



oice of the Meadowlark

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

Volume 17, Number 2

Winter 2016

President's Letter

By Melissa Hill



Hello Fellow Birders!!

As I write this, winter is trying to push through the last bits of autumn and settle in for the long haul. While many of you probably dread the coming of winter, I love it! Winter is my favorite season. I love curling up under a blanket with the dog on a cold night with hot tea and a good movie. I also love looking out across a field of freshly fallen snow where the only tracks belong to me, the dog, and the wildlife. But my favorite thing about winter is the return of some of my favorite birds!

I'm sure you all know that raptors are my favorite birds. As the days get shorter and the temperatures get lower, the rough-legged hawks wind their way down from the Arctic and greet me throughout the Big Horn Basin. The dark-eyed juncos seem much more active and noticeable and I'm always watching and listening for word of one of my bucket-list birds – the snowy owl – making an appearance in the area. Although it's happened at least twice since I've

lived here, I haven't been lucky enough to spot one yet!

While the urge to stay inside and hibernate until spring is tempting, I urge you all to resist. Take a moment to stop shoveling, scraping, or skiing. Fill up the bird feeders and bath pans and look around. The winter birds are here in all their glory, waiting to let you peek into their world for just a bit. You don't have to freeze to enjoy what our area has to offer, you just have to take a moment to appreciate it.

Happy Holidays & Best Birding!

Melissa

Wolves in Yellowstone

By Eric Rossborough

One day, when I was walking through a Wisconsin swamp, I ran into a trapper. We talked about the reed canary grass and the gray weather. He stood there in his waders. He showed me his mink. Then we got to talking about wolves. "They're here," he said, leaning a little closer to me.

"How could that be?" I said. "We're in farm country, ten miles from a city. I could see if one or two moved through—"

He cut me off. "They're here. The wolves are here. We're picking them up on our game cameras. Everyone knows it." His jaw, covered with whiskers, moved slightly. "The wolves," he said, "are all over the place now."

One day, I sat in the kitchen of a farm house. A deer hunter stood. "The Wisconsin DNR," he told me, "is stocking the place with wolves!"

"How can you be sure of that?" I said. "It sounds like a bit of a conspiracy theory. Why would they do that? What's their motive? Where would they get the money--"

He reached up taller, sucking a breath into his upper ribcage. "I hate wolves!" he said.

One time, in Madison, a long haired friend came up to me as I stood there watching dishes. "Eric!" he said. "I want you to buy a wolf tag."

"Why? I'm not interested in hunting a wolf."

"YOU have a hunting license," he said. "You can get a wolf tag! I'm going to give you the money, you're going to buy a wolf tag, and we're going to save the wolves from these rednecks!"

Another time, I stood in the room of a college girl. She had on her wall a garish print, painting of wolves in the wild with a Sigurd Olson quote underneath.

"Oh!" I said. "You like wolves."

"I love them."

"Well, what do you like about them?"

"Oh, they're just so – pretty!"

I said, "Do you really like wolves, I mean, do you read and study about them? Or do you just like to look at pictures of them?"



For some reason, wolves cause humans to freak out. Last year, in 2015, I did not sign up for the Spring

Into Yellowstone wolf hike. I'm just so sick of the whole wolf argument, of the emotional and irrational responses people have toward them. It's hard to get any real information. This year, I caved in, and we met Ron Blanchard in the predawn light at the Cody Auditorium, preparatory to seeing wolves where they live and breed, to seeing them in the flesh.

Ron Blanchard was a rodeo cowboy from Texas who drifted through Cody in 1972. He came for the rodeo, but stayed for the water, and, with his brother Rick, began Wyoming River Trips, leading raft excursions on the Shoshone. This left his winters free, and he utilized the time by working for Wyoming Game and Fish, working on the wolf reintroduction program. One can only imagine how this affected his popularity with local ranchers.

On the drive in through Sunlight Basin, Ron entertained us with stories of his cowboy days, of trapping and collaring wolves, of his youth in Port Arthur, Texas, where he grew up across the street from Janis Joplin. When we got to Slough Creek, we got out and met Rick McIntyre, who was overseeing a group of biologists studying a wolf den above, on the face of a hill, through various spotting scopes.

Rick McIntyre is a biologist for the Yellowstone Wolf Project. As we stood in the morning sun he explained things to us. In the den, which was hardly visible through my birdwatching binoculars, were ten adult wolves. This included two sisters. One had her first litter last year, the other this year. Right now they had their pups in the same den, but this doesn't always work out. In the past, the sisters have squabbled. There is a mother, whom neither of the sisters gets along with, and she lives somewhere else. However, she might not even be alive. A rival pack lives near the mother's likely den site, and she may have been killed by them. This is the common mode of death for Yellowstone wolves.

There are six yearlings in the pack, and they are a huge help to the den sharing mothers. They babysit, and at a year old can now help with hunting. A wolf will stuff twenty pounds of meat in its stomach, then bring it back and regurgitate it for the pups. Ron told us he had sent many wolf carcasses to the U.S. Geological Survey office in Oregon. All the wolves he handled have had broken bones. It's a rough and tumble existence. The wolf den we were looking at was originally a coyote den. The first wolf pack in

the area, the Slough Creek Pack, killed the coyotes and took it over.

Then Rick told an amazing story. Sixteen years ago, everything was going good for the Lamar Creek Pack. There were two moms with a den, getting ready for pups. The sub-adult females were helping out. One morning, when Rick and his people set up for the day with scopes, they saw other wolves in front of the den. What followed in the next thirteen days amounted to a siege.

The invading wolves repeatedly ran up to the den to try to attack and kill the mother wolves. The Lamar Creek Pack would station one female at the mouth to repel the attackers. The female wolves were heroic in their defense.

One morning, the sisters came out of the den together. They snuck down the hill to eat and drink. The enemy pack was sleeping. As they snuck back up the hill, one of the sisters stomped. The pack of twelve enemy wolves woke up. At that point the sisters had a choice; run and leave the pups to their death, or go for the den. One of them got stuck going in the mouth of the den, then popped in. The second wolf just barely made it in after her.

The upshot was that the pups starved. The sisters' male companions had abandoned them, and had taken up with new girlfriends down in the Lamar Valley. The sisters left the den, went down the valley, and drove off the new female companions of their erstwhile mates.

Rick doesn't know what happened at that point. All this sounded suspiciously to me like human behavior. Is it possible the wolf descendant, the dog, has aligned itself with us because our natures are similar?

The biologists, arrayed in a line facing the hill, let us look through their spotting scopes. I could see a wolf meandering at the mouth of the den, and a couple others resting in the shade of lodgepole pines a few yards downhill. Other than one time outside Ely, Minnesota, it was the first time I had seen a wolf in the wild. People hate wolves, or love them, but most have never even seen them, unless they are in a trap, or roaming free in Yellowstone. They seem to represent some sort of other, some hidden side of ourselves, but we don't know what that side is.

When I was in library school, I did a GIS project about wolves. I wanted to show the wolf packs in

Wisconsin, and where they were in relation to roads, timber cover, etc. I went to the map library to get the woman there to help me out. She called the office of the Wisconsin DNR. I stood there while I heard one side of a five minute conversation. "No, he's not going to use the information for any political purpose," she said. "He doesn't belong to a group." Pause. "He's just a college student.... He just wants it for his school project. No one's going to see it outside of his school classmates.... No, the public won't see the information." People freak out about wolves, but at this point, the wolves are winning.



Lovell Breeding Bird Survey

By Paul DuBow

The Breeding Bird Survey is a long-term, large-scale, international avian monitoring program initiated in 1966 to track the status and trends of North American bird populations. The U.S. Geological Survey Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and the Canadian Wildlife Service National Wildlife Research Center jointly coordinate the BBS program. Each year during the height of the avian breeding season: June, for most of the U.S. and Canada, participants skilled in avian identification collect bird population data along roadside survey routes. Over 4100 survey routes are located across the continental U.S. and Canada. Once analyzed, BBS data provide an index of population abundance that can be used to estimate population trends and relative abundances at various geographic scales. Trend estimates for more than 420 bird species and all raw data are currently available via the BBS web site.

Breeding Bird Surveys differ from the more familiar Christmas Bird Counts in several important ways.

Each BBS route is 24.5 miles long, with stops at 0.5-mile intervals: 50 stops total. At each stop, a 3-minute point count is conducted. During the count, every bird seen within a 0.25-mile radius or heard is recorded. Surveys start one-half hour before local sunrise and take about 5 hours to complete. However, as there is a 4 to 5 week window to perform a survey, if the weather is rainy or windy one can always wait for a better day. In contrast, a CBC is held on a designated day, which is rarely rescheduled, but you can take all the time needed to identify birds in a particular area.

The Lovell BBS was started in 1989 and ran yearly until 2007. In 2015 the survey was reinitiated and has been run for the past two years. The survey starts at the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area Visitors Center in Lovell, runs east almost to Kane Cemetery, proceeds northwest nearly to the Montana line, and then swings south and ends north of Cowley Airport. A total of 86 species, breeding and migrant, have been observed in the 19 years the route has been surveyed. However, the number of species observed in any given year has only ranged from 29 to 47, which is undoubtedly due to the hit-or-miss chances of observing and/or hearing a bird within three minutes at stations one-half mile apart. For example, several species that are regularly seen/heard at the Yellowtail Wildlife Habitat Management Area, including white pelican, bald eagle, sharp-shinned hawk, Virginia rail, tree swallow, have never made the list. Since 2015 two new species have been added to the Lovell list: Eurasian collared-dove and a lone bobolink that was observed this year.

A similar survey is conducted in Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area; however, as the side roads to Horseshoe Bend, Devil's Canyon and Berry's Landing are part of the route it does not qualify as a linear 24.5 mile survey. There are a number of additional Breeding Bird Surveys in northwestern Wyoming, including Yellowstone, Mammoth, NE Entrance, Cody, Clark, and Frannie, but over the years several routes, including Hunter Peak, Basin, and Worland, have been suspended for lack of observers. If you would like to reinitiate a suspended survey the requirements for participation are:

1. Access to suitable transportation to complete a survey.
2. Good hearing and eyesight.
3. The ability to identify all breeding birds in the area by sight and sound. Knowledge of bird

songs is extremely important, because most birds counted on these surveys are singing males.

4. New BBS participants must also successfully complete the BBS Methodology Training Program before their data will be used in any BBS analyses. The training program is available at the BBS website.

Breeding Bird Surveys are in many ways much nicer than Christmas Bird Counts; you don't need long underwear, insulated boots, parka or mittens. It would be great if suspended routes were revived in order to help understand population dynamics of our breeding birds.

For more information go to the Breeding Bird Survey website:

(<https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBS/index.cfm>)

and contact the Wyoming State Coordinator:

Andrea Orabona
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
260 Buena Vista
Lander, WY 82520
phone: 307-349-2999
email: Andrea.Orabona@wyo.gov

Olympic Peninsula Birdfest

This spring, the Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society, Dungeness River Audubon Center and Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe are collaborating to bring you the Olympic Peninsula Birdfest. The Dungeness River Audubon Center in Sequim will become "Bird Central" from April 7-9, 2017. The North Olympic Peninsula has a wide variety of bird species. Field trip locations include bays, fields, and wooded areas. The locations are part of the Olympic Loop of the Great Washington State Birding Trail and are known as Important Bird Areas (IBA).

This festival provides participants the opportunity to view a wide variety of birds normally seen on the Olympic Peninsula. Field trips are planned for Sequim Bay, Port Angeles Harbor, Ediz Hook, Dungeness Spit, the Elwha River, Salt Creek and at Neah Bay, as well as trips through wooded areas to view songbirds and locate owls in the evening. Boat trips to Protection Island are also planned. The North

Olympic Peninsula is widely known as a great place for bird watching. The day of the Olympic BirdFest is timed to overlap wintering birds and the beginning of spring migration.

In addition to the field trips, birders may participate in presentations, workshops and a banquet. A tour explaining the Jamestown S'Klallam tribal totem poles at the Tribal Center and the Seven Cedars Casino will also be offered.

In addition, there will be a festival pre-trip: a three-day and two-night birding and sightseeing cruise of the San Juan Islands from April 4-6, 2017. You can also extend your festival with our Neah Bay post-trip on April 9-11, 2017: two days exploring northwest coastal Washington. Cruise registration is available at www.pugetsoundexpress.com/audubon, or call (360) 385-5288.

For more information about Olympic Peninsula Birdfest, go to www.olympicbirdfest.org, or call 360-681-4076.

Olympic Peninsula April 7-9, 2017
BirdFest
Come bird with us!

- San Juan Island Cruise
- Neah Bay Birding Excursion
- Guided Birding Trips
- Bird Drawing Class
- Photography Workshop
- Gala Banquet with Speaker **Bonnie Block**

For more information:
www.olympicbirdfest.org
info@olympicbirdfest.org
or 360-681-4076

Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society logo
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For lodging and visitor information, call 800-942-4042 or click www.olympicpeninsula.org
www.visitsunnysequim.com
800-737-8462

Kane Christmas Bird Count

By Jennifer Miller

Hi fellow birders:

The Kane Christmas Bird Count will be held on Sat. Dec. 17, 2016. 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. The Kane Count Circle centered around the old town of Kane extends from roughly Moncur Springs on the west side to Sand Draw near Lovell and includes a good portion of the Yellowtail Habitat. Since the pheasant season is still open, wearing hunter orange is a good idea for your own safety. Everyone welcome: no expertise required, so bring a friend! We thank the National Park Service for being our host.

The Christmas Bird Counts held throughout North and South America and the Pacific Islands are sponsored by the National Audubon Society. As a citizen scientist during the Christmas Bird Count, your observations identify species at risk, focus public policy, initiate conservation strategies, influence public commitment, and locate birds on the move due to climate change.

Check out the Meadowlark Audubon website www.meadowlarkwyo.org for more information about Christmas Bird Counts in our area.

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

Contact Neil and Jennifer Miller @ 568-9346 or by email njmiller3247@gmail.com for more info.



117th Cody Christmas Bird Count

By Joyce Cicco

This year's Cody Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 31, New Year's Eve day. If we should have to reschedule due to weather conditions, the backup date will be the following day, Sunday. The window allowed for the CBC is set by the national CBC and we can only work within that time frame, so that's the reason for having to pick a less than optimal date.

Past count participants will be contacted soon to set up routes. If you did not take part in the count last year and are interested in joining us for this year's count, please contact Joyce Cicco, 527-5030, or Susan Ahalt, 527-7027. An informational letter, plus a map of the route and route partner names and phone numbers will be sent to each participant prior to the count. Route partners are responsible for contacting each other to arrange their meet-up place, time, etc.

Following the count, participants will meet at 6:00 p.m. at the Christ Episcopal Church, 825 Simpson Ave. in Cody, for the group tally of the day's observations. Chuck Neal has agreed to conduct the tally again this year, for which we are very appreciative as Chuck is extremely knowledgeable of the birds in our area.

At the conclusion of the tally, all participants, including their spouses and children, are invited to join the group for a pot-luck supper. Hot soup, donated by Sunset House Restaurant, beverages, dishes and utensils will be provided. Participants are asked to bring a side dish of their choosing to share with the others.

If a rare bird is seen during the count, the observers will need to fill out a CBC Rare Bird Documentation Form noting location, distance, viewing conditions, bird's plumage, shape, behavior, etc. If possible, observers are asked to make a sketch of the bird at the time it is seen, noting their observations, and if a camera is available, a photo of the bird can be very helpful, even if not of the best quality.

Joyce and Susan thank all those who take part in the count, the Church for allowing us to use their great facility, and the private landowners who give permission for us to cross their lands during the count. Necessary trespass permission will be secured

from the landowners by the organizers prior to the count. Come join other birders in our area for an enjoyable day and evening.

This will be the last year that Joyce Cicco will be an organizer for the Cody CBC, so if you are interested in stepping up to help continue this worthwhile citizen science annual event, please contact Joyce. Contact info: Joyce Cicco, 527-5030, email cicco.bj@gmail.com.



Dinwoody Glacier: 12,000 Years of Humans and Ice in Wyoming's Highest Mountains

By Eric Rossborough

Glaciers worldwide are melting at a rapid rate. One result of this is that archaeologists are able to follow them as they recede and pick up lithic scatters, or human debris and artifacts consisting of stone, and use this to piece together new information about early inhabitants of a region. On November 3, 2016, archaeologist Todd Guenther spoke at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West about his recent work on the Dinwoody Glacier.

Located on the east side of the Continental Divide in the Wind River Mountains, the Dinwoody Glacier is one of the largest glaciers in the Rocky Mountains, but it's been retreating rapidly. A 1989 study determined the glacier retreated rapidly between 1958 and 1983, and since then the process has accelerated. Between August 2014 and August 2015, nearly two meters of the upper surface of the Dinwoody Glacier melted. Much in the manner of early native inhabitants, who followed the retreat of ice age glaciers, archaeologists and glaciologists have repeated this process, but the hunt now is for information. "I always swore I would never get into

high elevation archaeology; you have to carry everything on your back. I grew up on horseback," Todd told us. The lure of the knowledge to be had at the receding Dinwoody Glacier, along with his students at Central Wyoming College, made him change his mind.

Once large glaciers in the Wind River Mountains have now been reduced to patches. "Many of my students are Native Americans from the Wind River Reservation," Guenther said. "They are aware that treaties state 'As long as the waters flow.' If the water stops flowing, what then? If these glaciers disappear, the Wind River Basin will become uninhabitable." The Dinwoody Glacier is losing mass at such a rapid rate, Guenther expects the glacier to disappear not at the end of the century, but within his own lifetime.

There were two groups at the edge of the glacier this summer: glaciologists, who were studying the quantity and quality of water, and archaeologists. The whole apparatus was supported by the Central Wyoming College Outdoor Adventure Club, who provided mountaineering support. Getting the students, food, and thousands of dollars' worth of equipment uphill took three days. With the use of horses, this sizeable operation was able to get within about a half day's hike of the glacier. At the base of Gannett Peak, the area around and above Dinwoody Glacier has not only been a magnet for early people. In recent decades mountaineers and trekkers have flocked to the region to try their luck at the peak. One thing glaciologists were interested in was the quality of the water. Would there be E. coli in surface waters? There was not.

By tracing the Holocene retreat of the glacier, Todd and his students are establishing a record of continuous human activity in the Wind Rivers. "Remember," Todd said, "these ancient people were not intimidated by cold, snow, or apex predators. They had come a long way. We have irrefutable evidence that these people were up high in winter. The question I pose to my students is, what were these people doing up there? Remember, Dinwoody is where the water comes from. They were either going up there to look at the scenery, as you or I might, or they were going for religious purposes." Todd pointed out that petroglyphs in the area seem to have a religious context.

What Todd Guenther and his students are doing at Dinwoody Glacier represents a worldwide trend. As glaciers disappear, archeologists from Siberia to the Yukon are finding all kinds of artifacts. Todd and his students spent days combing the boulder field around the receding glacier. "The problem is," he told us, "things fall down between the rocks, and you're never going to know they were there."

Of particular interest to Guenther and his students was the discovery of the highest bison jump known to exist in North America, at 11,000 feet. Campsites, cairns, butchering areas, and blinds litter the area. Guenther and his students found logs and had them carbon tested; the oldest turned out to be 2100 years old. Todd reminded us that these jumps would not be used every year. "I worked cows as a kid, and they remember places they don't like to go. And bison are not as tractable as cows," Guenther said. Currently it's assumed that use of bison jumps might be spaced decades apart. In any event, bison drives were community events involving dozens of people. The jump is marked in part by a drive line, made of stone cairns, which lead towards the cliff. The driveline narrows, and in the manner of water squirting through a hose, the bison would pick up speed as they get toward the cliff. Along the drive line, there are blinds from where people could wave the bison along. The area around the jump is also full of shaman structures. Assumably people in touch with the spiritual realm would sequester themselves here and gain luck of a divine sort. Getting your meat without firearms or grocery stores is a different affair, and it's easy to see why people reliant on Stone Age tools would inject a spiritual element.

Next year, Guenther and his students want to test the ground around the butchering area for calcium in the soil. This will provide more detailed information about the area. Guenther said, "The whole project is so new that we're making it up as we go."





Meadowlark Audubon Society of the
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Calendar of Events

Unless otherwise noted, all events take place at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, 720 Sheridan Avenue Cody, Wyoming 82414. 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.

Note that meeting dates have been changed to the third Wednesday of the month.

Wednesday, January 18, 2017. Prairie Habitat Management - Diversity through Disturbance, with Jarren L. Kuipers, Owner, Land Steward Services LLC. 7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 15, 2017. 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. TBA

Wednesday, March 15, 2017. 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. TBA

Newsletter Editor: Eric Rossborough. Email submissions to: ericrossborough@gmail.com