



# Voice of the Meadowlark

Newsletter of the  
Meadowlark Audubon Society  
of the Big Horn Basin and Northwest Wyoming

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## President's Letter

By Destin Harrell



Dear Members,

Thank you for supporting your local chapter of the Audubon Society. During this age of the Internet, where people socialize and spend their time more and more online, it is nice to go on a

field trip or attend a program and meet people face to face. The chance to build relationships and meet new people with similar interests is a primary goal of this Society.

This year we will be meeting on the second Thursday every month starting in September through May, except for December. This was our schedule for years. Last year we tried meeting every other month in the hope of getting more participation throughout the year. After trying this schedule last year, the board decided to go back to our original schedule in order to build more continuity and momentum through the fall and winter seasons.

Meeting more often through the year will give us the opportunity to meet these goals. Let's all take advantage of this opportunity, not only to attend programs, but to socialize, build friendships, gain birding partners, learn from someone else, and share your own experiences. However, more frequent meetings mean that we will be in need of programs and topics to discuss.

We want to learn from you. Have you gone on a birding trip recently? Have you participated in a study? Do you want to report on a birding hotspot? Or do you have an issue you would like to present to the membership? We want to hear what you have to say and learn from you. Just contact any of the board members and we can schedule you in to headline the program for the month!

This is a great way for our Society to become closer and learn the diversity of ideas and experiences we have within our members. This Society is only as strong as its membership. I hope to see you at the meetings and get to know you better.

## Letter From Your New Editor

By Eric Rossborough



In March of this year John Rumm mentioned that he was thinking about giving up editing the newsletter. I told him, after some thought, that I would be willing to take it over. He thought that over and decided he didn't want to give it up yet. That was all right. A few months

later, John found himself in my office at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, handing me a three ring binder full of *Voice of the Meadowlarks* and a thumb drive with even more stuff on it. He had found great a new position as Executive Director at the Nemours Mansion and Gardens in Wilmington, Delaware. This is a great opportunity for him, near where he got

his professional start, and also, he told me, right on the Atlantic Flyway. So he's very excited.

I got my start in nature dragging a rowboat over granite rocks off the Maine coast. This was when I was about ten years old. I would row out to what I called islands, really they were seaweed covered rocks, and here I would look for crabs and rocks. Later I would row out to farther spruce covered islands to pick raspberries on the edges of old clearings. This was the beginning. If my parents had known the road this would send me down I'm not sure how they would have felt about my activities.

Much later, in Southern California, I became a docent at Topanga State Park. They had a long course to train me and we led hikes in the spring for the ephemeral flowers. Somehow, on my first hike, I managed to run through everything I had planned to talk about in the first two minutes. The audience, about fifteen or twenty tourists, was there in the Southern California sun standing and looking at me. I got through it. That was the beginning of my actually trying to learn the names of things, which has proven to be a long road. Later I lived in a tent for half a winter in the woods of Northern Wisconsin. I was cataloging a library for an outdoor school and the recompense was all the road kill I could eat. It went down at night, ten, fifteen, zero, twenty below. When you sleep out like that frost forms on the inside of your tent and when you get up in the morning and bang around it's snowing inside. My dog stayed with me, and I would put a blanket on him to keep him warm, but he would just kick it off. The cold weather bothered him not at all.

After that I moved to Southern Wisconsin and got involved in prescribed fires and restoration work. I actually made my living doing this for several years. We would crawl through raspberry brambles in a line with spray tanks on our backs, killing invasive weeds. With a hundred degree heat index in summer, we'd be soaked from morning till night, in the morning, from dew, and later, from sweat. We didn't bring raingear because there wasn't any point. Doing it this way does something to your consciousness. It's different than hunting or fishing, where you just want a few fish or whatever, because your intent is, if you could, you would kill all the invasive plants and turn the whole Midwest back to tallgrass prairie. I don't do that sort of thing anymore, but I often wonder about where the science and methods of it will be in a few decades.

Now I am out in Wyoming. It's not my first experience here. When I was young I worked for an outfitter out of Pinedale. This is something I leaned on heavily when

talking to my prospective employers at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West. Apparently some people come out here and do not like the low population density. I love it. After spending most of my life in areas where I contented myself with islands of woods surrounded by houses, being out here seems like an embarrassment of riches.

This is your newsletter and I would like it to convey to you not only upcoming events and recent statistics, but other things of importance to you regarding birding and natural history in the Big Horn Basin. So please, send me your articles and missives. I hope to continue the fine work John Rumm did, and I also look forward to your submissions.



## **Kane Christmas Bird Count**

**By Jennifer and Neil Miller**

Hi Fellow Birders,

The Kane CBC will be part of the 116th Christmas Bird Count which is held throughout North and South America and the Pacific Islands and sponsored by the National Audubon Society. Observations made during the CBCs help identify species at risk, focus public policy, initiate conservation strategies, influence public commitment, and locate birds on the move due to climate change. The Kane Count Circle created by Terry Peters in 1990 is centered around the old town of Kane extending from Moncur Springs on the west to Sand Draw near Lovell, incorporating a good portion of the Yellowtail Habitat, as well as private land. Check out the Meadowlark Audubon website: [www.meadowlarkwyo.org](http://www.meadowlarkwyo.org) for more information about Christmas Bird Counts in our area.

The Kane CBC will be held on Saturday, Dec. 19, 2015. Meet at the Big Horn Canyon National Recreation Area Visitor's Center in Lovell at 7 a.m., at which time we will check in, enjoy a hot drink & muffin, and select a route. Each team will be given a packet containing a bird list, map, and other pertinent information. At sunrise the teams will cover their routes and regroup at 4 p.m. for a chili dinner and compilation.

Please drive a 4-wheel drive vehicle if possible. If not, we will try to pair you with a team that's in a 4-wheel. At check-in we'll ask for your vehicle license number and description, and if you have a cell phone, its number.

Bring binoculars, bird books, spotting scope, CAMERA, lunch, side dish for dinner, warm clothing & footwear, hat & gloves, and plenty of water and/or warm drinks. A clip board is handy to record your findings. Since the pheasant season will be open, wearing hunter orange is a good idea for your own safety. Everyone is welcome: no expertise is required, so bring a friend! We thank the National Park Service for being our host. Contact Neil and Jennifer Miller @ 568-9346 or by email [njmiller@tctwest.net](mailto:njmiller@tctwest.net) for more info.

We are looking forward to a fun and successful count day while helping out our feathered friends! See you on count day! Until then, good birding! Neil and Jennifer

## **116<sup>th</sup> Cody Christmas Bird Count**

**By Joyce Cicco**

The Cody Christmas Bird Count will be held Saturday, December 26, 2015. Backup date in case of blizzard will be the following Saturday.

The Cody routes are assigned prior to the count and participants receive route maps, bird checklists, and other information about the count in the mail. It is then up to those covering each route to contact each other and make plans to cover their route.

At 6:00 p.m. of the evening of the count, we gather to tally the results of the count and enjoy a pot-luck supper. Soup and beverages are provided, and participants are asked to bring a side dish of their choice to share. The meeting place for this year's tally and supper has not been confirmed, so please check the Meadowlark website: [www.meadowlarkwyo.org](http://www.meadowlarkwyo.org) closer to the date of the count for more information.

All levels of birders are welcome. We try to pair experienced birders with those who have less experience. There is a limited window open to conduct the counts each year, and this year we find that our only Saturday choice is the day after Christmas, leaving the following Saturday open in case we have to postpone due to bad weather. But after all, it is called the "Christmas Count."

If you would like to join the Cody Christmas Bird Count, call Joyce Cicco at 307-527-5030, or email [jcicco00@tritnet.net](mailto:jcicco00@tritnet.net) for more information.



## **The Adventures of the Monday Morning Birders Group**

**By Eric Rossborough**

For nine weeks each spring and fall, early Monday mornings find a dedicated group of birders sallying forth to the edges of the water bodies at Cody's edge to get a sense of the waterfowl, and other birds, in our midst. These are the Monday Morning Birders.

Officially called the Beck Lake Complex Bird Survey, the surveys were set up in September 2005 by Joyce Cicco. The surveys include the lakes and reservoirs of the Beck Lake Complex: Beck Lake, Alkali Lake, Buchanan Wildlife Sanctuary, Markham Reservoir, and New Cody Reservoir. This complex of lakes and reservoirs was named an Important Bird Area a number of years ago by the Audubon Society of Wyoming, now called Audubon Rockies. The surveys follow a survey protocol and route around the complex at predetermined stops for 10 minutes at each stop. The surveys take place once a week, for nine weeks, during both the spring migration and the fall migration.

Says Monday morning birder Lolley Jolley, "We begin at the east end of Beck Lake, and we stop at four or five

places along Beck. Each place we stop for ten minutes,” says Lolly. “Then we move on to Alkali. That’s three or four stops. Then we endanger our lives and cross the Meeteetse Highway to count at the Buchanan Pond. We make two stops there. Then we go for a bathroom break at the airport. The last places are the reservoirs: Markham Reservoirs, New Beck Reservoir, and Beck Lake Park. At the upper reservoirs we split up and cover these in smaller groups.”

The Monday Morning Birders are hardy. They meet in all weathers. They’ve endured sleet, rain, early and late snowstorms, and blistering winds. “We share hand warmers,” Lolly continued. “I think there was only one day that had to be postponed. There were only two of us that day. All the best birders were unwell. They were feeling puny.” They have met in sleet, rain, snow, and of course, high winds. “The thing about the wind is it’s blowing on the water,” says Lolly. “The wind disturbs the water so badly and the birds just hunker down.”

The focus is on waterfowl and other migrators, but they Monday Morning Birders count starlings, English sparrows, robins, ravens, and whatever else comes their way.

These experiences have given rise to many interesting stories. Most commonly, people recognize the Monday morningers as birders and get out to chat. Lolly continued: “One time a fellow drove by and got out of his vehicle. He could tell what we were up to. He wanted to know what a bird was. He had a picture of it on his phone. We all thought it was one of the usual raptors we saw in this area: a red-tail or a rough legged hawk. He didn’t like those answers. He was adamant that it was not anything so common. He didn’t tell us what he thought it was, or what he hoped it was, but he left unsatisfied.

“Often people stop just to tell us of some birding experience they have had. It’s like they’ve been driving around looking for an audience to tell of this. One or two of us will cluster around them, but we are focused on birding and don’t want to be distracted. We’re never rude, but we remained focused on getting a proper count.”

The Monday Morning Birders cut a visible swath. “We range from six to ten of us, depending on the weather,” Lolly said. “The purpose is to get a sense of the diversity of species and the quantity of birds migrating in the spring, and again in the fall. We count everything. We count the amount of robins in the trees, for instance. We start an hour after sunrise, so in the

spring it keeps getting earlier, and in the fall it keeps getting a little later, about five minutes each week.” The results are turned over to Dr. Charles Preston, who compiles the bird species recorded and the number of each species. This is entered on eBird, a real-time, online checklist program, and is available for research purposes.

“The thing about this is, participating in something like this really improves your birding eye,” said Lolly. “What really got me hooked on birding was learning to identify Avocets at that Buchanan Pond. That was strictly on my own, however. It’s just since joining Meadowlark, and joining this birding group that my skills have really improved.”

All of us could use help improving our birding skills. The Monday morning group shows a clear way to do it. To join the Monday Morning Birders, contact Donna Haman at 307-587-4190. The fall count looms!



## **Hummingbirds at Home: Helping Hummingbirds in a Changing World**

When you travel, do you like to plan your destination in advance? Do you like to know where you will stay and dine when you arrive? Hummingbirds like to know this too.

Hummingbirds must sync their migration with the flowering of nectar-bearing plants so that they can refuel after their long journeys. They can lose as much as half of their body weight during their migration. But what if they migrated and rather than finding their expected nectar plants, they found wilted flowers dry of nectar?

The Rufous Hummingbird is a long distance migrant stopping in many places through Mexico and the western U.S. along the way to its breeding grounds that stretch from northern Oregon, Idaho, and western Montana to southern Alaska. In fact, if the distance traveled during migration is measured relative to the size of the bird, the Rufous Hummingbird may make the longest annual trip of any species! Finding

abundant nectar plants at these stop-over sites is very important to the successful migration journey for this little bird. The Rufous Hummingbird is a climate endangered species, from findings in Audubon's bird and climate change report.

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is the only breeding hummingbird of eastern North America, and the great majority of birds of this species winter in southern Mexico and northern Central America. It is a trans-Gulf migrant, with most birds flying non-stop across the Gulf of Mexico, hitting the Gulf Coast in immediate need of sustenance. Phenology studies done over the last 100 years have concluded that the timing of spring migration of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird has changed, leaving Central America earlier but spending longer periods in the southern U.S and thus arriving later in the northern states. Are the bloom times of nectar plants changing too?

Scientific research will be essential for helping to understand how climate change is affecting hummingbirds and for learning how to mitigate those impacts. But it's not that simple. Collecting the necessary scientific data across large areas is difficult and costly.

That's where you come in. You can help make a difference for hummingbirds by becoming a citizen scientist.

Thousands of volunteers now routinely go out and record feeding hummingbirds through Audubon's newest citizen science program, Hummingbirds at Home. The purpose is to gather data that will help Audubon better understand how changing flowering patterns and supplemental feeding by people relate to the timing of hummingbird migration and breeding success. Moreover, we can learn how hummingbirds are impacted by feeders, non-native nectar sources in gardens, shifting flowering times, and climate change.

You can help protect hummingbirds by capturing this crucial data with just a few clicks. It's easy and fun to do – just submit your observations using Audubon's free app for smart phones or through the Hummingbirds at Home website.

Won't you help the hummingbirds along their difficult journeys by joining us in this important program? To get started, go to [hummingbirdsathome.org](http://hummingbirdsathome.org)

## The Screech Owl

By John Burroughs

*Considered in his time to be in league with such naturalists as John Muir and Ernest Thompson Seton, John Burroughs (1837-1921) is not as well known today. While Muir wrote of the high Sierra and living glaciers, Burroughs was the poet of the everyday. He grew up roaming the Catskill Mountains of New York. Later he began publishing essays written while he held a day job as a bank examiner. His first volume, Wake-Robin, focused on what an amateur naturalist might see closer to home. Burroughs' Complete Writings total 23 volumes, and his broad popularity included readers such as Thomas Edison, Theodore Roosevelt, and Henry Ford, who once gave him a car. In 1899 Burroughs participated in the legendary Harriman Expedition to Alaska, a trip that included Muir, ornithologist Clinton Hart Merriam, Indian photographer Edward Curtis, and many other prominent scientists and naturalists. This trip did much to document the Alaska coast. However, Burroughs' focus was exemplified by an essay he wrote on a trip to he took with John Muir, titled "Spell of the Yosemite," where he focuses not on the grandeur of the mountains, but on a robin. "Where the robin is at home, Burroughs wrote, "there at home am I."*

At one point in the grayest, most shaggy part of the woods, I come suddenly upon a brood of screech owls, full grown, sitting together upon a dry, moss-draped limb, but a few feet from the ground. I pause within four or five yards of them and am looking about me, when my eye lights upon these gray, motionless figures. They sit perfectly upright, some with their backs and some with their breasts toward me, but every head turned squarely in my direction. Their eyes are closed to a mere black line; through this crack they are watching me, evidently thinking themselves unobserved. The spectacle is weird and grotesque, and suggests something impish and uncanny. It is a new effect, the night side of the woods by daylight. After observing them a moment I take a single step toward them, when, quick as thought, their eyes fly wide open, their attitude is changed, they bend, some this way, some that, and, instinct with life and motion, stare wildly around them. Another step, and they all take flight but one, which stoops low on the branch, and with the look of a frightened cat regards me for a few seconds over its shoulder. They fly swiftly and softly, and disperse through the trees.

A winter neighbor of mine, in whom I am interested, and who perhaps lends me his support after his kind, is a little red owl, whose retreat is in the heart of an old apple-tree just over the fence. Where he keeps himself

in spring and summer, I do not know, but late every fall, and at intervals all winter, his hiding-place is discovered by the jays and nuthatches, and proclaimed from the tree-tops for the space of half an hour or so, with all the powers of voice they can command. Four times during one winter they called me out to behold this little ogre feigning sleep in his den, sometimes in one apple-tree, sometimes in another. Whenever I heard their cries, I knew my neighbor was being berated. The birds would take turns at looking in upon him, and uttering their alarm-notes. Every jay within hearing would come to the spot, and at once approach the hole in the trunk or limb, and with a kind of breathless eagerness and excitement take a peep at the owl, and then join the outcry. When I approached they would hastily take a final look, and then withdraw and regard my movements intently. After accustoming my eye to the faint light of the cavity for a few moments, I could usually make out the owl at the bottom feigning sleep. Feigning, I say, because this is what he really did, as I first discovered one day when I cut into his retreat with the axe. The loud blows and the falling chips did not disturb him at all. When I reached in a stick and pulled him over on his side, leaving one of his wings spread out, he made no attempt to recover himself, but lay among the chips and fragments of decayed wood, like a part of themselves. Indeed, it took a sharp eye to distinguish him. Not till I had pulled him forth by one wing, rather rudely, did he abandon his trick of simulated sleep or death. Then, like a detected pickpocket, he was suddenly transformed into another creature. His eyes flew wide open, his talons clutched my finger, his ears were depressed, and every motion and look said, "Hands off, at your peril." Finding this game did not work, he soon began to "play possum" again. I put a cover over my study wood-box and kept him captive for a week. Look in upon him at any time, night or day, and he was apparently wrapped in the profoundest slumber; but the live mice which I put into his box from time to time found his sleep was easily broken; there would be a sudden rustle in the box, a faint squeak, and then silence. After a week of captivity I gave him his freedom in the full sunshine; no trouble for him to see which way and where to go.

Just at dusk in the winter nights, I often hear his soft "bur-r-r-r" very pleasing and bell-like. What a furtive, woody sound it is in the winter stillness, so unlike the harsh scream of the hawk! But all the ways of the owl are ways of softness and duskiness. His wings are shod with silence, his plumage is edged with down.

Another owl neighbor of mine, with whom I pass the time of day more frequently than with the last, lives farther away. I pass his castle every night on my way to

the post-office, and in winter, if the hour is late enough, am pretty sure to see him standing in his doorway, surveying the passers-by and the landscape through narrow slits in his eyes. For four successive winters now have I observed him. As the twilight begins to deepen, he rises up out of his cavity in the apple-tree, scarcely faster than the moon rises from behind the hill, and sits in the opening, completely framed by its outlines of gray bark and dead wood, and by his protective coloring virtually invisible to every eye that does not know he is there. Probably my own is the only eye that has ever penetrated his secret, and mine never would have done so had I not chanced on one occasion to see him leave his retreat and make a raid upon a shrike that was impaling a shrew-mouse upon a thorn in a neighboring tree, and which I was watching. I was first advised of the owl's presence by seeing him approaching swiftly on silent, level wing. The shrike did not see him till the owl was almost within the branches. He then dropped his game, and darted back into the thick cover, uttering a loud, discordant squawk, as one would say, "Scat! scat! scat!" The owl alighted, and was, perhaps, looking about him for the shrike's impaled game, when I drew near. On seeing me, he reversed his movement precipitately, flew straight back to the old tree, and alighted in the entrance to the cavity. As I approached, he did not so much seem to move as to diminish in size, like an object dwindling in the distance; he depressed his plumage, and, with his eye fixed upon me, began slowly to back and sidle into his retreat till he faded from my sight. The shrike wiped his beak upon the branches, cast an eye down at me and at his lost mouse, and then flew away.

A few nights afterward, as I passed that way, I saw the little owl again sitting in his doorway, waiting for the twilight to deepen, and undisturbed by the passers-by; but when I paused to observe him, he saw that he was discovered, and he slunk back into his den as on the former occasion. Ever since, while going that way, I have been on the lookout for him. Dozens of teams and foot-passengers pass him late in the day, but he regards them not, nor they him. When I come along and pause to salute him, he opens his eyes a little wider, and, appearing to recognize me, quickly shrinks and fades into the background of his door in a very weird and curious manner. When he is not at his outlook, or when he is, it requires the best powers of the eye to decide the point, as the empty cavity itself is almost an exact image of him. If the whole thing had been carefully studied, it could not have answered its purpose better. The owl stands quite perpendicular, presenting a front of light mottled gray; the eyes are closed to a mere slit, the ear-feathers depressed, the

beak buried in the plumage, and the whole attitude is one of silent, motionless waiting and observation. If a mouse should be seen crossing the highway, or scudding over any exposed part of the snowy surface in the twilight, the owl would doubtless swoop down upon it. I think the owl has learned to distinguish me from the rest of the passers-by; at least, when I stop before him, and he sees himself observed, he backs



**Book Review: *Welcome to Subirdia: Sharing Our Neighborhoods with Wrens, Robins, Woodpeckers, and Other Wildlife*. By John M. Marzluff. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014. 303 pp. By Eric Rossborough**

When I moved to Wyoming, I knew it was the state with the lowest population density of any in the Union. It's actually behind Alaska, but whatever. With a population of a little over 500,000, I knew there would be plenty of room to move around. I have lived my whole life in urban or suburban areas where the wild land was portioned off, in small chunks, for people to jog in, and up to now I have taken my outdoor recreation largely in such areas. By moving to Wyoming, I figured, I was leaving all that behind. With me and my GPS, the sky, or at least the horizon, was the limit.

Well, not quite. The first thing that greeted me, almost, was one of the urban deer of Cody, grazing on my tiny lawn with huge antlers. When I left my job at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West one evening, after dark, I almost walked into a herd of them bedded down on the side lawn. I carefully wended my way around them so as not to disturb them. This trend is not restricted to a small town like Cody, which abuts an intact

down into his den, as I have said, in a very amusing manner.

From *Bird Stories from Burroughs: Sketches of Bird Life Taken from the Works of John Burroughs* by John Burroughs. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911.

ecosystem. As we have continued to push the boundaries of the wildland interface, the fauna around us have adapted to our presence, and some of them have done quite well. Studies show coyotes thriving in the city of Chicago. Deer have proliferated in the suburban town in Massachusetts I grew up in, when there wasn't one to be found when I walked the land trust trails there as a kid. Suburban areas in particular provide travel routes and edge habitat for wildlife. A number of books have addressed how to deal with the unwelcome presence of animals. *Welcome to Subirdia: Sharing Our Neighborhoods with Wrens, Robins, Woodpeckers, and Other Wildlife*, by John M. Marzluff, takes a different tack, providing strategies on how to make the human environment more welcoming to wildlife, and in particular, birds.

Marzluff led a team of research assistants over a period of many years, following tagged birds in order to determine how they fared in metropolitan areas. What they found was that it was not just English sparrows and Canada geese that had adapted to human presence. They found that while urban areas harbor tough survivors, and rural areas contain greater numbers, the edge system – leafy suburbs – contain greater bird diversity than either. Marzluff is not an advocate for suburbanization, but he feels that birds can and do benefit from the existing system, and to help them with this he proposes we follow what he calls “Ten Commandments” to help secure their future. These include, among others, keeping your cat indoors, providing food and nest boxes, and not lighting up the night sky – birds that migrate at night are attracted to the light of buildings, and then collide with towers, walls, and other human apparatus.

Marzluff writes well, and the approach he takes is a bit unusual. But it's one that more of us may have to apply to ensure the continued survival of our avian friends.



Meadowlark Audubon Society of the  
Big Horn Basin and Northwest Wyoming  
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## Calendar of Events

*Unless otherwise noted, all events take place in the basement community room of Big Horn Federal Savings, 1701 Stampede Avenue, in Cody. Information is subject to change, so please visit our website (<http://www.meadowlarkwyo.org>) for updates! If you would like to be added to our email blast list to receive notices and reminders about meetings and upcoming events, please contact Melissa Hill, [eyriehill@gmail.com](mailto:eyriehill@gmail.com).*

**September 10, 2015. Birding the Mindo Cloud Forest of Ecuador, with Rex Myers and Susan Richards. Join Rex and Susan for an evening of exotic birding experiences and photos from their trip to Ecuador this summer.**

**October 8, 2015. TBA.**

**November 12, 2015. TBA.**