FEBRUARY2025

Sacajawea Audubon News

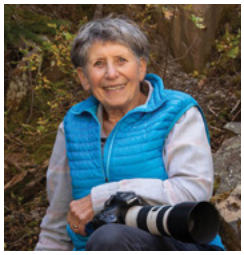
Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS) builds on an interest in birds to promote the conservation of our natural environment through enjoyment, education, and action.

SAS Monthly Program: Monday, February 10 at Hope Lutheran Church

Condor Courtship on the Balance Beam

with Carol Polich, nature photographer and author

As a "Bird Lover" you will be thrilled with this month's well timed program "Condor Courtship on the Balance Beam"!



Carol Polich.
Photo: Betsy Day

Renowned Montana nature photographer and author, Carol Polich, will present this "Heart Warming" presentation on Monday, Feb 10, 2025, just preceding Valentines Day. California Condors, which reproduce only every two years once mature, usually start laying eggs beginning in February, and may do so through the month of May. The continuing, challenging, unfolding story of the recovery of the California Condor as an iconic species likely tugs on all our "bird loving hearts". The California Condor was among the very first 78 taxa listed as Endangered, submitted to the National Register on February 24, 1967 (notice - also in February) by then Secretary of the Interior, Stewart L. Udall (published March 11, 1967). So, each February brings renewed hope for our beloved California Condors and the renewal of "amour" between Condors.

California Condor courtship behavior with female nuzzling the male, Navajo Bridge beams in the background.
Photo: Carol Polich

Carol's lecture will present the condor courtship behaviors in an array of artistic curves and well-balanced poses set on the Navajo Bridge beams which serve as linear backdrops. Condor history and anecdotal stories are only a fragment of her lecture. Her "still photo" transitioning set within musical phrasing adds another dimension when paired with her chosen music accompanying the bird's behaviors.

Polich has been widely published in the USA and internationally with her wildlife and birdlife photos and has two books to her credit: *Portrait of Paradise,* a photo journey on the Yellowstone ecosystem published by Far Country Press, Helena, MT 2007; and *Wildlife of Southern Africa*, about African wildlife survival published by Random Struik, Cape Town, South Africa, 2010.

Male California Condor impressing his female mate during courtship.
Photo: Carol Polich

Visit Carol Polich's website to see more of her stunning wildlife and nature photos: https://wildnaturetrails.com/.

For detailed information and updates on the status of the California Condor, we suggest this link to the California Condor page of the California Department of Fish & Wildlife website: https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Birds/California-Condor#:~:text=Nesting%20condors%20raise%20only%20one,to%20live%20on%20its%20own.

The in-person meeting will be held Monday, February 10, 2025 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.

For virtual attendance, please register at https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/4419822783659667032

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 Valentine's Day approaching, Program Chair, Ken Sinay, has lined up a great presentation by nature photographer and author, Carol Polich. Her presentation of **"Condor Courtship on the Balance Beam"** at our **February 10th membership meeting** is one I'm certain you will "LOVE". (page 1)

And I want to express that I "LOVE" the dedication exhibited by our SAS Board Members. The SAS Board is not a board where one just shows up and has a discussion each month. Our's is a WORKING BOARD--always going above and beyond. I want to point out a few examples you will see in this newsletter.

Board Member Vicki Saab heads up the annual **Avian Point Count Surveys of the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve** (IAWP). Read about the new birds documented at the IAWP in 2024 on page 3. Two other Board Members, Doug McSpadden and Ben Goodheart are among several volunteers that helped with this 3rd annual point count in 2024.

Board members often contribute articles for this newsletter. Be sure to read Mikaela Howie's article on ***Avian Flu and your Bird Feeders: The Long and the Short.*** (page 7)

Board Member Frank Marchak led the development of our new **Wetland Master Naturalist Course** which will be offered for the 2nd time this Summer. This is the only place to become certified as a Wetland Master Naturalist in Montana. (page 5)

Program Committee Chair, Ken Sinay, promotes the wonder of the **Freezout Waterfowl Management Area**, especially in March for the free "Wild Wings Choteau" event. (page 6)

Don't miss this month's **Pecha Kucha Feb 19 & 20** at the Ellen Theatre as both Frank and Ken take to the stage. Frank Marchak will introduce us to today's beavers in Bozeman and Ken Sinay will portray Bozeman's past when William Clark & Sacagawea made their trek through our valley. (page 3)

I am very pleased to announce that I have appointed Halle Nienhaus as our **newest SAS Board Member**. See page 4 to learn all about Halle and what she brings to your Board.

Rarely do your Board members just simply disappear after their time on the board. A great example is the **Blue Bird Trail** article by former Board member, and Past SAS President Lou Ann Harris. Lou Ann continues to head up our Blue Bird Trail Program and serves as Co-Chair of our Conservation Committee. (page 9)

I encourage you to read every word in the following pages….or you may miss out on one of the upcoming programs or activities offered through SAS. Look to future newsletters to learn about what other SAS members and Board Members are doing.

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
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Halle Neinhaus	halleneinhaus@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Vicki Saab	vickisaab@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Ken Sinay	kensinay@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
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Newsletter Design	Tamara Knappenberger tkknappenberger@gmail.com

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY

INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE
UPDATE: FEBRUARY 2025

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.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE AVIAN POINT COUNT REPORT FOR INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE 2024 3RD ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

BUSY BEAVERS Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve

By Victoria Ann Saab, Sacajawea Audubon Society Board Member & Scientist Emeritus USDA Rocky Mountain Research Station

Avian point count surveys were established in spring 2022 to provide baseline information on avian species richness, species abundance, and species diversity at the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve (IAWP) managed/owned by Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS) in Bozeman, Montana. Point count data are being collected to provide a standardized and repeatable method for evaluating changes in avian metrics (number of bird species and abundance of each species) related to proposed wetland restoration activities and the potential designation as a wetland mitigation bank.

During the 2024 field season, we conducted point count surveys at 9 established point count locations within the IAWP. We were able to collect data at all point count stations even with open and high-water levels.

Sixty-five bird species (species richness) and 2,072 individuals (species abundance) were recorded during 14 point-count surveys in 2024 at 9 stations from mid-April through mid-October.

The most notable changes in 2024 compared to 2022-2023 were the additions of three duck species: Blue-winged teal, Canvasback and Lesser Scaup. The Eastern Kingbird has had the greatest increase in abundance overall.

We are grateful to all observers that conducted point count surveys and entered data into eBird, which allowed for more efficient data entry and data management to complete this report: Kristen Bontadelli, Kevin Cox, Ben Goodheart, Angie Kociolek, Sam Koenen, Doug McSpadden, and Victoria Saab.

The complete report, including a table of species, can be found on the Bozeman Wetlands website. https://bozemanwetlands.org/WP/

Eastern Kingbird.
All Photos: Ed Harper.

Canvasback.

Diagnostic wing pattern on Lesser Scaup.

Blue-winged Teal in flight.

PECHA KUCHA

Feb 19 & 20 at the Ellen Theatre

Among those presenting will be the familiar faces of two dedicated SAS Board members:

Frank Marchak, Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve & SAS Board – ***Dam Good Neighbors: The Role of Beavers in Urban Wetland Ecosystems***

Ken Sinay, SAS Board – ***Natural Awareness: From The Missouri Headwaters To The Yellowstone With William Clark And Sacagawea***

For more information and to order tickets: https://theellen.my.salesforce-sites.com/ticket#/events/a0SVs00000Ft5ZWMAZ

INTRODUCING NEWEST SAS BOARD MEMBER - HALLE NIENHAUS

Freshwater ecologist by trade and water lover by passion, Halle completed all of her schooling in Michigan where she carried out Master's research on the aquatic insect communities of Lake Michigan's coastal dune wetlands. After graduate school, she found her way to Montana by taking a job with the U.S. Geological Survey – Rocky Mountain Science Center's fisheries team from 2021 to 2023. From there, she moved into consulting where she worked as a freshwater biologist and NEPA project manager on freshwater-related projects with the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and other entities. At the beginning of 2024, she accepted a new role as a project manager with Montana Freshwater Partners in Livingston, Montana, where she continues to contribute to freshwater restoration and conservation across the state.

Halle recalls her initial love for birds coalescing during a 2016 trip to Ecuador where she birdwatched in the Cloud Forest, Andes, and Amazon Rainforest. Over the years, she read through several of Jennifer Ackerman's books including *The Bird Way, The Genius of Birds, Birds by the Shore,* and most recently *What an Owl Knows,* furthering her love and appreciation for birds. Halle also deeply recognizes the intersectionality of freshwater habitat and bird habitat, thus encouraging her involvement with the Sacajawea Audubon Society. Halle brings her varied background in technical science, consulting, grant writing, hands-on restoration, and community-focused conservation work to the SAS Board of Directors.

When it comes to the outdoors, Halle enjoys mountain running, telemark skiing, mountain biking, whitewater paddling, and fly fishing. She is also a lover of live music, community events, and spending time with friends and loved ones. As a community-focused extrovert (and outward nerd), Halle hopes to contribute to SAS's mission of encouraging a love for birds and habitat conservation through education, events, and targeted engagement.

Photos courtesy of Halle Nienhaus

Bald Eagle Adult. Photo Scott Heppel

RAPTOR IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOP & FIELD TRIP

March 6h from 6:30 to 8:30 PM and March 8th all day

Sharpen your raptor identification skills! This program will be presented by Steve Hoffman, Founder of HawkWatch International and Coordinator of the annual Bridger Raptor Migration Project.

The Thursday night presentation will start **at 6:30 PM**, and conclude by 8:30 PM; at the **Hope Lutheran Church on Graf off of S. 19th Avenue in Bozeman.** 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.

Saturday's field trip on March 8th at 8:00 AM will meet at Museum of the Rockies (NE end of Parking Lot).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.

Fee: $40 fee for Sacajawea Audubon Society members (only $20 for participants under age 25)

$65 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 and to register visit: https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/YzMAsse6lRiQORiySz_LLw/unavailable

MASTER NATURALIST COURSE

WITH CEDAR MATHERS-WINN

March 25 – May 17, 2025

Master Naturalists are trained in the ecology and natural history of the local landscape, including geology, plants, animals, fungi, and the connections between them. The Master Naturalist course goes beyond basic identification of organisms to explore the lives and stories that reveal how even the smallest creatures are fascinating and essential to life in our shared ecosystems. Training includes foundational knowledge, local natural history of the large and small, traditional scientific tools and techniques, and practices utilized by Charles Darwin, Aldo Leopold, and generations of naturalists before them.

Through classroom and outdoor lessons, this 8-week course will deepen your experience and understanding of the fascinating landscape we call home. You 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.

Register online at: https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/R2hewdAX-6zQDhBCsbv7tg

IAWP Wetland Master Naturalist Course

Summer 2025

This wetland-focused master naturalist class will cover various aspects of wetland ecology and environmental science, tailored to Montana's unique landscapes and ecological characteristics. The course will include 10 classes and three full day field trips. Each class will be structured to last 2 hours, combining theoretical knowledge with practical, hands-on activities or field observations. Each topic will be taught by a subject matter expert drawn from local specialists, Montana University System, and the Society of Wetland Scientists.

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. It covers topics that provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex ecological interactions that occur within these ecosystems, with an emphasis on scientific observation, analysis, and interpretation, and integrates field trips and hands-on activities. For more information: contact Frank Marchak frankm@bozemanwetlands.org

Tuesday, June 24 – Saturday, August 02, 2025

- 5 consecutive weeks Tuesday/Thursday | 5:30-7:30 PM
- 3 Full Day Saturday field trips

Certification Requirements

- Attendance for 40 class hours
- Journaling and interpretative presentation on wetland topic of choice
- 6 hours volunteer service

Register online at: https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/7JksRxA9K4GJdlbLGoQ8WQ

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

- ❒ **February 2: World Wetland Day** tour of the IAWP
- ❒ **February 10: SAS Monthly Program Meeting**
- ❒ **February 12: GVED presentation Grasslands by Beth Madden** at Bozeman Public Library
- ❒ **February 14 – 17: Great Backyard Bird Count**
- ❒ **February 18: IAWP Trivia Night** at Lockhorn Cider House
- ❒ **Feb 19 & 20: Pecha Kucha** at The Ellen, Earth Day theme!
- ❒ **March 6 – 9: Raptor Identification** Workshop & Field Trip
- ❒ **March 10: SAS Monthly Program Meeting**
- ❒ **March 21-23: Wild Wings Choteau**
- ❒ **March 25 – May 17: Master Naturalist Class**
- ❒ **May 10: World Migratory Bird Day**
- ❒ **May 16 – 19: Sweetgrass Prairie Birding Tour**
- ❒ **May 18 – June 29: SAS Birdathon**
- ❒ **May 24 – 26: Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge Tour**
- ❒ **June 24 – August 2: Wetland Master Naturalist Class**

SAS SPRING WILDLIFE TOURS

WILD WINGS CHOTEAU

March 21- 23, 2025 (F, Sa, Su)

Every year hundreds of thousands of white geese (Snow Geese and Ross's Geese) migrate through Freezout Waterfowl Management Area. Along with them will be tens of thousands of swans. It's a majestic nature experience!

The nearby town of Choteau sponsors "Wild Wings," a free community event that includes educational, conservation, and entertaining activities to coincide with the peak of the migration.

Raffles, educational presentations, food, music, and socializing are a part of it, but the highlight is the free guided tours on Saturday and Sunday mornings and the birds themselves. Geese, swans, and other waterfowl are a constant as they lift off of the ponds by the thousands and alight in the nearby grain fields to fuel up for continued migration north.

An additional feature are the nearly ubiquitous Short-eared Owls at Freezout, numerous regional wildlife drive routes, and the spectacular "reefs" of the Rocky Mountain Front.

To experience the migrating geese you will want to go in the last two weeks of March, even if you choose to not attend the organized event. If you choose to go later in the spring, mid-April shorebirds will be returning and multiple active Sharp-tailed Grouse leks are to be found in the region. Several leks are visible from easily traveled roads.

More information is available at: www.wildwingschoteau.org

or contact Sacajawea Audubon Society Board Member Ken Sinay at kensinay@gmail.com.

Affordable accommodations and campgrounds are available in Choteau, but they do get full. So plan in advance. https://visitchoteau.com/where-to-stay/

Freezeout Lake Snow Geese. Photo: Bob Martinka

RED ROCK LAKES NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE TOUR

May 24-26 2025 (Sa, Su,M) Memorial Day Weekend

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is located in the scenic and isolated Centennial Valley of southwestern Montana, about 60 miles west of Yellowstone National Park. This 3-day, 2-night tour will take you into a diversity of habitats, ranging from high elevation wetland, sagebrush and prairie to the forests of the Centennial Mountains. This diverse, wetland-prairie-sagebrush-montane environment gives Red Rock Lakes its unique character. Nesting birds are abundant throughout Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge at this time of year, with 120+ species possible. This refuge is best known as the primary location for the heroic efforts to save the Trumpeter Swan from extinction in the 1930's.

In addition to the majestic swan, another 230 bird species have been identified within the refuge, including: Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Sandhill Crane, Red-necked Grebe, Black-crowned Night-Heron, American White Pelican, Sora, White-faced Ibis, American Avocet, Willet, Wilson's Phalarope, Northern Harrier, Bald & Golden Eagles, Swainson's & Ferruginous Hawks, Prairie & Peregrine Falcons, Short-eared Owl, Sage Thrasher, Brewer's Sparrow, Western Tanager and various ducks, flycatchers, kinglets, warblers, vireos, thrushes, woodpeckers and, if we're lucky, Greater Sage-Grouse!

Red Rock Lakes N.W.R. Montana. Photo: Ronana Donovan

Guides: Steve Hoffman – Steve is the founder of HawkWatch Intenrational and owns Merlin Birding & Nature Tours, LLC.

Cedar Mathers-Winn – Cedar is a naturalist, biologist, and Master Naturalist instructor based in Bozeman, MT.

More information and registration online at: https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/5Ug0qmBzMMlnTa39T9Mekg

... SAS Spring Wildlife Tours continued.

SWEET GRASS PRAIRIE BIRDING

May 16-19, 2025 (F, Sa, Su, M)

Join us for a 3-day/3-night prairie birding tour based out of the Sweet Grass Lodge on the J Bar L Ranch, May 16-19, 2025. Participants will enjoy an array of daily field trips in the varied habitats of the ranch and nearby areas, with an emphasis on observing and learning about prairie birds, as well as conservation ranching. The group will engage in a citizen science effort, reporting the results of their bird surveys to the ranch staff for use in guiding land management. Ranch managers will share info about regenerative grazing and their strategic ranching practices, which are aimed at improving ecological resilience on ranch lands.

Participants will drive their own vehicles or carpool to the ranch (20 miles N of Big Timber). Includes 3 nights lodging on the ranch (double occupancy only) and meals. Small group – no more than 12 participants.

The Sweet Grass Lodge is set atop a hill in the midst of the 8,000-acre J Bar L Ranch north of Big Timber. Photo: Ed Harper.

Cost & registration details available in March.

Guides: Beth Madden, John Parker, Ed Harper

More infomration online at: https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/wQush8v1KWZ-9Oon28lp7g

AVIAN FLU AND YOUR BIRD FEEDERS: THE LONG AND THE SHORT

by Mikaela Howie

Avian influenza, or avian flu, has been in the news a lot lately! What is the deal and what does it mean for our backyard bird feeders and for the wild birds we love? Here is the long and short of it all.

The current strain of avian influenza (highly pathogenic H5N1 or HPAI) affects a wide range of wild birds including raptors, corvids, shore birds, sea birds, game birds and especially waterfowl.

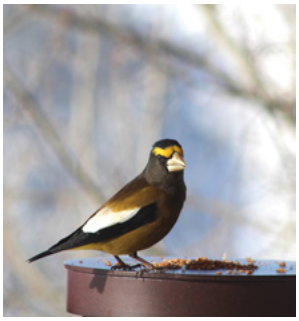
The virus is shed in the saliva, mucus, and feces of infected birds and is transmitted to other birds via ingestion or inhalation.

Should we worry about songbirds and avian flu?

Multi-year surveillance programs have reported that 3% of all wild birds testing positive for HPAI have been frequent visitors to bird feeders or songbirds. So, the risk seems low for songbirds, however, they are still capable of transmitting the disease. Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) does not have an equal effect on all birds and the "HP" or "highly pathogenic" part, specifically refers to the severity of the disease in poultry which get very sick from the virus. Raptors are also highly sensitive and the local Montana Raptor Conservation Center is taking special measures to ensure the safety of their resident raptors as well as those brought to them for recovery. HPAI is especially devastating to domestic poultry flocks and has been showing up in typical mammalian predators of birds (red foxes, skunks, bobcats, fishers, and bears).

It is most important that if you have active bird feeders this winter, you clean them regularly with soap and hot water.

When touching or cleaning your feeders, remember to keep yourself safe by wearing gloves and washing your hands!



Evening grosbeak at platform feeder. Photo: Terri Narotzky

If you have a domestic poultry flock and bird feeders on your property, the recommendations are to keep your bird feeders separate from your flock. Go to https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza for best practices with poultry care. **If you must touch sick or dead birds:** Wear gloves and a face mask and throw them away after use. Place dead birds in a double-bagged garbage bag. Wash your hands well with soap and warm water.

As bird enthusiasts, we want to do all we can to help our feathered friends stay healthy and prosper - but of course we also want to marvel at their beauty, listen to their winter chirps and occasional songs and observe their antics from the comfort of our kitchen windows. Bird feeders are a great way to observe more songbirds, but it comes with responsibility! The best and most lasting way to entice songbirds to your yard is to provide a safe habitat by keeping cats indoors or on a leash and using native plants that provide shelter and food, even when there are feet of snow on the ground! **For information about making your corner of the earth bird friendly check out more of SAS's work at:** https://sacajaweaaudubon.org/project/bird-friendly-communities/.

How You Fit In

Beth Madden, Prairie Denizen

By Judy Tsiang

The 2024 Bozeman Christmas Bird Count has wrapped up, and in what has become a post-count tradition, counters enjoyed the after-party at Beth Madden's house, a warm space peppered with bird art of all kinds, representing a collection over a lifetime of fascination with the natural world. That is just one of the ways in which Beth has contributed to the well-being of Sacajawea Audubon Society.

Beth moved from upstate New York for college, drawn to the University of Montana's Wildlife Biology Program. After earning her BS in zoology, she moved to Montana State University for grad school.

Her research took her to North Dakota where she studied the effects of fire on prairie songbirds. She also studied Bald Eagles in southwest Montana, when they were still listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Beth became a biologist for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) , working on national wildlife refuges throughout North Dakota and eastern Montana, advising managers on how best to manage their resources. Eventually she found a home at Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge, an isolated outpost in the northeast corner of Montana, where she remained until retiring to Livingston in 2009. By the time Beth moved to Bozeman in 2017, she had become involved with Sacajawea Audubon Society and was known in the community as a prairie advocate.

Beth also volunteers as the Montana Coordinator for the USGS North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). This landmark survey was created in 1966 in response to declines in bird numbers. Beth is responsible for staffing 106 breeding bird survey routes scattered throughout the state. Results paint a sobering picture: there are now 3 billion fewer birds in North America than there were 50 years ago. https://www.3billionbirds.org/

Prairie birds, in particular, are some of the earth's most imperiled species, as they have been losing their habitat at an alarming rate. "We have lost more than 53% of our grassland birds since 1970," Beth noted. Luckily, we live near some areas where prairie birds can still be observed. Each summer Beth leads a popular SAS field trip to some grassland areas north of Big Timber, where species like longspurs, Sprague's Pipits, and Long-billed Curlews can still be seen.

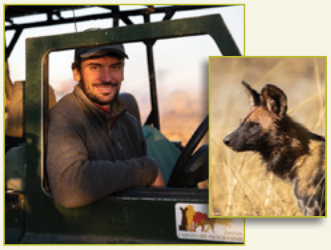
Beth Madden in prairie habitat. Photo: Amy Sheppard

Beth serves on the SAS Conservation Committee and works on both the Cats Indoors and Bird-Friendly Windows campaigns. To help homeowners with reducing bird window-strikes, Beth and her husband Bill Klenn promote an inexpensive and effective window pin-striping technique https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nOjJa1tHL0 that they have generously shared with community members.

Beth also developed the popular Great Migration Challenge for SAS, an obstacle-course game that illustrates the hazards faced by birds as they migrate. In kit form, the game is ready to go for any educator wanting to borrow it. Many have seen it, and/or played it at events like the Bridger Raptor Festival.

"I never cease to be amazed at the quantity and quality of work that Sacajawea Audubon Society completes on behalf of birds and conservation," Beth said of our chapter. "I am so glad to be part of this productive community." Beth is also a lifetime member and former board member of the Montana Native Plant Society, noting the many areas of mutual concern between the two groups.

For the new year, Beth looks forward to leading an overnight prairie bird trip where participants will stay at the J Bar L Ranch, a holistically managed cattle ranch in northern Sweet Grass County, Montana. See page 7 for trip details.



Congratulations

to SAS Board member, Ben Goodheart

who has successfully defended his PhD dissertation: *Effects of Prey Depletion and Reduced Competitors on Hunting, Movement and Space-Use of African Wild Dogs*

2024 Bluebird Trail Report

By Lou Ann Harris

The 55th year of the SAS Bluebird Trail Project was full of joy, drama, tragedy and surprises. In other words, just the usual! On the trails where we collected nesting data, a total of **353 bluebirds fledged**, compared to 421 last year. The three snowstorms that hit the valley in May & June had a big impact on the bluebirds and caused many nest failures. We **banded a total of 194 bluebirds:** 166 nestlings and 28 adult females. We recaptured 19 adult female bluebirds on the nest.

Five Mountain Bluebird nestlings.
Photo: Lou Ann Harris

On the Rocky Mountain Rd. trail during our field trip with the MSU Ornithology Class, **we recaptured a banded female bluebird incubating 3 eggs**. Her band number seemed familiar. Sure enough, she was banded as an adult in Box 63 in July 2020. She has been recaptured in three successive years (2022-2024), two years in the same box that she was originally banded in. That makes her at least 5 years old, which is a ripe old age for a bluebird. According to our records, **she has raised at least 20 bluebird fledglings** during that time. Plus, she has migrated between Montana and wherever she spends the winter at least 8 times. It's pretty humbling when you think about what these birds do. They really are amazing. (Note: This female only managed to fledge one young this year. She laid 3 eggs, of which only one hatched.)

Another interesting story involves two female bluebirds we captured incubating eggs in boxes #86 & #90 on Rocky Mtn. Road. Both were previously banded. Our records show they were banded in May 2022 as 12-day old nestlings in the same box. That makes them sisters! This is the first time we can recall catching two breeding siblings. **It's solid proof that "our" bluebirds are returning to their natal area to breed.** (Note: the female in #86 successfully raised two broods in the same box for a total of 7 fledglings.) **All of our nesting data is uploaded to Cornell's Nest Watch** (https://nestwatch.org)

Tree Swallows had a successful year with 176 fledged. **Two House Wren nests** on the Dry Creek Trail produced 12 fledglings. **House Sparrows continued to be a problem** and nested in 6 of our boxes. Each of these nests and eggs were legally removed (House Sparrows are not federally protected songbirds and are an invasive species). We also had a number of boxes used by mice this season.

In addition to hosting a **field trip for the MSU Ornithology Class with instructor Ben Goodheart**, we led our **annual SAS field trip** which was well attended. Participants of both trips watched as we banded bluebird nestlings, and everyone got to hold a baby bluebird. That always generates a lot of smiles.

Our nest box sponsorship program continues to be very popular, and **we raise over $3,000 each year for our conservation projects. If you are interested in sponsoring a bluebird nest box or two, please read the article below "Sponsor a Bluebird Nest Box in 2025".**

Sponsor a Bluebird Nest Box in 2025!

Setting up housekeeping.
Photo: Lou Ann Harris

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 that we monitor.

Sponsorship costs **$20** per year per box, and you can sponsor as many boxes as you like. Once the bluebird nesting season begins you will receive emailed updates and photos from the field. At the end of the season, we will send a summary of how the season went. **We have made an important change from past years and won't be assigning specific box numbers to sponsors going forward.**

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, as well as Sacajawea Audubon Society's other conservation projects, such as the Kestrel Nest Box Project and the Burdock Eradication Project.

BLUEBIRD BOX SPONSORSHIP

To sign up for a bluebird box sponsorship, donate online at: https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/mxNJZZM0A81T2_iWssOVJw **or fill out the form below and send with a check to: Sacajawea Audubon Society PO Box 1711 Bozeman, MT 59771**

Name: _____ **Email:** _____

Address: _____

 # Of Boxes Sponsored: _____

Is This Sponsorship A Memorial? ☐Yes ☐No **In Whose Name?** _____

BIRD NOTES

by John Parker

2024 Christmas Bird Count Summary

It was an exceptional year for most of this area's Christmas Bird Counts. Most of the Christmas counts had a high number of bird species, and a great many unusual winter birds were discovered on the various counts. The extremely warm fall and early winter was the primary factor contributing to the high counts and seasonal rarities. The warm weather allowed all the streams and rivers to remain open and kept most lower elevation areas free of snow. Some of the lakes and ponds even had open water, which rarely occurs to the extent that was the case this past year.

Anna's Hummingbird.
Photo: John Parker

The Bozeman count on December 14 was first on the calendar, and what a way to start the counts! On this very mild December day, 76 species of birds were tallied, which is two shy of the all-time record. Incredibly, after 86 years of counts, three species were added to the cumulative total, which now stands at 140. New to the count were **Greater White-fronted Goose**, **Anna's Hummingbird**, and **Williamson's Sapsucker**. Also of note were a **Hermit Thrush** seen for only the second time on the count, **Snow Goose** seen for the third time (13 birds, a new high count), and **Sandhill Crane** seen for the third time. In all eight species had all time high counts, including the 1,978 magpies seen on count day.

On the following day was the Livingston count. This was one of the two counts that experienced more difficult weather conditions. It was windy. Only 54 species of birds were spotted, down about 10 species from average. Eight Sandhill Cranes and a **Northern Pygmy Owl** were the highlights.

The December 18 Ennis count also experienced high winds, but the open water on the corners of Ennis Lake made up for some of the birds that may have been missed due to the wind. Three species new to the count **Cinnamon Teal**, **Horned Grebe**, and **Double-crested Cormorant**, were found along the fringes of the lake. There were new high counts for Snow Goose, **Northern Shoveler**, **Gadwall, American Wigeon**, **Ring-necked Duck**, **Western Meadowlark**, and **Brewer's Blackbird**.

The West Yellowstone count on December 22 benefited from more open water on Hebgen Lake than any previous count. New to the count this year were both **Spotted Sandpiper** and **American White Pelican**. Other uncommon birds on the count included **Green-winged Teal, American Coot**, and eight **Wilson's Snipe**.

The Gardiner/Yellowstone count was also conducted on December 22. This count had a new high species total of 44, which is about ten species higher than average. New to the count this year were **Williamson's Sapsucker** and **Black-throated Gray Warbler**. New high counts were established for **Common Merganser** and **Steller's Jay**.

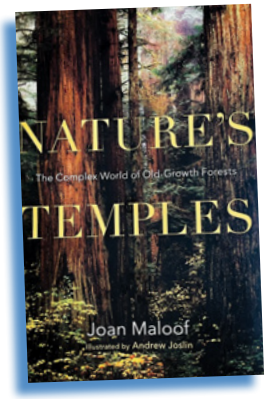
Three Forks takes the prize for the most additional species added to the cumulative total. It must have been the weather, with warm temperatures and little wind, except for the windy Madison River Valley. New to the count were **American White Pelican** (3), Steller's Jay, **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, and **Mountain Bluebird**. All the additional species were found by the Headwaters team, except for the Steller's Jay which was in the town of Three Forks.

The last count to be conducted, and the count with the most trying conditions, was the Ruby Valley count on January 4. The snowstorm that day made finding birds difficult. They did have new high counts for **Ferruginous Hawk** (2), Northern Pygmy Owl (2) and Western Meadowlark.

Any one of the birds highlighted above would be an exciting find in Montana during the winter months, but three of these birds deserve special note for their rarity. The Anna's Hummingbird seen near Gallatin Gateway is being sustained by a heated hummingbird feeder, otherwise it surely would have succumbed to the cold. This is the first winter record in this area for Anna's Hummingbird. The two Williamson's Sapsuckers are the first and second winter records for the northern Rockies! The Williamson's Sapsucker on the Bozeman count was first seen south of town by Byron Butler on December 11 and was last seen on December 18. The other Williamson's Sapsucker was seen only once on count day by John Cataldo in lower Mammoth, Wyoming. And finally, the bird of the season, a Black-throated Gray Warbler, was first seen on December 9, coming to Katy Duffy and Howard Weinberg's feeders in Gardiner. This warbler is the first recorded anywhere in the intermountain West during the winter months. Mealworms and suet are the foods of choice for this lost insectivore. And for the cherry on top, the Black-throated Gray Warbler was joined by a **Yellow-rumped Warbler** on January 9!

SAS BOOK CLUB NEWS – FEBRUARY

The **Sacajawea Audubon Society Book Club will gather on February 19th at Hope Lutheran Church from 6:30 to 7:45 pm**. You can find us in Room 123 mimicking birds at a feeder in the winter as we ingest high-calorie snacks while chattering (with excitement about the book at hand). This month the chatter will focus on *Nature's Temples: A Natural History of Old-Growth Forests*, first published in 2016, then revised and expanded by Joan Maloof (2023). If you would like to join the meeting remotely, contact Elisabeth Swanson (406-570-8325; elsswa@gmail.com) before the meeting.



Nature's Temples is a slim volume of less than 200 pages, yet surprisingly substantial. The book provides overviews of the natural history of old growth forests in North America, and the critical role of these ancient forests in securing the wellbeing of Planet Earth and its myriad life forms. British naturalist Diane Farrar described Maloof's book as the perfect "take along" reference to forest plants and fauna when traveling. Whether your interest is piqued by mosses, liverworts, snails, birds or the venerable trees themselves, and their ability to withstand centuries of destruction, thus providing the structural diversity essential for many species, Maloof's book won't disappoint.

The book is equally well-suited as a source of talking points about the value of old growth forests serving as carbon sinks, as wellsprings of biodiversity, and as sanctuaries providing for human tranquility and wellbeing. Despite the overwhelming benefits accruing to forests blessed with expanses of old growth – bursting with seeds, insects and unrealized potential – only 2% of forests east of the Mississippi and 5% west of the great river are old growth. As a result, Maloof's professional responsibilities as the founder of the national Old-Growth Forest Network include not only celebratory presentations as forests are folded into the network, but sadly she is often an invited speaker at locations where a verifiable old growth stand is on the cusp of being harvested. Maloof is never preachy and always the scientist, but passages from her forest elegies embedded in the book are deeply moving.

Abundant black and white drawings by Andrew Joslin – a naturalist, illustrator and professional tree climber – enhance the prose through their explanatory power and by creating a feeling that you have entered an old growth forest.

More about the author and illustrator: Joan Maloof has a PhD in Ecology, is a science writer and founder of the Old-Growth Forest Network, a national interrelated system of old growth native forests with public access, https://www.oldgrowthforest.net. Her publications include the books *Teaching the Trees* and *Among the Ancients,* and numerous scientific articles.

JOIN THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT (GBBC)!

Join us, February 14–17, 2025, when the world comes together for the love of birds. Yes, this is a global bird count!

Participating is easy, fun to do alone or with others, and can be done anywhere you find birds.

- Decide where you will watch birds.
- Watch birds for 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days, February 14–17, 2025.
- 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 tell us what birds you are seeing or hearing.

Three ways you can enter your data: https://www.birdcount.org/participate/

If you already use Merlin or eBird, all entries over the 4 days automatically count towards GBBC. Keep doing what you are doing!

February IAWP Trivia Night

Gallatin Valley Wildlife: Past, Present, and Future

Challenge yourself regarding *Gallatin Valley Wildlife: Past, Present, and Future*… from the river bottoms to the mountain peaks and everything in between. Hosted by Ken Sinay.

Tuesday, February 18
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

IAWP Trivia Nights at Lockhorn Cider House will continue to be held on the third Tuesday evening of every month in 2025!

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

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!

Choose your membership level above, 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/