APRIL 2021

Sacajawea Audubon News

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

Monday, April 12th, 2021 VIRTUAL PROGRAM:

"What's in It for Us: How Wetlands Impact Water Quality and Quantity, and Why We Need Them Across the Landscape" *with Lilly Deford*

Wetlands protect us from drought and flooding, and ensure our groundwater, rivers, streams, and oceans are fit to sustain life. They are nature's built-in buffer, neutralizing change to maintain a stable system. Nature has installed them all over the landscape, to mitigate dispersed impacts from herds of migrating elk, geology rich in phosphorus, a heavy rain storm here, and a dry summer there. As we add human impacts, these unassuming, soggy places have that much more work to do. Each wetland provides localized protection, while they all work together to avoid larger, cumulative damage. Every wetland across a watershed does a little bit to make our homes, our towns, our state, our country, and the world resilient. Each wetland we remove from a landscape makes us more susceptible to pollution, drought, and flooding. I will talk about each of these free services, and why wetlands are so good at what they do.

I grew up as part of a big farming family in Maryland. Weather and water were topics of conversation often, something to be humbled by, thankful for, and to steward. In 2006, I went to MSU to earn a bachelor's and master's degree in bio-resource engineering. My graduate work observed changes in wetland function before and after the restoration of Story Mill Park. I am now the Restoration Director for the Gallatin Watershed Council. GWC guides collaborative water stewardship for a healthy and productive landscape. I believe that we can find common ground in our dependence on clean water, and that our efforts to protect the resources in the Gallatin Watershed are stronger together.

Please register for SAS's April 12th Program Meeting at: https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/3829380610233947662. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email with information about joining the webinar. Share our virtual program using hashtags #sasbirds, #wetlands, and #IAWP.

SAS programs are free and open to the public. Our programs feature a special guest speaker the 2nd Monday of each month, September through May. ***Join us for a virtual social at 6:30 pm. Announcements and the program begin at 7:00 pm.*** *For more information on SAS Program Meetings contact Kyle Moon at* programs@sacajaweaaudubon.org

Lower East Gallatin River photo courtesy Chris Boyer / Kestrel Aerial.

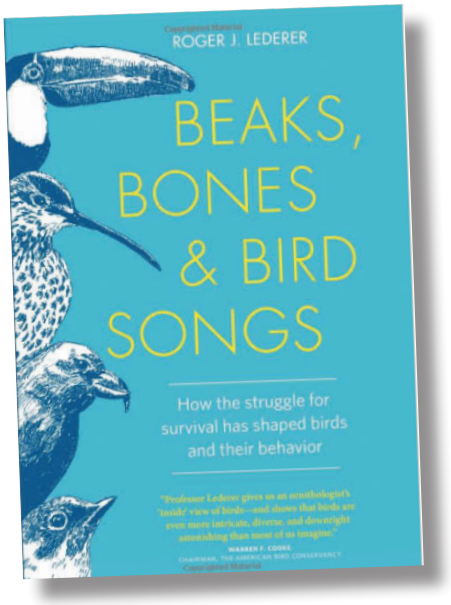
April SAS Book Club

by Sherry Staub

April is the final month of this year's SAS Book Club discussions!

I am so grateful for the option of using the virtual platform to maintain the seamless continuation of the group since we couldn't meet in person. I am especially grateful to Elisabeth Swanson for stepping up to be the facilitator for this virtual platform by receiving the attendees and supplying them with the link to the meeting. Further, much gratitude to Loreene Reed for providing the technical support. I can assure you, I would not have been able to pull this off without them.

So, here's the scoop for the April meeting!



DATE: As always, we will meet on the third Wednesday, which this month is April 21st.

TIME: 6:30–7:45pm

BOOK SELECTION: *"Beaks, Bones & Bird Songs: How the struggle for survival has shaped birds and their behavior"* by Roger Lederer.

John Mugaas will be leading the discussion for this book.

Please join us even if this is your first time. Everyone is welcome! If you would like to be on the email list for monthly reminders, email Sherry Staub at mayawindsong@gmail.com

Don't forget to contact Elisabeth Swanson to receive the link for the meeting: elsswa@gmail.com or 404-570-8325

Also, please log on about 10 minutes prior to start time so that we can start the meeting promptly at 6:30pm.

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY

INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE UPDATE: APRIL 2021

MEET the WILD NEIGHBORS at the INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE!

Sacajawea Audubon Society invites you to a special tour of the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve (IAWP) on **Saturday May 1st 10:00am–2:00pm**.

IMAGINE being greeted at the east end of Bozeman by a beautiful wetland oasis, networked by trails, teeming with birds and wildlife where one can find the tranquility that wetlands offer. By working together, this vision is on the road to reality! The Wetlands Preservation Project was initiated to accomplish SAS's mission to protect and restore increasingly rare wetland habitat in our region and to provide educational opportunities and enjoyment for generations to come. The IAWP is the first of our wetland protection projects.

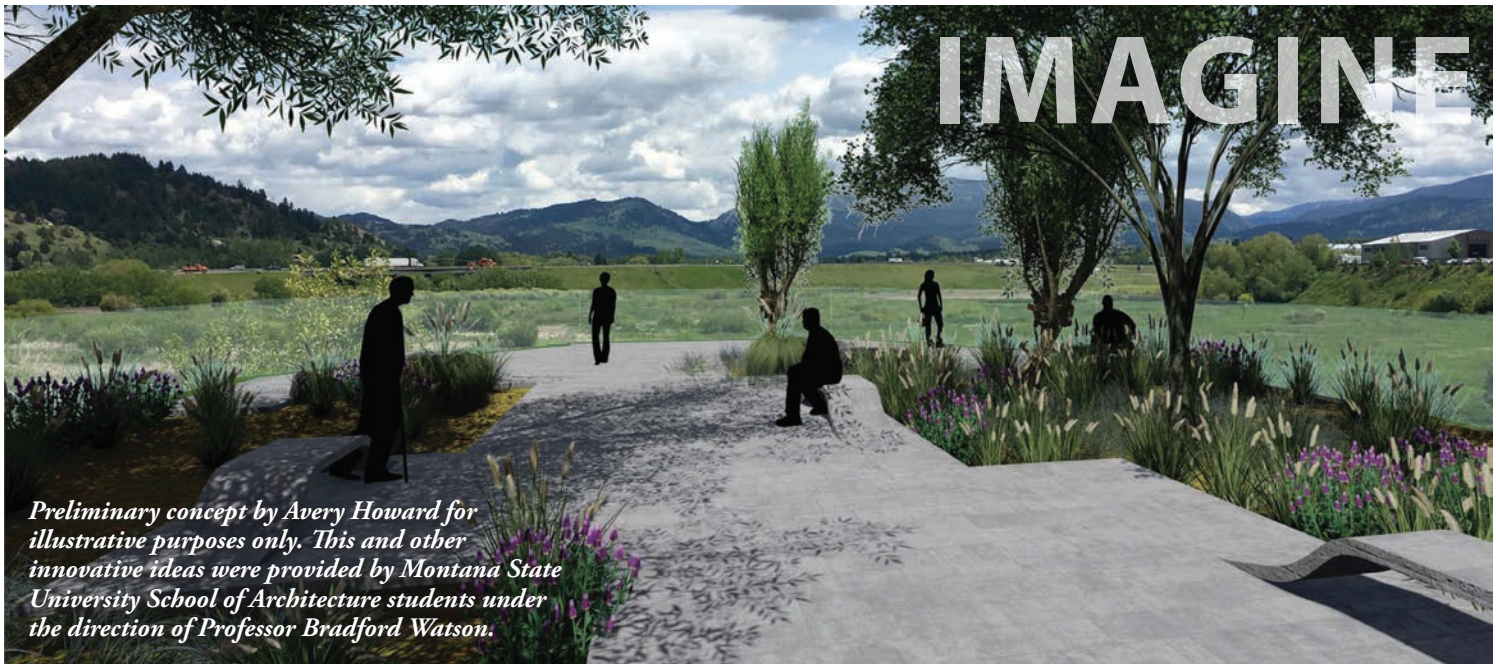
Please bring a mask and consider a hat, binoculars, bug spray, and of course **CURIOSITY** and **QUESTIONS**! For more information visit bozemanwetlands.org or email info@bozemanwetlands.org

VISION STATEMENT FOR THE IAWP

The Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve (IAWP) was set aside by Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS) to conserve and enhance a wetland community in an urban setting. The site will serve as an environmental study area offering education about wetland ecology accessible to all ages. SAS aims to document the effect of human influence on wetland communities and inspire the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of wetlands. SAS strives to have positive impacts on wetland conservation that extends beyond the Gallatin watershed.

GOALS FOR THE IAWP

1. Create a wetland community that serves as habitat for diverse wildlife species.
2. Monitor the site to ensure that management decisions do not adversely affect the wetland.
3. Showcase the role of beaver as a keystone species in creating wetland habitat.
4. Create educational opportunities to learn about hydrology, ecology and history.
5. Create a natural laboratory for scientific investigation.
6. Encourage critical thinking about ecology and environmental issues.
7. Provide for visitor access and infrastructure consistent with conserving the wetland resource while offering a place of respite in an urban area.
8. Explore alternative methods of weed control, with the intent of avoiding the use of herbicide.
9. Contribute to wetland conservation in the Gallatin watershed by establishing a wetland bank.
10. Develop an outreach program that extends beyond the Gallatin watershed.



Preliminary concept by Avery Howard for illustrative purposes only. This and other innovative ideas were provided by Montana State University School of Architecture students under the direction of Professor Bradford Watson.

BIRD NOTES

by John Parker

As hoped, early March was mild after February's onslaught of snow and cold. The clearing skies and warmer weather across the intermountain west, was just the signal that the bluebirds were waiting for. Within a period of three days, **Mountain Bluebirds** were being seen in all of the local river valleys. The first three Mountain Bluebirds were seen March 5th in the lower Madison Valley at Buffalo Jump State Park by Travis Kidd. The following day Lou Ann Harris saw a Mountain Bluebird in the Jefferson Valley at Lewis and Clark Caverns, followed the next day by Mary and John Griffith's sighting of two Mountain Bluebirds in the Gallatin Valley north of Belgrade. Finally, on March 8th, Melanie Moroney spotted two Mountain Bluebirds in Tom Miner Basin at the south end of Paradise Valley. As always, the first **Sandhill Cranes** arrive right on the heels of the bluebirds, with this year's first sighting coming from Anne Buckley's property north of Livingston on March 8th.

Locally, another harbinger of spring are the first **Ring-billed Gulls**. A good bet to see gulls is near the local landfill; so it wasn't as much of a surprise when on March 6th Vic Fesolowitz and Kim Oobink spotted two Ring-billed Gulls flying across the interstate north of the Gallatin County landfill near Logan.

The biggest surprise of the last month was a single **Double-crested Cormorant** seen resting on the Missouri River ice at Headwaters State Park. Pamm Davis saw this cormorant March 1st, which is the earliest record for this area by two weeks. Dalton Spencer added another early record to the books when he heard a **Say's Phoebe** at Buffalo Jump State Park on March 12th, beating the previous early date by three days.

I was watching ducks recently, thinking about bird names and how most of the common English names for ducks are fairly descriptive. Of course, there are exceptions like **American Wigeon** and **Mallard**. Some of the colloquial names for ducks can describe them in a word, like "Baldpate" for the pale or white head of the male wigeon, or simply "Greenhead" for the green head of the male Mallard. These remind me of a co-worker of my wife, who asked her :"What's the name of this bird I saw? It's a black bird with a yellow head." My wife replied: "Yellow-headed Blackbird,"to which she said: "No, really, what's its name?" I'm not sure if she was ever convinced that my wife wasn't pulling her leg.

Some of the other colloquial names for ducks include: "sprig" for **Northern Pintail**, "spoonbill" for **Northern Shoveler**,

Mountain Bluebird by V.C. Wald.

"blackjack" for **Ring-necked Duck** (can't we just call them Ring-billed Duck?), "rock duck" for **Harlequin Duck**, "butterball" for **Bufflehead**, "whistler" for **Goldeneyes**, and "sawbill" for **Mergansers**.

Often the Latin name can be much more enlightening than the common English names. One of my favorites is the **Harlequin Duck**, with the Latin name *Histrionicus histrionicus*. First of all, it's easy to remember and the "histrionic" coming from the Latin "histrio"—or a "stage player"—referring to their flamboyant plumage. The Latin name of the **Red-breasted Merganser** is *Mergus serrator*: Mergus for "a diver" and serrator for—wait for it—"a sawer."

So, you'll find me early in April looking for a diving sawer at Black's Ford on the Madison River, and later in May you might find me scanning the rocks in the upper Gallatin River for rock ducks.

2021 SACAJAWEA AUDUBON BIRDING WORKSHOPS

Birds inspire curiosity and a sense of wonder. Ever wonder who exactly is whistling "Hey Sweetie!" outside your window in the wee hours of the morning? Or how to identify a bird based on a flash of yellow feathers? Or what the little brown bird in the woodpile is called? Or why she's there in the first place? To help you answer all of these questions and more, Sacajawea Audubon Society is offering a variety of workshops and short courses. All courses will be taught by Ashley Martens, M.S., an experienced birder, naturalist, and outdoor educator. Ashley's approach to teaching birding engages all of your senses to tune in to what you see, hear, and love about the wild birds around us. **Contact Ashley at ashmartens@yahoo.com or 208-883-4998 for more information and to register for all classes detailed below.**

BEGINNING BIRDING IN FOREST & FIELD WORKSHOP

Participants will be introduced to the basics of birding through three evening classroom sessions and three field trips to a variety of habitats in the valley. We will cover bird families, common birds in our region, and what to look and listen for when seeking out the identity of a bird. There will be two sections (A and B) of this course this year.

Classroom Sessions

Sections A & B: Wednesday evenings (May 12, June 2, June 23), 6:00–7:30pm at Wild Birds Unlimited, 2047 W. Oak St. (except for June 23rd, location TBA)

Field Trips

Section A: Friday mornings (May 14, June 4, June 25), 7–10am at various locations

Section B: Saturday mornings (May 15, June 5, June 26), 7–10am at various locations

Cost: $95 for Sacajawea Audubon members; $115 for non-members. Please make checks payable to "Sacajawea Audubon Society" and mail to Ashley Martens at 2450 Sawmill Rd., Bozeman, MT 59715. Or register online at sacajaweaaudubon.org. Maximum 8 students per section. Supply lists provided upon registration.

INTERMEDIATE BIRDING SHORT COURSES

Perfect for birders who want to boost their birding skills up a notch and start studying more details of plumage, bird behaviors, and more sight and sound identification tips for specific bird families or groups. Choose as many courses as you like!

CAVITY NESTERS

We'll explore the ecology of birds in our region who either excavate their own cavities (like woodpeckers and nuthatches) or nest in existing cavities (like bluebirds,

(continued on page 6)

Ashley Martens leads a group of birders in Kelly Canyon. (L to R: Ashley Martens, Beth Madden, Stephanie Nelson, Adele Pittendrigh, Lou Ann Harris) Photo by Judy Tsiang.

2021 BIRDING WORKSHOPS *(continued from page 5)*

chickadees, and some owls). We'll also hone in on how to identify woodpeckers by calls, drums, and more. This trip happens early because most of these species breed early (and there are not so many leaves out so we can spot them easily)!

Live, Online Session: Wed, April 28th, 6:00–7:00pm
Field Trip: Sat, May 1st, 7:00–10:30am

BIRD LANGUAGE

Birds are the true messengers of the forests. They can tell us if there's a fox hiding in the brush, a person about to run down the trail, or a Sharp-shinned Hawk or owl about to fly through. Come learn the ancient art of bird language. We'll learn the five voices of the bird and some alarm patterns in class. We'll practice identifying these voices and patterns in the field and conduct a "bird sit" together. Awareness of bird language also inevitably leads to a deeper awareness of self.

Live, Online Session: Wed, May 19th 6:00–7:00pm
Field Trip: Sat, May 22nd 7:00–10:30am

WARBLERS

What is better than yellow feathers?! Well, maybe orange ones! We'll learn to identify differences between these wonderfully little flashy, fidgety birds and sort them out with plumage, song/call, and habitat clues.

Live, Online Session: Wed, June 9th, 6:00–7:00pm
Field Trip: Sat, June 12th, 7:00–10:30am

SPARROWS & ALLIES

Those little brown birds can be difficult to tease apart. We'll hone in on plumage, habitat, and songs and calls clues for the sparrows of our region so that we can begin to appreciate their subtle beauty and differences.

Live, Online Session: Wed, June 16th, 6:00–7:00pm
Field Trip: Sat, June 19th, 7:00–10:30am

THRUSHES & OTHER SONGSTERS: BIRDING BY EAR

The songs of the thrushes are some of the most magical sounds of summer. We'll learn to identify these birds by sight and song, as well as the many other lovely songsters in our region. This class will focus more on birding by ear than by sight, but of course we will take some time to explore and enjoy visual identification as well. Other bird families we will be sure to include are: vireos, flycatchers, grosbeaks, and the Western Tanager.

Live, Online Session: Wed, June 30th, 6:00–7:00pm
Field Trip: Fri, July 2nd, 7–10:30am

Cost per short course

$45 for Sacajawea Audubon members; $55 for non-members. Please make checks payable to "Sacajawea Audubon Society" and mail to Ashley Martens at 2450 Sawmill Rd., Bozeman, MT 59715. Or register online at sacajaweaaudubon.org.

Maximum 8 students. Supply lists provided upon registration.

DEEP NATURE CONNECTION SERIES

For six weeks, we will gather and practice routines to develop a deeper understanding of and connection to wild nature and natural cycles. We will investigate nature through quiet time, play, observation, journaling, and inspiring instructions. We will learn about edible and medicinal plants (and even make some tea and/or tinctures), animal tracking, bird language, and the many ways that nature teaches us.

Field Sessions

Wednesday mornings, 9am–11am (May 19 and 26; June 2,9,16 and 23)

- **Week 1** – *Observing and Sit Spot*
- **Week 2** – *Wandering and Wild Edible/Medicinal Plants*
- **Week 3** – *Seeing and Animal Tracking*
- **Week 4** – *Listening and Bird Language*
- **Week 5** – *Connecting with Natural Cycles*
- **Week 6** – *Bundling it All Together*

Course Materials

Blank journal and writing utensils for recording/sketching thoughts and observations, bag or backpack for collecting, field guides, and binoculars if you have them.

Cost: $120 for the entire series. Maximum 9 students. Near-town location TBA. Please make checks payable to "Sacajawea Audubon Society" and mail to Ashley Martens at 2450 Sawmill Rd., Bozeman, MT 59715. Or register online at sacajaweaaudubon.org.

Contact Ashley at ashmartens@yahoo.com or call her at 208-883-4998 for more information and to register for all classes detailed above.

Sponsor a Kestrel Nesting Box!

by Paulette Epple

American Kestrel photo by Mick Thompson.

Here is your chance to sponsor a kestrel nest box and learn more about our smallest falcon. American Kestrels are in decline in the United States and they need our help. Their population has been in decline by as much as 50–60% since the 1960s and the reasons are unknown. In response, Sacajawea Audubon (SAS) began installing kestrel nest boxes on private land around Gallatin Valley in 2012, and became a partner with the American Kestrel Partnership. Our SAS Kestrel Nest Box Project grew out of a desire to help support the conservation of kestrels. By providing quality nest sites in suitable habitat, we hope to increase the local kestrel population in our part of Southwest Montana. Information gathered by our citizen scientists as they monitor the boxes will provide data for professional researchers and scientists as they work to unlock the mysteries of the population decline.

Each year SAS monitors 70–75 boxes over a wide distribution area in four counties. During the nesting season, volunteers check the boxes for use, recording clutch size, hatching success, fledgling success, and conflicts with starlings. Nestlings are banded each year and, whenever possible, adults are also captured on the nest and banded. All of our data is submitted to and shared through the American Kestrel Partnership. Banding data goes directly to the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory.

The kestrel reproduction success rate can vary wildly from year to year. In 2019, although we only saw 15 boxes used, there were 55 young successfully fledged! The following year we had 25 nest boxes occupied but only 42 nestlings fledged. Every year is different and it is always exciting to follow the results which you will be able to do when you sponsor a box.

Male kestrels will be arriving first in Montana in March and early April. The male kestrel claims a nesting territory and identifies potential nest cavities. They will escort potential mates to cavities within their territories and the female will choose the nest site.

You can help by sponsoring a Kestrel Nesting Box and learn all about these birds and their nesting habits. Throughout the season—which is NOW—you'll be assigned a box and follow its progress. We will periodically provide information on nesting activity, hatching, and nestling success. We always have lots of fun stories to share along with photos, when possible.

American Kestrel photo by Steve Jorgenson.

We hope you will consider sponsoring one or more boxes at $50 each by sending a check to:

Sacajawea Audubon Society
PO Box 1711
Bozeman, MT 59771

You can also donate online at https://sacajaweaaudubon.org/project/kestral-next-box/ Make sure you send us your email address and write "Kestrel Boxes" on the check to help us keep track of sponsorships.

We hope your box will be successful! In any event, it's a fun way to help Sacajawea Audubon Society raise funds for its numerous conservation projects. So, sponsor your Kestrel Box today!

For more information, please contact Paulette Epple at conservation@sacajaweaaudubon.org. ***Thank you!***

BRIDGER RAPTOR MIGRATION PROJECT

FALL 2020 SUMMARY

Photo by Will Britton.

by Jojo Morelli

Thanks to an enormous amount of support from Sacajawea Audubon Society, the Bridger Raptor Migration Project collected its 29th season of fall migratory raptor data in 2020. It would not have been possible without the efforts of all wildland firefighters who assisted in containing the Bridger Foothills Fire—to whom we are so grateful.

This year's count continues the trend of a declining total migrant raptor count at the Bridger site. This season's lower count total is not just a result of time off the mountain due to the fire (15 days!). Even without an extended absence from the count site, the overall passage rate (migrant raptors counted per 100 observation hours) of 456.6 birds per 100 hours is the third lowest record for this site; this is much lower than the 1992–2019 average of 708.4 migrant raptors counted per 100 hours observed.

Turkey Vulture photo by Will Britton.

A RECORD HIGH FOR TURKEY VULTURE COUNT

The 2020 field season marked a record high count for Turkey Vultures —32 were seen migrating. There was an increasing number of Turkey Vultures observed at this site, which is similar to trends observed at other Rocky Mountain migration sites. This trend could be due to Turkey Vultures expanding their range northward in response to a warming climate.

No long-term trends have been observed in all accipiters, all buteos, all falcons, Northern Harriers, and Ospreys utilizing the Bridger range; this suggests that migratory populations of these species are stable. This is especially noteworthy since many of the species counts were lower in 2020 than their respective 1992–2019 averages. It is important for the Bridger Mountains Raptor Migration Project to continue to collect annual fall migration data, so that any changes in population trends can be detected.

DECREASE IN GOLDEN AND BALD EAGLE COUNTS

Golden Eagles

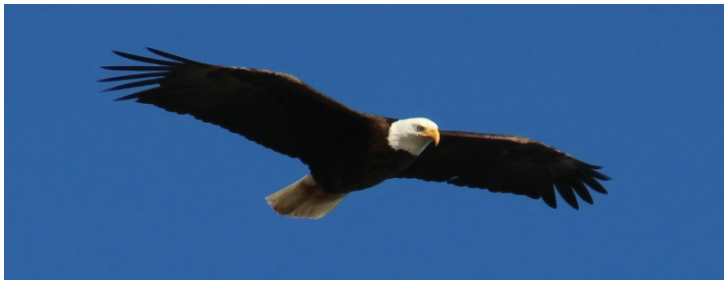
A major migrant at this site are Golden Eagles, which were seen in lower numbers this season. A total of 775 Golden Eagles were observed migrating this season, which is noticeably lower than the 1992–2019 average of 1,319 Golden Eagles. This is consistent with a declining trend in Golden Eagles seen at this site. This long-term decline can only be explained by speculation, but a likely primary cause could be habitat degradation and fragmentation, as well as a decline in their favored prey item, jackrabbit species. This decrease in Golden Eagles may also contribute to the trend of a decreasing total migrant raptor count at the Bridger site, since Golden Eagles comprise more than half of all migrant raptors at this site.

Bald Eagles

There is a trend of decreasing Bald Eagle numbers at the Bridger site, as well. A total of 35 Bald Eagles were observed migrating this season, which is lower than the 1992–

Golden Eagle photo by Will Britton.

2020 average of 76 Bald Eagles. This decline is likely related to climate change. Migratory Bald Eagles begin migration when waters begin to freeze in the north, since their main food source is fish. If these water sources take longer to freeze, Bald Eagles may remain in their breeding grounds for longer than typically projected. This results in delayed Bald Eagle migration, occurring in November and December. Bald Eagle movements during late fall would be undetected, due to the absence of site observers, therefore resulting in a smaller Bald Eagle seasonal count.



Bald Eagle photo by David R. Tribble.

THE VIEW FROM THE HELIPAD: OTHER WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS AND NOTES

Hawkwatching doesn't only reward observers with fantastic looks at migrating raptors, it also provides a peek into the daily lives of the local wildlife in the area, as well as providing a wider view of avian migration.

While on the Bridger Ridge helipad, we observed 65 species of birds (including migrant raptors and migrant passerines and waterfowl) in fall 2020. A sighting of note was Black Rosy-Finches, seen once with a flock of Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches foraging in the snow; this is a first sighting for the Bridger hawkwatch.

Additionally, observing local birds was always a treat. A male Dusky Grouse was often seen utilizing the trail system, foraging around the ski patrol hut, and even making a few appearances around the helipad. Common Ravens were often seen flying around the ridge in flocks, and playing with snow, sticks, or pinecones—or even pestering local and migrant raptors!

Local (non-migrant) raptors, including Turkey Vultures, Red-tailed Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, Prairie Falcons, and American Kestrels were seen at varying times throughout the season. A memorable young, local Golden Eagle was often seen following an adult Golden Eagle and vocalizing. It was also seen flying and playing with Common Ravens.

Mountain Goat photo by Adam Schneider.

Mountain Goats, Red Squirrels, Chipmunks, and Short-tailed Weasels made appearances around the ridge, as well.

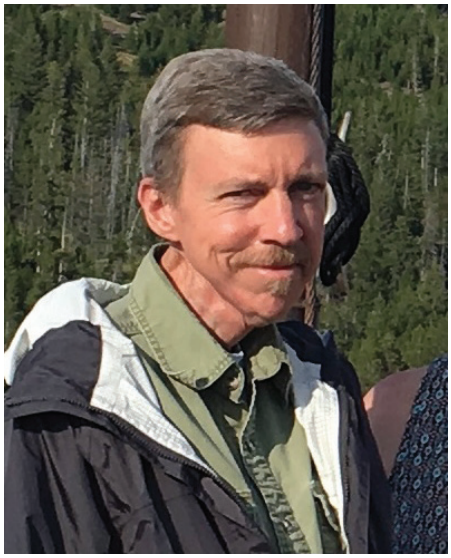
ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Bridger Mountains Raptor Migration Project celebrated its 29th season of collecting fall migratory raptor data in 2020. Every day, weather permitting, counters Will Britton and Jojo Morelli sat atop Bridger Ridge helipad from 0900 to 1700, scanning for migrant raptors so that they could be identified and tallied.

Hawkwatching is one of the easiest and cheapest ways to assess raptor population health for a variety of migratory species. It is also a way to determine any possible trends for these species. The Bridger Mountains hawkwatch typically runs from 1 September to 1 November; in 2020 it ran from 27 August to 31 October.

ABOUT THE WATCHERS

Will Britton and Jojo Morelli are seasonal field biologists who mostly specialize in avian field work. Both were excited to work at the Bridger Mountains hawkwatch.



In Memory of Jim Belli

We are so sad to hear of the passing of our dear friend and fellow Sacajawea Audubon Society member, Jim Belli. Jim was a dedicated naturalist, constantly learning and studying all aspects of nature and furthering his knowledge with classes at the Yellowstone Institute. He enjoyed putting his birding skills to good use helping with the Important Bird Area (IBA) Surveys in the Madison Valley. And Jim was a consummate "burdock warrior" (a "burdock whacker" as he liked to say!), never passing up the opportunity to volunteer to make the community more bird-friendly and attractive.

Everyone who knew Jim enjoyed his sharp wit and friendship. He often signed his emails with "Happy trails to you." We will miss you Jim, and wish you Happy Trails in the great hereafter. Donations can be made to Sacajawea Audubon Society in Jim's honor at https://sacajaweaaudubon.org/donate

Yellow-headed Blackbird photo by Lou Ann Harris.

Gallatin Valley Earth Day:
Transforming and Healing our Earth Together

Join Gallatin Valley Earth Day (GVED) for **EARTH DAY 2021**. GVED and its partners will be hosting virtual and in person events throughout the month of April, with lots of **FREE** events including:

Clean Up Day ~ Virtual Talks ~ Tours and Bird Walks ~ Art Class (with local wine and cheese) ~ Films ~ Book Club ~ Trail through the parks with exhibits ~ Earth Day Festival at the Library

Visit gallatinvalleyearthday.org for a calendar of events and more details, including information on how you can register for the virtual events.

GALLATIN VALLEY EARTH DAY FESTIVAL
Saturday, April 17th (10 am–1 pm)
Bozeman Public Library
(Covid-safe guidelines followed)
Music - Food - Exhibits - Kids' Activities

As part of Gallatin Valley Earth Day, Sacajawea Audubon Society will hold three events:

- **Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve Wetland Scientists.** Activities will help children learn about wetlands. **Saturday, April 17th (10am–1 pm)**
- **Open House** in the Learning Garden at the Story Mill Community Park. SAS will show people around the garden and offer advice on how to attract birds by planting bird-friendly gardens. Masks will be required. **Saturday, April 24th (10am–2pm)**
- **Guided Bird Walks.** SAS will offer two guided bird walks through the Story Mill Community Park nature preserve. Limit of 16 people in two smaller groups of 8. Masks will be required. Meet in the pavilion with the tree sculpture across from the Community Center and remember to bring your binocs! **Saturday, April 24th (8am and 10am)**

Plants for Birds:
Showy Mountain Ash

- **Scientific Name:** *Sorbus decora* (Rosaceae family)
- **Height:** 20 to 25 feet
- **Hardiness:** Zone 3
- **Wildlife Value:** Persistent berries through the winter. Attracts pollinators.

Showy Mountain Ash trees brighten our winters with their eye-catching clusters of red-orange berries—and the birds take notice too! Since the berries persist on the trees throughout the winter, they provide a much needed source of nutrition for birds when winter snows cover much of their food. It's always exciting to see a flock of Bohemian Waxwings descend upon a tree and gorge themselves on the berries. The fruit can even intoxicate the birds if it has fermented over repeated freezing and thawing. When robins get caught in late spring snowstorms, mountain ash berries are often still on the trees to supply them with food.

Though Showy Mountain Ash is not native to Montana, it is hardy here. It grows native a few states away in the Midwest and Northeast and can usually be found offered for sale at garden centers. These attractive smaller-scale (20–25 feet) trees are known for their all-season appeal with their fragrant white flowers in early summer, warm golden fall color and bright berries through the fall and winter. The profuse flowers attract a variety of insects and butterflies which in turn attract insectivorous birds. The berries are relished by catbirds, robins, waxwings, jays, grouse, and small mammals such as squirrels and chipmunks. The deer in my yard eat up every berry that falls from the tree or is dropped inadvertently by a robin.

In Montana there are two related natives: Greene's Mountain Ash (*S. scopulina*) and Western Mountain Ash (*S. sitchensis*). Both are smaller (5–15 feet tall) than the Showy Mountain Ash, are multi-stemmed, and are shrub-like in growth. These too are excellent for wildlife but are hard to find available in nurseries.

Plant mountain ash in full or partial sun, not full shade. They do best in rich, loamy soils but are fairly adaptable to clay soils. They are not considered drought-tolerant and require some supplemental water in southwest Montana. It is best to protect the trunks of young mountain ash trees to prevent sunscald in winter. Finally, the good news is that mountain ash are not true ash trees of the *Fraxinus* genus and therefore are not susceptible to the emerald ash borers that attack green ash.

Treat the birds (and yourself!) to a mountain ash in your yard. You will enjoy the year-round beauty of the tree and the birds will enjoy the feast that you provide them! ~ *Paulette Epple*

American Robin in Showy Mountain Ash. Photo by Christine Haines.

Showy Mountain Ash photo by Ryan Hodnett.

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