SEPTEMBER 2024

Sacajawea Audubon News

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

SAS Monthly Program: Monday, September 9 at Hope Lutheran Church

Eagles, Elk, and Engineering with Patrick Cross

Montana Department of Transportation: An Unexpected Environmental Champion

From the first nomination of a road reconstruction or bridge replacement project through its design and construction, Montana Department of Transportation Environmental Services staff are part of the process every step of the way. The biologists are responsible for ensuring projects comply with environmental regulations as well as incorporating fish passage and wildlife crossing considerations into the project design. They work with the project engineers to figure out how to avoid or minimize impacts, maybe even improve existing conditions, starting early in the design process.

In this presentation, Patrick will talk about:

• How MDT biologists identify resources in the project area, such as eagle nest locations, using data including from the Montana Natural Heritage Program, to which citizen scientists can contribute.

• Additional steps in the project design process address high profile environmental concerns, like the "Wildlife Accommodations Recommendation Memo", which elevate wildlife considerations when projects are in areas with high crossings or important habitat.

Ute ladies'-tresses orchids. Photo courtesy of Patrick Cross

• Active projects in Gallatin County with special environmental concerns and design features, and how the public can best get involved in projects like these.

• MDT's wetland mitigation program that locally harbors robust populations of Ute ladies'-tresses orchids, a listed threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

Patrick Cross grew up in Billings. He studied the genetics and behavior of an endemic Rocky Mountain red fox population on the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem's Beartooth Plateau

Patrick Cross with his daughter. Photo courtesy of Patrick Cross.

for his M.S. thesis at the University of Montana. He has also worked on research projects in Yellowstone National Park studying interactions between wolves, coyotes, and foxes, and the diets of grizzly and black bears. He is currently the Butte District Biologist at Montana Department of Transportation, working with the engineers maintaining highways and bridges across southwest Montana to avoid, minimize, and mitigate the environmental impacts of road projects.

To attend virtually, please register at https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/6385917796043315295 After registering you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

The in-person meeting will be held at Hope Lutheran Church, 2152 West Graf. (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.

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

SAS monthly programs are free and open to the public, featuring a special guest speaker 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

With the birds all flocking southward, it is again time for us as a group to flock back together. Join us for the first membership meeting and speaker presentation of the 2024/2025 season as Patrick Cross informs about the conservation efforts by MDT.

Consider joining in on one of the two fall migration field trips (pg. 6), Book Club meetings, and other activities listed in these pages.

Now….don't go thinking nothing was happening with SAS over the summer break. SAS received approval from the Montana Natural History Center, and provided the first ever Wetland Master Naturalist Course in the State of Montana (see article page 9). This program was largely designed by SAS Board Member Frank Marchak and led by several experts in the area. The endeavor was SO SUCCESSFUL, that SAS has now been asked to facilitate and provide the general Master Naturalist Course for the region. That is starting this month and is being taught by Cedar Mathers-Winn.

Of course the Busy Beavers were busy as, well, beavers…. all summer long. Tons of projects were accomplished at the IAWP. Many of our two legged beavers also helped with the 3rd annual BioBlitz at the IAWP.

IAWP Trivia nights continued at Lockhorn Cider House all summer. Don't miss the next one on grassland ecology, including Burrowing Owls.

Bluebirds, Kestrels, and even Saw-whet Owls were banded by our banding teams. Be sure and read the encouraging articles on how the banding season went. Burdock was removed from trails again this year. The success of these efforts are evident with the decline in burdock removed each year.

A BIG THANK YOU to all of you who participated in all SAS and IAWP activities….way too many to mention.

And, I hope all of you who are creating native plant habitat for pollinators, birds, and other wildlife in your home landscapes are seeing success and enjoying the benefit of your efforts.

Last week I stumbled across a new YouTube channel "A Garden For Birds" created and hosted by an avid long term gardener now turned enthusiastic native plant gardener www.youtube.com/@gardenforbirds The content is some of the most creative and entertaining I have ever seen on this topic. She only has 39 short videos at this point. Even though she lives in the east and thus the content is eastern based, the videos are so good, they are more than worth binge watching. Be forewarned….if you are not yet gardening with native plants….watching these short videos could ultimately cause you to get your hands dirty. My hands and nails are a mess….but….I have some beautiful butterflies and blossoms to show for it!

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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President	Chris Nixon pres@sacajaweaaudubon.org
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Treasurer	Loreene Reid treas@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Secretary	Emma Narotzky sec@sacajaweaaudubon.org

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Ken Sinay	kensinay@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Boardroom Bobcat member Talia Seltzer	boardroombobcat@sacajaweaaudubon.org

Activity Leaders

Education Chair	**Looking for Volunteer**
Conservation Co-Chairs	Paulette Epple conservation@sacajaweaaudubon.org Lou Ann Harris louann@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Field Trips, Bird Sightings	John Parker birdsightings@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Hospitality	**Looking for Volunteer**
Membership	Loreene Reid membership@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Newsletter	Terri Narotzky newsletter@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Programs	Ken Sinay programs@sacajaweaaudubon.org
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Wetlands Preservation	Loreene Reid wetlands@sacajaweaaudubon.org
IAWP/Busy Beavers Stewardship Coordinator	Emma Narotzky wetlands@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Book Club	Elisabeth Swanson & Hilary Johnson bookclub@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Newsletter Design	Tamara Knappenberger tkknappenberger@gmail.com

OUR NEW SAS BOARD MEMBER, DOUG MCSPADDEN

Photo courtesy of Doug McSpadden

Hello SAS!

Birding has taught me two critical things that I think are very important to pass along. Always keep your binoculars close, and never ever become distracted by a bird while your spouse is talking. ;-)

Seriously though, birding and bird photography have been wonderful ways for me to learn about specific birds, their niches and how they relate to the environment we share.

Burdock busting, weed pulling, tree planting, bird surveying, landscaping for birds, and "Busy Beavering" have all been volunteer activities that have kept me involved and interested in SAS. As a new board member it is my hope that I can support those leading work parties as well as encourage new volunteers to join in. I also hope that my past business experience can add value to the board.

My wife, Carmen, and I moved to Bozeman in 1985 and have raised two sons and four dogs during our time here. I also volunteer at The Bike Kitchen, and I enjoy photography, bicycling, hiking, Nordic skiing and skiing.

I am excited to join the SAS Board and contribute to a fantastic organization that does great work in the Gallatin Valley.

MEET TALIA, OUR 2024-2025 MSU LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE BOARDROOM BOBCAT

Hey Everyone!

My name is Talia Seltzer and I am excited to join the SAS Board. I am a graduate student studying Public Administration at MSU and I work at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Big Sky Country as the Bozeman Program Manager. In my masters program, I study nonprofit and public agency management and leadership as well as public policy processes.

I have worked for multiple nonprofits in Bozeman and I am excited for the opportunity to be on the Board of SAS and see a different side of nonprofit management.

"This photo of me was taken while exploring a wildlife refuge in Costa Rica where we saw so many cool tropical birds!" Photo courtesy of Talia Seltzer

I grew up birding with my dad in Massachusetts marshes and wetlands and can't wait to learn more about the work that goes into protecting bird habitats in Bozeman. In my free time, you will find me out on the local trails mountain biking and skiing!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

- ❒ **September 7: Field Trip to Headwaters/Three Forks**
- ❒ **September 9: Program Meeting**
- ❒ **September 14: Field Trip Harrison Reservoir**
- ❒ **September 17: Master Naturalist Course Begins**
- ❒ **September 17: Trivia Night at Lockhorn Cider House**
- ❒ **September 21: Gallatin Watershed Cleanup**
- ❒ **October 5–6: Bridger Raptor Fest**
- ❒ **October 19: Busy Beaver Rendezvous**
- ❒ **October 22: Halloween at IAWP**
- ❒ **December 9: HOLIDAY PROGRAM at the Ellen with Tom Murphy**

SAS LAUNCHES THE 33RD CONSECUTIVE BRIDGER MOUNTAIN RAPTOR MIGRATION SURVEY

by Steve Hoffman

Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS) celebrates the start of the 33rd consecutive annual Bridger Mountain Raptor Migration Survey. Adam Brown, Alicia Wilson and Rosemary D'Andrea have been recruited as the three official, season-long observers for the fall 2024 migration season. They will be documenting all raptors migrating along the crest of the Bridger Ridge - above Bridger Bowl Ski Area - from 27 August through 31 October. All three individuals have tremendous passion and enthusiasm for raptor research and conservation, and SAS is thrilled to have them on board throughout the 2024 raptor migration season!

Adam Brown

Alicia Wilson

Rosemary D'Andrea

The primary goals of the Bridger Raptor Survey are to: a) assess the status and long-term trends of Golden Eagles and other migrant raptor species using the Bridger Mountain flyway, and b) to monitor landscape-level environmental health and change using these widespread, apex predators as valuable ecological barometers. SAS is partnering with HawkWatch International (HWI) to continue this critically important project. HWI initiated these science-based, season-long counts in 1992. A total of 17 raptor species are recorded each season, including Golden & Bald Eagles, as well as many species of hawks and falcons, including Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Harriers, American Goshawks, American Kestrels, Turkey Vultures, Ospreys, Peregrine and Prairie falcons, and several other raptor species. These migrants originate primarily from breeding areas throughout the U.S. Pacific Northwest, western Canada and Alaska. Over-winter destinations include a wide range of latitudes - varying by species and breeding origins - from the American West and Mexico to Central and South America.

GOLDEN EAGLE COUNT TRENDS

Autumn Golden Eagle counts in the Bridger Range have generally totaled from 1,000 to 1,800 per season, with up to 150 or more tallied on a single migration day. Maximum Golden Eagle numbers are generally observed during the first 2-3 weeks of October. However, it is noteworthy that autumn migration counts of Golden Eagles at this, and other western sites have shown significant declines, particularly from 2000-2010, and also in more recent years.

Sub-adult Golden Eagle over the Bridgers. Photo: Kyle Dudgeo

The cause(s) of this long-term Golden Eagle decline is not fully understood. Our Bridger findings, as well as long-term migration counts conducted elsewhere in the western U.S., have inspired in-depth Golden Eagle research being conducted by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service across the western United States and Alaska.

RAPTOR VIEWING TIPS FOR THE BRIDGERS

The best overall raptor viewing for a variety of migrant raptors atop the Bridgers is from mid-September through mid-October. The general public is invited to join Adam, Alicia and Rosemary to witness one of nature's most spectacular phenomena as these majestic birds migrate south over the Bridgers!

Additional volunteer observers are always welcome, and certainly needed, to help conduct these counts. For those in good physical condition, it is a 1.5-2-hour hike to the observation point (2,000-ft. elevation gain). Anyone wishing to volunteer please contact Project Coordinator Steve Hoffman at swhoffman0322@gmail.com or 406-461-5714. Folks are encouraged to visit www.hawkcount.org or www.sacajaweaaudubon.org to obtain the daily count totals. We look forward to seeing you at the Bridger Lookout this season!

PROJECT FUNDING

It is always a challenge to find support for our long-term Bridger raptor population monitoring efforts. The 2024 budget for this important work is $20,000. Contributions in any amount are needed and greatly appreciated!!

Please send your check (write "Bridger Mountain Raptor Survey" on the memo line) to: Sacajawea Audubon Society, PO Box 1711, Bozeman, MT 59771 – or select Bridger Raptor Survey when you donate on-line at https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/e28X9UB5pkZ3Hs0vJwxtsA

THANK YOU!

RAPTOR FEST VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Excited about raptors and want to get involved? **We're looking for volunteers to help out at Bridger Raptor Festival on Saturday, October 5, and Sunday, October 6!** Whether you can lend a hand for a morning shift, an afternoon shift, or both, your help will make this event soar.

If you're interested in volunteering, please register below!

https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/L6RWLDis3_OG_kaYXVLryg

SEPTEMBER IAWP TRIVIA NIGHT

What do YOU know about Burrowing Owls, Roaming Bison and Dung Beetles?
Come find out at Grasslands Ecology Trivia with Mikaela Howie!

Tuesday September 17

5:30 PM – Sign-in

6:30 PM – Trivia begins

Burrowing Owl. Photo: Mikaela Howie

Lockhorn Cider House – 21 S. Wallace, Bozeman

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

KNOW YOUR WILD MONTANA!

Master Naturalist Course with Cedar Mathers-Winn

Sacajawea Audubon Society is now hosting the Master Naturalist Course.

Ever wonder what that flower is? How old are these rocks? What bird is singing? Join the upcoming Bozeman Master Naturalist course, and learn not just their names, but the stories they have to tell.

Through classroom and outdoor lessons, this 8-week course will deepen your experience and understanding of the fascinating landscape we call home. We will explore the local plants, mammals, birds, geology, and more. You will build a deeper connection with the land, meet other nature-enthusiasts, and join a state-wide community of master naturalists. This course is only offered twice a year.

Tuesday Sept 17 - Tuesday Nov 12

Evening classes (classroom & field): Tues / Thurs 5:30-7:30pm

Two Saturdays in the field: Oct 12 and Nov 16

Course provides Montana Master Naturalist certification!

Class size is limited. Register here:

https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/z_vi0dLupDj85z3HCUAjKA

2024 SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY FALL FIELD TRIPS

HEADWATERS STATE PARK FALL MIGRATION FIELD TRIP

Saturday September 7: Three Forks – Headwaters SP

Trip Leader: Tim Preso

Meet at: 7:45 AM at the Museum of the Rockies for carpooling or in the Three Forks area at 8:30. Exact location to be determined by the trip leader at a later date.

Late August/early September is the peak of fall migration with an amazing diversity of birds passing through Montana. This field trip will take advantage of the many birding opportunities in the greater Three Forks and Headwaters State Park areas. This trip will last until early afternoon, so bring a lunch and anything else you may need for a day in the field. Bring a scope if you have one. Bring your enthusiasm and your flexibility.

Participants limited to 10.

To reserve a spot on the trip or for more information please contact trip leader Tim Preso at presofamily@msn.com.

HARRISON RESERVOIR FIELD TRIP

Saturday, September 14: Harrison Reservoir

Trip Leader: John Parker

Meet at: 7:45 am at the Museum of the Rockies. Carpool and leave at 8 am.

The emphasis of this trip will be on waterfowl and shorebirds, while exploring all the shorelines and other habitats around Harrison Reservoir. September is the peak of the fall migration, so we will likely be making other stops on the way to and from Harrison Reservoir to look for other migrants. This trip will last until late afternoon, so bring lunch and anything else you may need for a day in the field. Scopes will be especially useful on this trip, as many of the birds will be distant.

Participants limited to 10

To reserve a spot on the trip or for more information please contact trip leader John Parker at conundr.umjp@gmail.com or 406-586-5863

SAS Book Club News for September

Welcome to a new season of reading about nature! Our September reading selection is ***How Birds Evolve: What Science Reveals About Their Origin, Lives and Diversity*** by Douglas J. Futuyma. Futuyma explores how evolution has shaped the distinctive characteristics and behaviors we observe in birds today. He describes how evolutionary science illuminates the wonders of birds, ranging over topics such as the meaning and origin of species, the evolutionary history of bird diversity, and the evolution of avian reproductive behaviors, plumage ornaments, and social behaviors. He explains complex concepts of evolutionary biology in lay terms, accompanied by graphs and visuals.

In this multifaceted book, he examines how birds evolved from non-avian dinosaurs and reveals what we can learn from the "family tree" of birds. Futuyma discusses how adaptation by natural selection accounts for the diverse life histories of birds and the rich variety of avian parenting styles, mating displays, and cooperative behaviors. He expresses cautious optimism in his discussion of conservation, climate change, and whether evolution as a process can save birds.

Along the way, he provides an insider's perspective on how biologists have practiced evolutionary science since the time of Darwin.

Futuyma is a professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolution at Stony Brook University. He is a renowned ecologist and evolutionary biologist, and as he states - he is a birder, not an ornithologist. In the first chapter he observes that birding "is an aesthetic, emotionally rewarding experience. I am overwhelmed by a peacock's tail, but it also spurs me to ask how and why it came to be, and having an answer enlarges and makes whole my birding experience."

We meet on the third Wednesday of the month at Hope Lutheran Church, Room 128, 6:30 to 7:45 PM. You are very welcome to join us September 18th either in person or virtually. If you would like email reminders the week before or plan to join us virtually please email one of our leaders, Elisabeth Swanson at elsswa@gmail.com, (406) 570-8325. You can also direct questions to our other leader, Hilary Johnson, ralphhilary@gmail.com, (406) 599-1446. Our discussions are fun. Come join us!

A Great Year for Kestrels (and Owlets!)

By Paulette Epple

It was another fantastic year for our Kestrel Nest Box Program! Kestrels used 28 of our boxes and we had a record number of 96 young kestrels fledge. In addition, we had an exciting surprise this year when we found a Northern Saw-whet Owl nesting in one of our boxes!

The female Northern Saw-whet Owl incubating her eggs while surrounded by an ample supply of mice.

Photo: Paulette Epple

This **Northern Saw-whet Owl** laid six eggs, and as you can see in the accompanying photo, she was being well supplied with a larder full of mice provided by the male owl. Unfortunately, four of the eggs were infertile, but two hatched and grew into handsome young owlets. Our banding permit does not allow the banding of owls, but we were lucky to have Vince Slabe of the Peregrine Fund accompany us and band the owlets before they fledged. Whereas young kestrels can often be feisty, these young owlets were completely calm and docile.

At 28 days old this Northern Saw-whet Owlet will soon be fledging. Photo: Lou Ann Harris

Nineteen day old kestrel chicks awaiting banding. Photo: Paulette Epple

This season yielded another surprise when we found a box of SIX healthy kestrel chicks crowded together. That was a first over the 12-year project! A typical kestrel nest has four to five chicks.

The year ended with 131 kestrel eggs laid in our boxes, 96 eggs hatched, with all 96 nestlings surviving to fledgling age. This gives us a 73% success rate for the year. We were able to band 88 of the chicks and we also captured and banded three adult females on the nest.

Despite our very successful season, we experienced 6 nest failures this year. One was from some form of predation, probably a raccoon. Other nest failures happened in boxes where the wood shavings were mostly missing and thus the birds laid their eggs on bare wood. We clean boxes and replenish shavings every spring, but European Starlings are known to use kestrel boxes and the first thing they do is remove the shavings by literally picking up mouthfuls of shavings and throwing them out of the opening before they build a grass nest. When a kestrel takes over a box at this point, they wind up laying eggs on the bare wood and the lack of insulation can cause the eggs to get too cold, arresting development.

Sacajawea Audubon Society continues to support the declining American Kestrel population by providing quality nesting sites in our part of Southwest Montana. We wish to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our landowner hosts, our volunteers who donate their time cleaning out and monitoring boxes, and the generous kestrel box sponsors who make this project possible. Special thanks to Alicia and Dennis Ochs who build new nest boxes for us when we need them.

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY

INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE

UPDATE: SEPTEMBER 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.

A SUMMER OF STEWARDSHIP: KEY MOMENTS AT THE IAWP

BUSY BEAVERS
Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve

This summer at the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve (IAWP) has been one of remarkable activity and collaboration. From hands-on conservation efforts to educational programs, the IAWP community, including our dedicated Busy Beavers Corp, has come together to protect and enhance this vital habitat. Here are some of the key accomplishments that made this season unforgettable:

This spring a special, free **birding class with Ashley Martens** was held, just for Busy Beavers. The class filled quickly, and was a greatly appreciated benefit of being a Busy Beaver.

A **MOSS class and an elementary school group** were among those that toured the wetland to learn about bird migration and biodiversity.

Eight people earned their **Wetland Master Naturalist certification** in the **first course of its kind in Montana**.

Busy Beavers and other volunteers accomplished a lot over summer during the big **cleanup day**, **Knock Out Burdock work days**, **ongoing weeding, trail maintenance, beaver management, water monitoring, and bird surveys**.

Several Busy Beavers were **trained as interpretive hosts**, and **Kevin Cox built a host platform** as well as **new pavilion railings**.

More than 40 people including local experts and community members came to the wetland for the **third annual IAWP BioBlitz**. They found and identified more than 163 species over the long weekend.

Busy Beavers **helped build beaver dam analogs at a Montana Freshwater Partners** site and **surveyed birds before restoration at Mandeville Creek**.

Hardworking and enthusiastic teens from the Travis Manion Foundation. Photo by Emma Narotzky

Teens from across the United States with the Travis Manion Foundation volunteered at the IAWP and worked on the old beaver deceiver, pulled weeds, spread mulch and refinished the benches on the berm. The Travis Manion Foundation empowers veterans and families of fallen heroes to develope character in future generations. We are greateful.

Todd Breitenfeldt with the Whitehall Biological Weed Control Project led **two biocontrol workshops**: for the Travis Manion teens and another for 21 adults.

Downy Woodpeckers, Yellow Warblers, Bullock's Orioles, Belted Kingfishers, and Sandhill Cranes were among the breeding birds at the IAWP this year.

As the season winds down, we look forward to celebrating these accomplishments and more during the **Busy Beavers Rendezvous on, Saturday, October 19.**

Want to make a difference? **Join the Busy Beavers Volunteer Corp** and get involved in our ongoing efforts to protect and enhance this unique urban wetland. Whether you're passionate about wildlife, conservation, or community, there's a place for you at the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve. For more information visit the website www.bozemanwetlands.org or email emman@bozemanwetlands.org.

Gallatin Watershed Council Fall Gallatin Watershed Cleanup

Saturday September 21

2 to 4 p.m: Clean up

Join a team: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0E4FA8A92EA6FBC43-50372422-2024#/ or

https://www.gallatinwatershedcouncil.org/fall-cleanup

FIRST–EVER MONTANA WETLAND MASTER NATURALISTS COURSE

By Frank Marchak

Eight individuals completed the requirements to be certified as Wetland Master Naturalists by attending 40 class hours, journaling and providing an interpretative presentation on a wetland topic, and six hours of volunteer service. Accreditation is through the Montana Natural History Center, and is one of only two specific-topic certifications offered beyond the general Master Naturalist certification. Our final class included a field trip to Lightning Creek in the Taylor Fork drainage, beginning with a description of the geology in the Gallatin Canyon as well as in the Taylor Fork with Tom Kalakay. After arriving at the Lodge, each student presentated on a specific wetland topic of interest, and we finished with an exploration of the wetland in the area.

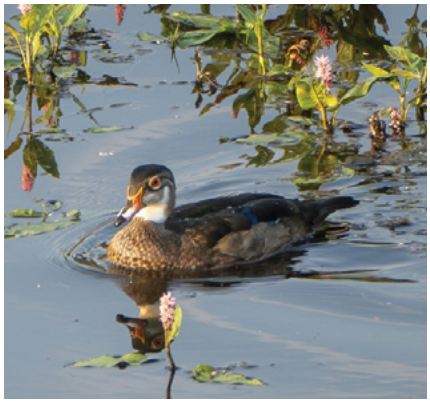
The next offering of the Wetland Master Naturalist course will be during the summer of 2025.

Soil sampling with Wetland Naturalist class at IAWP. Photo: Emma Narotzky

IAWP BIOBLITZ: A WEEKEND OF CITIZEN SCIENCE

The recent BioBlitz (3rd annual) at the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve was a resounding success, bringing together a passionate community of nature enthusiasts, volunteers, and experts. Over the course of the event, participants engaged in a wide array of activities, from bird watching to plant identification, contributing valuable data to iNaturalist and supporting ongoing conservation efforts. Special thanks to our team leaders and experts, whose knowledge and enthusiasm greatly enhanced the experience. We're grateful to everyone who took part in making this event so impactful. Your involvement is crucial in helping us protect and preserve these vital ecosystems.

Matt Bell educated the IAWP Bioblitz nocturnal team before going out with bat detectors. Photo: Emma Narotzky



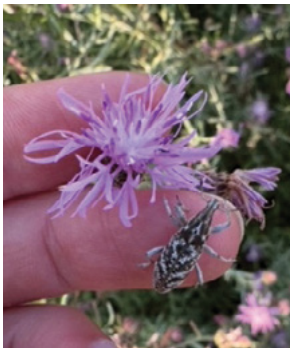
Wood Duck. Photo: Elisabeth Jarvis, Bioblitz participant.

THANK YOU to our coordinators: Emma Narotzky, Robin Hompesch, and Loreene Reid

team leaders: Cedar Mathers-Winn, Matt Bell, Frank Marchak, Ken Sinay, Kevin Cox, Matt Lavin, Frank Etzler, Aaron Clausen, and Hannah Cantu'

HARNESSING NATURE: A BIOCONTROL WORKSHOP

On August 6, 2024, the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve hosted a hands-on Biocontrol Workshop, bringing together community members to explore sustainable solutions for managing invasive species. Led by Todd Breitenfeldt, a renowned science teacher and co-author of *Field Guide for the Biological Control of Weeds in Montana*, the workshop highlighted innovative methods to reduce chemical usage in weed control. Participants engaged in discussions on how and why insects can be effective alternatives to chemical applications, followed by an interactive experience in the wetland where they released Knapweed Root Weevils to target Spotted Knapweed. Special thanks to Todd for his expert insights and to our Busy Beaver volunteers and community participants for their active involvement. This event not only deepened our understanding of biocontrol methods but also reinforced our commitment to finding chemical-free solutions in conservation efforts.



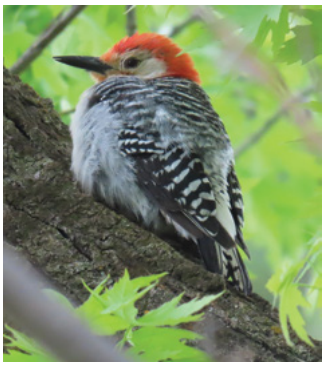
Spotted Knapweed with Knapweed Root Weevil. Photo: Emma Narotzky

BIRD NOTES

by John Parker

A wide range of unusual birds moved through this area during the spring and early summer 2024. Whether in the backyard or out on the prairie, the variety of birds was impressive.

The rarest bird of the summer to visit this area was a **Red-bellied Woodpecker**, which previously had only been documented in Montana six times. Joyce Seipel first spotted this Red-bellied Woodpecker in her Belgrade yard on May 21st. This neighborhood has a variety of older trees, including one large maple that the woodpecker would spend hours quietly perched in among the dense foliage. Without it making an occasional call, this bird could be nearly impossible to find. The Red-bellied Woodpecker was last seen on May 26th.



Red-bellied Woodpecker. Photo: John Parker

A **Least Tern** was observed by Reder Daughenbaugh swooping and diving over a small stock pond west of Bozeman on June 17th. This small tern has only been seen away from the Missouri and Yellowstone River corridors in northeastern Montana a handful of times. The interior subspecies that breeds in Montana has been on the Endangered Species List since 1985. Oddly, this year there were three extralimital sightings in western Montana. The other two sightings were at Arco Ponds near Anaconda on June 15th and at Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge on June 18th. These dates coincide with the major weather system that slowly made its way through the region.

On the evening of June 3rd, Anne Buckley spotted a **Green Heron** skulking along the edge of a pond by her home northeast of Livingston. With just over twenty records for Montana, this species was recently taken off of the State rare bird list. The heron only stayed for one day before the rising waters of the Yellowstone River began to flood and muddy the pond.

Green Heron Photo: John Parker

Earlier on that same day Stephanie Nelson saw a **Summer Tanager**, and watched as this beautiful first year male repeatedly returned to feed on the jelly and sliced oranges she had put out to attract orioles. Reportedly, this same bird was seen in the same neighborhood the following couple of days. Summer Tanager is another bird that was recently removed from the Montana rare bird list.

Summer Tanager. Photo: John Parker

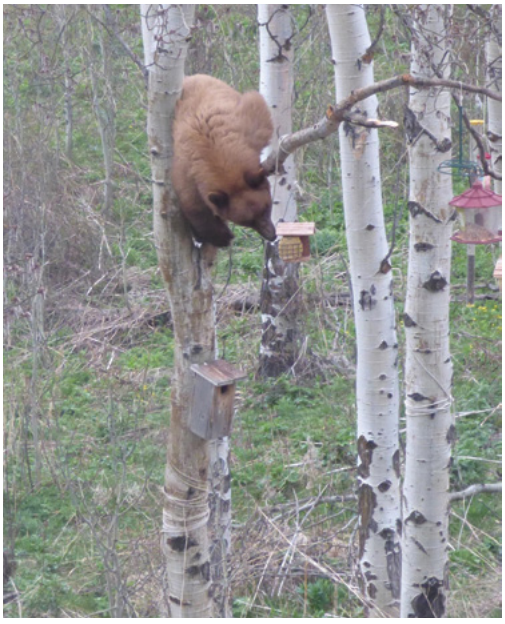
Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) require getting up very early, like sometime around 3 AM, as protocol has you starting the survey at sunrise. The upside is that it's a beautiful time of day, and it's possible that you might find an unexpected bird. While doing a BBS south of Three Forks on June 19th, Matt Keefer encountered an **Upland Sandpiper**. Upland Sandpipers breed in Park and Sweet Grass Counties, but this is only the fourth record for Gallatin County. On June 9th while doing another BBS route east of Melville in Sweet Grass County, Beth Madden saw a **Northern Mockingbird** fly to a shelter belt. It seems like Northern Mockingbirds can turn up just about anywhere, but a shelter belt in open country is always worth a second look for any stray birds. This mockingbird was traversing the type of country that you'd expect to see an Upland Sandpiper.

Locally, it's been a good summer for **Black-chinned Hummingbirds**. Paulette Epple started it off when a Black-chinned Hummingbird visited her northeastern Bozeman feeder on May 19th. Then on May 31st, while on a Sacajawea Audubon Society field trip, Don Profota and Katja Shimkin spotted another Black-chinned Hummingbird along the Sourdough Nature Trail. Finally, on July 26th, Dave Benes had a pair of Black-chinned Hummingbirds visit his feeder in Gallatin Gateway. Yes, a female and male Black-chinned Hummingbird together. From what I can tell this is the only observation of more than one Black-chinned Humming bird, let alone a female and male together, east of the Continental Divide in Montana.

Bears and Bird Feeders

By Ben Goodheart and Mikaela Howie

It's a hard truth, but birdfeeders in the Gallatin Valley are one of the two main attractants, along with unsecured garbage, for bears seeking food. With fall fast approaching, bears will be searching for easy to find, high-caloric foods to pack on weight for the winter. Bird feed is a highly sought-after food for black bears that live around our communities, and it is our responsibility to keep those bears safe. Bears are curious and smart. When they find a food source such as a bird feeder, they remember the location and come back again and again. Sows will even teach their cubs this behavior. When bears become habituated in our neighborhoods, they often get euthanized. Many are euthanized each year and others are hit by cars. The best way to protect bears from these outcomes is to simply not entice them into our neighborhoods in the first place. Biologists suggest that the only safe time to feed birds in bear country is during the winter when bears are hibernating. **Fall, when bears are spending up to 20-hours a day foraging, is likely the worst time and it is best to simply take down your bird feeders**. If you must hang bird feeders, be absolutely sure that a bear cannot reach the feeder (keep in mind all bears are great climbers) and add a catch underneath your feeder so that you can remove excess seed that accumulates regularly. A feeder should be at minimum 10 feet off the ground and more than 4 feet away from any tree trunks or poles. Pungent feed like black oil sunflower seeds and suet are the most attractive to bears and should be avoided. Instead substitute Nyjer/thistle seed. Remember, the most effective way to avoid conflict with bears is to simply refrain from hanging bird feeders in bear country and use native landscaping instead to attract birds to your yard!



Black bear accessing bird feeder near Bozeman in the spring of 2019. Used with permission.

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Sharp-shinned Hawk at Bridger. Photo: Kyle Dudgeon

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A big thank you to Bridger Bowl Ski Area for their continued support of the Bridger Mountain Raptor Survey.

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