

MURIE AUDUBON'S
PLAINS & PEAKS

FEBRUARY 2023 | VOL. 57 ISSUE 1

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Murie's General Program Feb 9th

Field Trip- Grey Reef/Aclova Dec 11th

SPECIAL FEATURES

**Trends of the Christmas
Bird Count**

pg 5-7

Membership Renewal

pg 11

FIELD NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT



Happy New Year!

What would you like to see Murie do this year? How can a conservation and education team improve our community for both humans and wildlife?

Murie has a long, rich history of conservation and education in our community. But we can't just celebrate our history, as fabulous as it is. We have the responsibility of leaving our legacy.

The board of directors have been tasked with designating three main goals to work on this coming year. We would LOVE your input as we continue to grow our involvement, membership, and impact.

Thanks in advance for all your wonderful ideas!

Jenny Edwards

FEBRUARY BIRD CHALLENGE

February's challenge is to find some of the most romantic birds! These birds either mate for life or perform elaborate courtship displays.

- Bald Eagle
- Canada Goose
- Eurasian Collared-Dove
- Trumpeter Swan
- Pied-billed Grebe
- Red-winged black bird
- American Robin
- Townsend's Solitaire

Data compiled from eBird.

KIDS CORNER



Solid water is less dense than liquid water

You may have noticed that parts of the North Platte River freeze each winter. And I bet you know there are fish thriving in the river all winter long. Have you ever wondered how the properties of water help make this possible?

KIDS CORNER Continued

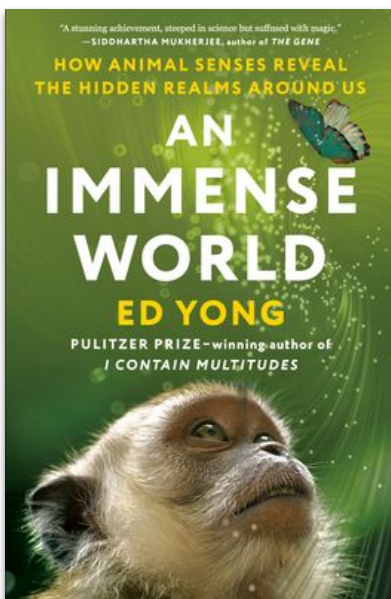
Just as you may have seen when ice fishing on a frozen lake or pond, there are fish and many other forms of life thriving below the frozen surface. When temperatures drop low enough water is converted into ice, and the ice rises to the top rather than sinking to the bottom. Can you imagine what would happen to life in these bodies of water if ice did not float? For sure the habitat for these fish and other life would be much different.



Photo by Luis Alza, Jan 2023 N. Platte River

The beautiful chemistry of water results in its solid form - ice - being less dense than its liquid form – liquid water, which is of course why ice floats. Interestingly, this is the opposite of many other substances, such as lead or argon, in which their solid states sink when placed in their liquid states. This, along with other unique properties, is how water facilitates life in so many ways.

Kelly Keenan



BOOK CLUB

***An Immense World*
by Ed Yong**

******* 5 Stars Recommended**

This author really captured what it is like to not be a human. I loved reading about fascinating animal adaptations that I didn't even know existed! Each chapter of the book addresses a different sense, from color, to pain to magnetic fields. Then there's an in-depth dive into how different animals utilize those senses. Just fascinating and fun!

Jenny Edwards

MURIE AUDUBON PRESENTS



Photo: Habitat Hero Awardee, Ellen Schreiner's garden in Casper, WY

In this presentation on February 9, we learn how to create wildlife-friendly gardens that help combat the loss of open spaces. Learn how to create green corridors that link your wildscape to larger natural areas by providing habitat for wildlife.

Jamie Weiss, Habitat Hero Coordinator for Audubon Rockies, will be presenting this program. Along with her B.S. in marine biology and chemistry from University of North Carolina Wilmington, Jamie is a certified interpretive guide through the National Association for Interpretation. Jamie previously worked at Boyd Lake State Park and the Georgia Aquarium as an educational interpreter, raising awareness of conservation. When not working, she is often leading an active lifestyle trying to keep up with her Border Collie puppy and Golden Retriever. She enjoys hiking, camping, snowboarding, and long-distance running.

Jamie will be presenting remotely from Colorado, we will gather at the usual location at the Izaak Walton Clubhouse to participate. To take part, come to the Murie Audubon free talk on February 9, 2023, at 7 p.m., at the Izaak Walton Clubhouse, at 4205 Fort Caspar Road.

Bruce Walgren

75TH ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT FOLLOW-UP



The 75th annual Casper Christmas Bird Count is in the books. Thanks to all 73 participants (48 in the field and 25 feeder watchers), plus all the organizers, officers, and board members who made this year's count a success. The potluck at the end of the day of counting was highlighted by a special 75th anniversary cake donated by Kelly Keenan and Luis Alza. Special thanks to them for making the evening special!

Count Day had a low temperature of 11, a high near 20, cloudy skies, and winds at 20 mph or higher. The weather made it a real challenge for observers, especially those on Casper Mountain and environs. 14,981 individual birds, representing 63 species, plus 3 count week species (those seen three days on either side of the count day) were tallied. These numbers are consistent with what we have been seeing in the last 10 to 15 years.

Thirteen species of waterfowl were counted. Canada Geese continue to over-winter, spending lots of time on the expanses of green grass within the city, also feeding on agricultural fields in the surrounding area. Wild Turkeys continue to be seen in good numbers throughout the count circle. Gray Partridge were counted again after an absence last year, reflecting scouting reports earlier in the year.

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No gull species were recorded; they seem to leave our area when colder weather prevails. While pigeons and Eurasian Collared-Doves were reported in high above average numbers, Red Crossbills were not found and Clark's Nutcrackers were hard to find, probably reflecting on a poor cone crop on the evergreens on the mountain. Bald and Golden Eagle numbers were also below average. Species found in above average numbers include: Black-capped Chickadees, American Robins, European Starlings, House Sparrows, American Crows, and Common Ravens. Luis Alza reported the last species of the day when he saw 2 Brown Creepers in his yard just as they were leaving to come to the potluck. Other species of note include one White-throated Sparrow, 3 Great Blue Herons and 170 Bohemian Waxwings.

Here is the complete tally: Cackling Goose 19, Canada Goose 2,161, Trumpeter Swan 2, Gadwall 46, American Wigeon 28, Mallard 483, American Green-winged Teal 23, Redhead 1, Ring-necked Duck 6, Bufflehead 4, Common Goldeneye 151, Hooded Merganser 15, Common Merganser 25, Gray Partridge 23, Dusky (Blue) Grouse 2, Wild Turkey 243, Great Blue Heron 3, Golden Eagle-mature 7, Golden Eagle-immature 4, Northern Harrier 4, Sharp-shinned Hawk 2, Cooper's Hawk 3, Bald Eagle-mature 9, Bald Eagle-immature 8, Red-tailed Hawk 4, Rough-legged Hawk 6, Rock Pigeon 941, Eurasian Collared-Dove 1,577, Mourning Dove 1, Great Horned-Owl 4, Downy Woodpecker 18, Hairy Woodpecker 14, Northern Flicker (Red Shafted) 71, Merlin 1, Prairie Falcon 1, Pinyon Jay 45, Steller's Jay 45, Blue Jay 72, Black-billed Magpie 146, Clark's Nutcracker 8, American Crow 220, Common Raven 39, Black-capped Chickadee 107, Mountain Chickadee 86, Bushtit 1, Red-breasted nuthatch 19, White-breasted Nuthatch 15, Pygmy Nuthatch 2, Brown Creeper 2, Townsend's Solitaire 46, American Robin 354, European Starling 3,576, Bohemian Waxwing 170, Cedar Waxwing 73, American Tree Sparrow 13, Dark-eyed Junco (unknown form) 141, Junco- Slate Colored 12, Junco-Oregon 10, Junco-Pink-sided 2, White-crowned Sparrow 5, Harris' Sparrow 8, White-throated Sparrow 1, Song Sparrow 5, House Finch 193, Cassin's Finch 5, American Goldfinch 10, Evening Grosbeak 32, House Sparrow 3,608, and three count week species Eastern Screech-Owl, Horned Lark, and Common Grackle.

-Bruce Walgren, Compiler

BATE'S HOLE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Despite the weather in Casper, we had a pretty good count in Bates Hole on January 1. I had 10 inches of snow in my yard when I got home that evening, and the road coming back to town was pure ice with snow cover. We missed the 5 or 6 people who were planning on coming out. In Bates Hole, it was warm for the Bates Hole Count with a low of 27° and a high of 33° with a wind of 0-5 mph except for some gusts of close to 30 out of the east. While it snowed all day, mostly it didn't snow hard, so the day was really very pleasant. There were no shadows for most of the day, so some of the roads were tough to drive on since you couldn't really see where the road was. Tony Martin and I found a drift of old snow with about 4 inches of new snow covering it that neither one of us saw ahead of time. I'm glad Tony was driving because he was being more cautious than I would have been and no damage was done to his truck. On the way back we had to dig through that drift, and having a 20 something doing most of the digging is sure easier on this 75 year old.

The total species of 48 was about normal for the last 10 years, but the total individual birds of 2,353 was a little above average. The river and the creeks were more frozen over than most years; -40°+ before Christmas will do that. The Trumpeter Swans were on a frozen pond just upriver from Government Bridge, and the river in that area was completely frozen which is very unusual. The Goldeneye were concentrated on the open water in the Lusby area, so we had many more than usual. They were also very jumpy, and wouldn't let you get close even if you stayed in the truck. There were Gray Partridge everywhere, and with the fresh snow we missed quite a few. The Sage-grouse Party thought they missed about 50 Sage-grouse, and still found lots of them. This is interesting in that the Lek numbers are way lower than they have been for the last 50 years, but the Christmas Count numbers are on the high end of what we have had over the 45 years of the count. It used to be that the Christmas Count number would tell us how good the Lek count would be in the spring. We aren't sure why the divergence, but we are actively looking for new Leks.

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The hawks are on the low side, but the rabbit population is still down, and the mouse population is just starting to rebound. It was good to hear Great-horned Owls again (actually I only heard 2, but Tony Martin would tell me how many I missed at each stop). I think that shows the mouse numbers are rebounding.

The Horned Larks were really common and the 333 is one of the highest numbers ever. It was good to have Bohemian Waxwings again (I wish I had seen them). It is good to see Starlings on the low end of normal. Nothing else in the list is unusual, and for the most part I think we found what was there. I was sorry to miss the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch, but as we warm these finches are harder to find. Below is the complete list.

Trumpeter Swan 17, Canada Goose 34, Gadwall 4, Mallard 127, Pintail 25, American Widgeon 1, Common Goldeneye 300, Common Merganser 14, Gray Partridge 165, Ring-necked Pheasant 10, Greater Sage-grouse 165, Wild Turkey 90, Great Blue Heron 2, Golden Eagle (A 16, I 5) 21, Northern Harrier 2, Bald Eagle (A 7, I 1) 8, Red-tailed Hawk 2, Rough-legged Hawk 2, Wilson's Snipe 2, Rock Pigeon 25, Eurasian Collared-Dove 49, Great Horned Owl 14, Belted Kingfisher 4, Downy Woodpecker 5, Red-shafted Flicker 6, Merlin 2, Prairie Falcon 1, Northern Shrike 3, Blue Jay 2, Black-billed Magpie 310, Common Raven 9, Horned Lark 333, Black-capped Chickadee 9, American Dipper 1, Townsend's Solitaire 6, American Robin 1, European Starling 34, Bohemian Waxwing 50, American Tree Sparrow 89, Dark-eyed Junco 137, White-crowned Sparrow 4, Harris's Sparrow 1, Song Sparrow 4, Red-winged Blackbird 61, House Finch 96, Cassin's Finch 1, American Goldfinch 25, House Sparrow 80. Three seen in count week, but not on count day are: Green-winged Teal, American Crow, and White-breasted Nuthatch. There were 48 species seen on count day and 2,353 individual birds.

MURIE'S SPRING FIELD TRIPS

Saturday February 11 - Gray Reef and Alcova. We will meet at the Game and Fish parking lot at 9:00 AM for a trip to see winter waterfowl. We tried this trip in January, but I had to cancel due to Covid. Hopefully, we will have better luck this month. Given this is winter, and my prior failed efforts, it would be best to call me to see if the trip is still on. If we have time, we will stop at Bessemer Bend to see what is there.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is President's Day weekend, February 17-20. This is a fun time to see how many birds you can see in your backyard, or if you want more adventure count what you see at some favorite spot. Go to gbbc@birds.cornell.edu for more information and to report what you see. Several people have expressed an interest in going up to Jackson Canyon to see the eagles, so if the weather is decent (it's rarely good) we will try to see what is there this year. On **Monday Feb. 20, we will meet at 4:00 PM** at the turnoff on Wyoming 220 just opposite the Goose Egg Inn. This is a strenuous hike that can have deep snow, poor footing, wind, and you come down in the dark. Bring a light for coming back. Even though the eagles no longer roost in the Canyon, they fly up the canyon and pretty close for good views. Also, the last time I went we saw 43 elk and 15 mule deer. Given the uncertainty, please let me know if you are coming. The weather can easily make me not go, and if Monday isn't convenient, we could change it to another day.

Saturday, March 11 - We will have a field trip, but I don't have any good ideas as to where to go. March is a tough time to go birding because we don't have new migrants coming through and we have seen all the winter regulars. I would love ideas as to what would be fun to do.

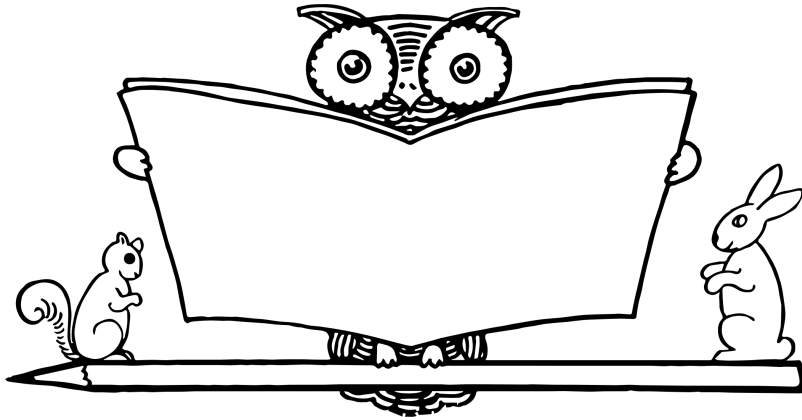
April - I will be able to take a few people to view strutting Sage-grouse. The roads to the leks I go to are dirt two-tracks that require 4-wheel drive, so the weather has to cooperate. Luckily, I go to Bates Hole where it doesn't snow very often, so the roads are passable most of the time. Also, 3 of the regular leks have almost winked out, so there is only one reliable one left. The Sage-grouse had a good chick year, so we can hope the other leks come back. Also, if the roads to the Bates Creek Reservoir area dry out, we could try for those leks which are doing better. The problem with the higher area is not just the snow and mud, but we also have to leave an hour or more earlier, and we won't get back until mid-morning. Also, we cannot get as close to the leks.

Stacey Scott (307-262-0055)

BIRD IDENTIFICATION CLASSES

Luis Alza and Stacey Scott are planning on doing a Bird Identification class again this spring. We should have lots of fun, and we will have the details in the March Newsletter.

Stacey Scott is teaching 2 OLLI classes this spring, one in April and one in late May. See the OLLI catalog for more information.



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

This is a friendly reminder that each September is our annual membership and renewal drive. All memberships expire on that date each and every year, so this is our big push to renew current members and to encourage visitors and guests to join.

We would love to have you as part of our education and conservation team. Features and benefits:

- Monthly Newsletter
- Education Programs
- Guest speakers
- Guided field trips
- Community projects
- Education Grants

You can be part of our citizen scientist efforts. You do not have to be a birder to join, enjoy, or take advantage of everything this site has to offer.

So, please, take a moment to sign up. The registration link is on our home page. We have on-line payment options for electronic payment, and of course, you can mail in payments using snail mail. As always, thank you for your continued support.

Harry
Murie Audubon Society
Membership Chair

MAS VISION STATEMENT

The vision of Murie Audubon Society is to instill a passion for nature in present and future generations through awareness, enjoyment, understanding, appreciation, conservation, and advocacy.

MAS MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Murie Audubon Society is to promote the conservation of birds and other wildlife through education and enhancement of natural habitats, understanding, appreciation, conservation, and advocacy.

OPEN POSITIONS

We have a couple of Murie Audubon Society Chapter open volunteer positions for your consideration.

- Membership Chair – This position requires some knowledge of working with spreadsheets and working with other Board Members to update our membership database, recruit new members, and other duties related to membership.
- Webmaster/IT Manager – This position requires knowledge of WordPress and cPanel, updating and managing our website.

Experience desired, but not necessary. We can train you if you are interested and have a computer with Internet access. If interested, please send an email to murie@murieaudubon.org

These are volunteer positions only.

Harry

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