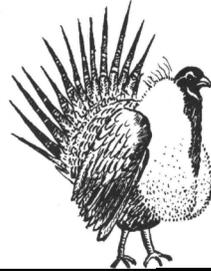


PLAINS & PEAKS



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MURIE AUDUBON

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URUGUAY: THE PEOPLE AND BIRDS

Gene Rohrbeck will be our guest speaker at our November program telling us about his experiences in Uruguay, first as a Peace Corp Volunteer from 1963-1965 and several trips later as a visitor starting in 2004.

Uruguay is located in southern South America, bordering the Atlantic Ocean, Argentina and Brazil. The country is about the size of North Dakota with population of almost 3.5 million. The terrain is mainly composed of fertile plains and grasslands conducive to sheep and cattle ranching, an important part of the economy. Uruguay tourism is a famous international destination - with 1.8 million visitors in 2007 alone. The country boasts some of the lesser known and unspoiled coastal places to visit. The climate is fairly uniform nationwide, since the country is located entirely within the temperate zone. Seasonal variations are pronounced, but extremes in temperature are rare.



CALENDAR

Nov. 6—Banquet Mtg.—6PM—ACGC
Nov. 6—Board Mtg.—7PM—ACGC
Nov. 11—General Mtg.—7PM—Oil & Gas Conservation Commission Bldg.—2011 King Blvd.
Nov. 21—Deadline for Dec. PNP
Dec. 15—MAS Christmas Bird Count (no general mtg. this month)
Jan. 1, 2012—Bate's Hole Christmas Bird Count
Feb. 11—Murie's Annual Banquet and Fundraiser
Brown Bag Birding—12 Noon—ACGC

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Along the Pathway with Harry, Audubon Adventures
Banquet Committee Looking for Volunteers, The Rippling Way, Bird Notes
Birds, Words, and Knowledge, Woodpeckers You Don't Know

PAGE

2

3

4

HAPPY THANKSGIVING

As a member of the 4-H Peace Corps Project, Gene worked with MJA clubs (similar to 4-H here in the U.S). While in Uruguay, volunteers lived with host families. Gene's host family lived on a ranch (estancia) near Sarandi del Yi in the Department of Durazno in the center of the country. Gene will share his photos of Uruguay and family homes, plus a larger number of Uruguayan birds.

Please join us on Friday, November 11, 2011 at 7 pm at the Oil & Gas Conservation Commission Building at 2211 King Blvd. for this very interesting presentation. As always, the program is free and open to the public!

Program Chair—Bruce Walgren

(Photo at beginning of article is a Great Kiskadee taken by Gene Rohrbeck.)

ALONG THE PATHWAY WITH HARRY

October 16th was an exciting day for us. My family was alerted to the sound of honking (yakking?) cross talk from Sandhill Cranes flying overhead. Not sure what the sound was, Tony, my oldest son, went out to investigate.

To our amazement, we started sighting not just a few, but dozens upon dozens of "V" formations of Sandhills, all traveling in a southbound direction. We quickly lost count and gave up. We can only guess that we were watching hundreds (maybe thousands) of these birds on their migratory path to warmer climates. They were at all elevations, the ones we could see, and the sound was almost deafening. Some of them, at the lower elevations, were circling to join the more accessible formations higher up. What a sight. It's as if we were witnessing the entire world population of these birds, in one day, as they passed overhead.

If we were seeing all these birds at our house, what must other people be seeing elsewhere? Whatever the reason for them to be passing over our house, it was an amazing sight. I have read that up to 450,000 of these birds migrate annually.

In case you haven't heard, a new movie has been released, and I have yet to see it, titled "The Big Year". It's about birding and I'm sure you'll have no problem finding reviews on the Internet, so I'll spare you any attempt to review what the movie is all about. I hope to go see it next weekend.

The weather is turning for the worse again. We have been watching the snow fall this morning. The feeders need refilling, and our feathered friends will be looking for their rations of sunflower seeds, suet, and thistle. It was just about two weeks ago, I recall spotting two humming birds tap the remaining morsels of nectar from our last surviving potted flowers sitting on our porch. I wonder where they are now. They could be somewhere in Mexico by now, picking over some other food source in a tropical setting.

Not sure what to put in your backyard feeders? In case you don't know, here's a good website with details and charts of what some birds like to see: <http://www.birdfeeding.org>

Don't let the cold weather keep you from enjoying the birding. Bundle up and go birding!

President—Harry Martin

AUDUBON ADVENTURES

I'm sure it sounds trite, but THANK YOU so very much for continued support after all these years to the Audubon Adventures program. So many of our sponsors have been loyal sponsors for MANY years.

Chris Michelson and Bart Rea have sponsored more than one class. Bobbie Roberts, Jackie Valdez, Mary Heisn and Jack & Ruby MacCrae have all sponsored one class.

I apologize, if I have missed anyone. I WILL catch up the next time. Please send your check to me at 1600 Linda Vista Dr., Casper 82609.

The teachers (65 + Audubon workers) have received their subscriptions for this year.

Education Chair—Ann Hines

BANQUET COMMITTEE LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS

Plans are well under way for the 2012 Murie Audubon Society Annual Banquet to be held at the Parkway Plaza on Saturday, February 11. If you can help, please contact Karen Anfang, 472 -0278 and/or attend the next meeting of the Banquet Committee at the Audubon Center, 6-7 PM (before the Board meeting) on Tuesday, November 8th.

Banquet Chairman—Karen Anfang

THE RIPPLING WAY

The Center was a popular place in October as school groups and families and visitors in town took advantage of the nice weather. The bird species may be fewer, to those who are trying to add to their list, but the Finches, Pine Siskins, and Chickadees always seem to delight both children and adults.

Remember Brown Bag Birding is every Thursday from 12:00-1:00 here at the Center. There are binoculars and bird books available to borrow, just bring a lunch and enjoy the birds!

Audubon Wyoming staff continue to be a presence and a force for protecting sage grouse habitat throughout the region. Fragmentation of habitat by transmission lines, and the proper siting of wind farms are ongoing issues. Community Naturalists Jacelyn and Dusty Downy have been recognized nationally for their outstanding work and programs here in Wyoming. None of our work would be possible without the hard work of Sidnie Shaffer who has helped secure some of the much needed funding.

Even though the temperatures are cooler and the days are getting shorter, the Center's trails are still a place for you and your family to enjoy. So grab your coats, your neighbors, some children or just yourself and come explore. There are countless discoveries to be made!

Nature Center Supervisor—Wanda Peters

BIRD NOTES

Temperatures are cooling down, we've had some snow, I guess winter is coming. Lots of birds are on the move. There have been reports of First of Season migrants - American Tree Sparrows, Rough-legged Hawks, Horned Grebes, and Sandhill Cranes.

Yard Bird Project - For the month of September, Wayne and I received 176 bird reports with 90 different species tallied. These observations came from 73 different locations in 19 states plus Italy and Belgium. The most reported species was (surprisingly!!) a 5-way tie between Cedar Waxwing, Black-capped Chickadee, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Sandhill Crane, and Red-naped Sapsucker. Second place was a 3-way tie between American Goldfinch, Turkey Vulture, and Western Meadowlark. Third place was another "multi-tie" between American Robin, Wild Turkey, Pileated Woodpecker and California Quail. Black-headed Grosbeaks are still being seen in good numbers - that species was in fourth place.

Wyoming Yard Birds

Casper: Jim Herold - Blue Jay, Chris Michelson - Rock Wren, Casper College Greenhouse - Turkey Vulture, Bruce Walgren - Cooper's Hawk, Donna Walgren - Wilson's Warbler; **Cheyenne:** Barb and Mark Gorges - Great Horned Owl; **Edness Kimball Wilkins SP:** Chris Michelson - Wood Thrush; **Evansville:** Bruce Walgren - Wood Duck, Donna Walgren - Greater Yellowlegs.

Thanks to all who helped with the Yard Bird Project in September!!! Here's hoping some good bird activity comes your way!! Send your sightings to Donna Walgren, 4311 S. Center St., Casper, WY 82601, or email to Piranga@bresnan.net, or phone 234-7455. Good Birding!!!

Donna Walgren



BIRDS, WORDS, AND KNOWLEDGE

The latest issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest* has an interesting article, "Birding, Knowledge and Humility," written by John Rumm. Dr. Rumm is curator of Western American History at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody; he is also vice-president of the Meadowlark Audubon Society. He notes that if you are knowledgeable about birds, you likely have as part of your vocabulary words that are generally unfamiliar to many people - such as eider, pipit, cotinga, and avocet.

Mr. Rumm writes of an experience he had some years ago when he was working at a Philadelphia museum. An exhibit was being set up in which visitors would feel like they were walking past a building in colonial Philadelphia where a group of men were working on a constitution for the new United States. Mr. Rumm was listening to the soundtrack when he heard a European Starling. He then informed the exhibit designers that starlings weren't introduced to North America until the 1870's. The designers thanked him for the information, saying "We just used whatever bird songs we could find." (They then asked him to review the entire soundtrack for other "mistakes.")

Mr. Rumm says that "knowledge is a wonderful thing, but for me, one of the greatest joys of bird watching is realizing how much we don't know about birds, and how much there is to learn." He makes the point that "whatever else it offers, bird watching is a lesson in humility. We humans have been observing birds since prehistory. In the process, we've accumulated vast stores of data about every conceivable aspect of bird life. Yet there's still so much about which we know little or nothing."

Birding, knowledge, and humility - I think that's a good combination to live with!!

Donna Walgren

WOODPECKERS YOU DON'T KNOW

(by Ken Keffer)

I've banded thousands of birds over the years, but woodpeckers are in a class all their own. They're loud, fearless, fierce and difficult—and I absolutely love'em.

Like most backyard birders, I delight in the antics of woodpeckers at feeders. I adore the cute little downys, just slightly longer than the suet cage they cling to, and the hairys, which look similar but are about 2 inches bigger. I enjoy the ubiquitous cackle of the cackle of the northern flicker, found across much of the continent.

My favorite backyard woodpecker might be the red-bellied. As a Wyoming native, I hadn't come across this eastern bird much. Then, just a few years ago, while on a trip to watch the epic sand hill crane migration in Nebraska, I saw one. As I struggled to locate the patch of color from which it gets its name, I couldn't believe everyone around me was ignoring this mesmerizing bird.

But what about all the other woodpeckers, the ones that don't typically show up in backyards? They deserve a spot in the limelight, too. So here's a look at some of the lesser-known—but undeniably impressive—woodpeckers of North America.

THE RIGHT HABITAT—Many of the most stunning woodpecker species live only in small pockets of the United States.

Two species, the gila and the golden-fronted, look very similar to the red-bellied. They are most native to Mexico and Central America, but you can also find them in the southwestern United States.

Gilas can be spotted in southeast California, much of Arizona, and southwestern New Mexico. They will use trees or cacti for excavating nesting cavities. Visiting Ajo, Arizona, last February with my mother, I had the pleasure of watching one of these beauties work a tree trunk near the town square.

Golden-fronted woodpeckers range up through

Texas and southwest Oklahoma. They prefer open woodlands and have even been spotted visiting parks and backyards where there's suitable habitat.

Acorn woodpeckers are also closely related to these species. They range from central America and Mexico to parts of west Texas, much of New Mexico, Arizona, California, western Oregon and extreme southern Washington along the eastern Cascades.

This species is uniquely colonial and can be quite common in urban parks with oak woodlands. Generations will band together to gather and store acorns, chiseling holes for them in trees. Their food caches can be extremely dense.

I've gone out of my way to find an acorn colony, and it was well worth the effort. Residents of the West have a fairly good chance of seeing this distinctive woodpecker, especially in years of poor acorn crops, when they move around a bit in search of food.

LOOK A LITTLE HARDER—Similar to the downy and hairy are the black-backed and American three-toed woodpeckers. Both of these fliers are found in the northern half of North America, from Alaska to the east coast of Canada, and even into western forests. Good luck spotting them, though. Both are considered uncommon species for birders because they stay deep in the forest, where they have plenty of bugs to keep them busy.

Two other woodpeckers in this group are the red-cockaded and the white-headed. The first, found in some parts of the Southeast, is endangered because of the destruction of the longleaf pine, its favorite habitat. The second, which also frequents pine forests, can be seen in parts of the far Northwest.

Three final woodpeckers worth mentioning are the ladder-backed, Nuttall's and Lewis's. The U.S. range of the ladder-backed is central Texas west to southeastern California, and as far north as Kansas and parts of Colorado, Utah and Nevada. It has a diet heavy in insects, though in the

desert it also feeds on cactus fruit.

Birders can find Nuttall's woodpecker at the western edge of the ladder-backed range in California, extending north into Oregon and south into Mexico. The two species can interbreed where their ranges overlap. Nuttall's has a close association with oaks, though it's rarely seen nesting in the trees and prefers insects to acorns.

The Lewis's is not what you think of when someone mentions woodpeckers. It's a slow flier with dark coloring and the unusual habit of catching insects on the wing. Named after explorer Meriwether Lewis of the Lewis and Clark expeditions, it is found in small patches through the U.S. **INCREASE YOUR ODDS**—While it's possible to get lucky and attract some of these species to your yard with either suet or a platform feeder full of sunflowers seeds, your best bet is to get out in the field. With woodpeckers, habitat is everything. So if you don't live in a heavily wooded area, you'll need to go seek one out.

When you do spot a woodpecker, be sure to get a close look at its specialized feet. Most species have two toes facing forward and two facing backward, an arrangement that helps them cling to branches, tree trunks, or cacti. Add stiff tail feathers that act like a third leg, and you've got a bird that can easily shimmy up and down vertical surfaces, making woodpeckers a wonder to watch.

It doesn't hurt to remain hopeful for an encounter with a species you've never seen before. You never know when you might get an unexpected guest. Until then, enjoy the downys, hairys, red-headed, red-bellied and pileated friends we know and love.

(Ken Keffer lives outside Limestone, Ohio. Having banded red-bellied woodpeckers several times, he can now attest to the redness of their bellies. Ken, also, was the former Community Naturalist of Audubon Wyoming, working at the Audubon Center at Garden Creek.

Permission was given to reprint this article by the Editor of the *Birds & Blooms* magazine where it appeared in the October-November 2011 issue.)