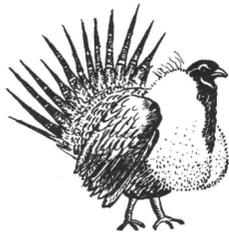


PLAINS & PEAKS



Vol. 42 - Iss. 1

JANUARY 2008

Murie Audubon Society

Casper Wyoming - Monthly Publication
<http://www.murieaudubon.org>

Calendar

- **Jan. 8** - Bd. Mtg. - 7pm - ACGC
- **Jan. 11** - Mem. Mtg. - 7pm - OGCC Bldg. - 2211 King Blvd.
- **Jan. 18** - Feb. newsletter deadline
- **Feb. 5** - Bd. Mtg. - 7pm - ACGC
- **Feb. 9 - Annual Banquet - 5:30pm - Casper Petroleum Club**
- No February Mem. Mtg.
- Every Thursday - Noon - ACGC - Brownbag Birding - Lunch with the birds and fellow birders!

BIRDS AND WILDLIFE OF TANZANIA

Our guest speaker for the January monthly membership meeting is no stranger to most Murie Audubon regulars. Dr Kent Sundell, Geology Instructor at Casper College, will be our guest and will share highlights of his trips to Tanzania from the past two years. In fact, this will actually be part one of two programs. (Kent has informed me that he has so many pictures that he'll have to split them into two groups. He isn't exactly sure how he'll split them yet - possibly geographically - Northern and Southern Tanzania. On his trip this year, they were fortunate to have an ornithologist as their guide, so they were able to identify many more of the bird species than on other tours. The program promises to be fun as

well as educational.

Our meeting will be held on Friday, January 11, 2008. The meeting time and place is 7 pm at the Oil & Gas Conservation Commission Building at 2211 King Blvd., and as always, the program is free and open to the public! Start the year off by inviting a friend along.

Bruce Walgren
Program Chair



gin your 2008 list with some interesting bird species. Here in Casper, we have been having more December snow events and colder temps than we've had in the last several years, which present the possibility of winter species making appearances. Unfortunately, we are also experiencing some strong winds at the same time which tends to keep many birds "hunkered down" and not seen as easily. But dress accordingly and take some time to venture forth into our Wyoming winter weather and

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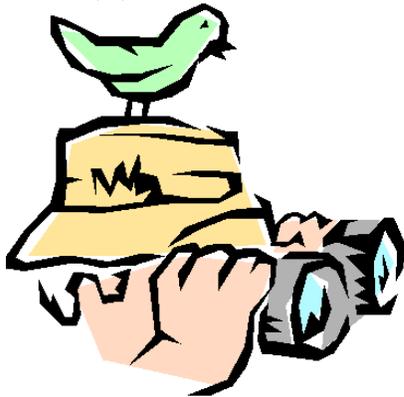
BIRD NOTES

As we finish up 2007, many of us are finishing our "birding year" by helping with one (or two or more!) of the Christmas Bird Counts scheduled at this time of year. CBC's can take place between Dec. 14 and Jan. 5. This gives you a chance to finish up your 2007 list - or be-

chances are you will find some interesting birds. And if you have a feeder in your yard, keep an eye on the activity out there. This cold weather makes these guys hungry and they will flock to your offerings – and to a reliable open water source if you have one! (The large flocks of House Sparrows and House finches in our yard have also brought in a hungry Sharp-shin looking for a meal.) Keep those binoculars handy!!!

One especially noteworthy bird sighting for the state in November was the Harris's Hawk in the Riverton area; Bob and Suzanne Hargis included photos with their post to WYO-Birds – a very exciting observation for Wyoming!!

November Birds – For the month of November, Wayne and I received 202 yard bird selections from 19 states plus the Dominican Republic with 80 different species reported. The number one species reported was Mountain Chickadee. Second place was a three-way tie between Steller's Jay, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and Dark-eyed Junco. Third place was a tie between Townsend's Solitaire and American Goldfinch, followed by a fourth place tie between Brown Creeper and Downy Woodpecker.



Casper: Jim Herold – Mountain Chickadee, Pat Classen – American Goldfinch, Cecil Foote – Steller's Jay, Chris Michelson – Cassin's Finch, Jan and Ed Whitney – Northern Flicker (red-sh.), Stacey Scott – Steller's Jay, Casper College Greenhouse – Townsend's Solitaire, Barb Yonts – Steller's Jay, Bob Yonts – Mountain Chickadee, Garden Creek Audubon Center – Brown Creeper, Bruce Walgren – Bohemian Waxwing, Donna Walgren – Snow Goose; **Buffalo:** Deane Bjerke – Red Crossbill; **Lovell:** Glen Olsen – Townsend's Solitaire; **Riverton:** Suzanne Hargis – Harris's Hawk, Bob Hargis – Mountain Chickadee.

Thanks to all who helped with the Yard Bird Project in November!! As I write this, December is drawing to a close and we are starting to receive December yard bird picks. As we head into 2008, it will be interesting to hear what everyone is seeing. Let us know what birds are visiting your yard and neighborhood. Send your bird notes to Donna Walgren, 4311 S. Center St., Casper, WY 82601, or email to Piranga@bresnan.net, or phone 234-7455.

Donna Walgren

CASPER'S 60TH CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Saturday, December 15th dawned cold and windy when Casper area CBCers ventured forth for the 60th time to count all the birds in the Casper count circle. At 7:30 AM the temperature hovered around the zero mark, and the wind was howling. As the day progressed, the temperature did warm up (the official high was 21°F.); unfortunately, the wind increased along with the temp. But it is winter time in Wyoming, and we have come to expect these conditions as "par for the course."

In spite of the adverse conditions, this year's count was a success with some record numbers – and new species counted. Here are the stats in a nutshell: 31 people counting in the field, 17 feeder watchers counting in their yards, 68 species of birds counted, 14,143 individual birds counted, 2 species new for the count (Fox Sparrow and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker), 1 species new for count week (Juniper Titmouse), and the observation of an unusual Spotted Towhee/Green-tailed Towhee hybrid at the Garden Creek Audubon Center.

We want to recognize and thank all the peo-

ple who worked on this year's count - they all helped make it so very successful. Those working in the field: Chris Michelson, Ken Keffer, Hustace Scott, Tony Martin, Kim Check, Miles Hecker, Joe Scott, Marie Scott, Janice Scott, Bob Yonts, Charles Scott, Bob Maxwell, Kathy and Larry Keffer, Tom Heald, Jan and Ed Whitney, Elizabeth Miller, Kent and Meg Sundell, J.P. Cavigelli, Betty Rickman, Sophia Bogart, Dwaine Wagoner, Vicki Pollock, Margo Spurrier, Bruce and Donna Walgren, Ann Hines, Craig Hines, and Kathy Knapp.

Those counting birds in their yards and at feeders: Judy Naginey, Micah Miller, Gabe Miller, Emma Narotzky, Frank and Lois Layton, Rose-Mary King, Betsy Barrett, Bart and Liz Rea, Michelle Smith, Pat Classen, Cecil Foote, Dick and Doris Von Holdt, Earline Hittel, and Jeanette Buelt.

We had record high numbers for several species: 17 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 21 Red-tailed Hawks, 425 Horned Larks, 34 Bushtits, 149 Cedar Waxwings, 940 Rock Pigeons, 4830 European Starlings, and 114 Eurasian Collared-Doves. The numbers for the pigeons and the starlings have been gradually increasing over the years; and this is

the third year for the collared-doves on the count as this species has continued its range expansion to the west and north. Interestingly, the numbers for House Sparrows have actually decreased over the last decade.

Here is the numbers/species list: 1,068 Canada Geese, 2 Wood Ducks, 1 Gadwall, 21 American Wigeon, 1,008 Mallards, 21 Green-winged Teal, 1 Ring-necked Duck, 171 Common Goldeneye, 2 Hooded Mergansers, 12 Common Mergansers, 3 Gray Partridge, 4 Ring-necked Pheasants, 97 Wild Turkeys, 1 Great Blue Heron, 22 Bald Eagles (Ad. - 14, Im. - 8), 9 Northern Harriers, 17 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 2 Cooper's Hawks, 1 Northern Goshawk, 21 Red-tailed Hawks, 2 Ferruginous Hawks, 10 Rough-legged Hawks, 35 Golden Eagles Ad. - 21, Im. - 14), 1 Merlin, 4 Prairie Falcons, Wilson's Snipe (cw), 77 Ring-billed Gulls, 1 Herring Gull, 940 Rock Pigeons, 114 Eurasian Collared-Doves, 9 Great Horned Owls, 2 Belted Kingfishers, 1 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, 13 Downy Woodpeckers, 8 Hairy Woodpeckers, 115 Northern Flickers (RS - 114, YS - 1), 15 Steller's Jays, 32 Blue Jays, 22 Clark's Nutcrackers, 105 Black-billed Magpies, 208 American Crows, 14 Common Ravens, 425 Horned Larks, 130 Black-capped Chickadees, 105 Mountain Chickadees, Juniper Titmouse (cw), 34 Bushtits, 18 Red-breasted Nuthatches, 9 White-breasted Nuthatches, 4

Pygmy Nuthatches, 2 Brown Creepers, 20 Townsend's Solitaires, 466 American Robins, 4,830 European Starlings, 94 Bohemian Waxwings, 149 Cedar Waxwings, 1 Spotted Towhee x Green-tailed Towhee, 69 American Tree Sparrows, 2 Fox Sparrows, 8 Song Sparrows, 1 Harris's Sparrow, 197 Dark-eyed Juncos (31sc, 31ps, 52or, 83?), Western Meadowlark (cw), 8 Pine Grosbeaks, 2 Cassin's Finches, 660 House Finches, 9 Red Crossbills, 7 Pine Siskins, 63 American Goldfinches, 7 Evening Grosbeaks, 2611 House Sparrows.

Donna Walgren

AUDUBON ADVENTURES

What an AWESOME response we have had this year for Audubon Adventures. The best ever! Those sponsoring more than one class are: Jacque Warburton, Dr. and Mrs. Robert Narotzky, Mrs. Grace Jenkins, Judi Van Rensselaer, Hallie and Don Harris. Those who sponsored one class are: Bonnie Lombardo, Donna & Terry Cleveland, Muriel and Frank McNeely, Mary Hein, Betty Young, Susan and Jim O'Neill. THANK YOU one and all for making this a tremendous year.

Ann Hines

THE GREAT BACK-YARD BIRD COUNT

GBBC is right around the corner on the weekend of February 15-18, 2008.

It's as easy as 1, 2, 3!

1. Plan to count birds for at least 15 minutes during February 15-18, 2008. Count birds at as many places and on as many days as you like—

just keep a separate list of counts for each day and/or location.

2. Count the greatest number of individuals of each species that you see together at any one time, and write it down.

3. Enter your results <http://gbbc.birdsource.org/gbbcApps/checklist>

AUDUBON TO HOST CHAPTER WORKSHOP

Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary will host a Chapter Workshop titled ***Taking Action for Birds in a Changing Climate***. The upcoming Chapter Workshop is in conjunction with the 2008 Audubon Rivers and Wildlife Celebration in Kearney, Nebraska on March 14, 2008. <http://www.audubon.org/local/index.html>.

EAGLE KILL IN WYOMING

Bart Rea informed me awhile back that the January/February issue of Audubon magazine would carry an article regarding the eagle killings in 1971. Bart said "It will be the rest of the story with new information."

Following is an article that ran in the Star Tribune on June 29, 2007 regarding the removal of the Bald Eagles from federal protection and Jared Miller's (Capital bureau) recap of "a notorious chapter in 1971 in Wyoming".

One of the most notorious chapters occurred in 1971 in Wyoming, when more than 700 of the birds are thought to have been gunned down by shooters in helicopters or killed by poison.

"It was really kind of devastating," said Casper resident Bart Rea, a semi-retired petroleum engineer and long-time bird enthusiast who in the summer of 1971 stored eagle carcasses in his freezer as evidence of the killings.

The events of that summer began when hikers discovered about two dozen dead eagles in Jackson Canyon west of Casper Mountain. It was eventually determined that the birds died after feeding on animal carcasses laced with thallium sulfate, a poison used widely at the time to kill coyotes.

The birds apparently survived long enough to return to

their perches and, after the poison kicked in, rained down dead on the canyon floor.

As the summer wore on, public awareness about the killings grew, and reports about dead birds streamed in. Rea, a member of the local chapter of the Audubon Society, responded to eagle deaths across the state.

In the process of retrieving an eagle carcass near the Casper airport, Rea and a fellow birder happened to notice a shotgun and spent shells inside a helicopter parked at the airport.

The helicopter door was open, and a man was working on the machine. Rea's companion snapped a photograph.

The man in the photo turned out to be James Vogan, a balding, heavy-set helicopter pilot from Murray, Utah.

Afraid he had been discovered, Vogan turned himself in and admitted using the helicopter to help kill more than 500 Golden and Bald Eagles in Wyoming.

"This was the way the whole helicopter shooting incident all broke loose," Rea said.

Vogan later testified about the slaughter to a U.S. Senate subcommittee. He said he knew of \$15,000 paid to the flying service that owned the

helicopter by a Wyoming sheep rancher named Herman Werner.

Werner, owner of one of the largest sheep operations in the state, ran a big spread on the North Platte River between Rawlins and Saratoga.

Vogan's testimony sparked anger in the nation's capital, and Interior Secretary Rogers C.B. Morton called the shootings a "national outrage," Time magazine reported in August 1971.

An Interior Department official termed it "absolutely sickening" ... a sordid story" ... "a cold, callous, deliberate defiance of federal and state law," according to another media report from 1971.

By that time, bald eagles were already protected by many state and federal laws including the Endangered Species Act.

After suffering the devastating impacts of the pesticide known as DDT, Bald Eagles numbered about 2,000 in the United States outside Alaska. The Golden Eagle population had dipped to around 10,000 birds, also as a result of DDT and other habitat changes.

The federal government filed charges against Werner, but they lacked hard evidence to back up Vogan's testimony. The biggest: Nobody could find the

dead birds.

As it turned out, the U.S. Air Force around that time was looking for ways to test its new, state-of-the-art heat-seeking technology. Serendipitously, an Air Force officer mentioned the equipment to an assistant Interior Department secretary named Nathaniel Reed.

Reed, who had just been appointed by President Nixon, came up with three tests for the new gear. They were: Learn more about elk migration in Olympic National Park, track whale migration in the Pacific, and find the dead eagles in Wyoming.

The officer later returned to say that the heat-sensitive equipment was no match for the depths of the ocean or the tree canopy in Olympic National Park. But he had the eagles.

The Air Force had located a "hot spot" on Werner's ranch created by the decomposing carcasses of around 60 eagles eventually unearthed there.

Werner was charged with the slaughter, but he never faced trial. Days before he was to appear in court, Werner was killed in an automobile crash in Rawlins.

The upshot, Rea said, was that eagles were no longer being savaged, and President Nixon signed an executive order banning the use of poison to kill predators.

"I think it was very directly related to this," Rea said of the executive order.

The story also height-

ened awareness about eagles across the country, and helped secure their recovery, Rea said.

"I think the public is so much more aware of the general conditions and the history of the eagles," he said. "I think it's very unlikely it will ever get as out of hand as it was before."

Power companies responded by modifying above-ground power lines to reduce the number of eagles killed by electrocution -- a big problem back then.

"I remember walking along the power poles in the Cottonwood oil field in Washakie County, and about every third pole there would be a dead eagle or an eagle skeleton," Rea said. "This was common throughout the West."

Eagles remain a problem for Wyoming sheep ranchers. Ironically, Bald Eagles are not thought to prey on sheep or lambs. Golden Eagles, however, killed 1,800 sheep and lambs in the state last year.

"Ranchers have never had a problem with bald eagles," said Bill Taliaferro, a Rock Springs-area sheep rancher. "Goldens are the problem all the way from Texas to Canada."

Wyoming continues to be part of the national discussion about Bald Ea-

gles.

Federal prosecutors are pursuing charges against a member of Wyoming's Northern Arapaho Tribe who in 2005 shot an eagle for use in a religious ceremony.

Lawyers for 22-year-old Winslow Friday of Ethete contend that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has refused to grant permits for tribal members to kill eagles, even though the permits are allowable under federal law.

Given the current population of 10,000 nesting pairs of Bald Eagles in the lower 48 states -- including more than 185 pairs in Wyoming -- the death of a few at the hands of American Indians probably isn't a major concern, Rea said.

"I'm not sure if the problem is significant enough that it really needs to be worried about," he said.

Editor

UNIQUE BIRD SPOTTED AT THE AUDUBON CENTER AT GARDEN CREEK

Like most of the Murie Audubon Society members, we at the Audubon Center at Garden Creek keep track of what species we see at our bird feeders.

On December 10th Uncle Larry Keffer and Community Naturalist Ken Keffer noticed a bird they hadn't seen in quite some time.

"Initially we were just excited to see a towhee in December," Larry recalls. Both Keffers reached for binoculars and both were surprised at what they saw. This towhee was different. At a casual glance it looked like a typical Spotted Towhee. The bird had nice rufous sides (many readers might recall the Rufous-sided Towhee, a species that has now been split to the Eastern Towhee and the Spotted Towhee), a dark head, and that long towhee tail. But wait, what was that on top of the head? Was that a brilliant rufous red cap on top? Indeed it was. Just like the rufous cap on the Green-tailed Towhee. This bird appears to be a Spotted Towhee X Green-tailed Towhee hybrid. This is a well documented hybridization, and it is not even the first time this hybrid has been reported at the Audubon Center at Garden Creek.

The bird has been fairly cooperative for bird watching. People have seen it throughout the week. The hybrid is often seen during the midmorning hours. Much to the delight of the crowd, it made a cameo appearance at a Thursday Brownbag Birding and was spotted again during the Christmas Bird Count. The



towhee seems to stop by the lilac bush looking for a meal just before dark as well, so if anyone is interested in catching a glimpse of this exciting bird feel free to stop by the Center. It is fairly rare for a towhee to spend the entire winter this far north, so take a break and come on out and see our winter gift to all of you.

Ken Keffer
AW Community Naturalist

(Note from Editor: Of course this grayscale photo does not do the bird justice and you can not see clearly the rufous red cap. Colored picture will be in the web site newsletter.)

**MANY YUMMY THANKS
TO ANN HINES AND
JACKIE VALDEZ FOR
PROVIDING THE JANUARY
MEETING GOODIES!**

**BANQUET TICKETS WILL
BE AVAILABLE AT THE
JANUARY MEETING OR
CALL ROSE-MARY KING
- 577-0568 - \$25/EACH
OR A TABLE OF 8 \$175.**