FEBRUARY 2024

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.

SAS Monthly Program: Monday, February 12, Hope Lutheran Church

"Starting a Bison Ranch from Scratch in Montana's Shields Valley"

with Matt Skoglund

Matt Skoglund. Photo Courtesy of North Bridger Bison

Ranching for bison and birds has become a reality in Montana. At our February membership meeting, Matt Skoglund will present how just over five years ago he and his family started their bison ranch from scratch in Montana's Shields Valley. He will inform us about the journey that led them to start the ranch, how they started it, what they do at the ranch, their business model, and how their strong conservation values are tied into everything they do. Demonstrating their heartfelt commitment to land conservation, the Skoglunds permanently protected their ranch from development by putting it under a conservation easement with the Gallatin Valley Land Trust in 2022. Then in 2023, the Skoglund's North Bridger Bison Ranch became the first Audubon Certified bird-friendly bison ranch in Montana. A short film about their certification can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q53UJp-mXoc

Nature is in charge at the ranch, which also provides habitat for a wide variety of birds and wildlife, including sage grouse, pronghorn antelope, sandhill cranes, coyotes, mule deer, wolves, moose, mountain lions, elk, black bears, waterfowl, songbirds, and many other wild critters.

Matt, along with his wife, Sarah, are the founders and owners of North Bridger Bison Ranch. The ranch is rooted in Regenerative Agriculture principles. They sell their Montana-raised, grassfed, field-harvested bison meat direct-to-consumer in the greater Bozeman area and all over the country.

Prior to starting North Bridger Bison in 2018, Matt was the Director of the Northern Rockies Office for the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), where he worked on various conservation issues in Montana and the Northern Rockies for a decade. Matt is a graduate of Middlebury College and the University of Illinois College of Law. He and Sarah have two young children, Otto and Greta.

The in-person meeting will be held Monday, February 12th at Hope Lutheran Church, 2152 West Graf St. (off S. 19th). A social begins at 6:30 PM; the program begins at 7:00 PM. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own reusable cups.

For virtual attendance, please register at https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5472922447266662746

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

Attendees—whether in person or virtual—are encouraged to share their bird sightings at this and every monthly program.

Bison Grazing at North Bridger Bison Ranch. Photo Courtesy of North Bridger Bison

SAS monthly programs are free and open to the public, featuring special guest speakers the 2nd Monday of each month, September through May. For more information, contact Ken Sinay at programs@sacajaweaaudubon.org.

MESSAGE *from* SAS PRESIDENT, CHRIS NIXON

I am thrilled that Matt Skoglund will be our speaker for this month's program! I first met Matt and his wife Sarah about 15 years ago, when Matt interviewed for the position of director of the Northern Rockies Office for the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). Matt and Sarah were our guests at the former Lehrkind Mansion Bed & Breakfast on N Wallace Ave during their visit for his interview. Matt was hired to fill the position and our bed and breakfast subsequently served as the landing place for both Matt and Sarah's families when they visited over the years. I lost touch with them - not knowing they had made the huge transition from Bozeman to the Shields Valley to start a bison ranch.

Believe me, you will want to attend this meeting and meet the Skoglunds of North Bridger Bison Ranch. Matt and Sarah are wonderful individuals and make a dynamite couple! Don't miss this presentation about this milestone for them and for Audubon's Certified bird-friendly ranch program.

I'm sorry I will not be at the February membership program to see them again in person. I am now even more grateful that SAS currently provides the option to attend our meetings virtually and records the presentations for posterity (when permitted). View past programs on our SAS website.

I'm also appreciative of Lockhorn Cider House's support of SAS and the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve (IAWP). Don't forget to attend our Wetland Trivia evenings, each third Tuesday of the month during 2024 at Lockhorn Cider House (see article).

Don't miss the World Wetland Day events at the Museum of the Rockies and the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve on February 2nd & 3rd (see article) to learn all about our local beavers. Winter finally hit Bozeman hard in January. Learn how beavers and the other critters survived the extremes.

Consider signing up for SAS's new Wetland Master Naturalist Program (See Article) and learn about how the wetland functions in all seasons. This program is a big step in our education efforts about our local wetlands. You may then consider becoming a Busy Beaver Wetland Host at the IAWP. We plan to begin construction at the IAWP this fall.

Stay up to date with all the big events, milestones, and changes going on with SAS. Your participation and support is what makes all this possible!

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY

INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE UPDATE: Feb. 2024

THE WETLAND PRESERVATION PROJECT (WPP) was initiated to accomplish Sacajawea Audubon Society's mission to protect and restore increasingly rare wetland and riparian habitats in our region, and to provide educational opportunities and enjoyment for generations to come. The IAWP is the first of our wetland protection projects.

Wetland Winter Wildlife at the IAWP

by Frank Marchak

As winter returns to the valley, changes in the conditions in the wetland at the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve (IAWP) means that the wildlife must adapt to the scarcity of food, deepening snow and ice, and frigid temperatures. Animals adopt different strategies to deal with winter. Several animals migrate to areas with more hospitable environments until the season passes. Other animals hibernate, reducing metabolic processes. However, many animals have evolved strategies to help them survive until spring.

A trail camera set up by the beaver lodge provides some insight into the denizens who remain in the wetland through the winter. Beavers create a cache of twigs and branches anchored to the bottom of their pond before the water freezes. They are active throughout the winter, mating in February.

The entrance to the lodge is below the surface of the water, so the beaver can enter and exit even after the surface freezes. If there are patches of open water, the beaver will make trips out on the ice to gather additional food.

Other animals active in the wetland in winter include raccoons as well as a small herd of five white tail deer. The deer in particular show interest in the trail camera.

The IAWP can be a magical place in the winter and well worth the trip despite the weather.

The beaver is not the only rodent active at this time of year. While muskrats spend the majority of the winter in their sleeping lodge – usually dug into a bank with an underwater entrance – they actively feed all winter. There are several reports of beavers sharing their lodge with muskrats in the winter.

Besides the mammals, several bird species remain through the winter. Magpies are a perennial attendee, making numerous appearances on the trail camera.

In addition, the resident pheasant made an appearance, and some mallards took advantage of some open water.

BUSY BEAVERS
Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve

Support Conservation by Volunteering with SAS

Sign up to be a Busy Beaver: (scan the QR code) and pledge just 10 hours of your time in 2024 to contribute to your local urban wetland restoration project. When you become a Busy Beaver you join a community of people who share a dedication to wetland conservation and outreach, and you gain access to discounted and free workshops with SAS throughout the year.

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY

INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE

UPDATE: Feb. 2024

World Wetlands Day Celebration!

FEATURING RONAN DONOVAN, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER

Friday, Feb. 2: Join us at the Museum of the Rockies for this informative evening. **Meet & Greet will begin at 6 PM with presenters** and other beaver enthusiasts, and our wetland partners including: Confluence Consulting, Trout Unlimited, Montana Outdoor Science School, Gallatin Watershed Council, Gallatin Valley Land Trust, Gallatin Local Water Quality District, Montana Watershed Coordination Council, Ducks Unlimited, Montana Freshwater Partners, and the SAS Wetland Preservation Project Committee. Colter's Run barbershop quartet will entertain us with wetland-themed songs.

Beginning at 7 PM we move into the auditorium for the short film "Beavers to the Rescue" with wildlife biologist and National Geographic Explorer Ronan Donovan. Then a panel discussion by Terry Cunningham, Torrey Ritter, and Erik Anderson will be moderated by County Commissioner Jennifer Boyer. These experts have experience in wetlands, ecology, and management at the city, state, and federal levels.

Webinar link for virtual attendance: https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5035129904189428 05

Saturday, Feb. 3: Gather with everyone at the **Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve (IAWP) at 1 PM**. Bring your mug for hot chocolate. Bring snowshoes to participate in a tour of the wetland guided by Frank Marchack. MOSS's snowshoes will be available to borrow if you don't have your own. *(The snowshoe tour is weather permitting.)*

Thank You our sponsors! Confluence Consulting, Gallatin Valley Land Trust and Gallatin Local Water Quality District.

wetlands@sacajaweaaudubon.org

New Wetland Naturalist Course

Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS) is developing a **new naturalist course with a focus on wetlands**, covering various aspects of wetland ecology and environmental science, tailored to Montana's unique landscapes and ecological characteristics. Each class will be structured to ideally combine theoretical knowledge with practical, hands-on activities or field observations. Each topic will have a subject matter expert drawn from Montana State University, Society of Wetland Scientists, and local specialists.

The approach is a curriculum that **focuses on the natural science aspects of wetlands with a concentration on the understanding of wetland ecology, hydrology, soils, plants, and wildlife.** The course covers topics that will provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex ecological interactions that occur within these ecosystems with an emphasis on scientific observation, analysis, and interpretation, integrating field trips and hands-on activities.

The wetlands course will be held in June and July. Please go to https://bozemanwetlands.org for **additional information and to register.**

Studies at the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve. Photo by Loreene Reid.

Raptor Identification Workshop & Field Trip

Thursday, March 7th from 6:30 to 8:30 PM and Saturday, March 9th all day

Have you ever wanted to sharpen your raptor identification skills? If so, this is the workshop for you! This program will be **presented by Steve Hoffman, Founder of HawkWatch International and Coordinator of the annual Bridger Raptor Migration Project.**

On **Thursday evening, March 7th Steve will provide a detailed discussion of the identification and natural history of all relatively common and widespread diurnal raptor species** (e.g., hawks, eagles, falcons, etc.) found in Gallatin Valley. Steve's PowerPoint-illustrated talk will include descriptions of the many plumage variations -including color morphs as well as age and sex variations- of the most common and observable species. Helpful behavioral clues (i.e., manner of flight, preferred habitat, etc.) will also be incorporated. Golden and Bald eagles and the "buteo" hawks, such as Red-tailed and Rough-legged hawks will be emphasized.

This presentation will be especially valuable for "intermediate" and "advanced" birding enthusiasts, although beginners will also find this workshop quite helpful. Participants will then go into the field on Saturday to practice their newly-developed identification skills. **The Thursday night presentation will start at 6:30 PM, and conclude by 8:30 PM; it will be convened at the Hope Lutheran Church at 2152 Graf St. in Bozeman.**

Saturday's (March 9th) field trip will meet at the Museum of the Rockies (NE end of Parking Lot) at 8:00 AM. Be sure to dress for the weather and bring any necessary drinks or snacks for this 5-6 hour field excursion. If you have a spotting scope you wish to bring, that would be most helpful.

A Dark Red-tailed Hawk in it's second year. Photo by Scott Heppel

An Adult Bald Eagle. Photo by Scott Heppel

There is a $35 fee for Sacajawea Audubon Society members (only $20 for participants under age 25), or $60 for non-members (this includes a $25 Sacajawea Audubon Society membership).

There will be a strict 20-person limit for the field trip. Advance reservation and payment are required. Early registration is strongly advised! **For more information, or to make reservations, please contact Emma Narotzky** at sec@sacajaweaaudubon.org (by February 14th).

To register: https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/gd1V6DGzq3un4ANKrkXpYA

Short-eared Owl. Photo by Ronan Donovan

Monthly IAWP Trivia Nights

The next Wetland Trivia Night is all about owls!
February 20th at Lockhorn Cider House (21 S. Wallace)

Sign-in begins at 5:30 PM. Grab a drink, mingle with other trivia-goers, and find your seat. Wetland Trivia begins at 6:30 and runs approximately one hour.

Order your copy of

Yellowstone's Birds: Diversity and Abundance in the World's First National Park

Yellowstone's Birds: Diversity and Abundance in the World's First National Park was recently released in October of 2023 by co-author Douglas W. Smith, retired Senior Wildlife Biologist with Yellowstone National Park and SAS's January Membership Program presenter. This is the first book on the science and conservation of the Park's birds, and only the third book in the history of Yellowstone to focus on birds.

Purchasing a copy of the book online through this link https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/ycBsFcuSppoOyjR7vuBXmA **supports SAS!**

MOSS's Spring 2024 Master Naturalist Course

Join Montana Outdoor Science Center's (MOSS) Master Naturalist Course and become a certified Montana Master Naturalist through the Montana Natural History Center. This program is a great way to dive deeply into Montana's amazing natural history and to learn how to share your knowledge and enthusiasm with others - with confidence!

Tuesday, March 19 - Thursday, May 16 2024

9 consecutive weeks Tuesday/Thursday classes: 5:30-7:30 PM

(No class 4/9 or 5/14)

2 Saturday field trips - April 27 and May 11

Instructor Cedar Mathers-Winn

Tuition - $425

Certification requirements:

- attendance for 40 class hours
- 6 hours volunteer service with an environmental organization
- complete 8 nature journal entries
- write and present an interpretive field note

MOSS Master Naturalist students in the field with instructor Cedar Mathers-Winn. Photo courtesy of Montana Outdoor Science School.

More information and registration at: https://www.outdoorscience.org/naturalist

Bird Sightings: Christmas Bird Count 2023

by John Parker

Overall, participation for this past season's Christmas Bird Counts was quite good. No doubt the relatively mild weather conditions played a part in the good turnout. All the counts before Christmas even had bare ground to go with the warm weather. Thank you to everyone in the field and watching feeders!

The Ennis count started things off on December 14th with a calm sunny day. Fifty-seven species of birds were seen, including new high counts for Gadwall, House Sparrow, and Brewer's Blackbird. The 13 Red-tailed Hawks and 26 **American Dippers** were one shy of record highs. Notwithstanding the Red-tailed Hawks, this year's count was notable for the paucity of raptors. No accipiters were spotted and only one Golden Eagle and three Rough-legged Hawks were seen.

Red-naped Sapsucker .Photo by Lou Ann Harris

Bozeman's count took place December 16th, on a beautiful sunny day. Seventy species were tallied, including two **Great-tailed Grackles**, which were new to the count. It was exciting to have **Sandhill Cranes** on the count for the second time. The three cranes were feeding on waste grain in a wheat field on the west edge of Bozeman. Nadine Brown had alerted us to the cranes' presence before count day. A **Spotted Towhee** in west Bozeman was the fourth for the count. Virginia Rails were seen for the sixth time and equaled the high count record at two birds. New high counts were also established for Cackling Goose, Ring-necked Duck, Great Blue Heron, Black-billed Magpie, and White-breasted Nuthatch.

It was another ideal day for the Three Forks count on December 27th. A total of 61 species were found. The lone Hooded Merganser was only the fourth one for the count, and a single **Harris's Sparrow** was the sixth for the count. Northern Pintail, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, White-crowned Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbird, and Common Grackle all had new high count totals. The 25 **Western Meadowlarks** in a single flock south of Willow Creek more than doubled the previous high count.

The Livingston, Gardiner and West Yellowstone counts were all conducted on December 17th, under near ideal conditions.

All the participants on the Livingston count were thankful for a calm day in the field. The count of only 47 species was about 10 fewer than usual, but one of those birds was arguably the best bird of this year's counts. George Kelly found a **Red-naped Sapsucker** in a woodlot on the east side of town. There have only been about ten mid-winter records for Red-naped Sapsucker in Montana.

Gardiner tallied 33 species of birds, which is average. There were no real stand out birds, but higher than usual numbers of **Green-winged Teal** were seen along the Yellowstone River.

The total count for West Yellowstone also fell into the average category. The Belted Kingfisher along the Madison River was a nice winter find for the area. The real oddity and a new bird for the count was the **Pinyon Jay** that Kyle Moon found.

The beautiful weather continued into the new year for the January 2nd Ruby Valley count. There were 47 different species seen, including a Cooper's Hawk– a new species for the count. Two **Blue Jays** that had been coming to Tom Forwood's mother's house in Sheridan were picked up as well.

One of the big take-aways from the warm and dry early winter was the very low numbers of Rough-legged Hawks. The lack of snow cover also allowed birds to spread across the landscape and not concentrate into smaller areas where they could more easily be found.

Winter returned with a vengeance the second week of January when an Arctic front ushered in extremely cold weather. In the days immediately preceding the front there was a flight (groups of 5-60 birds) of **Snow Geese** across western and central Montana. Perhaps these birds had lingered to the north during the mild early winter. In previous years there have been a number of instances of one to two Snow Geese sighted during the month of January, but nothing quite like this. Like the Sandhill Cranes on the Bozeman Christmas Bird Count, these geese were likely taking advantage of the lack of snow cover enabling them to feed in exposed grain fields.

John Parker's Extensive History with the Bozeman CBC

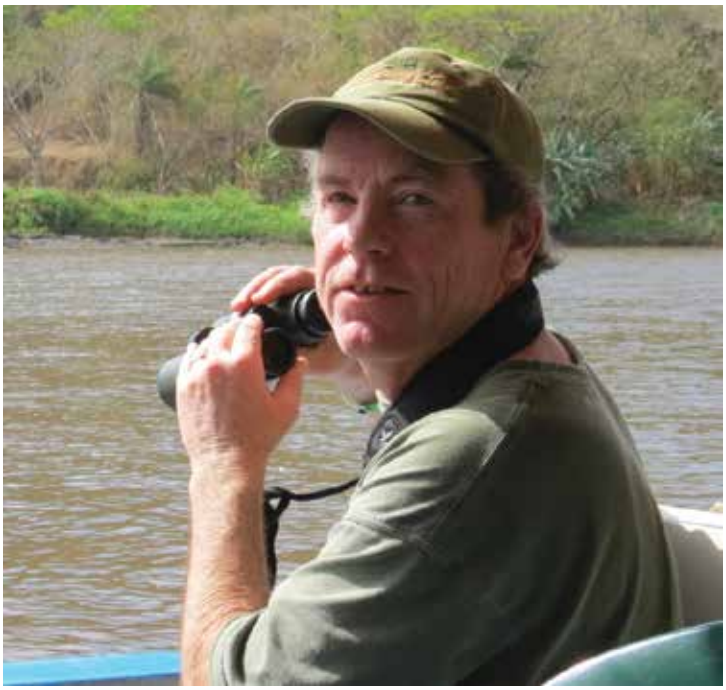
by Lou Ann Harris

For most of us members of SAS, it seems like John Parker has always been in charge of our annual Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). Well, that's because he really has. After serving 31 years as the Bozeman CBC compiler, John is passing the baton to Sam Koenen.

John took over the count from former SAS President Jim Sparks in 1993, but John's involvement in the area CBCs goes back a few years earlier. **As a novice birder, John's first count was in Ennis in 1984**, joining Mary Geis and Jean Thorsen. He also participated in the Three Forks count that year. In those early years, it was sometimes difficult to get enough birders to cover all the routes. John remembers driving to the Three Forks count after a terrible Christmas blizzard. He was by himself that day. The starting temperature was -14º F and he found many roads were not plowed and impassable. However, John found some good birds, including a Rusty Blackbird, Sharp-tailed Grouse and a Short-eared Owl.

Besides dealing with bad weather and bad roads, John also rescued a couple of lost animals during the CBC. While hiking the Kirk Hill loop during one count, John heard a pitiful cry. He tracked it down and found a little dog completely weighed down by snowballs stuck to its fur and unable to move. He picked it up and took it over to the Kirk family's house at the bottom of the hill. They were able to reunite the dog with its owner. **The most memorable story, however, concerns John and Tamie's cat, River.** John was doing the SW section of the Bozeman count in 2007 with Beth Kaeding and Mary Griffiths. It had been bitterly cold and snowy. Along River Rd., they noticed a black cat. John walked down to investigate, and the cat came over as soon as John extended his hand. The cat was just a skeleton and had obviously been living rough for some time. John picked him up. Back in the car, they fed him part of a turkey sandwich and gave him some water. Beth volunteered to take him to the pound while John and Mary finished up their route. A few days later, John and Tamie visited the cat to see how he was doing. They held and petted him and that sealed the deal. They adopted him a few days after, and named him River, since they found him on River Rd. River was an indoor cat after that, not having any interest in going outside where there were wild animals. He was perfectly content to stay inside where there was food, warmth and safety.

During all those years of compiling data, John has had a valuable partner in his wife Tamie, who created the spreadsheets and typed the summaries. John would like to thank her for all that work. Special recognition also goes to past members Ray and Eva Hays who hosted the after-count party for many years. After the Hays stopped hosting the parties, many of us remember packing into Jean Perkins little house



John in 2013 during MT Audubon trip to Costa Rica. Photo by Lou Ann Harris

on Rouse after a cold day in the field. Jean would greet us at the door with mugs of hot cider. After everyone had settled on a chair or on the floor in her living room, she passed around dozens of home-baked cookies. Jean hosted the party for 25 years until Beth Madden & Bill Klenn took over in 2019.

John pointed out that **the Bozeman CBC has been held for a total of 85 years,** including continuously for 68 years - every year since 1955. It holds records for the first CBC held in Montana (1908); the most counts held in Montana (85); the longest consecutive number of years (68), and of course, the most Black-billed Magpies observed on a CBC in the nation (1,718 in 2023). The first count conducted in 1908 netted only 12 species, when Aretas A. Saunders went by horse & wagon. He did two counts; one on Dec. 21st in Bozeman Creek Canyon, Gallatin National Forest, and one in Bozeman on Dec. 25th. By comparison, the 2023 CBC tallied 70 species. The increasing numbers of species over the years can be attributed to more birders, better optics and better access (i.e. more roads). The 2023 count had 63 participants and 11 feeder watchers.

I asked John what his best bird was during all those counts. One of the best, he said, was a Varied Thrush that had shown up along the Gallagator Trail near his residence.

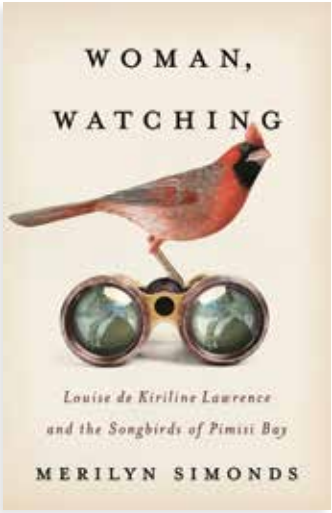
For John, the count has certainly changed over the years, as Bozeman has changed. **One thing that hasn't changed is the fun, camaraderie and gathering of important data to help our wild birds.**

Thank you John, for your years of dedication!

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY BOOK CLUB

This month the SAS Book Club meeting will be held on February 21st at Hope Lutheran Church, Room 129 from 6:30 to 7:45 PM.

We hope you can join us in person or virtually for a discussion of *Woman, Watching: Louise de Kiriline Lawrence and the Songbirds of Pimisi Bay* by Merilyn Simonds. Dessert will be provided. Please bring your own hot drink.



What a life! Louise de Kiriline was born into the Swedish gentry at the end of the nineteenth century. Trained as a nurse in the First World War she met her Russian aristocrat husband and later returned with him to Russia into the heart of the revolution. After her husband disappeared, she remained for four years searching for news of his fate. She then emigrated to Canada and joined the Canadian Red Cross where she visited her northern Ontario patients by dogsled and in a Ford Model T.

When one of her patients, Elsie Dionne, gave birth to five babies, Louise became nurse-in-charge to the Dionne Quintuplets. After a year, she retreated to her wilderness cabin, where she turned to the study of the birds in her forest. She became one of Canada's most accomplished self-taught ornithologists and nature writers, authoring six books, almost a hundred magazine stories and journal articles, and a monograph on woodpeckers that is still foundational to bird research. Her home became a mecca for international ornithologists.

Lawrence was an old woman when Merilyn Simonds moved into the woods not far away from Lawrence's cabin. Their paths crossed, drawn together by their love of birds and words, and Simond's curiosity about Lawrence's life story. Decades later, Simonds, after much research, produced this rich and lyrical story. In Simonds' hands, the passion, the struggle, the celebration, and the sheer beauty of Louise's story leaps off the page.

If you would like to be included in monthly email reminders or to attend the meeting virtually, please email Elisabeth Swanson at elsswa@gmail.com or contact her at (406) 570-8325. For other questions, you can email our other leader, Hilary Johnson, at ralphhilary@gmail.com, or call her at (406) 599-1446.

Story Mill Community Park Feeding Station

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Would you like to help feed the birds at Story Mill Community Park? Sacajawea Audubon Society manages a bird feeding station in the park next to the bird blind. We need more volunteers to take turns filling feeders one or two days per month. The bird seed is provided at the site, and we will train volunteers as needed. Be assured, the birds will thank you!

John Harris fills feeders at Story Mill Park.

Photo by Lou Ann Harris

If you are interested in helping or have questions contact Paulette Epple at conservation@sacajaweaaudubon.org.

Save the Date in 2024

Upcoming SAS Programs

February 2: World Wetlands Day Program *Beavers to the Rescue* with keynote speaker Ronan Donovan at Museum of the Rockies

February 3: World Wetlands Day Bonfire and Snow Shoe tour at the Indreland Audubon Preserve

February 8: *Whitebark Pine: A Species Worth Protecting* presentation. Information at gallatinvalleyearthday.org

February 12: SAS Monthly Membership Program with Matt Skoglund of North Bridger Bison

February 16 – 19: Great Backyard Bird Count

February 20: IAWP Trivia Night @ Lockhorn

February 21: SAS Book Club

March 7 & 9: Raptor Identification Workshop & Field Trip

March 11: SAS Monthly Membership Program with the Montana Raptor Conservation Center

Sacajawea Audubon Society 2023 Bluebird Trail Summary

by Lou Ann Harris

Mountain Bluebird at nest box. Photo by LouAnn Harris.

The 54th year of the Bluebird Trail Project concluded with below average numbers of Mountain Bluebirds. A total of **467 bluebirds** fledged from our five trails, **compared to 587 last year.** The two interesting obervations of the season were **a European Starling** nesting in Box #1 on Dry Creek Rd., and a **Violet-green Swallow** successfully nesting in Box #75 on Rocky Mtn. Road. We have always assumed starlings were too big to enter through a 1-9/16" hole, but apparently not! There was also a flash flood this spring on Dry Creek Rd in April which washed away a section of fence and one of the nest boxes. Luckily the box was recovered and relocated across the road.

Janne & Lou Ann banded a total of 328 bluebirds; 299 nestlings and 29 adult females. They also recaptured 12 adult female bluebirds. One female was banded as an adult in 2020 in the same box. That would make her at least four years old.

Tree Swallows had a good year on Pass Creek/Rocky Mtn. Road with 79 fledged from 18 boxes, including two pairs that nested in Box 52 & 52A. The boxes are just a few feet apart, and normally Tree Swallows will not nest that close together. But they got along well enough to fledge young. Three House Wren nests produced 11 fledglings. House Sparrows nested in four of our boxes. Each of these nests and eggs were legally removed (House Sparrows are not federally protected songbirds and are considered an invasive species).

There were many visitors on the trail this season, including the MSU Field Ornithology class, led by our own board member Ben Goodheart. It's always fun to introduce the Bluebird Nest Box Project to new people. **Sponsorship of the Bluebird Nest Box Program was the most successful to date,** with over $3,400 raised for bird conservation. Many thanks to those members who sponsored a box.

For questions about the Bluebird Trail Project, please contact Lou Ann Harris at louann@sacajaweaaudubon.org.

Sacajawea Audubon Society offers a fun way to support our chapter's conservation projects. We are giving members and friends the opportunity to **sponsor one of the bluebird nest boxes** we monitor. A Bluebird Nest Box sponsorship makes a great eco-friendly gift or you can sponsor a box in memory of a loved one. The money raised will fund the expenses of maintaining the Bluebird Trail Project, as well as Sacajawea Audubon Society's other conservation projects.

To sign up for a bluebird box sponsorship, donate online at https://sacajaweaaudubon.org/bluebirdboxsponsorform/ **or fill out the form below and send with a check.**

BLUEBIRD NEST BOX SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship costs $20 per year per box, and you can sponsor as many nest boxes as you like.

Once you have signed up we will assign you a box number, and you will receive email updates and photos when the nesting season begins. At the end of the season, we will send a complete list of all the boxes including their sponsors name and nesting results.

Name _____ **EMAIL** _____ **PHONE:** _____

Address _____

(Street or PO Box) (City) (State) (Zip)

A bluebird nest box sponsorship makes a great eco-friendly gift or you can sponsor a box in memory of a loved one.

THIS SPONSORSHIP IS: *(Please check one)* ❑ **FOR MYSELF** ❑ **IN MEMORIAL OF** ❑ **IN HONOR OF**

NAME OF PERSON BEING HONORED OR REMEMBERED: _____

ADDRESS OF HONOREE _____

(Street or PO Box) (City) (State) (Zip)

_____**# OF BOXES SPONSORED (X $20 each) = TOTAL DONATION**_____

Mail this form and your check to: Sacajawea Audubon Society. Attn: Bluebird Nest Box Sponsorship, PO Box 1711, Bozeman, MT 59771

Feb. '24 newsletter

Thank you!

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP 2024

Individual or Family | January–December 2024

❒ **Basic Membership** **$25**

❒ **Supporting Membership** **$50**
(Supporting local conservation & education projects)

❒ **Student Membership** **$10**
(College & High School Students)

❒ **Additional Donation $**_____

❒ Bridger Raptor Study
❒ Story Mill Park Bird Feeding Station
❒ Wetland Campaign
❒ Wherever is Needed

Name _____

Address _____
(Street or PO Box)

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

Phone (_____) _____

Email _____

Sacajawea Audubon Society Newsletter is sent by email. ❒ I would like a paper newsletter mailed to me.

We do not share your information except with National Audubon Society, so your contact information is safe with us. Please check this box ❒ *if you do* ***NOT*** *want your information shared with the National Audubon Society.*

❒ **YES! I have included another $20 to join National Audubon Society**

Mail this form and your check to: **Sacajawea Audubon Society, Attn: Membership, PO Box 1711, Bozeman, MT 59771-1711**

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

MT Wildlife Watchers Now Required to Purchase Conservation License

Beginning last July 1, 2023, **a Montana Conservation License is now required to access most state lands including fishing access sites (FAS), wildlife management areas (WMA), and wildlife habitat protection areas (WHPA).** Montana State Parks do not require a Conservation License.

A new law was passed by the 2023 Montana Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Greg Gianforte. It simplifies existing laws for state land users, and it provides a way for users who don't buy hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses to help pay for the maintenance and conservation work on state lands.

A Conservation License is **valid from March 1 to the end of February the following year**, which is considered the FWP license year. During the first year of the license requirement, FWP will educate and inform users of the requirement.

Beginning March 1, 2024, recreationists not holding a Conservation License may be issued a written warning, upon a first offense. Subsequent offenses may be cited.

Conservation License Costs

Resident: $8

Youth 12-17 Resident: $4

Senior 62+ Resident: $4

Nonresident: $10

How to Apply: You can purchase a Conservation License online at https://ols.fwp.mt.gov/ A valid driver's license or photo ID are required. You may also purchase a license at any FWP office.

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's Monthly Newsletter is available electronically to all Sacajawea Audubon Society members, September through May.

Deadline for article submission is the 10th of the month preceding the month the articles will appear. Send articles electronically to 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

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT FEBRUARY 16-19, 2024

Join thousands of other bird lovers in this year's Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). Watch birds for 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days.

Identify all the birds you see or hear within your planned time/location and use the best tool for sharing your bird sightings:

If you are a **beginning bird admirer** and new to bird identification, try using the **Merlin Bird ID app** to share what birds you are seeing or hearing. Learn how to use Merlin here https://www.birdcount.org/merlin-bird-id-app/

Experienced bird counters can record numbers of birds through the **eBird** Mobile app or enter your bird list on the eBird website (desktop/laptop). Learn how to use the eBird app here https://www.birdcount.org/ebird-mobile-app/ and how to use eBird on your computer here https://www.birdcount.org/ebird-on-computer/

If you already contribute to Merlin or eBird, continue what you are doing! All entries over the 4-days count towards GBBC.

The GBBC is an inter-organizational effort between the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Birds Canada, which work together to bring the joys of bird watching to their members.

Red-breasted Nuthatch. Photo by Terri Nartozki