MARCH 2020

Sacajawea Audubon News

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

Calendar *at a* Glance MARCH 2020

5	SAS Board Meeting at the Lehrkind Mansion
7	Early Spring Field Trip
9	SAS Monthly Program
18	SAS Book Group Discussion

Tours & Field Trips

May 1-3	Greater Sage Grouse Lek Tour
May 22-25	Red Rocks Lakes National Wildlife Refuge Tour
June 5-7	Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival

Monday, March 9th, 2020 Program:

Our Backyard—The Custer Gallatin National Forest

What is its role in supporting the ecological integrity of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem?

with ***George Wuerthner, Ecologist & Author***

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

The Custer Gallatin National Forest is the most visited national forest in Montana. Home to grizzly bears, wolverines, elk, many birds and other important species. It contains the Gallatin Range, the largest unprotected landscape sharing a border with Yellowstone National Park. With ten peaks over 10,000 feet, the Gallatin Range supplies 80 percent of Bozeman's drinking water. It's waters flow down through several Wild and Scenic Rivers, including the Gallatin River. The Montana Natural Heritage Program lists 18 birds, 8 mammals, 3 fish, 3 amphibians, and 1 reptile as "at risk" or declining in numbers within this unprotected landscape.

Join us as George Wuerthner, ecologist and author, will uncover the extraordinary history and discoveries of the Custer Gallatin National Forest with a special focus on the Gallatin Range.

George Wuerthner has published 38 books, including *Protecting the Wild: Parks and Wilderness, the Foundation for Conservation*; *Keeping the Wild: Against the Domestication of Earth*; *Wildfire: A Century of Failed Forest Policy*; *Montana, Magnificient Wilderness*; and three books on Yellowstone National Park.

George has extensive on-the-ground experience with protected landscapes having visited more than 400 designated wilderness areas, more than 200 national park units, and every national forest in the West. He has previously taught environmental studies and ecology field classes for a number of universities. He also has worked as a botanist and biologist for the Idaho BLM, wilderness guide in Alaska, a river ranger on several Alaskan Wild and Scenic Rivers, and a Backcountry Ranger in the Gates of the Arctic NP in Alaska.

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.

BIRD NOTES

by John Parker

TRIPLE TREE TRAIL

The Triple Tree Trail south of Bozeman is one of the premier birding locations in the Gallatin Valley. What makes the trail special is that it passes through a variety of habitats and the transitional edges between them. The lower portion to the trail passes through the grasslands and brushy deciduous vegetation along Limestone Creek. Once the trail reaches the middle loop it climbs through Douglas fir and lodgepole pine forests. For the more ambitious hiker, there is a Forest Service trail that makes a loop to the top of the hill, with the namesake limber pine "Triple Trees" on the east ridge. The entire trail system covers nearly six miles, with an elevation gain of 1,600 feet.

Triple Tree trail. Photo by Lou Ann Harris.

In the twenty years that this trail has been accessible to the public, 130 species of birds have been identified, with over 70 those birds breeding in the area. During peak breeding season it is possible to see 35-45 different species as you climb through the different vegetation zones. There are not many other places in our area where you can hope to see such a wide range of birds like **Three-toed Woodpecker**, **Cassin's Vireo**, **American Redstarts**, or even a **Northern Goshawk**.

There is probably no better place to listen for and compare the beautiful songs of the thrush family. Of course, you will hear the ubiquitous caroling of **American Robins**, but as you make your way through the lush areas along Limestone Creek listen for the descending song of the **Veery**. Then as you start to transition into the conifers you can begin to hear the ascending songs of **Swainson's Thrushes**, and finally higher on the shaded slopes you will hear the clear flute-like song of the **Hermit Thrush**. Anyone who birds the Triple Tree Trail is likely to come home with another favorite moment.

Early in 2016 the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation proposed the Limestone West timber sale. This proposed sale encompassed the entire Triple Tree Trail system, and all of the surrounding 2,700 plus acres of state land. Shortly after this timber cut was proposed, a local citizens' group (Save Our Gallatin Front) was formed to stop or mitigate the effects of the project.

This timber cut not only would have changed the birding experience on the Triple Tree Trail, but would have also destroyed the last remaining uncut and roadless drainage in the foothills south of Bozeman. This area is the northern end of an unbroken roadless corridor all the way to the interior of Yellowstone Park.

After a more than three-year battle Save Our Gallatin Front, Earth Justice, and several other groups including Sacajawea Audubon helped block this timber cut and create an opportunity to place this local treasure in a 25-year conservation license to defer logging. A huge thank you to the dedicated individuals and hundreds of other local citizens who donated money and time to buy the license to protect this special spot in our valley. Hopefully, in another 24 years, Sacajawea Audubon and others can find a way to protect this unique wildlife area permanently.

A SIGN OF SPRING

Once again spring is on the way, and that means it is time to start looking for your first bluebird of the year. But the honors of the very first bluebird of the year in our area has already gone to Jayne Uerling. Jayne spotted a **Mountain Bluebird** just inside the North Entrance to Yellowstone National Park on February 4th.

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY
INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE
UPDATE: MARCH 2020

Where Have all the Wetlands Gone?

By Chris Nixon, SAS Board Member and SAS Wetlands Preservation Project Committee Chair

The Native Americans that utilized the abundant resources of the Gallatin Valley knew it as the 'Valley of Flowers.' They could have just as accurately called this lush region the 'Valley of the Beaver.' It would be difficult for current day inhabitants to envision how much of the valley was a vast wetland complex of beaver dams, ponds, and sloughs teaming with geese, swans, ducks, and other waterfowl interspersed among the Elk, Bison, Moose, Black Bear, Grizzly Bear, Mule Deer, White-tail Deer, and...well you name it. It was here.

When viewing wetlands in Bozeman today you may find yourself gazing upon wings you would not have expected in a wetland. As birders, we would hope to see the colorful flashes from speculums of various ducks—not spicy hot wings. But, times they are a changing with the rapid growth in our area.

As the rush of new developments impact or obliterate the remaining wetlands within our city limits, you may ask- "What's happening? Aren't wetlands supposed to be protected?" Haven't we all heard the phrase "No new net loss of wetlands?" Unfortunately this phrase leaves us nature lovers with more of a warm fuzzy feeling—or should we say more warm feathered feeling than is rightly warranted.

Yes, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has jurisdiction over wetlands and is given the task of regulating/protecting remaining wetlands. According to the USACE, there are three paths forward when one considers actions/developments that can impact/destroy jurisdictional wetlands:

1. Avoid impacting or destroying wetlands.
2. Mitigate onsite or adjacent to the site if one cannot avoid impact/destruction to the wetland.
3. Pay to mitigate offsite by purchasing wetland credits at a designated wetland bank—if impact/destruction is absolutely unavoidable.

This last option is the least desirable, least acceptable, and least beneficial method when it comes to preserving the amount of wetlands and the critical functions they provide at the initial site. Unfortunately, this last method has now become the de facto procedure when wetlands are impacted within the city limits of Bozeman. We are now seeing situations where wetlands that were themselves created/enhanced as a mitigation effort for prior impacted/destroyed wetlands are in turn now being destroyed by current developments. These wetlands are now being degraded/eliminated/encroached upon and mitigation credits are being purchased at the nearest wetland bank—about 90 miles away (65 as the Crow flies over a mountain range) in Twin Bridges, Montana. That private wetland bank is in a different river drainage. This mitigation trend does not preserve the important water recharge, water filtration, flood abatement, and wildlife habitat resources within our drainage basin of the East Gallatin River.

Ronan Donovan

On January 27th, SAS board members spoke before the Bozeman City Commission requesting the Commission address the loss of wetlands in Bozeman. Commissioner Terry Cunningham is championing the wetlands issue and the City Commission voted unanimously to add the issue of wetland loss to their Tier 2 level of priority within the City's United Development Code (UDC). The City Commission directed Interim City Manager Dennis Taylor to research and identify the amount of staff time and resources it would take to tackle the question of how to best prevent the loss of wetlands within Bozeman City limits. It will not be a simple and easy fix. SAS has offered to rally experts and assist the City in gathering information on how other municipalities have successfully addressed this issue. SAS wants to

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Photo by Ronan Donovan.

RED ROCK LAKES NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE TOUR
MAY 22–25, 2020

Explore a vast array of habitat, ranging from high elevation wetland and prairie habitat at 6,600 feet, to the mountain forests of the Centennial Mountains.

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is located in the incredibly scenic and isolated Centennial Valley of southwestern Montana, about 50 miles west of Yellowstone National Park. This 4-day, 3-night tour will take you into a vast array of habitat, ranging from high elevation wetland and prairie habitat at 6,600 feet, to the mountain forests of the Centennial Mountains (which ascend to over 10,000 ft. above sea level). It is this diverse, wetland-prairie-sagebrush-montane environment that gives Red Rock Lakes its unique character. Nesting birds are abundant throughout Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge at this time of year, with 120+ species possible. Red Rock Lakes is best known for being the primary location for heroic efforts in the 1930s to save the Trumpeter Swan from extinction. In addition to the majestic swan, there are another 230 bird species within the refuge, including: Long-billed Curlew, Sandhill Crane, Red-necked Grebe, Black-crowned Night-Heron, American White Pelican, Sora, White-faced Ibis, American Avocet, Willet, Northern Harrier, Bald & Golden eagles, Swainson's & Ferruginous hawks, Prairie Falcon, Short-eared Owl, Sage Thrasher and various ducks, flycatchers, kinglets, warblers, vireos, tanagers, thrushes, woodpeckers and, if we're lucky, Greater Sage-Grouse!

Tour cost: $975/person
(Non SAS member cost: $1,025/person)

Trip Includes...

- Fully guided trip with National Geographic Photographer & Wildlife Biologist Ronan Donovan.
- A photography workshop.
- Small group size (no more than 12 participants).
- Travel from Bozeman to the Refuge by 4WD drive Suburbans or passenger van.
- 3 nights lodging at Elk Lake Resort.
- Dinner Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Breakfast and lunch Saturday, Sunday, and Monday.

To register or if you have questions call Loreene Reid at, 406-600-6666 or email at loreener@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*

Name _____

Address _____
(Street or PO Box)

_____ _____ _____
(City) *(State)* *(Zip)*

Phone (____) _____

Email _____

❖ Sacajawea Audubon News is sent by email. There is a $10 annual fee for a paper copy mailed to you.
☐ *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:

Sacajawea Audubon Society
Attn: Membership
PO Box 1711
Bozeman, MT 59771-1711

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

newsletter 3/20

Bald Eagle photo by Lou Ann Harris.

Early Spring Field Trip

On this early spring trip, the focus will be on finding raptors in the northern portion of the Gallatin Valley, but there should be some other interesting birds along this route. The trip ends early in the afternoon at **Central Park Pond** where a good variety of waterfowl should be present. Be sure to dress for the weather and bring any necessary drinks or snacks for this 5-hour trip. This trip could be extended for those who may wish to spend an extra hour or two in the field. If you have a spotting scope, that would be helpful.

This trip will meet at the Museum of the Rockies parking lot at 8:15 AM Saturday March 7. After arranging for carpooling, we will leave at 8:30. There is a 12 person limit for this trip.

For more information call John Parker at 406-586-5863 or email birdsightings@sacajaweaaudubon.org

Plants for Birds:

Crabapple

- **Scientific Name:** *Malus spp.* (Rosaceae Family)
- **Height:** 10–25 feet
- **Hardiness:** Zone 2, 3, or 4, depending on species
- **Wildlife Value:** Abundance of food for birds and mammals, provides nesting sites, attracts pollinators

The common crabapple is a highly popular ornamental tree. A member of the genus *Malus*, it is cousin to the orchard apple but with much smaller and more tart fruits. It is a stunningly beautiful tree in bloom, with blossoms in shades of pink, magenta, purple and white. In the fall persistent red, sour tasting fruit linger into winter. As well as being incredibly showy, the blossoms attract pollinators and are also eaten with relish by waxwings and other birds. The abundance of fruit in the fall is a welcome food source for deer, squirrels, rabbits, and a plethora of bird species including robins, waxwings, flickers, finches, chickadees, grouse and turkeys. Many of the crabapples hold their fruit all through the winter providing a food source when it is needed most.

Crabapples are adaptable, hardy, easy to grow, and are widely available in numerous varieties. Although not native to Montana, several species of crabapple are native to the United States; thus the cultivars attract insects, pollinators, and birds in a manner similar to native plants. Crabapples tend to grow 10 to 25 feet tall and 15 to 25 feet wide with low canopies good for planting under power lines. They prefer full sun and well drained, heavy loam, moist soils but will tolerate some clay types as well. Crabapples are fairly drought tolerant once established.

Bohemian Waxwings photo by Jerry Taylor.

There are reported to be over 1000 different cultivars of crabapples all displaying different characteristics in flower/fruit color, disease resistance, hardiness, timing of flowering, leaf color, number of flower petals, and size. There are even some grown for their fruit, being tasty for jellies and preserves. It is said there is a crabapple variety to meet every landscape need. Gardeners should know that some people find the fruits of some cultivars messy after dropping and that some varieties are susceptible to fire blight, so choose your cultivars carefully.

Crabapple trees are a fantastic addition to your garden, adding color and accent, as well as attracting a variety of birds with fruit, flowers, insects, cover and nesting sites.

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Board of Directors:

President	Lou Ann Harris pres@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Vice President	John Edwards johnedwards@sacajaweaaudubon.org
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Member at Large	Debi Naccarto debinaccarto@sacajaweaaudubon.org
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Education Chair	Travis Kidd education@sacajaweaaudubon.org
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Field Trips	John Parker birdsightings@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Newsletter	Stephanie Nelson newsletter@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Book Club	Sherry Staub hospitality@sacajaweaaudubon.org
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Membership	Loreene Reid membership@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Hospitality	Sherry Staub hospitality@sacajaweaaudubon.org
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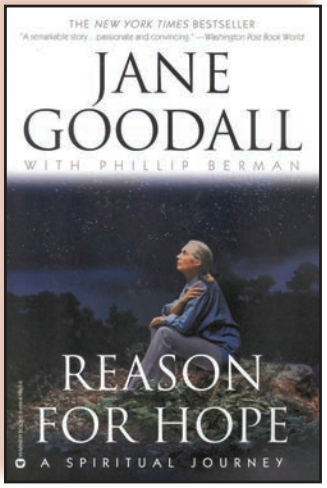


SAS Book Club

Nothing gives us a reason for hope like Spring!!

So why not join us for the March book club selection: "Reason For Hope" by Jane Goodall. Ann Banks is facilitating the discussion.

As always....we will meet the 3rd Wednesday of the month, on March 18th (just two days before Spring!) from 4–5:15 pm at Pilgrim Congregational Church in the conference room. **Questions? Call Sherry Staub 563-370-0757.**

Monthly Meeting Hospitality Reminder!

If your name (first or last) begins with the same letter as the month—M for March—please consider bringing something to share at the monthly meeting. Fruit, baked goods, chips, cheese.....anything you have on hand.

Also, please consider bringing your own coffee/tea cup to the monthly meeting. This will help us reduce our waste and save money!

Wetlands *(cont. from page 3)*

help identify what options may be available to help preserve and enhance the remaining wetland resources within Bozeman. SAS is investigating establishing a Wetland Mitigation Bank at our new Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve so that wetland functions and services might be retained within our own watershed of the East Gallatin River.

If you have interest in preserving our local wetlands, we encourage you to speak with any of us on the SAS Wetlands Preservation Project Committee and let your City Commissioners know that you value the wetlands in Bozeman and the 'Valley of the Beaver.'

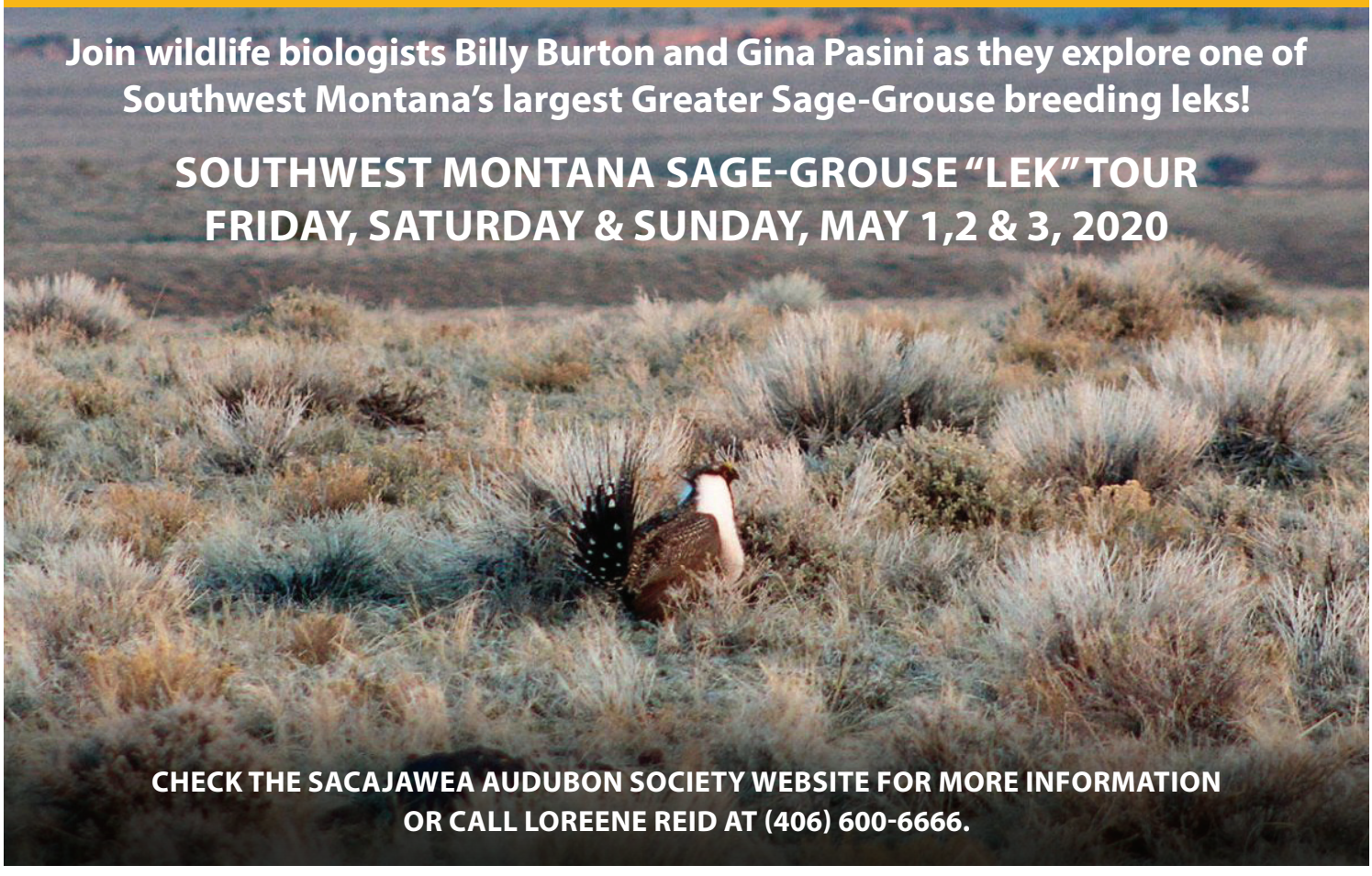
Sacajawea Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1711
Bozeman, MT 59771-1771

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