

# **Owls May Not Be as Smart as You Think**

By Crista Videriksen Worthy

A wise old owl sat in an oak, The more he saw, the less he spoke. The less he spoke, the more he heard, Why can't we all be like that bird? - Oscar Wilde

Owls aren't actually particularly wise; parrots and members of the Corvus family are much smarter. But many people, including

me, love them anyway. Perhaps it's those big forward-set eyes, along with the "ears" (on some of them) that present a "face" rather than a head, to the viewer.

On the other hand, perhaps due to that same face, along with their nocturnal habits, in many parts of Africa, owls are reviled as harbingers of death and killed whenever possible, mostly with rat poison. In South Africa, a company called EcoSolutions provides a Ghostbusters-like relocation service, removing barn owls that have taken up residence in structures. They've set up a program whereby schoolchildren take care of the rescued owlets, thus learning that owls are not evil. The kids work to re-educate their parents and neighbors that owls are instead highly beneficial, with their penchant for consuming large numbers of the rats that plague many townships. Let's hope this program can help end those bad superstitions.

Here in Hidden Springs, I can hear great-horned owls al-

most any time I step outside shortly after dark or before dawn. In early December a pair of them were hooting at each other as I stood outside at 7 a.m. to throw out seed for the quail. It was still mostly dark, but I could see the male sitting in a pine above our lawn, while the female sat on the rooftop. They went at it for 15 minutes while I listened raptly. Across the sky, a slivered moon, Jupiter, Mars and Venus all glowed brightly.

Great horned owl

the star Antares, Mars, the star Spica, and Jupiter, all lined up across the heavens—a rare sight. Maybe you'll hear and see some owls too.

Of course, any time you have a hankering to see a magnificent owl up close, you can visit Wally, the Eurasian eagle-owl, at the World Center for Birds of Prey here in Boise. These are some of the world's largest owls, and with those orange eyes, Wally is quite a sight.

Great-horned owls were also plentiful in our yard where I grew up in southern California. At age 21, I spent several weeks drawing the face of a great-horned owl with pencils, making several trips to the San Diego Natural History Museum to look at one of their specimens. My sister, who still lives in Los Angeles in an area with large trees, has a screech owl that sleeps all day in the rafters just outside her bedroom for part of each year. It's been showing up for several years now and doesn't fly away even

when they stand inside just three feet from it and look through the window.

Several times, as I have driven on the road over the foothills into Hidden Springs, a barn or greathorned owl has flown low across the road, momentarily illuminated by my headlights. Between the owls and the deer, I keep the speed down at night; I'd hate to hit one.

For me, my biggest birdwatching "get" would be to see a snowy owl in the wild. I painted one of those too when I was in college. A couple of years ago during a winter irruption of snowys, one was sighted in Nampa. I rushed out there and looked all day but never did see it. My photographer friend Jackie Robidoux, who lives in New Hampshire, has seen them, though.

Here's another good reason to get up and out early: until February 20, look up in the pre-dawn sky, and, from east to west, you can see Mercury, Venus, Saturn,

Colored pencil drawing by Crista Worthy

**Events Calendar on Page 4** 

#### **President's Message**

By Sean Finn

Spring is in the air. I can smell it! Or at least see it in the neighborhood birds. Or at least imagine I'm seeing it. The old groundhog failed to see his shadow, and his prediction for an early spring is A-OK with me, even if he's not a bird.

For the past two years we've had a pair of great horned owls nest in our yard. Their first year, 2014, comes with a hilarious story about how they fledged three beautiful owlets with a little help from some clumsy humans. I'll be happy to tell (eh - confess) that story at the banquet (more on that later). But last year their nest failed when the eggs fell out of the bottom of the old squirrel nest they used. Needless to say we were very sad to find the shattered eggs signaling a lost effort. The mated pair – my daughter named them Miles and Daisy – has continued to use the trees in our yard as home base throughout the year, and we hope they start showing nuptial behaviors soon.

I really love the spring and the new hope it brings. I also love it because of the annual milestones it brings to bird lovers in the Treasure Valley. First up is our Annual Banquet on March 12 – the convocation of the tribes of GEAS members and friends. It is always a great time to catch up with friends and share stories – some true – about our birding experiences. It's also an important fund-raiser for our chapter, so please come with an appetite for desert and an eye for the many wonderful items in the silent auction. This year's banquet is extra special because we have a most amazing guest speaker. Kenneth Dial's reputation as a dynamic and compelling speaker is only superseded by his distinguished career as an avian evolutionary biologist. If you have never seen Ken on All Bird TV, YouTube it – I'm sure you'll agree a live presentation is can't miss. But Dial isn't just another handsome face. He is an extraordinarily innovative scientist who continues to teach us amazing things about bird flight. Get your tickets early and come prepared for a great presentation.

The second springtime event I'm excited about is International Migratory Bird Day. This year The Peregrine Fund will host the event at the World Center for Birds of Prey. Admission is free for Golden Eagle Audubon Society members (a good reason to sign up or renew) and a slew of fun activities are available. Please gather up family and friends and join us on Saturday May 14 for an action packed and inspiring celebration of birds and their astounding migrations. While you're planning your spring, also check the calendar at goldeneagleaudubon.org and come join us on one of our field trips.

Viva springtime!

Sincerely, Sean Finn, President

### GEAS CALENDAR

#### March-April 2016

GEAS Annual Banquet and Auction	March 12
Family Birding Walk	March 13
SIBA Field Trip	March 19
Field Trip: Sage Grouse Lek	March 20
GEAS Monthly meeting	March 29
Field Trip: Eagle Island State Park	April 9
Family Birding Walk	April 10
GEAS Monthly meeting	April 26

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## News from the Board: January-February 2016

- The board posted an open letter to the illegal occupiers of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge headquarters complex. The letter is posted on goldeneagleaudubon.org.
- The Banquet Committee has been working tirelessly to make sure the March 12 event is a success. Find details elsewhere in this Newsletter. If you have something to donate for the silent auction, please contact Liz Urban immediately.
- GEAS continues to join our partners at Idaho Families for Clean Water in the fight against the proposed CuMo molybdenum mine at Grimes Creek. Our legal partner, Advocates for the West, filed a federal complaint against the Forest Service to ensure proper monitoring of groundwater quality and avoid impacts to the rare Sacajawea's bitterroot.
- We commented on the recently completed State Wildlife Action Plan drafted by Idaho Department

Thank you Alex Takasugi, Alexander Sapiens, Lew Ulrey, Hope Denney, Sue Norton, Harold Ward, Leah Dunn, Jessica Fusek and Niels Nokkentved for your work on the newsletter and helping to make it happen.

Thank you Joe and Cordi Atkinson for your amazing presentation about the remarkable Philippine Eagle at our January General Meeting.

We'd also like to thank our fantastic field trip leaders RL Rowland, Alex Takasugi, Pam Conley, Kristin Gnojewski, Amy Silver and Kevin Glueckert.

And thank you to everyone who came out and participated in the Christmas Bird Count!

Thank you to Rob Miller, of the IBO, who pitched in on Dec. 8 at the last possible moment when our scheduled speaker got sick, to give his talk about the IBO's Short-eared Owl Population Study; to Joe and Cordi Atkinson, from Vale, Ore., who spoke to us on Jan. 26, about their experience training and filming two Philippine eagles, the largest species of eagle in the world; and to Steve Bouffard, spoke on Feb. 23, about his recent trip to China, where they went to see four species of Asian cranes and many other birds.

of Fish and Game. The plan identifies a role for everyone in protecting and enjoying important birds and wildlife in Idaho. We encourage everyone to view the plan at: fishandgame.idaho.gov.

The nomination process for positions on the Board of Directors is underway. Please contact Lew

Ulrey if you're interested in serving on the Board.

The Board voted to partner with Idaho fish and Game and others to erect a luxurious, elevated birdwatching blind at the Fort Boise Wildlife Management Area. The blind should be available for use later this spring.



Virginia rail

#### Volunteer News

Thanks very much to these recent speakers.

Thanks to Susan Werner on the Membership Committee who has processed more than 100 donation checks from our

fall fund raiser and has sent the thank-you notes and tax receipts for all of them. She has also updated all our membership records when our members renew their subscriptions and made all the address changes that came in during the past year. And

thanks to the hundreds of

peaceful demonstrators who came out on Jan. 19 and 30 at the Idaho State Capitol, to protest against the militant occupiers at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns, Ore.



Cedar waxwings

Photo by Alexander Sapiens

## GEAS EVENTS for March and April:

**Field trip information is subject to change.** Please check the Calendar and Field Trips section on the website <u>http://www.goldeneagleaudubon.org</u> for the latest information or contact Alex Takasugi at 484-9132 or alextakasugi@cableone.net and Kristin Gnojewski at kgnojewski@cableone.net.

**Field Trip Etiquette:** We set up car pools to take as few cars as possible, while making sure everyone has a window. Please give the driver of your ride gas money and arrive 10 minutes early.

#### Sunday, March 13

Family Birding Walk – Especially for children or the child in you Time: 9 to 11 a.m.

Location: Hyatt Hidden Lakes Reserve, 5301 N. Maple Grove Road, Boise, lower parking lot

Contact: Alex Takasugi alextakasugi@cableone.net 484-9132 This Boise park is managed for wildlife and has a number of ponds and upland habitat, which support a diverse number of birds and other wildlife. Bring the family, especially the young ones. We have binoculars and field guides you can borrow and will cover their use. Sign up the kids in our Frequent Flyer Club where they earn rewards for birding. We will finish at 11 a.m.

#### Saturday, March 19

SIBA field trip to Fort Boise WMA meet at 9 a.m. for a long halfday trip.

#### Sunday, March 20

Field trip: Sage Grouse Lek Time: 4:45 a.m.

Location: Meet at the Park & Ride at Rackham Road, NE Corner of Eagle and Overland Rds, south of the freeway from St. Luke's Contact: Alex Takasugi 484-9132 alextakasugi@cableone.net Trip Leader: Dave Hazelton, 362-1119

Beware, sage grouse numbers have been declining and there is no guarantee that we will see them. We need to meet before 5 a.m. to carpool and be on the road promptly at 5 a.m. We'll arrive around first light at the sage grouse lek near Midvale. If we are lucky, and we see these great boomers, we'll travel to C. Ben Ross Reservoir via remote unpaved roads, arriving around noon. Our route is weather flexible, but the plan is to check out other areas in the vicinity. In the past, we have walked along the Weiser River trail in Goodrich in the early afternoon. Bring lunch, water and protection from the elements. This is an all day trip.

#### March 21 – March 25

**Spring Break Drop-in Programs at the Boise Watershed** Each day this week, there will be a half-mile walk to the heron/cormorant rookery behind the Boise Watershed at 9 a.m., followed by a program on birds at 10:30 a.m. – Monday, woodpeckers; Tuesday, raptors; Wednesday, owls; Thursday, hummingbirds; Friday, great blue herons – and activities for kids and tours of the wastewater treatment plant – closed-toe shoes required for the tours. Free; no registration required. Boise Watershed is at 11818 W. Joplin Road in Boise.

#### **Tuesday March 29**

GEAS monthly meeting: Golden Eagles in Southwest Idaho, Karen Steenhof and Rob Spaul

Time: 7 p.m.

Location: Idaho Fish and Game Headquarters, Trophy Room.

Karen Steenhof will talk about their 40 years of data about golden eagles nesting in southwest Idaho. Her team has documented declines in nesting success, often related to increasing use of offhighway vehicles. Steenhof is a retired raptor researcher from the USGS who studied for decades at the Birds of Prey National Conservation Area on the Snake River. Rob Spaul is a recent BSU graduate of the BSU raptor biology program and will talk about his master's thesis on the effects of disturbance by OHVs and other forms of recreation on golden eagles.

#### Saturday, April 9

Field trip: Eagle Island State Park

Time: 8:30 a.m.

Location: Meet at the Albertson's parking lot 16th and State St. Contact: Lew Ulrey, 322-8246 or lulrey@cableone.net. We will carpool to the park and start birding by 9 a.m. Eagle Island State Park never disappoints – 155 species have been reported there on eBird. Highlights include northern harrier, ringnecked pheasant, great egret, Wilson's snipe, downy woodpecker, all the swallows, yellow-rumped warbler, white-crowned sparrow and song sparrow. With any luck we see should be able to lure out Virginia rail, western screech-owl and Bewick's wren. We probably will also find some unexpected species.

#### Sunday, April 10

Family Birding Walk – Especially for children or the child in you Time: 9 to 11 a.m.

Location: Hulls Gulch. Meet in parking lot off 8<sup>th</sup> Street next to Foothills Learning Center

Contact: Alex Takasugi alextakasugi@cableone.net or 484-9132 A highlight of this walk will be seeing the nesting great-horned owls that live in Hulls Gulch. We hope to be there in time to see their fuzzy nestlings. We will also look for the warblers and lazuli buntings that are returning to Boise for the spring and learn about migration. Where do birds go in the winter? What birds are here one time of the year and gone another? Why do birds migrate? Bring the family, especially the young ones. We have binoculars and field guides to borrow. We will finish at 11 a.m.

#### Tuesday, April 26

GEAS monthly meeting: "Bird By Bird" program, Deniz Aygen and others.

Time: 7 p.m.

Location: MK Nature Center

Deniz Aygen, watchable wildlife biologist for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and coordinator of the Bird by Bird program, will talk about the program and GEAS's involvement. "Bird by Bird" is an Idaho program to teach children of all ages about birds and their habitats and provides them an opportunity to participate in citizen science by observing birds, monitoring behavior, and documenting data. Students get the opportunity to learn in outdoor environments about biology, ecology and the complex interrelationships between wildlife, habitats and humans. Some students and teachers who are in the program will talk about how they have taken what they have learned in the classroom and taught their families about birds, bird watching, and being wildlife stewards. "Bird by Bird" is a partnership with Idaho Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, BLM and Wild Birds Unlimited.

#### March-April 2016

#### Field Trip Report: Fort Boise WMA

#### By Kevin Glueckert

On the last day of January, 18 participants traveled through dense valley fog and were rewarded by clear skies upon arrival to Martin Landing, where the Boise River meets the Snake. It didn't take long for a pair of bald eagles to appear just over the canopy at close range, repeatedly delivering clear, ethereal calls, possibly directed toward a pair of red-tailed hawks that may have intentions of breeding there.

Searching for any sign of warmth on the brisk morning, the group appreciated a great blue heron's choice of the opposite river bank as a resting place where the sun beamed in brightly. For much smaller birds, such as the brown creeper and rubycrowned kinglet, this was no time for rest as they actively foraged at their usual quickened pace. A prairie falcon happened over the parking area just as the group was preparing to move on, and all were grateful for the gesture. Having covered the area well, we would have a chance to warm up on the way to the next stop.

It was well past noon when the field trip resumed into the WMA from the end of Bar Diamond Lane. Approaching Sedge Pond from the south, the importance of this area to raptors was readily evident. A number of red-tailed hawks and northern harriers were active on the wing, in addition to two American kestrels and a sharp-shinned hawk.

Some of the season's first migrating geese began trickling in to their well-known stopover much to the delight of the birders directly beneath, who were kindly advised to keep their mouths closed. By day's end, a few Ross's, more than 2,000 snow geese and several dozen greater white-fronted geese were observed. With a far lesser body weight than those geese, the diminutive marsh wren had managed to survive winter thus far by inhabiting dense reed cover near a small patch of open water.

Moving on to the river access point at the north end of Fort Boise, there was collective bewilderment at the lack of bird activity in an area that typically and reliably produces. About the only thing keeping hopes up was a suggestion by one birder that this could be a good place for a spoonbill! Or was it spoon-billed sandpiper? In any case, the group maintained that it was a fun way to spend the day, before most headed home.

Six of us continued south, following the trail to Teal Ponds, where a handful of species turned up. Three of these came from the same thicket: First, a spotted towhee, followed by a hermit thrush and, with a sigh of relief, a mountain chickadee. Rounding out the day, two keen and highly-experienced observers were able to tease out a brown-headed cowbird among a small passing flock of red-winged blackbirds. The species list for the day had reached No. 50. Though, at the end of the trip, it's not this number that will be remembered, but the enjoyable experience in the company of fine people who all share in their love of birds.

#### Don't miss this one!

Golden Eagle Audubon and Intermountain Bird Observatory are teaming up to present a one-night only showing of "The Messenger" documentary. Join us at 6:30 p.m. April 14, at Edwards Boise Downtown Stadium 9 for this special screening to learn more about the conservation challenges facing songbirds in North America. This is a crowd-funded film screening hosted by Tugg. Reserve your tickets online today at https://www.tugg.com/events/89886.

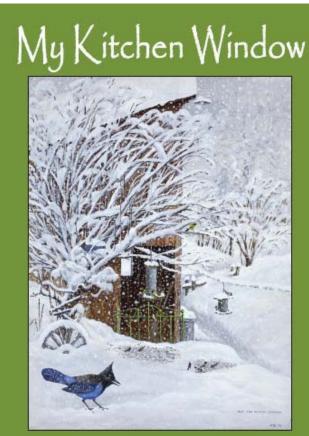
## Hilda's Columns, Sketches Collected

Hilda Larson began writing a column for the Golden Eagle Audubon Society in the 1980s. She began writing a column for the Southwestern Idaho Birders Association in 2007. She also drew cartoons and sketches of birds and birders for the newsletters. She continued writing for both groups until her death in 2014.

Sue Norton and Cathy Eells have compiled a collection of Hilda Larson's columns and sketches from the newsletters called My Kitchen Window. Niels Nokkentved did the design and layout. It also contains a history of Al Larson and Hilda's project of setting up blue bird trails in Idaho.

The book will be of interest to people who like to watch birds and other wildlife and those who would like a glimpse into the world outside the windows in Hilda's life. She writes with great warmth, curiosity, and humor.

You can order a copy by contacting Sue Norton at 378-4248 or at nortonsu@msn.com or Cathy Eells at 459-4435 or cathyeells53@gmail.com. Copies are \$13. Sue or Cathy will mail one to you for \$16. Proceeds will go to GEAS and SIBA.



Observations on Life and Nature by Hilda Larson Edited by Sue Norton and Cathy Eells

#### The Golden Eagle

## The second annual New Roots Program is a success

#### By Liz Urban

In June of 2015, GEAS and our partners hosted the second year of the New Roots Program, a project designed to engage youth from Boise's refugee and immigrant communities.

New Roots aims to engage these children with place-based environmental education and conservation action by working alongside community conservationists and life sciences professionals.

Fourteen children, ages 12 to 16, participated in this year's camp. They came from countries across the globe, including Nepal, Burma, Iraq, Jordan, Tanzania, Mexico and Kenya.

In 2015, thanks in part to the support of a new partnership with Boise National Forest, we were able to extend the length of our program to two weeks. This extension allowed us to visit additional sites, spend more time learning and tackle the allimportant task of getting to know one another.

Over the course of this day-camp, we visited 11 locations chosen to illustrate the amazing diversity we have in and around the Treasure Valley. The children were introduced to the plants

and animals of the area through a variety of activities. Each activity was designed to teach the importance of stewardship and encourage the participants to become stake-holders in their natural surroundings.

During 2015 camp we helped band nestling American kestrels at Lucky Peak Lake, planted Wyoming big sagebrush at Blacks Creek Bird Reserve, picked up micro-garbage at Hyatt Hidden Wetlands Reserve, helped inventory species at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge's BioBlitz, watched IBO band birds at their river site, and more. We played games to learn about bird migration, created sun-art to catalog plant diversity, and wrote daily in our journals to reflect on our experiences.

It may surprise you to learn that some in the refugee community don't know what a deer or cottontail rabbit is, or that they have never walked in the foothills. Many of by the Idaho Office for Refugees. This is a great celebratory event for the children to enjoy, but also an opportunity for them to share their experiences and new knowledge with the greater Boise community. In 2015, I also happened to be a full day past the due date for my first baby during this event. It was certainly a different level of challenge to coordinate and help lead this camp while nine months pregnant. It would not have been possible without the support of our wonderful leadership team and our volunteers.

Megan Jones, my partner and co-creator for New Roots, was an inspiring and engaged teacher throughout. Her hard work and enthusiasm have been essential in this program's success. We were also lucky enough to bring in Genny Gerke as a program leader this year. Her energy and knowledge brought a new depth to the program and she was absolutely amazing with the kids. Lastly my husband, Mark, stepped up as a leader for every day he was able during this two-week period. I would've had trouble getting through the camp without his help, and he was a fantastic



New Roots participants learn about bird banding.

Photo by Liz Urban

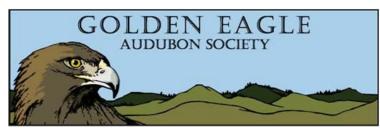
the children in the program are new to Boise, and we believe it is vital for them to immerse themselves in nature in order to feel fully connected to their new home. We hope that this experience not only affects those who participate, but that it radiates into their families, friends, and the larger refugee community as well.

We want New Roots to be learning-based, but in a way that is reinforced with creativity and fun. I personally feel that sending these children home with positive experiences in nature is one of greatest goals for this program.

In the two years we have offered the New Roots Program, we have ended the camp at Boise's World Refugee Day, hosted role model for the boys in the program.

Community partners for 2015 included Boise National Forest, the Foothills Learning Center, the Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey, Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge, BSU's Intermountain Bird Observatory, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Lucky Peak Lake, and the Idaho Office for Refugees.

We will be presenting more photos and stories from the program at the GEAS monthly meeting on May 24. Please join us to learn more about 2015's adventures and our plans for this coming year.



P.O. Box 8261 Boise, ID 83707 • www.goldeneagleaudubon.org

## **Annual Banquet and Auction**

Saturday, 6 p.m., March 12, 2016 Red Lion Downtowner, 1800 Fairview Ave. \$45 Per Person or \$400 for a table of 10

Please consider joining us for this annual fundraising event. In addition to our wonderful presenter, we will have a delightful silent auction during the social hour before dinner. Items include a landscape design consultation, original artwork, two tickets to a BSU football game, a spotting scope and more! Come spend the evening in good company and select a delicious homemade dessert as part of the fundraiser for \$5. Dinner is at 7 p.m.

# Kenneth Dial, 2016 GEAS Banquet Speaker, to Discuss "Waxing and Waning of Wings: Ecology and Evolution of Avian Locomotion"



Kenneth Dial is a professor in the Division of Biological Sciences at the University of Montana. His research program has focused on the biomechanics, ecology and evolution

of avian flight. Dial took a keen interest in aeronautics and biology as a teenager. For more than 20 years, he was acting director of the UM Flight Laboratory as well as director of UM Field Research Station at Fort Missoula. He teaches graduate classes in evolutionary ecology in East Africa. With more than 30 years of experience as a pilot, Dial is certified to fly several types of jet aircraft but prefers back country flying into hidden dirt and grass airstrips. He hosted 26 episodes of "All Bird TV" on the Discovery Channel's Animal Planet. He currently is transitioning from his professorial duties to wildlife conservation efforts in Tanzania, Kenya, southern California and western Montana.

#### Banquet Registration – Due by March 7, 2016

Please complete your registration, with payment, and mail to: GEAS, 1963 Teal Lane, Boise, ID 83706 or pay by credit card online at <u>www.goldeneagleaudubon.org/banquet</u>

Tickets are \$45 per person or a reserved table for 10 is available for \$400. To purchase a table please call or e-mail Liz Urban at 208-629-2146 or urbanhawk127@gmail.com

Name:	_ Phone:	E-mail:		
Address:	City:	State: Zip:		
Number of tickets (@ \$45 per guest):	Check	Enclosed: \$		
Entrée Choices are Beef Tenderloin (B), Char-Grilled Northwest Salmon (S), or Vegetarian Lasagna (V). Please indicate each guest's selection by circling one selection below:				
Guest Name:	Entrée Choice: B, S, V	If you would like to support GEAS by donating an auction item or a		
Guest Name:	Entrée Choice: B, S, V	homemade dessert, please e-mail		
Guest Name:	Entrée Choice: B, S, V	Danette at <u>danette444@gmail.com</u> .		
Guest Name:	Entrée Choice: B, S, V	Thank you!		

## Here's lookin' at you . . .



Snowy owl

Photo by Jackie Robidoux

The Golden Eagle Audubon Society publishes The Golden Eagle six times a year.

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- For membership/subscription information, renewals, or change of address, e-mail membership@goldeneagleaudubon.org.
- For newsletter submissions, send an e-mail to Niels S. Nokkentved at sparre47@gmail.com. The deadline for newsletter . submissions is the second Sunday of the month.

### We invite you to join the Golden Eagle Audubon Chapter

Membership in the local chapter includes a one-year subscription to The Golden Eagle, and all my dues remain with the local chapter and support local activities.

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Please contact us for information on membership scholarships.				

To join the National Audubon Society visit http://www.audubon.org/ and use chapter code G00 for Golden Eagle Audubon Society, or write to: National Audubon Society, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250.

The Golden Eagle Audubon Society is southwest Idaho's chapter of the National Audubon Society. GEAS promotes environmental awareness through field trips, local programs and volunteer work. Post Office Box 8261, Boise, Idaho 83707 www.goldeneagleaudubon.org