DECEMBER 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 Special Holiday Program: Monday, December 9 at the Emerson Center for the Arts & Culture

A Look at the Adaptive Wisdom of Birds : Photographs by Tom Murphy

Tom Mnurphey.
Photo: Artie Morris

Join us, and what is certain to be a captivated audience, as author and photographer extraordinaire - Tom Murphy takes us on a deep dive into the remarkable adaptive traits of our feathered friends. Tom has taken photographs in wild places all around the world. Birds are our constant companions everywhere and he works to illustrate their behavior. His three main questions are: 1. What are they? 2. Who are they? and 3. How are they able to prosper on every continent? They have evolved to negotiate our complex earth in amazing ways with adaptations involving feathers, nest building, migratory route finding and navigation, extremely varied feeding behaviors, flight, and other activities we still don't understand. Not only are these traits interesting and compelling, they are also beautiful.

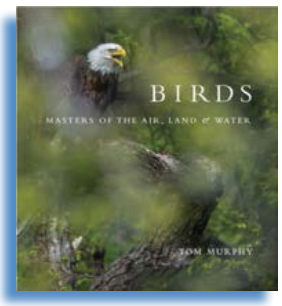
Great Gray Owl with pocket gopher on burned log.
Photo: Tom Murphy

Tom grew up outdoors on a 75,000 acre cattle ranch in western South Dakota. After moving to Livingston, Montana in 1978 to be near Yellowstone National Park, he became the first person licensed, in 1986, to teach photography in the Park. He has written and illustrated numerous books, including *Birds, Masters of the Air, Land, & Water*, *A Nature Journal, Science & Solitude: Yellowstone's Winter Wilderness, The Art of Yellowstone Science - Mammoth Hot Springs as a Window on the Universe*, and a four volume set sub-titled *The Seasons Of Yellowstone*. Featured in the PBS Nature film, "Christmas in Yellowstone", his winter photography is also highlighted in a new film biography released December 2024. He donates his work to conservation groups helping preserve wildlife and wildland. Some of his work can be seen on his web site: https://www.tmurphywild.com/

Lilac-breasted Roller.
Photo: Tom Murphy

This special holiday SAS program will be held at the Emerson Center for the Arts & Culture in the Crawford Theater on Monday, December 9th. Doors open at 6 PM; the program will begin at 7 PM. This program is free and open to the public. A $5 suggested donation is appreciated.

For virtual attendance, please register at https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7036558201798472796. 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.



Tom's book: *Birds, Masters of the Air, Land, & Water* will be available for purchase prior to the program. Special discount for SAS members!

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

It is hard to believe we are here at the end of another year! Where did the time go?

As we wrap up 2024, It is astonishing just how much has been accomplished by all of you–the volunteers and financial supporters of SAS.

Check in on the IAWP and all the exciting updates on page 6. If you are really getting into your Santa mode for the season, please check out the wish list (page 7) for equipment needed at the IAWP to further our data collection and to make all the work at the IAWP more efficient for our Busy Beaver volunteers. It is impressive how all the individuals who serve as Busy Beavers help keep this huge project moving forward.

The first recipient of SAS's newly established Bob Moore Scholarship has been selected and her project has been funded in the amount of $3000.00. Establishment of this scholarship has been a long term dream for the Board of SAS. Thank you to everyone who has given. Look forward to the January newsletter to learn in detail about this first year's recipient and her research work. In the meantime, please consider giving to the Sacajawea Audubon Society Bob Moore Scholarship at Montana State Universtiy. Each year a new recipient will be selected to receive funding for important avian habitat related research here in Montana. Many of you remember Bob Moore as he taught individuals within SAS and the community about the birds of the region in his position as Professor Emeritus of Biology at MSU Bozeman.

And, be certain to read Adam's wrap up article concerning the Bridger Raptor Count on page 10. Adam provides a refreshing review of the Raptor Count. Ongoing funding of the Bridger Raptor Project/Count is vitally important to continue to understand the trends of the 17 raptor species that use this critical flyway.

It is time for all of us to renew our 2025 membership in SAS. It is easy with our membership renewal form on page 5, or join or renew online at www. sacajaweaaudubon.org. On the membership form you can choose to check the boxes in order to make additional donations to all the aforementioned projects.

As you consider your year-end giving, there are numerous important opportunities for you to play Santa through donations to SAS. Or if you prefer, contribute by volunteering your time to one our many projects. Go to www. sacajaweaaudubon.org to learn more.

Enjoy the season! Above all, spend time with family and friends! Squeeze in some winter birding and try to locate some of the winter birds that move down our way this time of year… Northern Shrikes, Rough-legged Hawks, Common Redpolls, and possibly even Snowy Owls. There is always a plethora of birds to help make the season "Merry & Bright"!

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Officers

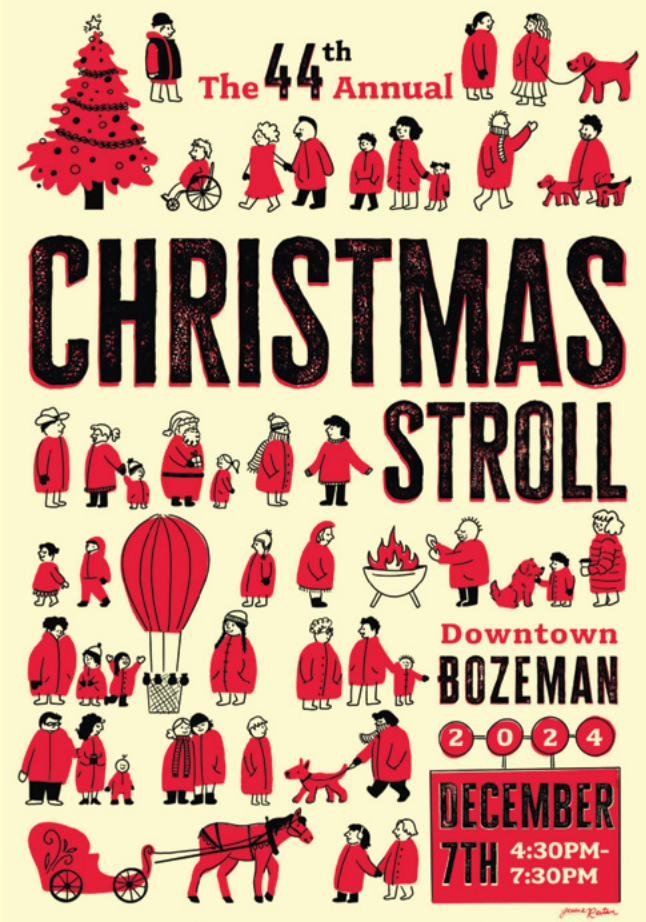
President	Chris Nixon pres@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Vice President	**Open Position**
Treasurer	Loreene Reid treas@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Secretary	Emma Narotzky sec@sacajaweaaudubon.org

Board Members

Aaron Clausen	aaronclausen@sacajaweaaudubon.org
John Edwards	johnedwards@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Ben Goodheart	bengoodheart@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Mikaela Howie	mikaelahowie@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Frank Marchak	frankmarchak@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Doug McSpadden	dougmcspadden@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Vicki Saab	vickisaab@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Ken Sinay	kensinay@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Boardroom Bobcat member Talia Seltzer	boardroombobcat@sacajaweaaudubon.org

Activity Leaders

Education Chair	**Open Position**
Conservation Co-Chairs	Paulette Epple conservation@sacajaweaaudubon.org Lou Ann Harris louann@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Field Trips, Bird Sightings	John Parker birdsightings@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Hospitality	**Open Position**
Membership	Loreene Reid membership@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Newsletter	Terri Narotzky newsletter@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Programs	Ken Sinay programs@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Website	Lou Ann Harris & Doug McSpadden webmaster@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Social Media/ Communications	Lou Ann Harris and Mikaela Howie socialmedia@sacajaweaaudubon.org
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



Look for the SAS canopy in front of Chalet Sports. Get your raffle tickets for a ski pass at Bridger Bowl. See if you can identify tracks of some of the wildlife that has been seen at the IAWP.

GIVING TUESDAY

Thank you for remembering our wildlife neighbors on December 3rd!

Giving Tuesday is a day that encourages people to do good as part of a global movement unleashing the power of radical generosity. Join Sacajawea Audubon Society in celebrating this global day of generosity and philanthropy by making a gift today! Your gift helps us continue to protect our local Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem natural environment for wildlife and people.
https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/lMpYyMrPF8oG3BKZgnFSHQ

Christmas Bird Count Schedule

Come and join in on the fun during one of our area's Christmas Bird Counts. These counts are an opportunity for beginning to expert birders to get together for the day, and share this holiday tradition. If you are unable to join a count for the entire day, another option for participation is to be a feeder watcher. Please contact the compiler if you would like to be a feeder watcher for one of the counts.

For more information, contact the area count compilers. Participation in all counts is free.

Please contact the area compiler before the count, as this will give them the opportunity to plan and organize the count before the count day.

Bozeman — **Saturday, December 14**
Compiler: Sam Koenen
(406) 600-7502 | goodbirding@pm.me
email preferred

Livingston — **Sunday, December 15**
Compiler: George Nixon
(406) 219-6169 | hawkowl526@gmail.com

Ennis — **Wednesday, December 18**
Compiler: Don Skaar
(406) 465-6135 | skaar.fcs@gmail.com

Yellowstone — **Sunday, December 22**
Compiler: Katy Duffy
(307) 699-2696 | katyduffyMT@gmail.com

West Yellowstone — **Sunday, December 22**
Compiler: Tut Fuentevilla
(406) 646-7001 | education@grizzlydiscoveryctr.com
Teams may observe by car, foot, snowmobile, or ski on the day of the event. There will be an optional meeting at the Grizzly & Wolf Center at 7:30 AM for participants to gather before heading out to their routes or counting locations.

Three Forks — **Friday, December 27th**
Compiler: Sam Koenen
(406) 600-7502 | goodbirding@pm.me
email preferred

Ruby Valley — **Saturday, January 4th**
Compiler: Tom Forwood
(406) 570-6432 | tjfishing75@gmail.com
email preferred

How You Fit In

Cathy Stamm Finds Her Place

By Chris Nixon

If there is something going on with Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS), there is a good chance you could meet Cathy Stamm there.

Cathy has lived all over the West and Midwest. She was born and raised in California and has lived and worked in Wyoming, Arizona, Colorado, with a stint in the Midwest in Missouri. One of her earlier jobs was working in Yosemite in a little jewelry store next to the Ansel Adams store. She has now landed here in Montana. She moved to Bozeman about five years ago and has been involved with SAS for as long.

Her lifestyle is one of being active. She stays busy! She does a lot of hiking, biking, cross country skiing and fly fishing. And although she doesn't necessarily have her binoculars with her on these other activities, she can always enjoy the birds.

Cathy Stamm.

In fact, she has been a birder for 45 plus years, but she had never really belonged to an Audubon group before SAS. Arriving here in Bozeman she started volunteering at the Food Bank, with Wild Montana, with the Gallatin Watershed Council, and then found out about the Busy Beavers.

She helped install beaver dam analogs on Rocky Creek and decided she should check out the Busy Beavers in more depth. She first attended one of the clean-up days at the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve (IAWP). That set things into motion. There were so many opportunities with the Busy Beavers at the IAWP, she plunged right in.

Her family and friends thought it hilarious that she was now a Busy Beaver….she would make the perfect Busy Beaver!

Cathy said her most enjoyable projects that she has helped with at the IAWP have been working with Kevin Cox and others to put up the Kingfisher Pavilion, the storage sheds, and erecting the bat box. She also loves pulling the weeds as it just keeps you moving and active. And there are always more weeds to be pulled. She has helped wrap trees to prevent the beaver from eating…well everything.

Loreene Reid said Cathy has been a lifesaver. The storage sheds needed to be reorganized, and Cathy came to the rescue. She helped go through all of the SAS materials in our three storage areas. She 'weeded out' materials that are out of date, reorganized boxes with our SAS tabling supplies, printed materials, and display items at Hope Lutheran, at the IAWP and at the offsite storage facility on N Rouse. She volunteered at Raptor Fest and has now worked on the Raptor Fest Boxes and has them ready for Raptor Fest 2025. Yep….she is also an 'early bird'.

After getting busy with the Busy Beavers, Cathy said what sparked her interest in joining SAS was the opportunity to meet other people that like to bird, and knew birds and bird sounds. So, she joined SAS and also National Audubon at the same time.

A close 2nd to her enjoyment of working with the Busy Beavers has been the SAS Field Trips with John Parker and Adelle Pittenridge. She learns something new each time.

Cathy has taken a lot of classes with Ashley Martens. Her favorite class was Ashley's Beginning Birding class with classroom studies during the week and the field trips on the weekends. She said that arrangement worked well for her. She said Ashley shares a wealth of knowledge about birds and bird sounds and the environment as a whole. She has also taken two of Steve Hoffman's classes and thoroughly enjoyed them. She still struggles with the raptors that have so many morphs. Who can relate?

Now Cathy has stepped up to help with the Hospitality Committee and would love for more members to join her. So you will definitely be seeing Cathy if you attend our monthly meetings at Hope Lutheran.

Cathy said there are so many things to participate in at the IAWP and she loves being involved in moving the IAWP vision forward.

She said…if someone is contemplating getting more involved with SAS but doesn't know where they would fit in… to just attend the meetings, and/or check out the SAS website to see what sparks their interest. Then come and join in. There is always something engaging going on!

STAY IN THE KNOW!

RENEW YOUR SAS ANNUAL LOCAL MEMBERSHIP FOR 2025

You are part of Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS), so we trust you enjoy our field trips, monthly programs, and conservation work. Your support and involvement are what makes all this happen! If you have not already renewed your local chapter membership, please do so. **100% of your Local Membership dues directly supports SAS's educational and conservation programs.** And, of course we welcome new members!

We do our best to make your annual donations have the most impact possible! We do not send out multiple mailers each month asking for renewals and additional funds. So, your contributions are important here at the turn of the new year! Don't miss out on this yearly opportunity to stay connected!

Even if you belong to the National Audubon Society (NAS), your support through a Local Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS) Membership is needed to make things happen here at home in SW Montana. As an SAS member, you'll enjoy the benefits of membership while knowing that **your annual dues are used ONLY locally**, for conservation right here in your own neighborhood. Please help us ensure a secure future for what remains of the wildlife & wildlands in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem of Montana by joining our flock and flying high together.

Please Note: Sacajawea Audubon Society's Local Chapter membership does not include membership in the National Audubon Society. *We are an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit organization (EIN 816012429) with its own board of directors, membership, budget and programs. We rely on financial support from local members to carry out our wide array of programs.*

As a chapter of National Audubon Society, we fully value and support their work and advocacy. We encourage you, in addition to your SAS local membership, to join or renew your membership in the National Audubon Society for only $20 more. Join online: https://sacajaweaaudubon.org/join-sas/

We hope that you will join us today, as we approach our 57th year as an effective local grass-roots group, building on an interest in birds to promote the conservation of our natural environment through enjoyment, education and action.

Thank You, *Sacajawea Audubon Society's Board of Directors and the birds and wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem of Montana*

Choose your membership level below, and thank you for considering an additional donation.

Join or Renew for 2025 by filling out the membership form below or check out the many benefits of membership and join online at https://sacajaweaaudubon.org/join-sas/

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

Individual or Family | January – December 2025

❒ **Basic Membership** **$25**

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

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

❒ **Additional Donation $** _____

- ❒ Bridger Raptor Study
- ❒ Wetland Campaign
- ❒ Story Mill Park Bird Feeding Station
- ❒ 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 the 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! include 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

Thank you for your membership and donation. We look forward to birding with you! December '24 Newsletter

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY

INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE

UPDATE: DECEMBER 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.

IAWP to Expand in 2025

BUSY BEAVERS
Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve

If you haven't been out to the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserver (IAWP) this summer, you should check it out and see the new structures that have been installed or improved.

- Railings have been added to the Kingfisher Pavilion.
- A larger storage shed has been donated and added.
- The smaller storage shed was moved up next to the Kingfisher Pavilion for educational items.
- A new bench was installed.
- The Host Station and storage bin was built along the historic railroad berm.

We know that everyone is constantly questioning…. When is the pond building and earth moving going to start at the IAWP?

IAWP on November 15, 2024. Photo: Loreene Reid

The largest road block, or should we say rail block, is that we are still in discussion with Burlington Northern on how to best meet the goals of the IAWP and wetland protection and at the same time meet the desires of Burlington Northern. At this time, we are still planning to move forward with the current design by our expert engineers.

Donors are stepping up to help fund properly placed boardwalks to give more seasonal access to the wetland. Concepts and design will be revealed in the near future.

The Montana Land Reliance is working on finalizing the Conservation Easement documents for the property. That is a critical step for us to finalize the Wetland Mitigation Bank instrument and start accepting/selling wetland mitigation credits for local projects.

The **biggest news** that we can finally announce is that the IAWP will expand in 2025! Mr. Arthur Donnelly and Conti Bozeman LLC, owners of The Kestrel, the newly completed apartment building project within the Village Downtown, is donating almost an additional acre of land, including the historic Northern Pacific Railroad trestle, to SAS.

Much of the sloped area with all the larger cottonwood trees and other upland vegetation will now be protected in perpetuity as part of the IAWP. This will provide us with better habitat to install Wood Duck boxes. This potential expansion has been in the works for months and months. But all good things take time and effort. Rarely does anything 'just happen'. Believe us…. there are a lot of incredible negotiations and possibilities waiting for the appropriate time to be revealed. So, become involved in whatever way your time and finances permit. The IAWP is an incredible project that is demanding a huge amount of work. If this was 'easy', it would have been done decades ago. All good things take time.

IAWP WISH LIST

Our Busy Beavers volunteers have been super busy in 2024. A great deal of data has been gathered. But, there is so much new high tech equipment coming onto the market that could help us collect data in a more effective manner, Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve (IAWP) Chair, Frank Marchak has generated a wish list of items that would greatly help assist in our research and data gathering.

If you have a love for the IAWP and all that's going on there and are feeling generous, please browse through the following list and determine if you can help provide one of the following instruments or pieces of equipment. Please contact Frank Marchak or Loreene Reid in order to make your wishes known. We appreciate it if you decide to play Santa this year for some very active Busy Beavers!

Piezometer/Well Water Level Meter – $244

(x2) **Water Temperature Data Logger** – $75/ea

(x4) **Frogg Toggs Men's Steelheader Lug Sole Bootfoot Chest Wader –** $180/ea

Bat Detector Equipment

Song Meter SM4BAT FS Ultrasonic Recorder – $1099
External microphone – $250
Power kit – $199

Bird Monitors (maybe several?)

Song Meter SM4 Acoustic Recorder – $699
Power kit – $199

Trail Cameras

3 - Stealth Cam Deceptor™ Max Solar Battery Combo – $150/ea

Stealth Cam Revolver Pro 360° Cellular Trail Camera – $180

UTV (Utility Terrain Vehicle)

Yamaha Wolverine X2 850 XT-R – $13729

Weather station

KestrelMet 6000 Cellular Weather Station Compatible with Verizon – $1300

Education supplies for IAWP outreach and Master Naturalist Classes

(7) Compound microscopes

(1) Large printed USGS geological map of Montana

A variety of mammal skulls - including rodent, mustelid, canid, felid, bear, rabbit, deer, elk, and moose

Various mammal pelts - including deer, elk, moose, rabbit, hare, fox, coyote, otter, etc.

4-H Photography youth members learning about ducks and beavers from SAS volunteers at the Wetland Halloween in October.
Photo: TK Knappenberger

Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve Trivia Night

All Critters Great & Small Wildlife Trivia

Join us at Lockhorn Cider House on December 17th for this year's final Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve Trivia Night! This month you'll need to know a little of everything to win, as December's compilation trivia features questions from all of our previous trivia nights in this year's series. Beavers, bats, owls, bears, plants, predators, and more will make an appearance.

Tuesday, December 17
5:30 PM – Social Hour | 6:30 PM – Trivia begins

Trivia is free, followed by a raffle. Enter to win a prize basket and benefit the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve. Tickets are $5 each or 5 for $20.

Lockhorn Cider House – 21 S. Wallace, Bozeman

Great News for the New Year! IAWP Trivia Nights at Lockhorn will continue to be held on the third Tuesday evening of every month in 2025!

BIRD NOTES

by John Parker

The mild weather this fall noticeably delayed the movement of waterfowl from the north. By mid-November the expected push of Snow Geese and Tundra Swans still had not occurred. While the Snow Geese flight seems to have been sparse in southwest Montana, many of the geese have already arrived in the Central Valley of California. Many of the ducks also seemed to be present in lower numbers than usual. Perhaps the expected stormy weather predicted for the third week in November will get more waterfowl moving through our area. A couple of **Greater White-fronted Geese** did pass through this area. The first Greater White-fronted Goose to be reported was a bird found by Kevin Cox on October 29th at Three Forks Ponds. Another Greater White-fronted Goose was first seen on November 8th by Andrew Guttenberg at Davis Lane Pond in northwest Bozeman.

An **Anna's Hummingbird** was visiting Patrice Walker Dello-Russo's feeder near Pray in Paradise Valley from October 29th till November 7th. These wandering Anna's Hummingbirds are almost becoming expected along the southern tier of Montana during the fall.

Several shorebirds made later than expected appearances. On November 8th Meghan Mutch spotted a **Greater Yellowlegs** on the shoreline of the Missouri River at Headwaters State Park. On November 1st Ian van Coller and Jason Gregg found a **Long-billed Dowitcher** at Central Park Pond. While on a trip to Harrison Reservoir October 24th Robin Wolcott and John Parker spotted a phalarope on a distant shoreline. On closer inspection they were able to identify it as a **Red-necked Phalarope**. This would be either the second or third latest fall record for Montana.

On October 23rd John Parker discovered a **Pacific Loon** on Hyalite Reservoir. This bird remained at Hyalite until November 7th, allowing many others to see it. Those lucky enough to go to Hyalite on October 27th, also saw a one-day wonder **Surf Scoter.** While birding Ennis Lake's east shore, Mackenzie Johnston spotted two Pacific Loons.

On October 21 Avery Jordan found a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** in a tree along West Story in south Bozeman. Helping with Avery's discovery were the very vocal and agitated neighborhood chickadees, nuthatches, and juncos. From his yard south of Bozeman, Don Profota was able to record a Northern Saw-whet Owl from October 27th till November 1st.

MacGillivray's Warbler. Photo: Lou Ann Harris

The first of the season **Harris's Sparrow** was found at the Cherry River fishing access site in north Bozeman on November 1st by Robin Wolcott. One day later a Harris's Sparrow showed up in Paulette Epple's northeast Bozeman yard.

After a snow storm October 18th, Dave Benes saw a **Palm Warbler** in the company of a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** as they foraged in the leaves of an ash tree in Gallatin Gateway. Two days later Don Profota recorded another Palm Warbler south of Bozeman. These two Palm Warblers represent the fourth and fifth records for this area of Montana.

Finally, the best for the last. While on Villard Street in north Bozeman on November 11th, Mary Keck spotted a **MacGillivray's Warbler.** This sighting of a MacGillivray's Warbler is the latest record in Montana by a full month. Not only that, but according to eBird records, this sighting is later than all but a handful of sightings away from the coast or southeastern Arizona.

Fill the Feeders at Story Mill Community Park

By Lou Ann Harris

John Harris filling feeders at SMCP.
Photo: Lou Ann Harris

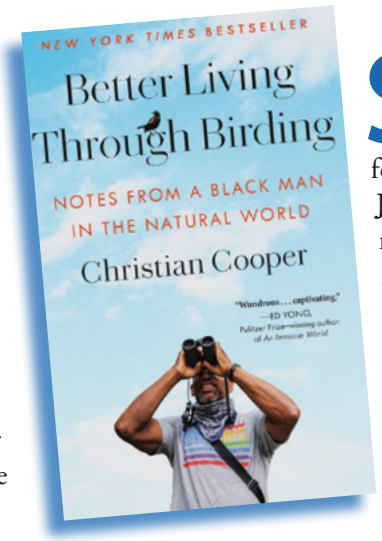
The feeders at the bird blind at Story Mill Community Park were very popular during this past winter and spring. Lots of photographers, birders and other nature lovers were regular visitors. Then in July, we had to take the feeders down because of the continued presence of Black Bears. We plan to get the feeders filled and back up by December 1st. Sacajawea Audubon Society volunteers keep the feeders filled for hungry birds, whether they are migrating through or are our year-round residents. We encourage you to stop by and see the variety of birds that are visiting our feeding station. There are usually Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, House Finches, Song Sparrows, Evening Grosbeaks, and the ever-present Black-capped Chickadees. However, our bird seed fund is again running low. On average, we spend $1,000 on bird feed each year, and like the cost of everything else, the cost of the seed and suet is increasing.

We encourage and appreciate donations to keep the feeders filled, and the birds and park visitors happy! You can donate online at https://sacajaweaaudubon.org/donate/ as the "Story Mill Park Bird Feeding Station" is listed as one of our special campaigns. Or simply add a little extra amount earmarked for the feeding station as you renew your membership https://sacajaweaaudubon.org/join-sas/ this month. Regardless of how you donate, the Story Mill Park birds and birdwatchers thank you for your support! Your generosity makes the world a better place for the birds and the people that enjoy them!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

- ❒ **December 3: Giving Tuesday**
- ❒ **December 7: Christmas Stroll** - Downtown Bozeman
- ❒ **December 9:** HOLIDAY PROGRAM at Emerson Center for the Arts & Culture
- ❒ **December 14 – January 4: Christmas Bird Counts**
- ❒ **January 13: SAS monthly program meeting**: *Origin and Evolution of Birds* with MOR's Ashley Hall
- ❒ **January 16: Gallatin Valley Earth Day Presentation** – Ben Goldfarb author of *Eager, The Surprising Secret Life of Beavers and Why they Matter* at Emerson Center for the Arts & Culture
- ❒ **January 30: Presentation** *World Wetland Day* at Emerson Center for the Arts & Culture
- ❒ **February 2: World Wetland Day** at IAWP
- ❒ **March 18 – May10: Master Naturalist Class**

SAS Book Club News



NO MEETING IN DECEMBER

Sacajawea Audubon Society Book Club does not meet in December. We look forward to our next meeting on **January 15, 2025**. We will be reading *Better Living Through Birding: Notes from a Black Man in the Natural World* by Christian Cooper. Happy Holidays!

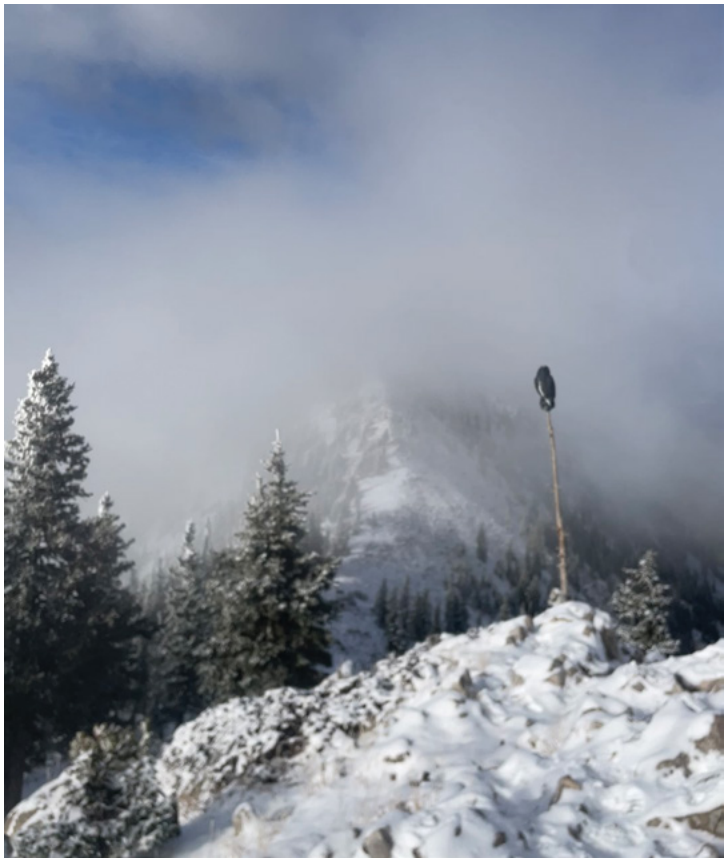
If you would like to join us virtually call or email, Elisabeth Swanson at (406) 570-8325, elsswa@gmail.com before the meeting.

2024 BRIDGER RAPTOR MIGRATION COUNT: SEASON CONCLUSION

GOLDEN EAGLE COUNTS REMAIN LOW; MANY OTHER RAPTORS ARE STABLE.

By Adam Brown (one of Sacajawea Audubon Society's three 2024 official counters)

Completing our 33rd consecutive season-long raptor count, the 2024 season comes to a close. It sure did fly by! It doesn't seem all that long ago that we were counting the first birds of the season, rising over Ross and Sac in the 80-degree heat of late summer. Yet, as always, the season progressed; and we inevitably found ourselves watching the last of the migrants as they flew overhead, continuing southward over Saddle until they were completely out of sight. It felt fitting to hike down on that final day (October 31st), with snow falling from the clouds and a few inches already accumulating at our feet—a stark contrast to the start of the season.



Snowy Ridge. Photo: Rosemary D'Andrea

We were fortunate this year to experience a mild fall (at least from the perspective of maximizing counting days), which meant lots of hours observing up on the ridge. We counted nearly 30% more hours than the long-term average, with only four days where the count couldn't be conducted at all. As a result, this season's total was the most productive since 2016, the last year we surpassed 3,000 birds (with a count of 3,040). Although we didn't quite reach our goal of 3,000 this season, ending with a total of 2,993 (17 raptor species) feels like a genuine achievement — something everyone who contributed to this year's effort should take pride in.

The season had its share of highs and lows, and I'm not just talking about the many hikes to and from the ridge. Each counter and the numerous supporters faced their own personal challenges along the way. But, all things considered, the birds kept flying, and this project has proven to be just as resilient as the raptors we counted. We can only hope that as long as birds head south for the winter, there will be a few dedicated folks up on the ridge to count them.

From a numbers' perspective, the project had some noteworthy milestones, reaching a few significant records. We tallied a count of exactly 900 Golden Eagles! We also set a new record with 211 Broad-winged Hawks and saw all-time highs for Merlins at 40 (previously 36), Cooper's Hawks at 583 (previously 389), and matched the previous record for Swainson's Hawks at 11. Of course, with ongoing changes in climate, habitat, and migration patterns, there is always more than meets the eye with these totals. Hopefully, these increases signal promising shifts for the future.

While our total of 900 Golden Eagles falls short of the site's long-term average of 1,260 (nearly 30% below the long-term average Golden Eagle count), it is still a testament to the perseverance of the project. On the final day of the count, Alicia and I hiked up to the ridge, fully aware that the weather would be closing in by afternoon and knowing we were just four Golden Eagles shy of 900. As soon as we reached the ridge, it was clear that the weather would arrive sooner than expected. The outlook was bleak, but with some encouragement from Steve, we were determined to give it our best shot. Almost immediately, we spotted our first eagle—a hopeful sign that birds were still moving despite the fog and approaching storm. An hour passed, and we counted a second one—just two more to go. The weather continued to deteriorate, and we were nearly driven to retreat to the shelter. Time ticked away as we considered packing up for the season. But then, a sudden break in the clouds brought a glimpse of sunlight, and in that brief moment, two Golden Eagles appeared, one after the other, emerging from the fog to the north. We followed their flight south as they vanished into the flurries beyond Saddle Peak,

Painting by Jamie Rankin

just as suddenly as they had appeared. Moments later, the clouds closed back in, and the snow began to fall in earnest. We both knew that was our cue to get off the ridge—but not before we hit 900 Goldens for the season!

Alicia had this to say about the project coming to a close: "This season was a true blessing. Not only did I improve my raptor identification skills, but I also had the opportunity to spend time with amazing people. My fellow Bridger Hawkwatchers were wonderful, and the visitors and volunteers who joined us to help with the counts were the highlight of my days. As the season has come to an end, I'll miss the hikes to and from work and the many hours spent in the Bridgers observing and counting raptors." - Alicia Wilson (2024 official counter)

"A heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to this year's count, no matter how small your role. It's your generous efforts and dedication that make this count possible, year after year. It was an incredible season, and it was a pleasure to work alongside all of you!" - Rosemary D'Andrea (2024 official counter)

Support the Bridger Mountain Raptor Project

LAST CHANCE TO ENTER TO WIN ONE OF TWO SEASON SKI PASSES!

Sacajawea Audubon Society's important Bridger Mountain Raptor Project is entering its 34rd year, and your support is more crucial than ever. To ensure the continuation of this vital monitoring program, we're excited to raffle off ***two Bridger Bowl Ski Area Season Passes, valued at $1060 each.***

The data collected from this survey is essential for tracking population trends of Golden Eagles and other raptors, helping to shape conservation efforts. The funds raised from this raffle will cover approximately one-quarter of the project's $20,000 budget.

TICKETS ARE $10 each, or 6 for $50.

Every ticket you purchase supports the ongoing work of the Bridger Mountain Raptor Project to better understand and safeguard the future of these majestic birds.

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

Sharp-shinned Hawk at Bridger. Photo: Kyle Dudgeon

Raffle tickets will be available for purchase at the SAS tent during the Christmas Stroll on December 7th, at the SAS program meeting on December 9th, or by request online at:

https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/Q0pL3HYUgMa_wF7Odow5hg

WINNERS WILL BE DRAWN DECEMBER 9th at the SAS Program at the Emerson.

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

King Penguins necking. Photo: Tom Murphy

Sacajawea Audubon Society's

Special Holiday Program

A Look at the Adaptive Wisdom of Birds

Photographs by Tom Murphy

December 9, 2024
at the Emerson!

NOTE THE CHANGE OF VENUE!

6:00 PM – Doors open.

7:00 PM – Program begins.

This will also be your last opportunity to purchase raffle tickets for a chance to win one of two Bridger Bowl Ski passes. The two winners will be drawn at the end of the program.