubon.org

Sacajawea Audubon volunteers collected an impressive amount of trash at the 2019 Wetlands Cleanup Day.

CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Join the fun and get involved as we continue to build our conservation programs for the benefit of birds and their habitats. The opportunities are many for meaningful work on our many projects. There are hands-on tasks like:

- **planting native plants in a demonstration garden;**
- **invasive weed control; or**
- **clean-up efforts on our new wetlands.**

Or consider helping with such projects as:

- **nest box data entry;**
- **bird surveys;**
- **leading bird walks; or**
- **giving presentations for our Bird-Friendly Landscape Program.**

Are you a good writer? We could use your help for some newsletter articles we have in mind. And we are always looking for leadership help to coordinate some of our projects and to start up a new project to prevent bird deaths from glass collisions. No matter what your talent, we have a role for you!

On February 4th our Conservation Committee will meet at 7 pm at the Hope Lutheran Church (Room 128) to chart out our upcoming season of conservation projects. Everyone who has an interest in helping with conservation projects is encouraged to attend this meeting. Bring your enthusiasm and your ideas. Find out how you can contribute and make a difference for birds and other wildlife in our community.

If you want to be involved but can't attend, or for more information, contact Conservation Chair Paulette Epple at conservation@sacajaweaaudubon.org or call **(406) 580-6186**.

Sacajawea Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1711
Bozeman, MT 59771-1771

Change Service Requested

Sacajawea Audubon Society, affiliated with the National Audubon Society, meets on the second Monday of each month, September through May.

Sacajawea Audubon Society Monthly Newsletter is available electronically to all Sacajawea Audubon Society members September through May. Members and non-members can receive a mailed paper newsletter for an annual $10 subscription fee. Please send your check to the address above.

Deadline for article submission is the 15th of the month preceding the month the articles will appear. Send articles electronically to Stephanie Nelson at: newsletter@sacajaweaaudubon.org.

Change of Address: If you have a change of address or are away, please notify membership@sacajaweaaudubon.org. Undeliverable mailed newsletters are returned to us for an extra fee.

Find more at the **Sacajawea Audubon Society website** at: sacajaweaaudubon.org

BECOME A MEMBER OR RENEW YOUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP TODAY!

Sacajawea Audubon Society Membership 2020

Individual or Family

☐ Basic Membership $25

☐ Supporting Membership $50
(Supporting local conservation & education project)

☐ Additional Donation .....$_____
- ☐ *Bridger Raptor Study*
- ☐ *Education*
- ☐ *Story Mill Park Bird Feeding Station*
- ☐ *Wetland Campaign*
- ☐ *Wherever is Needed*

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☐ *I would like a paper newsletter mailed to me and have included an additional $10 to cover the annual cost.*

❖ We do not share your information except with Montana Audubon, so your contact information is safe with us.

Mail this form with your check to:

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Attn: Membership
PO Box 1711
Bozeman, MT 59771-1711

Thank you for your membership and donation. We look forward to birding with you!