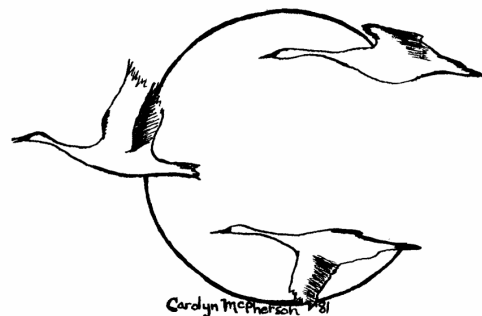


Missouri River Journal



Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Society

Vol. 38, No. 5 JANUARY 2018

Wallabies, whales, penguins, platypus and parrots!

A 6 Week Adventure in Australia

Monday, January 8, 7 PM - FWP Headquarters, Giant Springs Road

In 2010 Roger Pepper traveled to Australia for a 6 week adventure. There was 4 days of diving and snorkeling the Great Barrier Reef to some of the most spectacular dive spots in the world. Imagine snorkeling with dwarf Minke whales only 3 feet away. The dive trip was followed with hiking over 250 Km of trails in Central Australia, Northern Australia and Tasmania visiting numerous National Parks. Some of these hikes were extended multi day hikes in a variety of outback environments. This presentation will cover adventure travel in Australia on a budget. Roger will discuss Australian culture, climate, ecosystems and wildlife. This trip encompassed tropical rain forests, deserts, temperate rain forests and exotic coastlines. Australia has an abundance of parrots and other exotic bird life, incredible reptiles, and of course amazing marsupials. He will also discuss aboriginal culture and art.

Roger Pepper is an outdoor enthusiast originally from Washington. He has been hiking, skiing, kayaking, etc. for most of his life. He was involved in several bird banding projects for over 6 years and data collected on Red Crossbills was included in the Crossbill Life Histories in the Birds of North America series. He has traveled throughout the North America and visited Africa and Australia. In graduate school he researched small mammals in riparian corridors in coniferous forests of the Eastern Cascade Mountains of WA State. He spent two summers in Washington working as an interpretive naturalist for the USDA Forest Service. Roger has been a teacher for a long time but refuses to admit how many years. For the last 14 years he has been a Biology Professor at Great Falls College MSU where he teaches General Biology, Microbiology, and Anatomy and Physiology. He is an avid hiker and loves the Bob Marshall Wilderness and Utah's Canyonlands. His summers are filled with adventure travel with future plans to visit the Scottish Highlands, Morocco/Spain/Portugal, and Ecuador/Galapagos.

The program is free and open to the public, January 8 at 7 PM in the conference room of FWP HQ.

WINTER CALENDAR

January 1—Get outside—see how many “first of the year” birds you can find!

January 8 - 6:00 pm UMBA Board Meeting-FWP—immediately preceding monthly program

January 8—7 pm UMBA monthly program—Wallabies, Whales, Penguins, Platypus and Parrots!

January 20—Newsletter deadline for articles, photographs and calendar items.

January 20 (alternate date 21) - Field trip, winter eagle watch , see page 7

February 16-19—Visit gbbc.birdcount.org for all the details. A bird count for everyone of all skill levels.

May 18-19, 2018—Raptor ID class and field trip with Steve Hoffman

June 8-10, 2018—Bird Festival in Kalispell, mark your calendars now

GREAT FALLS CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

UMBA's 44th Christmas Bird Count (CBC) 12/16/2017

Weather: 25F-33F; 9mph peak wind; 1-2" snow; partly cloudy; open water. It was glorious weather for an UMBA CBC!

Between 8:00 AM and 4:15 PM, thirteen vehicles carried 43 observers who walked/drove a combined 17 miles/417 miles to cover our 15-mile radius count circle. Last year was warmer but the river was partly frozen. This year we had open water. Last year we counted 59 species and 17,716 individual birds. This year we counted 66 species and a total of 25,692 individual birds. The less common CBC birds listed for our area are in bold print and the asterisk marks the most surprising CBC bird this year. The Yellow-billed Loon is a rarity in Great Falls that first showed up December 8th. Among the several species we usually find but didn't this year were American Robin, Mourning Dove, Horned Lark, and Bohemian Waxwing. We welcome you to join us next December for UMBA's CBC. It's a cool experience! Thank you to all who helped with this year's count. To view the various CBC results, go to www.christmasbirdcount.org.

Species:

Cackling Goose 6	Canada Goose 17,390	Trumpeter Swan 1
Gadwall 3	American Wigeon 10	Mallard 713
Canvasback 6	Redhead 127	Ring-necked Duck 41
Lesser Scaup 40	Long-tailed Duck 3	Bufflehead 265
Common Goldeneye 1508	Barrow's Goldeneye 27	Hooded Merganser 20
Common Merganser 61	Ruddy Duck 9	Gray Partridge(Hun) 7
Ring-necked Pheasant 218	Sharp-tailed Grouse 29	Wild Turkey 48
Pied-billed Grebe 1	Horned Grebe 1	Amer. White Pelican 1
Great Blue Heron 1	Bald Eagle 18	Sharp-shinned Hawk 5
Northern Goshawk 1	Cooper's Hawk 3	Red-tailed Hawk 26
Harlan's Hawk 4	Ferruginous Hawk 1	Rough-legged Hawk 72
Golden Eagle 2	American Kestrel 1	Merlin 6
Prairie Falcon 3	American Coot 277	Ring-billed Gull 97
Herring Gull 1	Rock Pigeon 912	Eurasian-collared Dove 140
Great Horned Owl 7	Belted Kingfisher 7	Downy Woodpecker 13
Northern Flicker(unknown species) 46		No. Red-shafted flicker 40
Yellow-shafted Flicker 1		Northern Shrike 4
Blue Jay 8	Black-billed Magpie 475	American Crow 18
Common Raven 23	Black-capped Chickadee 257	Red-Breasted Nuthatch 7
White-breasted Nuthatch 2	Brown Creeper 2	Townsend's Solitaire 5
European Starling 504	Cedar Waxwing 34	American Tree Sparrow 16
Song Sparrow 4	Dark-eyed(Slate)Junco 8	House Finch 543
Red Crossbill 3	White-winged Crossbill 1	Common Redpoll 172
House Sparrow 1384		
*Yellow-billed Loon 1		

Submitted by Nora Gray, UMBA CBC Compiler

CUT BANK CBC

Cut Bank's 3rd Christmas Bird Count—12/17/2017

Despite the rather breezy conditions in Cut Bank, we pulled together another great count for our 3rd annual CBC. (ed. note - Wind was 35-45 mph most of the day with a mid-day squall that had winds steady at 50 mph and gust to 58 mph (officially). Temperatures hovered in the low 30's all day. Blowing snow was constantly scraped off car windows.)

We found 26 species, plus two more for count week. In the previous 2 counts, we found 28 (plus 4 count week) and 29 (plus 1 count week).

The total number of individuals is 37 birds higher than last year. While a few species seemingly went missing, overall our results are on par for what is expected this time of year on the Hi-Line.

New species for the count: Blue Jay (previously a count week-only bird), American Tree Sparrow, and Ring-necked Pheasant. A new species for count week is Canada Goose.

The standout individual species for a low count was Horned Lark at only 521, vs. 1289 (2nd year) and 2407 (1st year). Of course today (December 18) it got cold and started snowing, and I saw far more Larks in the road on the way home. Funny what a single day can do.

The standout species for a high count was Common Redpoll at 302, vs. 15 (2nd year) and 136 (1st year).

I'm glad most folks were able to see the one Snowy Owl we found this year, and I'm so grateful for everyone's perseverance in the extremely windy conditions. It certainly hampered our ability to hear, chapped a few cheeks, and coated many a car window with snowy grit.

Thank you all once again for your participation and wonderful company. I look forward to crossing paths with each of you in the coming year.

Warmly from snowy Cut Bank, Kate Atkins

Editors Note—7 members of UMBA traveled from Great Falls on the 17th to help with the Cut Bank CBC. The weather forecast was for "breezy" conditions. A better description was "brutal" blowing snow.

In Memorium: UMBA recently lost a longtime member - Irene Ryder. She and her husband Cal were lifelong outdoor enthusiasts-hiking, fishing, backpacking, gardening and bird watching. They did it all together. The family requested that in lieu of flowers that memorials be sent to Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon. The board is touched by their thoughts and hope to do something special to honor her memory.

The **MISSOURI RIVER JOURNAL** is published monthly from September through June by the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Society, Great Falls, MT. The Chapter meets the second Monday of each month, September through May, 7:00 P.M., in the conference room at Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Giant Springs State Park, Great Falls. Meetings and field trips are free and open to the public.

UMBA Mission Statement:

To promote birds and birding in North Central Montana by 1) Protecting bird habitat (with an emphasis on species of concern); 2) Educating people about birds and wildlife; 3) Providing the chapter resources to achieve the mission

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT ROUND UP

There are 34 official CBC count circles in Montana. It is interesting to see what some of the other counts have been seeing. Here are a few summaries that have been posted.

The Eureka CBC was held Saturday, Dec 16 in moderate weather with good participation. Preliminary totals show 69 species which would be the second highest in our 25 year history. First time ever birds included White-winged Scoter, Northern Shoveler, and Chipping Sparrow. Red-naped Sapsucker was seen for only the 3rd time on our count. Lewis Young.

The 44th annual Bigfork Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 16th. The weather was incredible compared to last year when we had -15 below zero and little open water. This year temps ranged from 28-32 F degrees, no wind, and water was mostly open. Consequently, all the participants had a good day, birds were easy to observe, and remarkably we ended up with an **unofficial** count total of **94 species, a new Bigfork record!** The previous Bigfork CBC record was 90 species. Some highlights were, Cackling Goose (2nd record for the count), Wood Duck (5th record), Peregrine Falcon (3rd record), Sandhill Crane (4th record), Lesser Black-backed Gull (1st cycle and the 1st record for the count), Yellow-headed Blackbird (3rd record), and a Brown-headed Cowbird (3rd record). Many of the birders enjoyed a beautiful immature Snowy Owl in Lower Valley for only the 6th time on the Bigfork count. Thanks to all the participants who made the count so enjoyable and successful! Craig Hohenberger

The Bozeman CBC was conducted on Saturday December 16. There were 52 participants on the count, including 5 feeder watchers. The weather was challenging, with moderate snowfall all day long, totaling up to 10 inches. The temperature was in the moderate range of 28-34 degrees. Even with the poor visibility and poor road conditions we had a very respectable total of 61 species (plus 4 count week species). Cackling Goose and Sandhill Crane (injured wing) were new species for the count. Northern Shoveler was seen for only the second time and American Coot was seen for the fifth time. Birds with new high count totals included Wild Turkey, American Kestrel, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Gray Jay, Blue Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, and Red-winged Blackbird. John Parker

In Helena, Last Chance Audubon experienced fog in the valleys until mid-morning, and then enjoyed temperatures in the low 30's for the rest of the day on Saturday, Dec. 16, 2017, for our Christmas Bird Count. We had record counts for Cackling Goose, Rough-legged Hawk, American Kestrel, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, and Rusty Blackbird. We matched an existing record for White-winged Scoter and Common Grackle. We had a total of 64 species (not including any count week birds), which is 1 above our average over the past 14 years. Though our overall count of birds was only 9580, which was quite a bit lower than our 14 year average of 11,667. We did however, have a record number of participants this year with 57. Many thanks to Coburn Currier, who not only organized the event but wrangled the data. Janice Miller

The Ennis CBC was conducted on Wednesday December 20, 2017. There were 22 participants hailing from Ennis, Bozeman, Deer Lodge, Helena, Livingston, California and Alaska! In addition there were 3 diligent feeder watchers who added to the total species count. The weather in Ennis was challenging with blizzard-like conditions encountered throughout the day and temperatures that began at 40° then plummeted to 12°. Even with the poor visibility and terrible road conditions, we had an unexpected total count of 63 species for the day with an additional 5 species seen during count week. We enjoyed return visits from Harris's and White-throated Sparrows, had a record high 3 Virginia Rails, tied the high count for Great Blue Heron and found 2 lingering Ring-billed Gulls and a Northern Shoveler that were seen for only the third time on the count. Many thanks to all who participated and endured the treacherous drive home! Robin Wolcott

DECEMBER BIRD SIGHTINGS

A Yellow-billed Loon showed up December 8th at Giant Springs. It was catching fish off of the fishing island by the "giant spring". It remained in the same area until at least December 24th. On the 26th the area was filling up with ice - it was not seen. Its presence created quite a bit of interest. Not only is a Yellow-billed Loon very uncommon in the winter it was unusual because of how long it lingered and how undisturbed it was by all the visitors watching it and photographing it. The last well observed YBLO in Great Falls was 2008. There have been a few more recent sightings/reports/rumors that were distant, fleeting, poor conditions, single day sightings not nearly as well documented. This bird was unusually cooperative.

The World population has been estimated at under 10,000 birds. It breeds from northern Alaska and Northern Canada east nearly to Hudson Bay. It nests on large tundra lakes making it vulnerable to the effects of climate change, oil spills and subsistence hunting. In fact, in 2010 the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) changed the status of the YBLO from Least Concern to Near-Threatened as the species appears to be in a "moderately rapid" population decline. An unsustainable level of subsistence harvesting by indigenous peoples was specifically named as the main threat.

It breeds in high Arctic tundra region often on large tundra lakes. In winter it is generally found on sheltered coastal areas of the northern Pacific Ocean and the northwestern coast of Norway. It has been recorded as a breeding bird in Russia, Canada and the US. Though it winters primarily north of 50°N, its winter range extends south to 35°N off the coast of Japan. It has been recorded as a vagrant in more than 20 countries, including some as far south as Mexico and Spain.

It was easy to observe the feeding behavior of diving from the surface and swimming underwater. It often would swim along the surface with its head partly submerged watching for prey. It is built for speedy underwater swimming. It was a gift to watch this bird and we can only hope that it survives to return to the Arctic this spring. (photo below—Russell Hill)

Another December bird of note - on December 6th a Northern Parula was well documented at Giant Springs State Park. It was the first eBird record for this bird at Giant Springs—and it was December! Russell Hill photographed it on the 6th. It was subsequently seen by Richard Mousel (on 2 different days) and Beth Hill with Richard on the 9th. Despite efforts of many skilled bird watchers over the following week it was not seen again. It is a tiny (kinglet size) warbler of tree tops. It has two distinct populations - one in the south-east that nest in Spanish moss - the other a northern population that nest in similar looking old man's beard lichen. It is possible that this young bird was from the northern population and got its east and west confused. The temperatures were below freezing at night and it is unknown if this insectivore would survive to fly to warmer wintering grounds. (photo below: Russell Hill)



Photo—Russell Hill



Photo—Russell Hill

CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECT

Dear Short-eared Owl Enthusiasts,

We need your help, The Owl Research Institute (ORI) is embarking on a 3-year collaborative study to monitor Short-eared Owl populations in the western U.S. The study will rely on volunteers to make it a success.

Project WAFS (Western Asio flammeus Landscape Study), involves 15 other agencies and organizations across 8 states and is designed to assess the population status, trends, and threats against the Short-eared Owl - an enigmatic, open-country species.

This project, funded by a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is a rare example of cooperation and collaboration on a large scale and is an opportunity to influence and focus conservation and restoration activities for this species. This species specific monitoring program will provide the most robust population data for Short-eared Owls to date.

The effort aims to complete a number of coordinated surveys across California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. The survey design is well-suited to volunteer participation and will rely primarily on volunteer, citizen-scientists to collect data.

Volunteers will be asked to select one of 50 grids in the state and will be responsible for two 1.5 hour visits, each occurring in a separate 3 week window (March/April and April/May). The timing for a given route is dependent upon elevation. It is a road based survey (8-11) points along a secondary road, separated by 1/2 mile) that starts 100 minutes before darkness, and finishes 10 minutes after darkness, and finishes 10 minutes after darkness. The survey timing is set to coincide with the Short-eared Owls elaborate courtship displays. Check out this video from partner Neil Paprocki (Hawkwatch International) in Utah: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-YKEmTvEQE>.

More information, maps, and sign-up will be coming shortly. In the meantime, if you're interested in learning more about this ambitious project or want to know how to participate, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Matt Larson

Research Director-Owl Research Institute

Cell: (701) 86605571

Email: owlinstitute@outlook.com

Owl Research Institute

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406-644-3412

PO Box 39 Charlo, MT 59824

Short-eared Owl

Photo: Russell Hill



UMBA HAS A WEBSITE!! AND AN EMAIL ADDRESS

Between field trips UMBA has been working on our web presence this summer. We have our own email address: um-baudubon@gmail.com. We also have a basic web site! You can find a calendar, past newsletters, a blog, a links page (yet to be developed) and a page to contact us for more information - find UMBA at www.umbaudubon.com

UMBA has a Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/uppermissouribreaksaudubon. It hasn't been there that long and we are over 100 "likes"! Candace Beery and Beth Hill try to keep you up to date on activities, sightings of note or items that may be of interest. And you can post sightings, pictures, etc.

We still have the "Wildbirds-UMBA" yahoo group at: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Wild-Birds-UMBA>. Here you can follow (without subscription) as users post their bird sightings. Subscribe and you can opt to receive postings as a digest or individual emails and have access to files, post pictures, etc.

Great Backyard Bird Count

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at birdcount.org. Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world.

Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](http://cornelllabofornithology.org) and the [National Audubon Society](http://nationalaudubon.org) learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. Last year, more than 160,000 participants submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded.

The 21st annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 16, through Monday, February 19, 2018. Please visit the official website at birdcount.org for more information and be sure to check out the latest [educational and promotional resources](#).

UMBA will be planning a field trip (or two) to coincide with the count. Watch for details in February's newsletter.

Winter Raptor Wander

Saturday January 20 (alternate weather date Sunday January 21). We will be looking primarily for wintering raptors between Ulm and Cascade. We will meet up at 8:30 AM in the parking area between Columbia Paint and Dominos Pizza (in the Staples/Ace Hardware shopping center on NW Bypass). Our route will take us down the east side river road between Ulm and Cascade (some of you may know it from our raptor class). Dress for the weather, bring your optics (a field guide never hurts). Expect minimal walking. We might even go looking for any recent Snowy Owls sightings. We plan to be back at our starting point between noon and 1 pm. To reserve a space or questions contact Beth Hill -grizhill@gmail.com.

Bald Eagles fussing over breakfast
Photo: Russel Hill





UPPER MISSOURI BREAKS AUDUBON SOCIETY
P.O. Box 2362
Great Falls, MT 59403

Nonprofit Organization
US POSTAGE PAID
GREAT FALLS, MT
Permit No. 149

Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Society

ELECTED OFFICERS

President: nominations will be considered by board (1 year term)
Vice President: Candace Beery(2018).....crbeery@gmail.com907-306-6320
Treasurer: Beth Hill ...(2018).....grizhill@gmail.com.....452-4931
Recording Secretary: Kay Silk ..(2018).....klis.lv20@yahoo.com.....453-0545

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dan Bennett...(2018).....bennettdan@bresnan.net.....452-7657
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Aubrey Fowler (2018)..... aefnfl@gmail.com.....750-6961
Laura Slaughter(2019).....atttilahun7@gmail.com.....750-6626
Doug Thorsen(2018).....doughthorsen@yahoo.com.....750-5642
Open Position.....1 year term

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Audubon Adventures: VOLUNTEER
Christmas Bird Count: Nora Gray ..norafgray@gmail.com.....781-4153
Beth Hill..... grizhill@gmail.com.....452-4931
Bird Sightings: Wayne Phillipsmtwayne@gmail.com.....453-0648
Bird House Trail: Richard Mousel..... rmousel@bresnan.net
Conservation: Dan Bennett.....bennettdan@bresnan.net.....452-7657
Education: Beth Hill.....grizhill@gmail.com.....452-4931
Community Naturalist: Arla Eckert.....turtle@mt.net.....727-9755
Field Trips : Doug Thorsen ..doughthorsen@yahoo.com.....750-5642
Beth Hillgrizhill@gmail.com.....452-4931
Membership: Beth Hill.....grizhill@gmail.com.....452-4931
Jeri Brown.....jerian@juno.com.....761-0102
Program: Dan Bennett (see above)
Hospitality: VOLUNTEER
Newsletter Editor: VOLUNTEER (in the meantime—Beth Hill)

Representatives on Montana State Audubon Board: Primary - Nora Gray,
Alternate –If interested in this position, contact Nora Gray.

**National Audubon Society
New Membership Application**

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and my local Upper Missouri Breaks Chapter.

____ National membership, includes local membership and newsletter is \$20 a year.

____ Local membership only and newsletter is \$12 a year.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State/Zip _____

Email my newsletter to _____

N57

Make checks payable to "Audubon"

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