

MURIE AUDUBON'S

PLAINS & PEAKS

FEBRUARY 2024 | VOL. 58 ISSUE 1

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WHY IS WYOMING'S CLIMATE CHANGING- TESTING HYPOTHESES ABOUT THE CAUSES



UPCOMING EVENTS

February General Meeting Feb 8th
“Why is Wyoming’s Climate
Changing-Testing Hypotheses about the
Causes”

Field Trip Feb 10th
Grey Reef and Alcova

SPECIAL FEATURES

Winter Field Trips and Bird Counts pg 8

About Murie’s Board Members pg 7

FIELD NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT



Greetings!

I'm writing this in deep winter, with blowing snow and below zero temperatures, and I can't help but wonder how tiny juncos and chickadees survive these arctic blasts?

I've been really interested in the study of phenology, lately. This field of research investigates the cycling of seasons especially in relation to plant life and migration. It makes me wonder if current weather adds important inputs to stabilize climate and other patterns.

Speaking of plants, the board is very interested in moving forward on our native plantings at Edness Kimball Wilkins State Park this spring. My hope, is these important plants will provide food and habitat for our birds, especially during extreme weather events.

Keep in touch to see how you can contribute!

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

Chicken Nuggets



There are over 10,000 known species of birds in the world, but have you ever thought about how many of these species humans consume? After pondering this question you'll likely come to the conclusion that, relatively speaking, the majority of humans eat a very small fraction of bird species, which is different from the case of mammals. There are less mammalian species in the world compared to birds, however we consume a greater fraction of their species.

Which are the most common birds consumed by humans in the United States (US)? For sure you can purchase chicken at most any grocery store in the US and it is frequently consumed in households and restaurants. What other kind of bird meat can be purchased at your local grocery store or as an option on the menu of restaurants in your community? Turkey and duck are fairly common. Less common of an option would be quail. Can you think of any others?

KIDS CORNER Continued

Yet there are other species to consider if we look outside the grocery stores and restaurants, in other words beyond domesticated birds. There are game birds such as pheasant, grouse, wild turkey, and wild duck to name a few. And, if we considered other parts of the world, and the various cultures among humans, we'd add several more species of birds consumed by humans to the list. But overall, the list would be much shorter compared to the total number of bird species in the world. With that, on average there is lower diversity in the birds humans eat compared to the diversity of mammals humans eat. Why is this the case?

Kelly Keenan

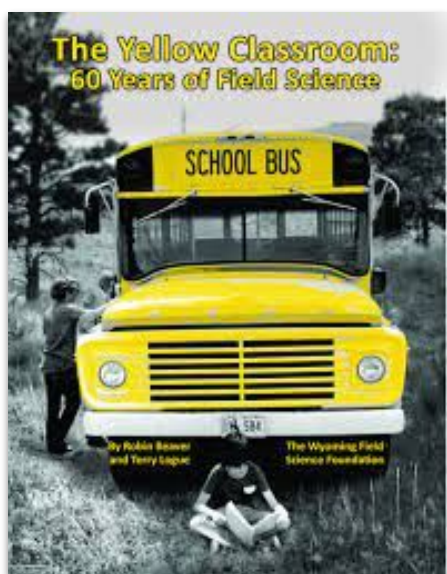
BOOK CLUB

The Yellow Classroom: 60 Years of Field Science by Robin Beaver & Terry Logue

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

"The Yellow Classroom: 60 Years of Field Science," details the many outdoor science programs taught by Casper educators Dana Van Burgh, the late Ed Strube, and Dr. Terry Logue over a span of 60 years.

Written by Robin Beaver and Terry Logue, the book captures the uniqueness of Wyoming Field Science, which encompasses the disciplines of geology, botany, and biology—all taught in the non-threatening environment of a Natrona County School District bus.



Many of the program's students provided the authors with anecdotes from their rolling summer adventures ... some that will provoke a belly laugh; others that might spark those ah-ha moments that arise with touching granite crystallized more than 2-1/2 billion years ago; or the thrill of being poised on the ridge of a limestone outcrop to witness the sun disappear over the horizon.

The book was written, in part, to help provide teachers with ideas for engaging today's students in their own field science education. And alumni will enjoy reliving their adventurous treks over the highways and byways of Wyoming and adjoining states ... or simply delight in all of the ways field science might have inspired them.

"The Yellow Classroom: 60 Years of Field Science" is available at Wind City Books, 152 S. Center St., in Casper.

Robin Beaver & Terry Logue

MURIE AUDUBON'S 76TH ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

We've gone through our lists and checked it twice, so below is the list of species and numbers of each that were seen on December 16, 2023 for the Murie Audubon Christmas Bird Count. The weather was agreeable from the standpoint of the observers; warm temperatures, very little or no snow to impede driving, and winds that were tolerable. Yet these conditions perhaps contributed to the lack of total numbers. There is a downward trend of fewer birds being seen and some species not migrating while the nicer weather persists. Stacey's list of species that we missed seeing (see below) is interesting as some of them, such as Horned Lark, Pinyon Jay, Cedar Waxwing, American Tree Sparrow, and Pine Siskin can be eruptive and are dependent upon seeds from plants and trees that didn't have much for seeds this year. One real surprise was the sighting of a Green-tailed Towhee that should have been gone quite some time ago; this is a new species for our count. - Bruce Walgren

We had great participation, and our coverage of the circle was probably the best we have ever had with 55 participants. But the number of species was the lowest since 2009, and the number of individual birds was the lowest since 2003. We added a Green-tailed Towhee, but missed American Tree Sparrows for the first time in 76 years. Raptors just weren't around, maybe food was scarce, certainly there aren't many rabbits, or maybe it is so mild they didn't come south. The non-native town birds are all down by a lot, which is a real puzzler. I am really interested in why others might think this is so. The common birds that we missed are Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Harrier, Prairie Falcon, Horned Lark, Pinyon Jay, Cedar Waxwing, American Tree Sparrow, and Pine Siskin. - Stacey Scott

So thank you once again for participating in our annual count.

Snow Goose	1	Eurasian Collared-Dove	1,072	Junco-Dark-eyed	27
Cackling Goose	1	Eastern Screech-Owl	2	Junco- Slate Colored	8
Canada Goose	1,716	Great Horned Owl	3	Junco-Oregon	17
Gadwall	23	Belted Kingfisher	1	Junco- Pink-sided	2
American Wigeon	3	Downy Woodpecker	6	White-crowned Sparrow	1
Mallard	372	Hairy Woodpecker	4	Harris' Sparrow	1
Northern Pintail	3	Northern Flicker	64	Song Sparrow	2
Green-winged Teal	13	Merlin	2	Green-tailed Towhee	1
Lesser Scaup	2	Steller's Jay	27	Common Grackle	3
Bufflehead	2	Blue Jay	56	Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch	105
Common Goldeneye	153	Black-billed Magpie	137	Pine Grosbeak	7
Hooded Merganser	14	Clark's Nutcracker	3	House Finch	61
Common Merganser	21	American Crow	86	American Goldfinch	4
Dusky (Blue) Grouse	1	Common Raven	35	Evening Grosbeak	19
Wild Turkey	288	Black-capped Chickadee	56	House Sparrow	1,746
Golden Eagle	8	Mountain Chickadee	41		
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	Red-breasted Nuthatch	20		
Cooper's Hawk	1	White-breasted Nuthatch	3	Total Species	58
Bald Eagle	13	Pygmy Nuthatch	4		
Red-tailed Hawk	2	Brown Creeper	1	Total Individuals	9,592
Killdeer	2	Townsend's Solitaire	27		
Ring-billed Gull	29	American Robin	208		
Rock Pigeon	819	European Starling	2,240		

MURIE AUDUBON PRESENTS

“Why is Wyoming’s Climate Changing-Testing Hypotheses about the Causes”



Dr. Bryan Shuman (Ph.D. and Sc.M. in Geological Sciences, Brown University), Professor and Wyoming Excellence Chair in Geology and Geophysics at the University of Wyoming (UW) will present a program on Wyoming’s climate. Shuman has taught at UW since 2007 and uses geological evidence to examine how past climate changes affected water and ecosystems. A central theme of his research is reconstructing the temperature, precipitation, and vegetation history of North America since the last ice age based on evidence from lake sediments. The work uses fossils, physical sedimentology, geophysics and geochemical techniques to determine the full spectrum of natural climate variation, evaluate climate model projections about the past, gain insight into how water and

ecosystems respond to climate change, and provide context for the archeological record. Recent projects have examined the histories of wildfire and the snowpack in the Rocky Mountains over past millennia to anticipate climate impacts on society and landscapes today. Shuman has written over 120 peer-reviewed scientific publications on related topics. He has also built upon this research background to co-lead the 2021 Greater Yellowstone Climate Assessment.

Come hear about Dr. Shuman’s research at the Murie Audubon free talk on February 8th, 2024 at 7 p.m., at the Izaak Walton Clubhouse, at 4205 Fort Caspar Road.

NOV 11th FIELD TRIP REVIEW

The November field trip was on Casper Mountain. The snow was only an inch or so, so it didn't make walking hard. We walked to Tom and Michelle Wernsmann's feeder which is one of the best on the Mountain. There was a Hairy Woodpecker on the feeder, but flew away before everyone got a good view. We had excellent views of Mountain Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches and Steller's Jays. On the way into the feeder, we had a dozen birds that flew like Rosy Finches but didn't give us any kind of view. Based on the few calls I heard, I think they were Rosy Finches, but with the wind in my hearing aids I didn't hear them well enough. We only added some Turkeys to the birds at the feeder, but we saw what is normal for November on the Mountain. The seven of us on the field trip had a very pleasant hike.

Stacey Scott

REPORT FROM THE TREASURER

The Board of Directors has decided that once a year the Treasurer ought to explain Murie's Receipts and Disbursements. Our fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30 the next year. The donations were unusually large this year. In 2023, the Great Plains Astronomical Community donated \$1,047 and the Wyo. State Parks Annual Conference donated \$750, with the other \$2,270 from individuals. The 2022 amount is more normal. The National Audubon Society gives us \$1,214 as our share of donations made to National every year. We rent the quonset hut at the Piggery for storage, and receive \$900 every year. In 2007, Murie put \$50,000 in the Community Foundation, and the Community Foundation gives us 4% of the balance of the money each year.

Under Disbursements, the newsletter is the cost of printing and mailing it, and Administration covers the website, corporate tax, insurance, meeting expenses, PayPal (the cost of donating or paying dues online), the Post Office Box, storage and The Christmas Bird Count. In 2022, the \$880 cost for the Piggery Fence materials is included under Administration. In FY 2023, we had the fund raiser for EKW plants that netted \$1,250 plus \$165 in additional donations that are listed under Restricted Funds. Under Education we received \$46 for Audubon Adventures and bought binoculars and donated to NCHS for a Teton Science School Trip and the Casper Mountain Science Program. Under Restricted, the donations for the EKW plants fell in both years, with 2023 also including \$53 spent on sunflower seeds.

If anyone has any questions, contact Stacey Scott and I will be able to look at the detailed records to answer any questions.

<i>Receipts and Disbursements</i>	<i>FY 2022</i>	<i>FY 2023</i>
<i>Donations</i>	<i>\$ 822</i>	<i>\$4,067</i>
<i>NAS Dues Share</i>	<i>1,214</i>	<i>1,214</i>
<i>Murie Membership</i>	<i>840</i>	<i>981</i>
<i>Rental of Quonset Hut</i>	<i>900</i>	<i>900</i>
<i>Community Foundation</i>	<i>2,588</i>	<i>2,615</i>
<i>Newsletter</i>	<i>(502)</i>	<i>(434)</i>
<i>Administration</i>	<i>(2,955)</i>	<i>(1,860)</i>
<i>Fund Raising</i>	<i>(150)</i>	<i>1,400</i>
<i>Audubon Adventures</i>		<i>46</i>
<i>Education</i>		<i>(4,672)</i>
<i>Restricted: Seeds/Other</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Net Receipts/(Disbursements)</i>	<i>\$2,848</i>	<i>\$4,280</i>

ABOUT MURIE'S BOARD MEMBERS-



FEBRUARY'S ALL ABOUT... JENNY

Name: Jenny Edwards

Favorite Bird: Corvids, passerines, raptors

Career: I am a science teacher at Natrona County High School. I teach several different types of science courses, but my true passion is in the environmental sciences. I teach a variety of topics from water quality, evolution, ecology, soils, agriculture, and climate.

Hobbies/Interests: I really enjoy spending time outdoors. Hiking and wandering around in nature with my 3 dogs is one of my favorite pastimes. I also have been spending quite a bit of time recently in the yard. I've been trying to improve my tomato gardening skills. I also really enjoy reading and traveling.

Favorite Murie work: Honestly, I have really enjoyed our social events. Whether its a banquet, bingo, or a Christmas bird count potluck, I sure do enjoy hanging out with all you folks!

Contact: jenny5526@myncsd.org



Wild Turkey

From an article in Buckrail November 24, 2020

“The history of wild turkeys in Wyoming dates back to 1935 when the Wyoming Game and Fish Department traded sage grouse with New Mexico for 15 Merriam’s turkeys, nine hens, and six toms.

The birds were released on the George Waln Ranch on Cottonwood Creek in Platte County in the spring of 1935 and were reported to lure some of the ranch’s domestic turkeys with them into the Laramie Mountains. By 1947, the wild turkey population was estimated to number over 1,000.

The Laramie Peak birds served as seed stock for several futile reintroduction attempts across the state until birds were sowed into the fertile habitat of the Black Hills in 1951-52. Thirty-three Platte County turkeys, along with 15 more New Mexico transplants, found new roosts near Redwater Creek in the northwest Black Hills. They probably combined forces with some transplants that strayed over from South Dakota releases, and the introduction served as the foundation for Wyoming’s most recognized turkey hunt area. In 1955, hunters began harvesting the wild turkeys.”

The first report of Wild Turkeys on the Casper CBC was in 1988 when 25 birds were tallied. Turkeys were reported periodically in subsequent years until 1999 when they began to be reported each year. In 2006, 194 turkeys were counted and each year since then they have been plentiful (288 this year). The nearest introduction of turkeys in this area that I am aware of was in Converse County where they were released as potential source of hunting. Since their introduction, they have done well enough that they are very common within the city limits of Casper. So common, in fact that in August 2023 it became illegal to feed turkeys in Casper to try to manage the turkey population and mitigate the negative effects caused by its growth. It will be interesting to see how the turkey population may respond to the ordinance against feeding them.

Eurasian Collared-Dove

The success of the Eurasian Collared-Dove in North America cannot be denied. According to the Texas Invasive Species Institute web site “The Eurasian Collared-Dove was originally native to the Bay of Bengal region (India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar), but historical records suggest that it expanded its range in the 1600s (by introductions and/or by natural means) to include Turkey and the Balkan region of southeastern Europe. By the end of the 1900s, the Eurasian Collared-Dove could be found throughout Europe.”

From BioOne Digital Library dated 3-Jun-2022: In all probability the origin of the Eurasian Collared Dove in America was the aviary of a bird breeder in Nassau, New Providence in the northern Bahamas. In fact, the origin was the Netherlands, which is where he obtained his birds in the early 1970s, although he thought they were Barbary Doves! In late 1974 several escaped, influencing the breeder’s decision to release the remainder, and it is believed that in all 50 individuals were liberated. Currently, the species can be found in nearly every North American state, in parts of Canada and Mexico, as well as Central America.

Locally here in Casper, this species was first recorded during count week during the 2003 Christmas Bird Count. They have been tallied each year since 2005, generally in increasing numbers. Given their size and numbers, most residents of Casper have observed them and noticed their increasing numbers.



Blue Jays, American Crows, and Common Ravens

These three species are all members of the Corvid family. Blue Jays are an interesting species for the Casper area. While native to North America, they apparently have not always been found here in Casper. They were first noted on the Christmas Bird Count in 1958 and have been seen each year since then.

American Crows were first counted in 1949 and were somewhat sporadic until 1996, but have been seen each year since then, sometimes very numerous.

Common Ravens first occurred on the Christmas Bird Count Census in 1952, but then not again until 1991, off and on until 2003. They have been seen every year since then with a high of 105 in 2014.

All these Corvid species are opportunistic and eat a variety of foods. Perhaps with a growing population in and around Casper and varying land uses, these species have thrived and grown their populations.

House Finch

House Finches are another species that I assumed had always been here in Casper, and they have been around since at least the 1948 Christmas Bird Count.

The House Finch was originally a bird of the western United States and Mexico. In 1940 a small number of finches were turned loose on Long Island, New York, after failed attempts to sell them as cage birds (“Hollywood finches”). They quickly started breeding and spread across almost all of the eastern United States and southern Canada within the next 50 years. It would be interesting to know if Casper’s House Finches came from the west or the east, or both.

House Finches have been quite numerous and most people who feed birds enjoy seeing them at their feeders and in their yards. We have averaged over 300 House Finches tallied yearly for our Christmas Bird Counts with a high of 1,149 in 2010, but sadly only 61 this year.

While the above information is not by any means scientific, I found it interesting, perhaps especially the Corvids, as they have been successful in the area without any major changes to the habitat or climate.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, February 10 - Field Trip to Gray Reef and Alcova - We will meet at 9:00 AM at the Game and Fish Parking Lot. This is a good way to add water birds to our year's list. If we are lucky, we could find Trumpeter Swans. We should be back about noon. This is our third attempt at this field trip, so we hope the third time's a charm. Call Stacey Scott at 262-0055 for more details.

April - I count three different Sage-grouse Leks in April, and would be glad to have company. I need to be at the lek half an hour before sunrise and stay for at least an hour. Dry or frozen roads are required, so I cannot schedule the counts very far in advance. If anyone is interested in joining me, call me at 262-0055.

Stacey Scott

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

RENEW OR BECOME A REGULAR MEMBER OF MURIE AUDUBON FOR ONLY \$10



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\$10 One Year \$20 Two Years \$30 Three Years or electronic payment on our website.

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