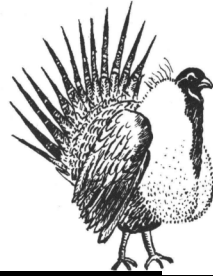


PLAINS & PEAKS



Vol. 44—Iss. 1

FEBRUARY—2010

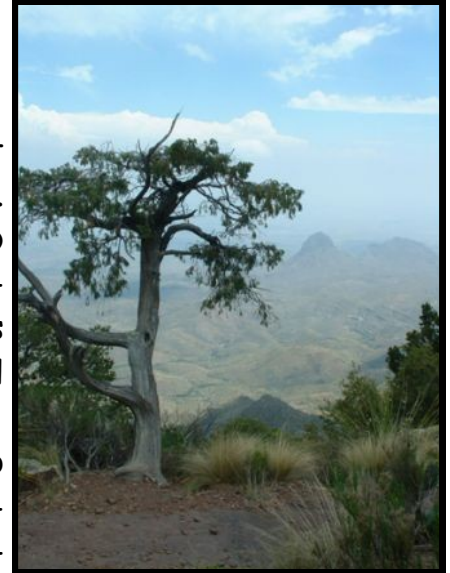
MURIE AUDUBON

Casper Wyoming - Monthly Publication

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK, "WHERE RAINBOWS WAIT FOR RAIN"

Scott Burt, Ph.D., Visiting Associate Professor of Biology at SUW/CC will be our guest speaker for this year's banquet. Scott has a B.S. and M.S. in Biology from Angelo State and his PhD from the University of New Mexico. While his training is specialized in mammals, he has had a long history in the biology of birds and often plans vacations to include birding at Big Bend National Park.

Big Bend National Park was authorized by Congress in 1935 to preserve and protect a representative area of the Chihuahuan Desert along the Rio Grande for the benefit and enjoyment of pre-



CALENDAR

- Feb. 2—6PM—Banquet meeting—ACGC
- Feb. 2—7PM—Board Meeting—ACGC
- Feb. 6—10-12 Noon—Bird ID class—ACGC
- Feb. 12-14—Great Back Yard Bird Count
- Feb. 13—24th Annual Banquet & Fund-raiser—5:30—Parkway Plaza—tickets are \$25 each or a table of 8 for \$175—Call Rose-Mary for tickets (577-0568)
- Feb. 15—Deadline for articles for the March *Plains & Peaks*
- Feb. 20—Jackson Canyon Eagle watch field trip
- March 18-20—40th Annual Rivers & Wildlife Celebration—Kearney, NE

SAVE PAPER, MONEY & FOLDING TIME—READ YOUR NEWSLETTER AT MURIE'S WEBSITE—CONTACT ROSE-MARY KING—
rking7453@bresnan.net

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sent and future generations. The park encompasses more than 800,000 acres in south-west Texas and has national significance as the largest protected area of Chihuahuan Desert topography and ecology in the United States. The park's river, desert, and mountain environments support an extraordinary richness of biological diversity, including endemic plants and animals, and provide unparalleled recreation opportunities. The geologic features and Cretaceous and Tertiary fossils in Big Bend create opportunities to study the sedimentary and igneous processes. Archeological and historical resources provide examples of cultural interaction in the Big Bend Region and varied ways humans adapted to the desert and river environments. The Rio Grande is life-sustaining for plants, animals and human inhabitants beyond its banks.

This remote and seldom visited park offers to the intrepid traveler (and bird-watcher!!) a suite of remarkable natural treasures, from the ribbon of the Rio Grande River to an island of forested mountains surrounded by a sea of desert. A surprising number of plants and animals, including more than 450 spe-

cies of birds, call Big Bend home. This presentation will cover some of the organisms that manage to survive (and thrive) in such a harsh environment. The past, present, and future of the park will also be discussed.

The Parkway Plaza will be the location for this year's annual banquet on February 13, 2010. The tickets are \$25 each, or you can reserve a table of eight for \$175; contact Rose-Mary King (577-0568) or (262-4861) for tickets. We will begin the evening with a social hour at 5:30 PM with dinner at 6:30 PM, so you should have time to visit and check out the raffle and silent auction items. Proceeds from the event will be used to support Murie Audubon's education programs. **Program Chair—Bruce Walgren** (Photo by Scott Burt)

PRESIDENTIAL PONDERINGS



We're having a party! It's called the "Murie Audubon Society Annual Banquet," an occasion to eat, consume beverage of choice, court

Lady Luck (raffles), meet old friends and make new ones (excepting maybe those you out-bid in silent auction), and above all a time to be merry! Combining the above with an excellent speaker and presentation of awards to deserving people makes an evening to remember. The fun begins 5:30 Saturday, February 13th with a happy hour at the Parkway Plaza followed by a delicious western style buffet. This year, the Natrona County High School Strings will accompany the merriment.

Banquet planning commences 2-3 years ahead with the booking of a facility and thinking about availability of potential speakers. This year we're delighted to welcome back Dr. Scott Burt, who will talk on the Natural History of Big Bend National Park. You may remember his description of amazing feats of endurance and navigation involved in bird migration when he spoke to us at our September membership meeting. We would like to think that Rose-Mary King is Banquet Chair for Life, but she will be stepping down after several years of deftly co-coordinating this

event. The annual planning process accelerates when the Banquet Committee convenes in October. A Master of Ceremonies is recruited, and the committee and Murie Board work together to identify individuals deserving of awards, always welcoming input from the membership. Committee members contact businesses and individuals for donations of items for raffle and silent auction. Much thought is given to centerpieces and favors, as well as the placemat themes translated to delightful drawings by Mrs. Grogon's class at Paradise Valley Elementary School. Centerpieces this year will be freestanding collages of photos by Art Van Rensselaer. Favors will be a surprise (hint: something to do with suet). Not to be overlooked is the task of designing banquet tickets, posters and awards. The committee, Board members and whomever else we can co-opt sell the tickets. Finally, the banquet program goes to press, listing the order of proceedings and expressing thanks to volunteers and contributors of raffle and silent auction items. On the day of the banquet, commit-

tee members and helpers gather to lay out these items, each accompanied by a card identifying the donor. Minimum bids (if appropriate) for silent auction items need to be agreed and bid sheets labeled. The night of the banquet, volunteers collect admissions and wander around the room wreathed in raffle tickets, a not-so-silent come-on to purchase more. During the raffle, our more able-bodied volunteers (young people) deliver winnings to the winners. Planning the banquet requires astute and dedicated leadership. Thank you Rose-Mary! And thanks to the committee and volunteers! See you on February 13th.

President—Jim Brown

MURIE'S CBC

Murie Audubon's CBC was held on Saturday, Dec. 19, 2009. The following species were tallied.

C a n a d a
Goose 1255, Tundra Swan cw, Amer. Wigeon 2, Mallard 1079, Common Goldeneye 302, Hooded Merganser 1, Common Merganser 35, Chu-

kar cw, Dusky (Blue) Grouse 2, Wild Turkey 194, Great Blue Heron 1, Bald Eagle 27 (19 adults, 8 imm.), N. Harrier 4, Sharp-shinned Hawk 1, Cooper's Hawk 1, Red-tailed Hawk 10, Ferruginous Hawk 2, Rough-legged Hawk 25, Golden Eagle 33 (24 adults, 9 imm.), Amer. Kestrel cw, Merlin 3, Prairie Falcon 3, Rock Pigeon 570, Eurasian Collared-Dove 416, Mourning Dove 1, E. Screech-Owl cw, Great Horned Owl 11, Belted Kingfisher 3, Downy Woodpecker 10, Hairy Woodpecker 13, Amer. Three-toed Woodpecker 2, N. Flicker 96 (R-S 95, Y-S 1), Northern Shrike 1, Steller's Jay 16, Blue Jay 30, Clark's Nutcracker 95, Black-billed



WYOMING CBC IN ACTION

(Cartoon by Harry Martin)
Magpie 124, Amer. Crow 51, Common Raven 18, Horned

Lark 60, Black-capped Chickadee 108, Mountain Chickadee 38, Bushtit 4, Red-breasted Nuthatch 8, White-breasted Nuthatch 11, Brown Creeper 1, Townsend's Solitaire 23, Amer. Robin 531, European Starling 2017, Cedar Waxwing 5, Spotted Towhee cw, Amer. Tree Sparrow 6, Song Sparrow 2, Junco - Dark-eyed 104, (Oregon form 9, pink-sided 2, slate colored 12, 81 undifferentiated), Gray-crowned Rosy Finch 4, House Finch 300, Red Crossbill 22, Amer. Goldfinch 7, Evening Grosbeak 228, House Sparrow 3247.

Number of Species 55 -
Total Individuals 11,186

**Chris Michelson & Bruce
Walgren—Compilers**

BATES HOLE CBC

The Bates Hole 2009 Christmas Bird Count was taken on January 1, 2010. The following birds were seen.

Mallard 103, Pintail 5, Common Goldeneye 110, Common Mergansers 4, Ring-necked Pheasant 9, Sage-grouse 251, Wild Turkey 169, Bald Eagle 12 (3 adult, 9 immature), N. Harrier 1, Sharp-shinned Hawk 1, Gos-hawk 1, Red-tailed Hawk 4,

Rough-legged Hawk 22, Ferruginous Hawk 4, Golden Eagle 13 (8 adults, 5 immature), Rock Pigeon 60, Great Horned Owl 10, Belted Kingfisher 1, Hairy Woodpecker 1, Red-shafted Flicker 4, Horned Lark 120, N. Shrike 2, Pinyon Jay 4, Clark's Nutcracker 7, Magpie 207, Amer. Crow 2, Common Raven 26, Black-capped Chickadee 14, Mountain Chickadee 1, Bushtit 14, White-breasted Nuthatch 1, Dipper 2, Townsend's Solitaire 16, Amer. Robin 5, European Starling 202, Amer. Tree Sparrow 97, Song Sparrow 15, Dark-eyed Junco 67 (Slate-colored 26, Oregon 8, Pink-sided 16, undifferentiated 17), Red-winged Blackbird 23, Gray-crowned Rosy Finch 300, House Finch 102, Pine Siskin 62, Amer. Goldfinch 4, Evening Grosbeak 14, House Sparrow 68.

13 observers and 2 feeder watchers identified 45 total species and 2,160 individual birds.

The highlight of the count was the 251 Sage-grouse, a good showing for a bird some consider as possibly threatened. The thirteen Golden Eagles seen were fewer than are often seen on the Bates Hole CBC. The Bates Hole rabbit population is currently at a cyclical low and the rabbits are a principal food for the Golden Eagle.

No Canada Geese were seen which is unusual. The Casper CBC had a large goose count. It would seem that the local Canada Geese have moved to town for the winter.

Noticeably absent were warmer season birds like Meadowlarks and Gulls that stay during our milder winters but move south when the winter turns cold as this one has. On the other hand, there was a relatively high count of Rough-legged Hawks, an Arctic bird that migrates south to Wyoming for the winter.

The Count was sponsored by the Murie Audubon Society of Casper and is part of the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count. The count is an attempt to count all the birds in a 15 mile diameter circle. Points on the circle include Government bridge, the junction of highways 220 and 487, the Free-land Cemetery on the flank of Muddy Mountain and a point slightly north of where highway 487 crosses Lawn Creek. The count has been taken annually in the same area since 1977.

Participants in the count include from Casper Tom Heald, Robin Kepple, Chris Michelson, Wanda Peters, Hustace Scott, Karen Snyder

and Dwaine Wagoner, from Riverton Jessica and Andy Anderson, and from Bates Hole Harry and Tony Martin, and Charles and George Scott with Milcey Scott and Susan Martin watching feeders.

Charles Scott—Compiler

GOVERNMENT INTELLIGENCE

(By—Lewis and Annette Hein)

Jake tried to reassure himself: all he had to do was talk knowledgeably about birds. It didn't matter whether it was accurate, it just had to sound genuine. He recalled instructions from the *FBI Undercover Manual*: "When trying to sound knowledgeable about subjects on which you are ignorant, follow the lead of the group." If he just kept that in mind, everything would be fine.

Anyway, he didn't have time for worrying. The field trip party that he must keep under surveillance was assembling at the trailhead. All three of them carried suspiciously powerful binoculars. Taking a deep breath and trying to act casual, he strolled over to the group and asked "Is this the Audu-

bon field trip?"

Everyone turned. "Yes, it is," answered a middle-aged lady. Something seemed to startle her as she looked at him, then she asked, "Do you want to come along?"

Jake had already provided himself with binoculars and a notebook. "I do," he replied. "I'm from the Game and Fish, by the way." The Audubon members stared at him for a moment, then glanced at each other. After a moment one of them said, "Well, we're glad to have you. Let's go!"

The group started slowly along the trail, and Jake began to feel that he was doing quite well. He had completely forgotten that stamped conspicuously on the cover of his notebook was "Department of Homeland Security, Audubon Surveillance Project."

As they walked, Jake noticed that all the other members kept glancing at him, and he decided he should do something more to establish his cover. He was trying to think of an intelligent remark about birds when someone said "Hey, isn't that a prong horned lark?"

A small brown bird with bold black face markings was walking about in the grass.

"Yes" said someone else, "that looks like a prong horned lark to me." Jake nodded and

wrote "1 prong horned lark" in his notebook. He was beginning to relax. Yes, this was going to go fine. Just then he heard a noise that sounded like branches rubbing together. Everybody stood listening for a minute then someone said, "That sounds like a creaky owl." Jake confidently agreed. "Yup, that's a creaky owl."

"You know," said someone after a short pause "I think creaky owls are the only birds that use pellet stoves. They burn owl pellets in them."

"Why yes" said Jake "I remember reading about that somewhere."

A small yellow bird flashed across an open space and into some bushes. "That must be a wagtail warbler," said someone.

"I do believe it is" said Jake, feeling very proud of how knowledgeable he was sounding. He decided it was time to say something authoritative. He shut his eyes, pointed at random and said, "Looks like a greater goldfinch over there."

Everyone agreed and Jake felt relieved. He figured all these bird names were code words anyway.

The party continued along the trail till they reached a small picnic area overlooking

the river. The Audubon members stepped to the riverbank and pretended to search for water birds, but Jake knew what they were really doing. Three miles away were the towers of the John Davidson power plant, puffing clouds of steam. Undoubtedly, the Audubon members were here to receive steam signals about a sabotage plot from their confederates at the power plant.

The birdwatchers had their binoculars pointed across the river at the power plant and code words were flying faster than ever: "There's a pelican!" "Yes, and there's another!" "Three geese behind that little island." "Look, mallards! They're probably nesting in that marshy bit." "There's a sandpiper."

Jake was noting down this conversation for later decoding when another person arrived.

"Sorry I'm a little late. Seen any good birds?"

"Why yes," answered Jake. "We found a pronghorned lark, a creaky owl, and a greater goldfinch."

The man looked blank. "A creaky owl?" he asked. "What in heaven's name is a creaky owl?"

"You know. One that burns owl pellets." said Jake, beginning to wonder whether he was doing so well after all.

"Owl pellets? What—" The man suddenly looked at him sharply and said "Oh yes, of course. Do you see that pacifist loon over there?" He pointed to a small black bird swimming on the river.

"Oh yes," said Jake. "I wondered what that was."

The man went over and conferred in a low voice with the other Audubon members. Then he announced "Time to wrap up the field trip."

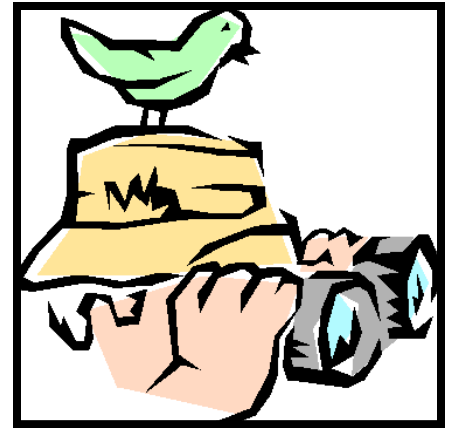
"OK," said Jake. He was pleased that he'd kept under cover so well. He would have lots of useful material to report.

Twenty minutes later Jake walked proudly into his boss' office. "Hi, I've been spying on those Audubon people like you said."

His boss stared at him. "You didn't carry that notebook on the field trip, did you?" "Well, of course I did—**OH, NO!**"

(Lewis, 15, and Annette, 17, first became interested in birding when their family took several summer-long camping "vacations" near Jackson Canyon while building the straw bale cabin where they now live. They have been home schooled since the age of two.

Ed's Note: Our canceled field trip—by Homeland Security—to Dave Johnson Power Plant provided inspiration for this story. The characters involved are a product of the authors' imaginations.)



BIRD NOTES

Winter continues to grip the country - some parts of the Midwest have received record snowfall; and freezing temps have reached deep into the southeastern US. What all this will do to bird species movements remains to be seen. So far Cassin's Finches, Pine Siskins, and Common Redpolls seem to be few and far between; and Evening Grosbeak numbers are - well, who knows about Evening Grosbeaks? (Though, the Casper CBC did have 228.) So, it will be interesting to learn what species will be seen - and where they will appear.

December birds - For the month of December, Wayne and I received 235 yard bird selections from 18 states plus the Yukon and Ecuador with 79 different species reported. Good numbers of raptors are still being seen (11 species plus 2 species of owls). Woodpeckers are usually seen in winter months - we had 5 species in December; and as typical - lots of chickadees, Steller's Jays, and nuthatches. However, reports of Pine Siskins, Red Crossbills, and redpolls were down. The number one bird was Sharp-shinned Hawk. Second place was a tie between Black-capped Chickadee and Bald Eagle. Pileated Woodpecker came in third, and Northern Flicker was in fourth place.

Wyoming Yard Birds

Casper: Brigid Herold - Black-capped Chickadee, Lois Layton - Spotted Towhee, Barb Yonts - Sharp-shinned Hawk, Bob Yonts - Northern Flicker, Pat Classen - Black-capped Chickadee, Cecil Foote - American Robin, Ed Reish - Black-capped Chickadee, Chris Michelson - Red-breasted Nuthatch, Rose-Mary King - Sharp-shinned Hawk, Garden Creek Audubon Center - Pine

Siskin, Ann Hines - American Robin, Casper College Greenhouse - Dark-eyed Junco, Bruce Walgren - Bald Eagle, Donna Walgren - Northern Harrier; **Buffalo:** Deane Bjerke - Blue Jay; **Cheyenne:** Barb Gorges - Dark-eyed Junco; **Evanston:** Patti Gorman - Cassin's Finch, Tim Gorman - House Finch; **Lander:** Andrea Orabona - Rough-legged Hawk; **Riverton:** Suzanne Hargis - Northern Goshawk, Bob Hargis - Wilson's Snipe; **Sundance:** Jean Adams - Merlin.

Thanks to all who helped with the Yard Bird Project in December!! Keep watching for winter visitors that might show up in your neighborhoods. Send your bird notes and yard bird reports to Donna Walgren, 4311 S. Center St., Casper, WY 82601, or email to piranga@bresnan.net, or phone 234-7455. Good Birding!!!

Donna Walgren

FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, Jan 9, 2010. Homeland Security's new rules don't provide for birders looking toward a Power Plant with bird glasses and scopes. So instead of going to the Dave Johnson Power Plant, we went to Gray Reef. We had a good variety of birds. I don't know where they were hiding during the Bates Hole Christmas Count, but there were lots of geese. We had excellent views of

Hooded Mergansers and other ducks, but the best view we had was of an immature Goshawk that flew by the window of the car. It was about 30 feet away and everyone had an excellent view. We saw about 25 species, which is a pretty good for a leisurely afternoon in January.

Saturday, Feb. 20. Originally we were going to go to Gray Reef on Feb. 6, but due to Homeland Security we did that in January. I have decided to move the Jackson Canyon Eagle watching forward from March to February. We will have to rethink what would be good for a March field trip. We will meet at the turnout opposite the Goose Egg Inn turnoff on Wyoming 220 at 4:30 PM. We will then drive to the base of Jackson Canyon and walk up to the Eagle Roost. The walk will be about a mile and an 800 foot elevation increase, and through snow. Dress warmly because at the end of the walk we get to stand around waiting for the eagles to fly over us. We will then walk down in the dark, so bring a flash light. Jackson Canyon almost always has strong winds that will feel cold at 40 degrees. If it is too cold (sub-zero) or snowing too hard, we will postpone for a week. There was a suggestion that we go to the Goose Egg for supper after watching the Eagles. Let me know if you are interested in that. Call Stacey Scott at 262-0055 for details. That is my

cell phone, and should reach me where ever I am.

**Field Trip Chair—Stacy
Scott**

AUDUBON CENTER AT GARDEN CREEK

Greetings! Winter at the Center marches on with much anticipation and planning of the spring and summer to come. The feeders are a flutter of activity with the usual House Sparrows, House Finches, Black-capped Chickadees, Pine Siskins, and Magpies. The Downy Woodpecker and Northern Flicker are daily visitors and occasionally Evening Grosbeaks and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches fly in to feed. There's often a Golden Eagle or Rough-legged Hawk soaring overhead, and a perching Sharp-shinned hawk initiated an exodus of all birds in the vicinity. Dwaine Wagoner has spotted a porcupine on several occasions and managed to get it to pose for multiple photographs!

I can't imagine a life without nature close at hand, and yet for many children, an inside world is all they know. Play is structured and often indoors, school field trips to places like the Audubon Center at Garden Creek are not seen as part of the curriculum. The No Child Left INSIDE coalition is a nationwide group of nearly 1500 business, health, youth, faith, environmental, and recreation

groups who want to see Outdoor Environmental Education be more prevalent. They are working to support legislation to ensure that every student achieves environmental literacy. If you would like more information on the No Child Left Inside coalition visit the web site www.eenclb.org Providing opportunities for children (and adults) to experience the natural world and learn about the local ecosystem is one of the main goals of the Center and its programs. Audubon, on all levels, plays an important role in helping to ensure that children learn outside as well as in the classroom.

February will bring some new programs, including Home school Science Days, Preschool Nature Story time, and Yoga with Jess Ryan! I was just asked by a community member about the possibility of a beginner bird class in preparation for the Great Backyard Bird Count on February 12-15. Sounded like a great idea to encourage more informed bird watching, so Saturday, February 6 from 10-12 is the tentative date which will allow folks to participate in the field trip that afternoon as well.

I will be attending an Environmental Education conference over President's Day weekend and will regrettably miss the Bird Count and the gala banquet event that I've heard so much about. I wish you all great fun and inspiration and a record breaking attendance!

Winter Trivia: Who developed the world's first photo-micrograph

of a snow crystal? Wilson Alwyn Bentley on January 15, 1885 . The children's book Snowflake Bentley tells all about his life and discovery and is being enjoyed by adults as well as children. For more technical enjoyment, the Field Guide to Snowflakes is fascinating and beautiful. Both of these books and more are available for checkout at the Center!

May the winter winds bring good birds, and time to enjoy!

**WANDA PETERS - Nature
Center Supervisor - Audubon
Center at Garden Creek**

AUDUBON ADVENTURES

Thanks to Bart Rea for sponsoring multiple classes of Audubon Adventures. ALL CLASSES ARE NOW SPONSORED!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I will notify teachers of their sponsors in February. Hopefully sponsors will receive a thank you note.

Education Chair—Ann Hines

BANQUET NEEDS

I'm still in need of plastic tops from spray cans for the banquet. They should be about two inches across like the ones on Pam or spray paint. They can be left at the Audubon Center or contact Ann Hines - 266-3160.

Raffles items from individuals or local businesses or silent

auction items are needed. Banquet tickets can be purchased until Feb. 10. \$25/each or a table of 8 for \$175. Please contact Rose-Mary King - 577-0568

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION RECIPIENTS

Murie Audubon presented Certificates of Appreciation at the January 8, 2010 monthly meeting.

Jan Whitney was recognized for her 15+ years of work maintaining our newsletter mailing list, getting the mailing labels on the newsletter, and getting them all into the mail. You should know that Jan makes quilts as a hobby and that she volunteers at a local nursing home instructing and helping residents with quilting projects. She has also tutored students at Casper College and at the Natrona County Detention Center helping the detainees work on GED requirements.

Chris Michelson has been a Murie Board Member since 2001, served 6 years as our treasurer, has taught beginning bird classes, helped with Murie's sunflower seed sale, and frequently leads our birding field trips. Chris serves on the Wyoming Rare Bird Committee helping to review rare bird reports from across the state. He also conducts a Breeding Bird Survey near the



Dave Johnston Power Plant. Since his retirement from Casper College, Chris has consulted with various companies to do bird surveys at potential wind farm sites. You may also know that Chris is a Board Member of the Platte River Parkway Trust and will soon become President of that organization.

As Assistant Naturalist at the Audubon Center at Garden Creek, Larry Keffer spent countless unpaid hours doing everything from mending mist nets, working with kids of all ages, to mowing lawns. Larry has coordinated and conducted migratory bird surveys at Steamboat Lake (Pathfinder National Wildlife Refuge) as well as monitoring two Sage-Grouse Leks in the spring, plus doing a Breeding Bird Survey in June, and helping with Murie's sunflower seed sale. Larry is also a long time member and Past-President of the Casper Photography Club. As President of the Wardwell Water and Sewer District, Larry presided over the new water tower for the district that serves Bar Nunn, where he lives. Larry enjoys most outdoor

activities from birding to pheasant hunting.

Betty Krause has made sure that we all enjoy refreshments at our monthly meetings for more than 20 years. She coordinates volunteers bringing the goodies to our meetings for snacks after the program is over.

Betty is also an active volunteer with the American Cancer Society (ACS), raising funds for them during their annual Relay for Life as well as many of the other activities with ACS. She is also active with her church, Our Saviors Lutheran.

(Pictured above left to right: Jan Whitney, Chris Michelson, Larry Keffer, Betty Krause)

Donna Walgren

REFRESHMENT SCHEDULE

February—Annual Banquet

March - Arlene Carr & Ann Hines

April - Debb Tarr & Dan Van Burgh

May - Kathy Keffer & Jackie Odaz

Thank you to all of you who have volunteered. If you can fill in for someone who can't bring refreshments, please call me, 237-2392. Those who have signed up to fill in are Kathy Davis, Hallie Harris, Arlene Carr & Kathy Keffer.

Hospitality Chair - Betty Krause