NOVEMBER 2026

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 & Membership Meeting: Monday, November 9

Home on the Range Reintroducing Sharp-tailed Grouse to Western Montana

with Laura Dykstra, Department of Animal & Range Sciences

Sharp-tailed Grouse were once abundant in intermountain grasslands west of the Continental Divide in Montana, but populations declined as the region developed, and sharp-tails became locally extirpated by the early 2000s. However, sharp-tails still thrive in the prairies of eastern Montana, where each spring males gather at leks and perform their elaborate courtship dances. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks began reintroducing Sharp-tailed Grouse to western Montana in 2021.

Each spring, sharp-tails are captured at leks in central and eastern Montana, transported across the state by volunteers, and released at sites in the Bitterroot, Blackfoot, and Drummond Valleys.

Laura Dykstra in the field tracking Sharp-tailed Grouse.

To date, more than 800 grouse have been translocated!

Each Sharp-tailed Grouse receives a radio collar or a GPS transmitter, allowing our research team to monitor them throughout the year using telemetry. We track female movements and habitat use as they find a home range, search for a mate, nest, and raise a brood.

Sharp-tailed Grouse eggs.

We've been encouraged by the successful fledging of more than 200 chicks and the establishment of 5 new leks at the reintroduction sites. By studying translocated grouse, we've learned what influences their behavior and survival after they are released, helping us improve our conservation strategies.

Now, five years later, Sharp-tailed Grouse are dancing in western Montana again. How can we make sure that they are here to stay?

Laura Dykstra holiding Sharp-tailed Grouse.

Laura Dykstra is a Ph.D. candidate in the Wildlife Habitat Ecology Lab at Montana State University. She studies the movements and demography of Sharp-tailed Grouse reintroduced to western Montana, in collaboration with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and has spent the past four summers tracking sharp-tails with radio collars across cattle ranches. Her research focuses on science-based wildlife conservation on working lands, particularly on finding strategies to improve translocation outcomes. Laura received her M.S. from the University of Connecticut, where she researched Mallards in exurban landscapes. She grew up in suburban southern Ohio, where studying Red-shouldered Hawks introduced her to wildlife research. She enjoys birding around Bozeman, especially finding a Prairie Falcon on winter raptor surveys.

SAS Monthly Program Meeting and Social

The in-person meeting will be held on **November 9 at Hope Lutheran Church; 2152 W Graf, Bozeman.**

A **social begins at 6:30 PM; the program begins at 7:00 PM**. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own reusable cups.

Attendees—in person and 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. December's 2026 program will feature Bob Landis.

For virtual attendance, register at sacajaweaaudubon.org/program.

For more information, contact programs@sacajaweaaudubon.org.

MESSAGE *from* PRESIDENT, DOUG MCSPADDEN

My sincere thanks to everyone who volunteered at Raptor Fest, as well as to the **generous contributors** who sustain the Raptor Count program. Your time, energy, and support help make this work possible, and we are deeply grateful.

With roughly 63–65% of Montana's land in private ownership—and approximately two-thirds of that land held by **4,000 landowners**—it's easy to see why National Audubon and Montana Audubon are working collaboratively with landowners to identify and protect vital wildlife and bird habitat.

Our November program will feature **Laura Dykstra**, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Animal & Range Sciences at Montana State University's Wildlife Habitat Ecology Lab. She will share insights from her work on wildlife conservation and management in working landscapes. We hope you will join us for this engaging presentation.

The Christmas Bird Count is just around the corner. We look forward to sharing more details and welcoming members of all experience levels to take part in this **cherished Audubon tradition**.

This is also the time of year when we invite our neighbors to join Sacajawea Audubon Society and ask our current members to **renew your memberships**.

Thank you for your continued support and for helping make our region a welcoming place for birds and those who admire them.

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY LEADERSHIP

President	Doug McSpadden, pres@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Vice President	*Open Position*
Past President	Chris Nixon, saschrisnixon@gmail.com
Treasurer	Brad Frazee, treas@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Secretary	John Edwards, sec@sacajaweaaudubon.org
Membership	Loreene Reid, membership@sacajaweaaudubon.org

Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve

President	Frank Marchak, Frankm@bozemanwetlands.org
Treasurer	Loreene Reid, loreener@bozemanwetlands.org

For a complete list of board members and activity leaders, visit: sacajaweaaudubon.org/our-board

SAS Upcoming Events!

02 Nov: **SAS Board Meeting (virtual) | 6:30 p.m.**

03 Nov: **Indreland Preserve Board Meeting at Confluence | 3:30 p.m.**

3 & 4 Nov: **PechaKucha "Look Up! Stories and Magic in the Night Sky" with SAS Dark Skies Project Lillian Lin at the Ellen Theatre | 6:40 p.m.**

9 Nov: **SAS Program, "Reintorducing Sharp-tailed Grouse to Western Montana" with Laura Dykstra at Hope Lutheran Church | Social at 6:30 p.m.; Program at 7 p.m.**

17 Nov: **Wildlife Trivia at Lockhorn Cider House | 6:30 p.m.**

18 Nov: **Book Club Meeting at Hope Lutheran Church | 6:30 p.m.**

22 Nov: **Celebration of Ancient Forests and the Birds who Depend on Them at Country Bookshelf | 4 p.m.**

05 Dec: **Christmas Stroll; SAS Booth in front of Chalet Sports | 4:30 p.m.**

14 Dec: **Last day to Raffle for the '26/'27 Bridger Bowl Season Pass | Click here.**

14 Dec: **SAS Special Holiday Program celebrating Bob Landis with Doug Smith and John Marzluff the Ellen Theatre *(more details on backpage)***

14 Dec–5 Jan: **Christmas Bird Counts (*Check sacajaweaaudubon.org for a list of local counts*)**

01 Jan: **Renew your Local SAS Memberships today!**

31 Jan: **Snowshoe tour at the Indreland Preserve | 1 p.m.**

Visit sacajaweaaudubon.org for the latest happenings and bozemanwetlands.org for all that will be going on this fall at the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve.

Speak Up - Your Voice Matters!

Urge Congress to Advance a Conservation-Forward Farm Bill!

The Farm Bill represents our country's single largest investment in conservation on private lands, and can help reverse the alarming decline of grassland and forest birds; act.audubon.org

Bozeman Urban Forest Management Plan

The Bozeman Urban Forest Management Plan will build upon the framework of the City's current UFMP, created in 2016, that aims to "sustainably, holistically, and efficiently manage Bozeman's urban forest to realize the full expanse of benefits urban trees can provide"; engage.bozemanmt.gov

BIRD NOTES

..... by John Parker

Mid to late fall is a season of surprises, and once again, this year is producing its share of unusual birds. Typically, lakes are the go-to locations to be searching for the unusual strays, but there may be a surprise waiting to be found in your yard.

With the exceptionally mild September, the waterfowl numbers and variety hadn't really changed by early October. But even so, an outing to three Forks Ponds on October 4th rewarded Robin Wolcott with 4 **Greater White-fronted Geese**.

On October 11th Andrew Guttenberg and Davey Walters spent the day combing through thousands of **American Wigeons** at Hebgen Lake, and eventually Davey found an adult male **Eurasian Wigeon**.

But the most outstanding bird of the day was the **Iceland (Thayer's) Gull** seen moving up and down the Madison Arm of the lake. This is the first time an Iceland Gull has been recorded for Gallatin County.

Anna's Hummingbird. Photo by Taylor McDowell

Several **Sabine's Gulls** have been seen at this area's lakes, including Cottonwood Reservoir, Harrison Reservoir, and Hebgen Lake. The first sighting of the season was the single Sabine's Gull seen on September 14th by Vic Fesolowitz at Cottonwood Reservoir.

Now that there are more people out looking for birds on a consistent basis, a **Red Phalarope** seems to turn up about every couple of years in this area, especially so at Harrison Reservoir. So, it wasn't a total surprise when Taylor McDowell discovered a Red Phalarope at Harrison on September 27th.

Red Phalarope. Photo by Taylor McDowell

On October 4th John and Tamie Parker saw a hummingbird at their house south of Bozeman, but their photographs proved inconclusive. They were shared with experts, who were speculating that it was some sort of **Anna's Hummingbird hybrid.** More satisfying was the female Anna's Hummingbird that made a brief appearance at their half-frozen flowerboxes early on the morning of October 13th.

John Steele had over 30 **Pinyon Jays** visit his feeders in Manhattan. This was the first time he'd had them at his house. A few **Blue Jays** have turned up this fall, from Big Timber to Three Forks. The first to arrive was a single Blue Jay that Chris Keil spotted at Sacajawea Park in Livingston on September 4th. The other five or so Blue Jay sightings were clustered around the end of September and early October.

A gorgeous adult male **Magnolia Warbler** made a stop in Lila Siggins' Big Timber yard on the 10th of October. This "eastern" warbler is quite rare in southwestern Montana, with fewer than ten records.

NOVEMBER BOOK CLUB NEWS

This month, we'll be discussing *Birding Without Borders: An Obsession, a Quest, and the Biggest Year in the World* by Noah Strycker. The meeting will be held **at Hope Lutheran Church** on **Wednesday, November 18th**. Doors will open at 6 p.m., and the **discussion will begin at 6:30 p.m.** The link for virtual attendees will be available starting at 6:20 p.m.

Email Dr. Chris Brown at chrisb.sunroom@gmail.com for further information and to request Zoom access.

UPCOMING BOOK CLUB:

December: No Meeting

20 January: *Fire Weather: A True Story from a Hotter World* by John Vaillant

17 February: *The Feather Thief: Beauty, Obsession, and the Natural History Heist of the Century* by Kirk Wallace Johnson

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS: WETLAND RESTORATION 2026

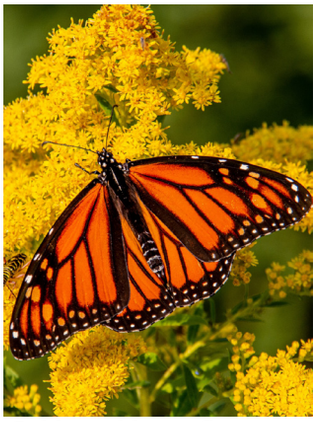
..... *by Ashley Hall*

This past summer, our Busy Beaver volunteers helped plant over 100 native plants as part of our ongoing efforts to conserve, restore, and enhance the Indreland Preserve's wetlands and surrounding natural areas. These new plantings represent an important step toward creating a healthier, more resilient habitat for birds, pollinators, and other native wildlife.

Special shoutout and thank you to Allison Rognlie, Volunteer Project Lead, who grew plants from seeds collected at the wetland and other locations around Montana, along with the Busy Beavers who help plant, water, and weed.

WHY ARE NATIVE PLANTS ESSENTIAL TO A HEALTHY, THRIVING ECOSYSTEM?

Over thousands of years, bees, butterflies, birds, and other native wildlife have evolved alongside specific plants, developing intricate relationships that support entire ecosystems. As European settlers colonized North America and moved west, they also brought plants from other parts of the world. Some, like leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*), may have been introduced intentionally for their showy flowers, while others, like common hound's-tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), arrived accidentally, hitching rides on clothing or in the fur of domesticated animals. By restoring plants native to Montana, we are rebuilding the foundation of an entire ecosystem, one plant at a time. After all, "If you build it, they will come."



Goldenrod butterfly.

Planting a diversity of native species helps support pollinators throughout the growing season. Monarch butterflies, for example, don't just prefer milkweed; their caterpillars need it to survive. Monarchs lay their eggs exclusively on milkweed, and the compounds their caterpillars consume from milkweed leaves make them toxic or unpalatable to many predators, including birds. Other native plants offer a wealth of resources for wildlife. Coneflowers (*Echinacea*), for instance, provide food and habitat for multiple species. Silvery checkerspot caterpillars rely on certain coneflowers as host plants, while adult butterflies feed on the nectar they provide. After coneflowers finish blooming, their seedheads provide food for American goldfinches, which feed seeds to their young during the late summer, when other food resources may become scarce.

Curlycup Gumweed.

As these new plants grow and mature, they will help create an increasingly welcoming landscape for native wildlife. Every plant makes a difference, and you can too!

SPECIES PLANTED AT THE INDRELAND AUDUBON WETLAND PRESERVE

- ❒ **Pearly Everlasting** ***(Anaphalis margaritacea)***
- ❒ **Hemp Dogbane** ***(Apocynum cannabinum)***
- ❒ **Silver Sagebrush** ***(Artemisia cana)***
- ❒ **Silver Wormwood** ***(Artemisia ludoviciana)***
- ❒ **Swamp Milkweed** ***(Asclepias incarnata)***
- ❒ **Showy Milkweed** ***(Asclepias speciosa)***
- ❒ **Rocky Mountain Beeplant** ***(Cleome serrulata)***
- ❒ **Narrow-leaved Coneflower** ***(Echinacea angustifolia)***
- ❒ **Purple Coneflower** ***(Echinacea purpurea)***
- ❒ **Curlycup Gumweed** ***(Grindella squarrosa)***
- ❒ **Common Sunflower** ***(Helianthus annuus)***
- ❒ **Tahoka Daisy** ***(Machaeranthera tanacetifolia)***
- ❒ **Upright Prairie Coneflower** ***(Ratibida columnifera)***
- ❒ **Canada Goldenrod** ***(Solidago canadensis)***
- ❒ **Late Goldenrod** ***(Solidago gigantea)***
- ❒ **Field Goldenrod** ***(Solidago nemoralis)***
- ❒ **Smooth Blue Aster** ***(Symphyotrichum laeve)***
- ❒ **Blazing Star** ***(Liatris punctata)***

Interested in volunteering? Become a Busy Beaver! Visit bozemanwetlands.org to learn more about how you can help restore and protect Bozeman's wetlands—not only for wildlife, but for future generations.

Following the Water at Indreland: Four seasons of groundwater monitoring establish a baseline for wetland restoration *with Frank Marchak*

Since May 2023, volunteers have measured groundwater weekly from spring through fall at the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve. These four seasons of data establish a baseline for comparing water levels before and after wetland restoration.

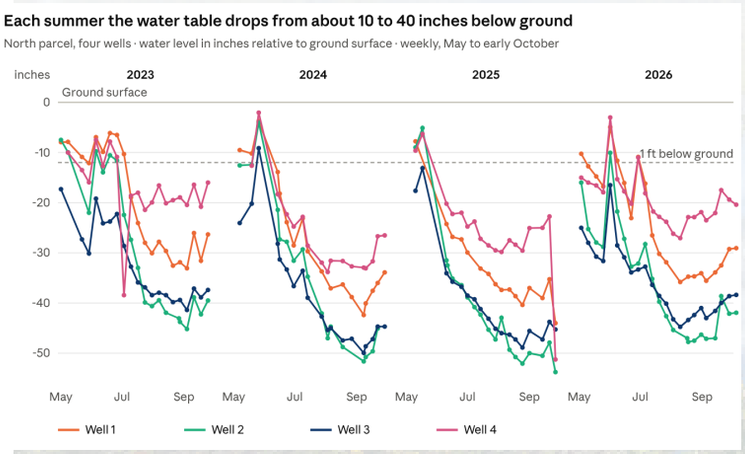
Water Monitor Beaver measures piezometer water levels.

Wells and piezometers look similar above ground but measure different things. Wells have openings along most of their buried length, measuring the water table and showing how close groundwater comes to the surface. Wetland scientists generally look for water within a foot of the surface during part of the growing season. Piezometers have an opening only at the bottom, measuring water pressure at a specific depth. They help reveal whether groundwater is feeding the wetland from below or draining downward. Restoration planning benefits from both measurements.

The preserve has four wells on the north parcel and five piezometers on the south. Two underwater piezometers cannot be read, leaving seven devices in this report. Volunteers measure each device every Saturday at 10 a.m. From 578 usable readings, a consistent seasonal pattern emerges.

On the north parcel, groundwater typically sits 5–15 inches below ground in May and early June, sometimes rising closer to the surface after heavy rain. It then falls through summer, reaching 30–50 inches below ground by late August, before recovering slightly in September. Well 4 is consistently the wettest, while Wells 2 and 3 are driest. Summers 2024 and 2025 were especially dry, with Wells 2 and 3 dropping more than four feet below ground.

The south parcel behaves differently. Piezometer 3 usually registers above ground, indicating upward groundwater pressure. Piezometers 4 and 5 remain relatively stable, generally 3–11 inches below ground. In 2024, all three dropped sharply but recovered in 2025.



This baseline will help determine whether restoration improves water levels or whether changes simply reflect yearly weather differences.

Thank you to our dedicated Saturday volunteers! To join the Busy Beavers monitoring team next season, visit [bozemanwetlands.org.](bozemanwetlands.org)

HELP BIRDS AND WILDLIFE THRIVE
RENEW YOUR SAS MEMBERSHIP FOR 2027!

You enjoy Sacajawea Audubon Society's birding trips, monthly programs, and educational events. Care about protecting birds, wildlife, and the wild places of southwest Montana, including the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem?

PLEASE RENEW YOUR SAS MEMBERSHIP FOR 2027!

100% of your local membership dues directly support SAS educational and conservation programs. **Even if you belong to the National Audubon Society (NAS), we need your support through a separate local SAS membership.**

Your Membership Makes a Difference:

SAS members help protect working lands and wildlife habitats, promote bird-friendly communities, provide environmental education for all ages, advocate for local conservation, strengthen community partnerships, and support educational opportunities at the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve.

Enjoy Being Part of Our Flock!

Members enjoy **free monthly keynote speaker** meetings and guided **birding field trips**, a member e-newsletter or paper newsletter published nine times a year, discounts on **educational workshops** and **special events, member-only sales, and opportunities to connect with fellow nature lovers** and participate in **citizen science projects.**

Joining or renewing is easy! Just fill out the paper form on your right, mail it out, and fly with us (*or use this QR Code*):

Local SAS membership is separate from National Audubon Society (NAS) membership. We encourage you to support both! To join or renew with NAS through our membership form, check the appropriate box and add $20.

Thank you for being part of our flock!

Sacajawea Audubon Society's Board of Directors

SACAJAWEA AUDUBON SOCIETY ANNUAL CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP

Join the Flock, Fly High Together!

Sacajawea Audubon Society (SAS) encourages everyone who enjoys our field trips or our monthly programs or supports our conservation work to join our local chapter. Even if you belong to National Audubon Society, we need your support through a Local SAS Membership.

100% of your Local Membership dues directly support SAS education and conservation programs.

January – December 2027

Membership dues covers an individual or nuclear family

Basic Membership.....$25

Supporting Membership.....$50

Student Membership.....$10

Additional Donation $ _____

- ❒ Bridger Raptor Study
- ❒ Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve
- ❒ Story Mill Park Bird Feeding Station
- ❒ Wherever is Needed

Sacajawea Audubon Society **Newsletter** is sent by email.

❒ Check here to receive a **paper copy**.*

**We do not share your information except with National Audubon Society, so your contact information is safe with us.*

❒ Please check this box if you do **NOT** want your information shared with National Audubon Society.

❒ **YES!** Include another **$20** to join National Audubon Society.

Choose your membership level above, and THANK YOU for considering an additional donation.

Mail this form and your check to:

Sacajawea Audubon Society, Attn: Membership
PO Box 1711, Bozeman, MT 59771-1711

or Visit: sacajaweaaudubon.org/membership to join or renew your membership online.

Name(s) : _____

_____

Address: _____
PO Box or Physical Address

_____
City State Zip

Phone: (_____) _____

Email: _____ May '26 Newsletter

YOUR MEMBERSHIP MATTERS!

Burdock Meets its Match ...Again! *by Paulette Epple*

We are celebrating our successes! This August, 38 hard-working volunteers harvested 2,000 pounds of invasive burdock from trails, parks and neighborhoods across Gallatin County. We do this to prevent deaths of birds and bats who become entangled in burdock's Velcro-like burs.

Our influence has been growing. This is the third year in a row that the Northeast Neighborhood Association and the Midtown Neighborhood Association have organized their own volunteers, removing a huge truckload of burdock from their alleys and vacant lots. And this year Headwaters Academy joined the effort and worked to control burdock on their campus.

Our success is only due to the hard work and time commitment of our incredible volunteers. Thank you to each and every one of you!

Volunteers (not all pictured): *Jennifer Abbott, John Backes, Susan Bilo, Roxanne Bryant, David Cole, Catherine Courtenaye, Billy Eickman, Andy Epple, Paulette Epple, Leo Freeman, Carla Grier, David Grier, Adira Groundwater (age 9), Yalda Groundwater (age 7), Lou Ann Harris, Steve Hoffman, Deborah Hines, Ellie Isler, Kim Kearney, Peggy Kimmet, Ron Kimmet, Bill Klenn, Susan Krueger, Adam Makhluf, Beth Madden, Elizabeth Mann, Frank Marchak, Brigitte Schulze Martinez, Stephanie Nelson, Peggy Osbourn, John Parker, Anne Ready, Richard Ready, Julie Rognlie, Gretchen Rupp, Cathy Stamm, Jennifer Wang,*

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Old -Growth Forest Network and Sacajawea Audubon Society present:

Join award-winning nature writer Marina Richie and naturalist Ashley Martens in reading, conversation, and celebration of the new book Feathered Forest: Aloft with Birds in Ancient Trees on **November 22, 2026 at 4p.m. at the Country Bookshelf**.

MOTUS Update

by Ben Goodheart

We have deployed tags on several birds at or near the Indreland Audubon Wetland Preserve, including **Lincoln's Sparrow**, **White-crowned Sparrow**, and **Evening Grosbeak**. Evening Grosbeaks in particular have suffered severe declines in the last several decades and are considered data deficient.

Lincoln's Sparrow. Photo by Jason Gregg

Our two tagged **Bobolinks** continue their journey southward. The Bobolink that was in Iowa is now in St. Petersburg, FL; and the Bobolink that was in Indiana is now outside of Charleston, SC! Hopefully these birds fare well with the passing of Hurricane Isaias since Caribbean storms are known to impact this grassland species.

With luck, data from these MOTUS towers can help us understand these impacts and more. One of the **White Pelicans** that has been up at the Headwaters site is now in the Fort Collins area. This individual really gets around, having made stops in Houston, Illinois, the Canadian border, and the Snake River Valley in Idaho!

Check these movements out and more at MOTUS.org!

WELCOME MEMBERS OF THE PINTLER AUDUBON SOCIETY!

The **Pintler Audubon Society has officially merged into the Sacajawea Audubon Society**, and we are delighted to welcome members in the former Pintler region to our growing community!

Your **National Audubon Society membership now connects you with SAS as your local chapter**. We also encourage you and your family to consider a local SAS membership. Local dues and donations stay here in Montana to support conservation projects in your region.

For more than 10 years, SAS has supported projects in the former Pintler region, including waterfowl protection efforts at Berkeley Pit, bird point counts and Christmas Bird Counts in the Ruby River, and wetland restoration in the Beaverhead and Big Hole regions.

We are pleased that **Jack Kirkley, formerly of the Pintler chapter board, has joined the SAS Board of Directors**, helping preserve local knowledge and representation.

Together, we are building a stronger community for bird conservation across Southwest Montana!

Thank you for helping protect the birds and habitats we all cherish. The sky is your limit with SAS. Soar with us!

Questions about membership, the newsletter, or volunteer opportunities? Contact Jack Kirkley or Loreene Reid at membership@sacajaweaadubon.org

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.