

MURIE AUDUBON'S

PLAINS & PEAKS

FEBRUARY 2025 | VOL. 59 ISSUE 1

<http://www.murieaudubon.org> | Facebook @ Murie Audubon Society

MURIE AUDUBON PRESENTS: REDDS SPAWNING HABITAT ENHANCEMENT



UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 13, 2025 Program: Redds Spawning Habitat Enhancement

Mar 14-17: Kearney, NE Sandhill Crane Migration Overnight Field Trip

Apr 12: Habitat Hero Workshop in Casper

FIELD NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT



Happy New Year from all of us at Murie! As we usher in another year, we're thrilled to share some of the fantastic opportunities coming your way. Let's make 2025 a year filled with field trips, learning, and a deep connection to our local bird communities.

Mark your calendars for our upcoming field trips! In February, join us for a birding adventure to Riverton, Wyoming. This day trip is perfect for checking out species that don't quite make it to Casper. Check out the field trip section for more information.

Speaking of cool field trip experiences, don't miss the overnight Crane Migration Trip to Kearney, Nebraska, from March 14th to 17th. Witness the breathtaking spectacle of thousands of cranes gathering along the Platte River—a truly unforgettable experience. Be sure to reserve your spot early as spaces are limited! Again, more information is posted to page ___.

In addition to field trips, we're excited to announce the Murie Audubon Habitat Hero Workshop on April 12th. This hands-on workshop is designed to help you create bird-friendly gardens in your own backyard. Learn how to select native plants to make your outdoor space a haven for wildlife. Whether you're an experienced gardener or just getting started, this workshop is a fantastic way to make a positive impact in our community.

Finally, keep an eye out for more details about our upcoming book club! This will be a wonderful opportunity to engage with fellow members and explore literature that inspires and informs our connection to nature. Stay tuned for announcements about the first book selection and meeting dates. We can't wait to see you at these incredible events!

Jenny Edwards

FEBRUARY BIRD CHALLENGE

This month's challenge is to check in on some of the birds from the Christmas Bird Count that were lower than usual. Now that we've had cooler weather, are we noticing this species?

- Barrow's Goldeneye
- Hooded Merganser
- Northern Harrier
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Great Horned Owl
- American Crow
- Common Raven
- Pygmy Nuthatch
- Pine Siskin

How to Participate

Many of these birds are feeder birds. Ravens and hawks are great birds to find while driving Wyoming's highways. Help kids document their observations.

Share Your Experience: Post your sightings on our Facebook page (Murie Audubon Society) with **#WyomingBirdwatchChallenge**.

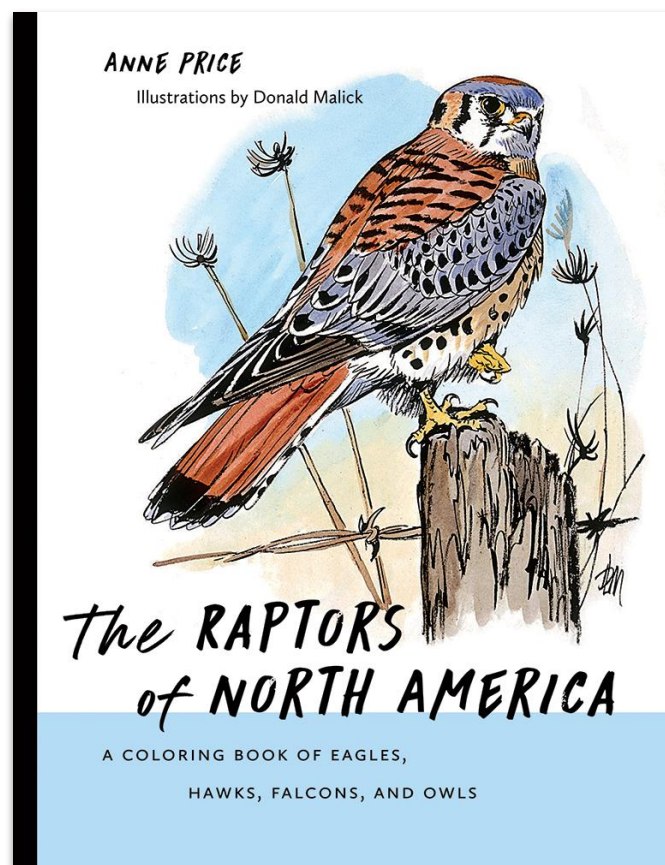
Email any photos to jenny5526@mynncsd.org

SANDHILL CRANE MIGRATION TRIP TO KEARNEY, NE

Murie has booked a trip to Kearney, NE for its members to witness the Sandhill Crane spring migration. Everyone is responsible for their own transportation, lodging and food. We do need to know who is going because we are limited to 20 in the Audubon blind. Please e-mail Jenny5526@mynncsd.org to reserve your spot. Also, please arrange lodging at The Holiday Inn in Kearny. Murie has reserved a block of 20 rooms. The reservation is under Murie Audubon, Phone: (308) 237 8813.

Please sign up and make reservations, as soon as possible. The deadline for registration is February 7th.

BOOK CLUB



“The Raptors of North America”: A Coloring Book of Eagles, Hawks, Falcons and Owls” by Anne Price

Illustrated by Don Malick, this is the first coloring book featuring every species of raptor in the US. Originally published in 1985, this third edition has great information about each species, with a fun “cool fact” and full-color miniature on each page. There are also plans for a kestrel nest box and a handy checklist of raptors in the back of the book.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

If you have questions, please call Stacey Scott at 307-262-0055, I will post field trips and any changes under “Events” on the website, murieaudubon.org. Also, I am looking for more ideas for field trips. Let me know if you have any ideas.

Saturday, Feb 15. Meet at the Game and Fish Parking Lot at 8:00 AM for a field Trip to the Riverton Area. We will carepool, and meet Bob Hargis who will show us around Riverton. Bring a lunch and water. The Riverton area has different wintering birds than we do, so this should be fun. We won't go if the roads are not decent, so I will post on the Murie Website under events whether we will go. Or call Stacey Scott at 307-262-0055 for more details.

Friday - Monday, March 14-17. We will go to Kearney Nebraska to watch the Sandhill Cranes. This is a tremendous show, and is something everyone should see at least once. There are also other birds like ducks and Snow Geese. Everyone is responsible for their own transportation, lodging and food. We do need to know who is going because we are limited to 20 in the Audubon blind. Please e-mail Jenny5526@myncsd.org to reserve your spot. Also, please arrange lodging at The Holiday Inn in Kearny. The reservation is under Murie Audubon, Phone: (308) 237 8813.

Saturday, April 12. The Audubon Habitat Hero Workshop will be this Saturday. We will have more details in future newsletters.

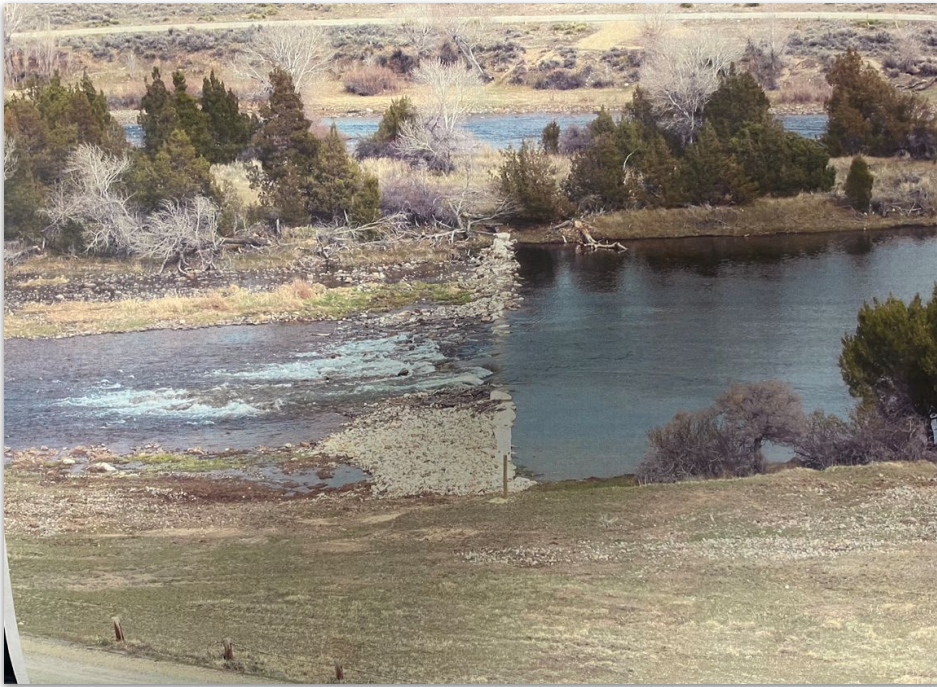
Saturday, April 19. Let's do a field trip to Goldeneye to look at the early duck migration. We will meet at 9:00 AM at the Game and Fish Parking Lot, and we should be back by noonish.

Sage-grouse Leks. I will be counting Sage-grouse Leks during April and early May and would like company. There is no guarantee that we will see Sage-grouse. Call 307-262-0055 if you are interested.

REPORT ON JANUARY 11 FIELD TRIP
January 11 was actually a very nice day for the middle of winter. The sun was missing, but the temperature was in the low 30°s with almost no wind, and it didn't start snowing until we were headed back. Only two of us went, but we saw some good birds. Gray Reef and Alcova were completely open, which I'm not used to in January. Gray Reef had more Coots than I have ever seen on it, and only a few other ducks which were Mallards, Redheads, Lesser Scaup, 1 Greater Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye and some Ring-billed Gulls. At Alcova Dam we added Pied-billed Grebes, Gadwalls and a Marsh Hawk. There were almost no ducks on Alcova, but we found Townsend's Solitaires and Flickers in the Russian Olives, and I had 7 Gray-crowned Rosy Finches fly through my field of view while I was looking for ducks on the lake. We didn't see any Rough-legged or Red-tailed hawks on our way to Gray Reef, which is most unusual.

Stacey Scott

MURIE AUDUBON PRESENTS: REDDS SPAWNING HABITAT ENHANCEMENT



The Redds Spawning Habitat Enhancement is located on BLM lands ~30 miles southwest of Casper within the North Platte River's famed Gray Reef section. Gray Reef is designated a blue ribbon trout fishery that attracts anglers from around the world who are seeking numerous trophy rainbow, brown, and cutthroat trout.

Additionally, trout spawned in this section populate the rest of the North Platte River to Dave Johnston Powerplant as temperatures and sediment loading become detrimental below Government Bridge.

The Redds Spawning area consists of three channels; the main southern channel receiving all of base flow (500 cfs) and includes ~250,000 ft² of potential spawning habitat. As flows increase beyond ~700 cfs the middle and northern channels are engaged opening an additional ~159,000 ft² of potential spawning habitat.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department and the Platte River Foundation are pursuing Redds spawning habitat enhancements including: diverting flow from the main channel to the middle channel at base flow taking advantage of an additional ~112,000 ft² of potential spawning habitat, buffering middle channel flows using the Northern channel as "relief" while adding an additional ~47,000 ft² of potential spawning habitat, adding favorable spawning gravels to riffle and glide habitats, incorporating favorable hydraulics including glide-like features, stabilizing nearby eroding banks decreasing fine sediment inputs, and allowing adjacent low lying wetland areas to be used by young of year trout as rearing habitat. These areas will be constructed to hold water year round serving as refuge for waterfowl and amphibians including the leopard frog.

John McCoy, Aquatic Habitat Biologist with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department will be our guest speaker to update us on the efforts for habitat improvements not only for aquatic fauna but also for all species along the river.

Public and Audubon members are invited to come to the Murie Audubon free talk on February 13, 2025 at 7 p.m., at the Izaak Walton Clubhouse, at 4205 Fort Caspar Road.

BIRD STORY AND PHOTO OF THE MONTH

A few years ago, I discovered a new birding spot in Carbon County. I do a few weekend fossil hunting trips to areas of the Red Desert in southwestern Wyoming in late spring. In 2023 I decided to try a new route into the backcountry.



County Road 23 (County 4; Sweetwater) runs south of Wamsutter going to Baggs. Ten or twelve miles south of the interstate, it runs into Wyo Highway 789 at a nonexistent town called Dad. About a half mile before connecting to 789, you pass a sign for Red Wash Wetland Area. It is not in my DeLorme Atlas, it is not on the Baggs BLM map, it is not on the local USGS 7 ½ minute topo map. It only exists when you actually get there. I imagine that if you come in from Dad, look for signs for Co Rd 23.

Red Wash is an area of dikes and ponds created by the BLM (I assume). There was a lot of water here in May of 2023 and 2024. The dikes are all drivable, but as the sign warns, you need to drive responsibly. I did not want a cool bird to cause me to fall off the dike, which would have ruined my outing and my wife's weekend. One could just as easily get out and walk.

I was not able to take any photos on my 2023 or 2024 visits, but I highly recommend this area to anyone who is in the area in the spring. Being 'in the area' is a bit of a laugh; unless you are going to Baggs or Craig or points beyond, this place is quite in the middle of nowhere. But if you are

on I-80 and have a couple hours to kill looking for birds, give it a try. My list included almost all of the expected ducks, grebes, phalaropes and countless coots. The more exciting birds were black-crowned night herons, many marsh wrens and a few black and Forster's terns. I do not know if the Rawlins BLM office has any records of birds found here, but it would be interesting to find out, and I may do so prior to my next visit in May.

I grew up birding in Massachusetts, where every summer my brother and I would enjoy the countless marsh wrens singing and flapping about in the cattails of Plum Island. This is the first place I have seen anything like this in the west.

Because we all like photos, I did get some portraits of a flock of marbled godwits in a puddle along Co Rd 23. This puddle exists on wet years, and sometimes has birds. The godwits were a first in the state for me.



IN CASE YOU MISSED IT...

JANUARY'S PROGRAM NON-GAME BIRDS OF WYOMING



The Non-game Bird Program in Wyoming is part of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Zach Wallace, the statewide non-game bird biologist, is the head of this program and was our guest speaker in January.

460 bird species have been identified in Wyoming, 250 of these species are confirmed or suspected of breeding in Wyoming. The statewide Nongame Section works with regional personnel and many partners, to improve understanding of the state's nongame bird populations, conserve and restore their habitats, and increase public appreciation of these species. Currently, 79 non-game birds are classified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in Wyoming's State Wildlife Action Plan because of declining populations, limited distribution, or threats. They are proposing to add 10 more species to the SGCN list. These species can be found in all of Wyoming's diverse habitats, including sagebrush steppe, grasslands, forests and woodlands, alpine, and wetlands.

The Wyoming populations of the following species represent the highest concentrations of their species in the United States: Black Rosy Finch (actually over 50% of the world's breeding population is found in Wyoming), Greater Sage-Grouse, Lark Bunting, Sage Thrasher, Brewer's Sparrow, and Sagebrush Sparrow. It is estimated that in North America, over 2.9 billion birds have been lost since 1970. Common Birds in Decline include: Chipping Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Evening Grosbeak, Lark Bunting, Mountain Bluebird, and Western Kingbird.

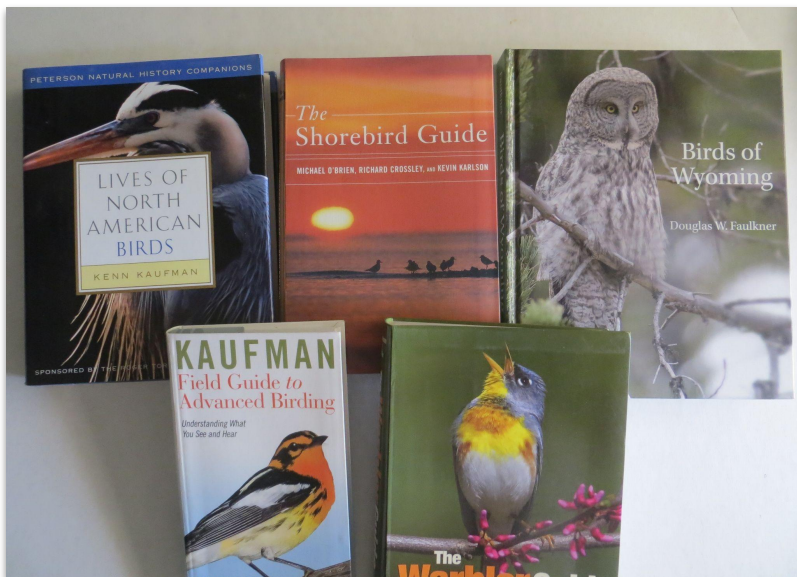
Monitoring projects are a major tool used to learn about our avian friends. Wyoming Game and Fish personnel, professional contractors, and volunteers all have a role in aiding the research of avian species. Many Murie members have participated in the North American Breeding Bird Surveys – a roadside count that involves counting all birds along a 50 stop route. A grid survey is the main component of the Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions program that is left up to the professionals. Long-term monitoring projects for Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, grassland raptor monitoring, Trumpeter Swans, and Harlequin Ducks are ongoing throughout the state.

New projects include a study of Pinyon Jays, their habitats and movements, as well as the response to fire by the American Goshawks.

Wyoming Game and Fish works with many other agencies, academic organizations, non-profits, as well as the public, to gather data to help in the management decisions of avian species.

RAFFLE TO BE HELD AT MARCH MEETING

Chris Michelson recently donated some optics and some very nice bird books to Murie Audubon. If you're interested in a spotting scope or if you want to fill out your bird book library, this will be a great chance to get something for yourself or as a gift. The optics include: a Kowa TSN-824 M spotting scope with tripod, and a Kowa TSN-2 spotting scope. We will be selling raffle tickets for the two spotting scopes and for Doug Faulkner's Birds of Wyoming book at the February and March meetings. The drawing will take place in March. Ticket prices will be \$20 each for the Kowa TSN-824 M scope, \$10 each for the Kowa TSN-2 (with 2 lenses) and \$5 each for the book. There is still a good selection of books available.



YOUR STORIES

Calling All Murie Friends: Share Your Stories and Insights in Our Newsletter!

Whether you're a seasoned birder or just starting out, your experiences and knowledge are invaluable to our Murie Audubon community. That's why we're inviting you to contribute to our newsletter!

Why Share Your Bird Watching Experiences?

Birdwatching is more than just a hobby; it's a way to connect with nature, contribute to conservation efforts, and join a global community of like-minded enthusiasts. By sharing your stories, insights, and discoveries, you can:

1. **Inspire Others:** Your experiences could spark curiosity and enthusiasm in others. Whether it's a rare sighting or a simple joy of watching familiar backyard birds, your stories can motivate others to explore birdwatching more deeply.
2. **Learn and Grow:** Birdwatching is a continual learning process. By sharing your observations and challenges, you open the door to feedback, advice, and new perspectives from fellow birders. It's a great way to expand your knowledge and refine your skills.
3. **Contribute to Conservation:** Your sightings and insights can contribute to broader conservation efforts. By documenting bird behaviors, migration patterns, or unusual sightings, you can help scientists and conservationists track changes in bird populations and habitats.
4. **Build Community:** Birdwatching can be a solitary activity, but it doesn't have to be. Sharing your experiences helps build a sense of community. You may find others who have had similar experiences or discover new birding spots and techniques.
5. **Citizen Science:** Bird sightings and journal entries from 50 years ago are proving to be important scientific evidence for documenting key changes in migration, abundance, and frequency of birds.

What Can You Contribute?

Each month, the newsletter will provide a prompt. However, please share any of the following outside of the prompt. Here are some ideas.

- **Exciting Bird Sightings:** Did you spot a rare species or observe an unusual behavior? Share the story of your encounter and what made it special.
- **Birdwatching Gear:** Have you found the perfect gear that makes birding more enjoyable. Share your tips with fellow birders!
- **Favorite Birding Spots:** What's your go-to birdwatching location? Describe the habitat, the species you typically see, and what makes it unique.
- **Cool photos you've captured of birds.**
- **Advice to new birders in the area.**

YOUR STORIES

March's Prompt:

Unprepared Birding- Tell us a story about accidentally happening upon a bird

How to Submit Your Contributions

Contributing to our newsletter is easy! Simply write up your story, tip, or insight and send it to our editorial team at jenny5526@myncsd.org by the **third week of each month**. Feel free to include photos, illustrations, or links to additional resources. We'll review your submission and may reach out with any questions or for further details.

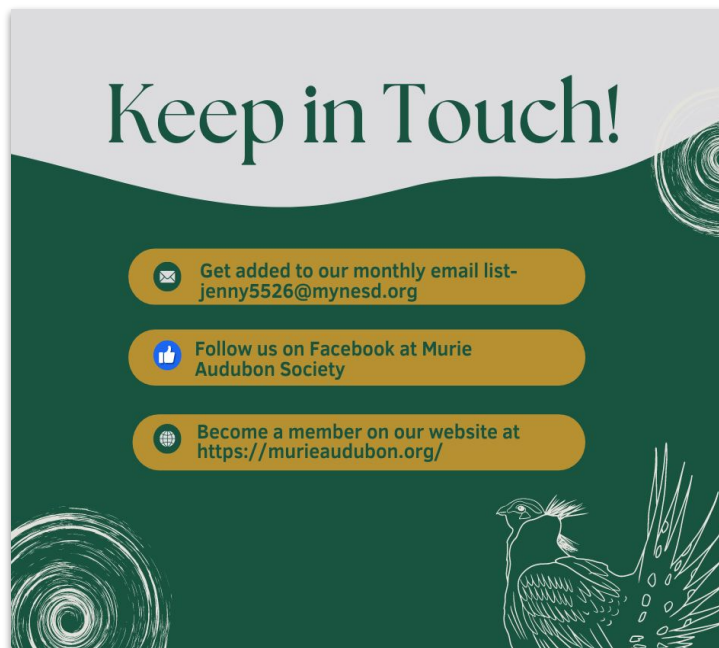
Happy Writing!

Jenny Edwards

CALLING FOR SUBMISSIONS FOR MARCH

Did you have a rare bird alert recently? Or were you able to capture an excellent shot? Did you travel somewhere and see a new species? Please share, by sending in your photos to be published in our newsletter!

E-mail photos to Murie@murieaudubon.org!



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RECAP

The 77th annual Murie Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held December 14, 2024. Though our count has been postponed in some previous years, we have never had to cancel it. Here are the Big Numbers: I'll start with our volunteers- 63 people braved very windy conditions to census birds in our 15 mile diameter circle. 66 species (58 on count day and 8 during count week) were tallied, which is about what we've seen in recent years. 10,721 individual birds were accounted for – above our average of 7,436 but well below the maximum of 16,721 counted in 2018.

New Count Species: Actually a hybrid – Cackling Goose X Greater White-fronted Goose

Big Misses: Buteos, only the Ferruginous Hawks were seen on count day, one Rough-legged Hawk was seen on count week, but no Red-tailed Hawks or Northern Harriers were counted. No Common Redpolls, no Pine Siskins, and no American Tree Sparrows were tallied.

High count: the Ring-billed Gull had a high count of 120.

Low counts: the finch family continues to show a down trend in numbers, only 2 Townsend's Solitaire were seen vs an average of 30.

Notable sightings: One Greater Sage-Grouse was recorded, the first since 2006 and before that not seen since 1973! An observer noted a flyover of a Black-crowned Night Heron at Washington Park, a Varied Thrush was recorded in a backyard – this is the 3rd sighting for our count, a Brown Thrasher was recorded for the 6th time, and a Spotted Towhee was also recorded.

Complete list:

- 3 Snow Goose
- 91 Cackling Goose
- 1 Cackling Goose X Greater White-fronted Goose
- 2286 Canada Goose
- 34 Gadwall
- 21 American Wigeon
- 388 Mallard
- 3 American Green-winged Teal
- cw Lesser Scaup
- 33 Common Goldeneye
- 67 Common Merganser
- 9 Gray Partridge
- 1 Greater Sage-Grouse



4 Dusky (Blue) Grouse
 236 Wild Turkey
 1 Black-crowned Night Heron
 11 Golden Eagle - Mature
 2 Golden Eagle - Immature
 6 Sharp-shinned Hawk
 2 Cooper's Hawk
 5 Bald Eagle -Mature
 3 Bald Eagle -Immature
 cw Rough-legged Hawk
 2 Ferruginous Hawk
 120 Ring-billed Gull
 601 Rock Pigeon
 952 Eurasian Collared-Dove
 cw Eastern Screech-Owl
 1 Great Horned Owl
 2 Belted Kingfisher
 15 Downy Woodpecker
 5 Hairy Woodpecker
 125 Northern Flicker
 1 Northern Shrike
 cw American Kestrel
 1 Merlin
 9 Steller's Jay
 35 Blue Jay
 110 Black-billed Magpie
 49 Clark's Nutcracker
 66 American Crow
 13 Common Raven
 22 Horned Lark
 57 Black-capped Chickadee
 43 Mountain Chickadee
 35 Red-breasted Nuthatch
 17 white-breasted Nuthatch
 5 Brown Creeper
 2 Townsend's Solitaire
 136 American Robin

cw Varied Thrush
 1 Brown Thrasher
 2582 European Starling
 75 Cedar Waxwing
 1 Lapland Longspur
 127 Dark-eyed Junco
 cw Harris' Sparrow
 1 White-throated Sparrow
 2 Song Sparrow
 cw Spotted Towhee
 23 Western Meadowlark
 cw Common Grackle
 25 Gray-crowned Rosy Finch
 197 House Finch
 2 Cassin's Finch
 19 Red Crossbill
 7 American Goldfinch
 2028 House Sparrow



Stacey Scott

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.



RENEW OR BECOME A REGULAR MEMBER OF MURIE AUDUBON FOR ONLY \$10. REMEMBER, ALL MEMBERSHIPS EXPIRE SEPTEMBER 1ST

Today's Date: _____

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

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City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ (Not shared with anyone – honest!)

Email: _____ (Again, not shared with anyone)

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