



The Golden Eagle

Newsletter of the Golden Eagle Audubon Society

Winter 2021

Some birds 'speak' more than just one language

Crista Videriksen Worthy

Birds live in such a different world from us. Because they have the gift of flight and maneuver through the air, their world is more three-dimensional than ours. As a pilot, I know this from direct experience. Have you ever spent a day on a boat, or body-surfing in the ocean, and then for hours afterward, you can still feel yourself in or on the water? Though it's a different physiological phenomenon, after flying for a while—taking off, maneuvering up and down and around in the air, descending, and landing—and then I get back in my car and drive, it feels like I am driving inside a flat painting—two-dimensional instead of three.

Because they move at great speed relative to their body size, most flying birds have excellent eyesight, which helps them to prevent collisions as well as find food and avoid predators. While it's true that colorful feathers help birds communicate with each other up close, sounds—songs or calls—are the critical first communication. These communications are broadcast across distance, as if you were shouting in a Wal-Mart, trying to make yourself heard all the way to the other end of the store, above all the other people talking and shouting. If you could sit quietly in a natural environment, such as a tropical rainforest with a healthy bird population, the noise would be nearly deafening.

That's why it's so important for bird song to be precise; so other members of the same species can identify and understand each other through the cacophony. Over time, members of a single species living in different areas often develop different dialects. Humans do this too. Not only do we have different languages, but a child who grows up in Alabama, for instance, will speak English with a different accent than a child who grows up in New Jersey. Young birds learn to sing by listening to their parents and other local birds. When scientists raise songbirds in cages and play recordings of different dialects, the birds learn the dialect they hear, even if it's different from the dialect of their parents.

I'm always listening to the birds that move through my yard, even if I don't have the tools to conduct a scientific study. Male and female great horned owls have different calls, but it also seems that one pair doesn't sound the same as another. I still remember one male goldfinch that had a strikingly different song, a couple of summers ago. I never saw that male with any female or

offspring, so it's possible that he didn't find a mate. If so, was it that his song was different?

A couple of years ago at the annual meeting of the American Ornithological Society, one researcher told a story that combined his study of birds with thoughts about his own life. Daizaburo Shizuka, an ornithologist specializing in avian vocalizations, had been studying golden-crowned sparrows, whose song—three long, descending notes that sound like “Oh dear me”—is familiar to many birders here in Idaho. These birds often nest in open habitats in western Canada and Alaska.

Shizuka studied a population in the Canadian Yukon in which each bird sang one of two dialects. The territories of these birds overlapped, but each bird only sang the song its parents sang, except for one male that sang both songs perfectly—like a completely bilingual person. This bird was easily identifiable by unique color bands on its legs. But every time Shizuka saw him, he was alone. Eventually, as the other golden-crowned sparrows busied themselves raising young, he stopped singing,

and then disappeared.

Shizuka had emigrated from Japan to the U.S., with his older siblings and parents, as a 7-year-old. This is toward the end of the human “critical language acquisition period,” and he learned to speak English perfectly, without an accent. The rest of his family struggled to speak English, and he often had to translate. He saw his family experience isolation through language. Shizuka said that, for him and perhaps others who straddle two languages and cultures, sounding the same doesn't necessarily equate to feeling the same. Sometimes the result is you never quite feel at home anywhere. My parents immigrated to the U.S. from Denmark before I was born, and I grew up with both languages. My extended family all live in Denmark, and I feel this pull, especially at Christmas. It's a common situation as people move all over the globe or just across a country as large and diverse as the U.S.

At the meeting, Shizuka shared how he hoped the bird had found his home, in a different territory. It's an interesting story and a way to relate ornithology to the human experience. More than anything, what I love about birding, and life in general, is noticing things. Birders notice things. We sit quietly, we look, we listen. In noticing, we can also develop empathy. Here's to a wonderful year of noticing, and empathy, in 2021!



Golden-crowned sparrow

Photo by Doug Greenberg

President's Message

By Liz Urban

Dear GEAS Community,

It is my pleasure to introduce Liz Littman as Golden Eagle Audubon's first-ever executive director. Liz brings an extensive background in nonprofit management experience and a clear dedication to conservation. We have had the pleasure of working with Liz this past month to get her on board, and we are very confident that our organization is in good hands. Please find Liz's letter of introduction in this newsletter.

Thank you to the ad-hoc hiring and personnel committee who worked tirelessly to set up GEAS to be ready to bring on our first employees and made the recommendation to the board to offer Liz the position. The board was thrilled to have so many great applicants apply for the role and voted unanimously to bring Liz on.

We have also hired Adra Lobdell, who worked as an independent contractor for the past year, as staff in the role as educator and volunteer coordinator. We hope to fill our last staff position, the communications and development coordinator, soon. The board and I are excited to see GEAS grow with a dedicated team and staff.

It is so energizing to see our volunteers, committees, and board members ready to get to work as we become a more structured and effective organization with the help of staff. I personally have served on the board for the past eight years and have seen our chapter grow in size and reach, and I am so thankful that we have committed to ensuring that our momentum continues and makes ever increasing positive impacts for birds and people through our conservation, education, and advocacy work.

We hope you will join us in this new year and next chapter of evolution. We continue to develop and offer a number of virtual and Covid-conscious opportunities for the community. Please check out our online calendar and follow us on Facebook for upcoming events.

Your support, including membership dues, is a vital piece of ensuring we can focus on programming and conservation actions. We want to thank everyone who supported GEAS with a donation during our annual appeal; it was our most successful fund-raiser of the year. We really appreciated that 2020 ended on such a positive note.

Lastly, we would welcome any interested member to contact us if you would like to learn more about our work or join us in making Idaho a better place for birds. Our standing committees and board of directors would love to connect with anyone interested in serving. There is much we hope to accomplish, and the more dedicated hands we have, the bigger the impact we can make together.

Cheers to a brighter 2021!

Liz Urban, president,

P.S. Yes, there are now two Lizzes.



American dipper

Photo by N.S. Nokkentved

Golden Eagle Audubon Society

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STAFF

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Adra Lobdell, Education Specialist and
 Volunteer Coordinator
alobdell@goldeneagleaudubon.org

Anyone interested in becoming more involved with Golden Eagle Audubon committees or volunteer opportunities, please contact:

info@goldeneagleaudubon.org

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of GEAS or its members.

Volunteer News

Volunteer Acknowledgements

Thank you to Lisa Reed for her leadership in chairing the Hiring and Personnel Policies committee to set up GEAS to bring on our first staff; this was no small task. Thank you to Patti Guicheteau for participating in the ad-hoc committee with Lisa Reed and Liz Urban to develop a full proposal for the board of directors. Thanks to Dondi Black, Sierra Laverty, and Liz for working with Lisa in establishing policies for board approval, and thank you to the committee and past board member Matt Podolsky for taking the time to interview for two of the approved staff positions. Treasurer Ceredig Roberts also gave a lot of time to establish payroll and set up checks and balances, so thanks to him as well.

Thank you to Alexander Sapiens for his years serving as our program coordinator. It's been a delight to learn alongside him at the GEAS monthly presentations that he worked so diligently to coordinate.

Thank you to Jimmy Hallyburton for encouraging us to honor Al Larson this past fall with a Covid-appropriate award ceremony. Jimmy helped organize the event and we truly appreciate the support. Thank you to Matt Podolsky for helping document the event and to the long-time friends and volunteers who helped make the day special. We also want to say thank you again to the City of Boise and Jim Hall Foothills Learning Center for allowing us to hold the celebration safely outdoors.

Thank you to the volunteers who are working on our window-collision monitoring effort in downtown Boise; Ingrid and Bill Brudenell, Patti Guicheteau, Dondi Black, Sean Finn, Lorna Snow, Barbara McGillivray, Maria Minicucci, Alan Crockett, HJ Sheppa, Jessica Solberg, Libby Burtner, and Liz Urban.

Thank you to Sierra Laverty for creating and leading the new Development Committee and to the members Jim Lyons, Ceredig Roberts, Kent Laverty, Dondi Black, and Liz Urban for participating.

Thank you to Shauna Arnold, Jay Carlisle, Lucian Davis, Matt Dresser, and Cheryl Huizinga, for coordinating local

Christmas Bird Counts this December.

Thank you field trip leaders for leading wonderful birding outings for the public and being flexible with new COVID-19 related protocol. We appreciate their willingness to take the community out birding in a way that is safe and responsible. Volunteers who have led field trips this fall/winter include Dondi Black, Tricia Bookman, Jon Curd, Lucian Davis, Louisa Evers, Cheryl Huizinga, Jim James, Sierra Laverty, Jim Lyons, Vicki McGrane, Lorraine Poore, David Potter, and Ceredig Roberts.

Thank you to Bryce Robinson for teaching a great virtual sparrows workshop this fall. We also would like to thank Louisa Evers for teaching many wonderful online classes for our members this fall and winter.

Thanks to the Conservation sub-committee members Matt McCoy, Lisa Reed, and Alex Takasugi, who worked to establish an evaluation rubric to help prioritize projects and opportunities.

Thanks to Dondi Black for her leadership on the second annual Winter Birding Challenge; it promises to be a January

highlight for many. We would also like to thank Dondi for coordinating our Climate Watch Program for the past few years. She is stepping down as the coordinator this winter. We greatly appreciate her dedication and hard work to build Climate Watch into a great community science program for GEAS.

Thank you to Alexander Sapiens for purchasing and installing new shelving units in our storage units and thank you to Dondi and Jeff Black for helping in the re-organization.

Thank you to Terra Falconer, who worked with GEAS as a contractor over the past two years. We will miss her creativity and wish her the best in her new career!

Thank you to Niels Nokkentved for his dedication to the newsletter.

And thank you to Adra Lobdell and Liz Littman for joining us as our first staff and working through this transition with us.

Adra Lobdell: education specialist & volunteer coordinator, Golden Eagle Audubon Society: alobdell@goldeneagleaudubon.org



Three double crested cormorants

Photo by N.S. Nokkentved

Greetings from the first GEAS executive director

It's an exciting new year for Golden Eagle Audubon Society. I am thrilled to be joining the team as the new executive director. While I have been a fan of GEAS for years, I admit that until I came on board I didn't have any idea just how many programs and projects this volunteer-run organization had its hands in. And I probably still don't have the full picture. It really is remarkable what this group of energetic and dedicated volunteers has been able to accomplish.

Before joining GEAS, I was the assistant director at Zoo Boise where I led the visitor service departments focusing on the zoo's conservation programs, special events, communications, education programs and admissions. In my time with the zoo, I was most proud to help with the creation of ground-breaking conservation programs that raise money to support the protection of endangered species around the world. It's the opportunity to continue this conservation work on a local level that makes me so excited to be a part of the GEAS team.

I am a Boise native, but I left for a time to get a bachelor's degree in drama from Vassar College, with a minor in music and

culture. An obvious prelude to working with Audubon, right? I have spent my entire career working with a variety of nonprofit organizations, including the Idaho Shakespeare Festival and Idaho Nonprofit Center.

I am excited to use my creative skills to expand the impact of GEAS's mission and connect our community with birds and wildlife to promote their protection. I look forward to growing our membership, promoting our community science programs across our chapter area and diving into our next habitat restoration projects. Regarding birding, I consider myself a beginner. I could easily talk for hours about penguins, but not so much about our Idaho birds. When we are all able to be together again, I look forward to joining you on our bird walks and field trips.

I'm not the only one with a new title at GEAS. You may know Adra Lobdell; please welcome her in her newish role as Education Specialist & Volunteer Coordinator. We are so glad that she came on as our first official employee from her contractor role.

Liz Littman, executive director

Book Review: Field Notes from an Unintentional Birder: A Memoir

By Jim Lyons

First, I love this book, so let's start that way! Admittedly though, I had a somewhat mixed first impression. While any book with "Birder" in the title is a big plus, immediately making me want to know more, I was frankly put off by the cover art* including two bird species that hinted at artist's renditions, and not "real" species that (as a long-time birder) would jump out at me. This can be a big turn-off for me and, I suspect, many other birders.

Field Notes from an Unintentional Birder: A Memoir,

By Julia Zarankin

Douglas & McIntyre, 256 pp.
\$24.95

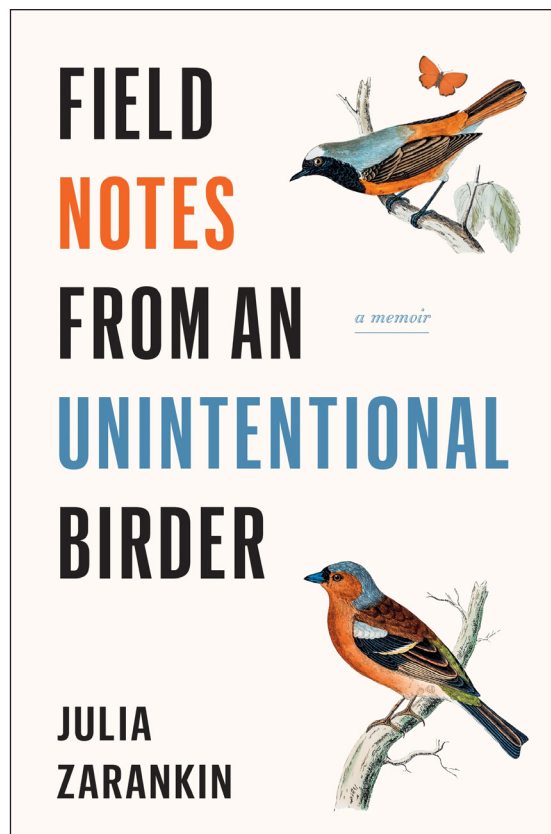
This initial encounter was of the online variety, and not as we all would probably prefer, enjoyably browsing the stacks at our local library or physical bookstore. It was online browsing, naturally, in these times, ending with the discovery that same local library had a Kindle-compatible copy that was available – yes!

To me, a good memoir about the birding life needs plenty of focus on specific birds (chase stories included), as well as birding locales, and of course, interesting observations of other birders! The gold standard to me among many is Kenn Kaufman's Kingbird Highway. If I had examined the back as well as the front of the book during that first impression, I would have noticed that at the top of the stack of "Unintentional" blurbs, is no less than the kingbird himself, Kenn K. (I also find it fascinating that the number two blurb is from Margaret Atwood!)

There is so much more to the memoir, too. It is the story of a multi-generation immigrant family which is fascinating. Zarankin now lives in Toronto but she was born in the USSR (back then), and her background includes college education and teaching roles at a range of US universities, including a PhD in Comparative Literature from Princeton. That helps answer the question of if she can write, and it also helps explain the book's multiple Anna Karenina references!

Acquiring new vocabulary, or at least a word here and a word there, is often a joy of my reading, and I picked up a little birding terminology in "Field Notes...". Zarankin relates in a very open, non-jargony way, her path to becoming a committed birder. I enjoyed reading about her activities and thoughts while assisting in field work at ornithology study sites, but I think the thing I think I related to most is Zarankin's enthusiasm for learning her local birding spots, Toronto's hidden pockets of wildlife habitat, and observing which birds frequent these at various times and seasons. She describes that this has become the aspect of birding that is her most recent focus, and I can connect with that.

I found the entire book to be a delightful read, with multiple benefits including plenty of miles, kilometers in Canada, virtually following along with the author on many of her birding adventures, with both of us gaining insight as she goes. Also, I can attest to learning things, including some current birding terminology and a few references well beyond the world of birds.



Donor Thanks

Thank you for supporting Golden Eagle Audubon!

The following individuals have made generous donations to support our education, conservation and advocacy efforts between November 1 and December 31, 2020:

John and Edwina Allen
 Carol Arrizabalaga
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 Barbara Ballance
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 Gloria Young
 Judith Zuckert

Donations in memory of Don Riley:
 Walt and Tonya Smith
 Tod Wingfield

The following individuals have made generous donations to the Larson Legacy Fund to support community science efforts in southwestern Idaho between November 1 and December 31, 2020:
 Patti Guicheteau
 Sue Norton



Great horned owl

Photo by N.S. Nokkentved

2020 GEAS Christmas Bird Count brings fog, results

Boise's Christmas Bird Count on December 27: We had a mix of very foggy weather in the western/southwestern portion – about 40 to 50 percent of the count circle – to beautiful sunny weather on the eastern side and in the foothills. Thanks a ton to everyone who participated, all 80-plus of them, and to the many folks who helped coordinate. We tallied 104 species on count day – this CBC's second highest count-day total, only trailing the 2019 count with 108 species – and we found another 13 count-week species.

Some highlights:

- Count firsts: Trumpeter swan, long-eared owl, western tanager.
- Second time: Red-breasted merganser, greater yellowlegs, ovenbird (second time).
- Two bushtits (third time).
- Lincoln's sparrow (fourth time).
- Two spotted sandpipers (fifth time).
- Osprey (sixth time).
- Good variety of finches including red crossbill, pine grosbeak, and evening grosbeak.
- Count week species: Snow goose; lesser scaup; ring-necked pheasant; rough-legged hawk; barred owl; lesser black-backed and herring gulls; red-naped sapsucker; blue jay; Harris's, white-throated, and fox sparrows; and Swainson's thrush.

After Jim Lyons and Dean Jones shared that they first participated in the Boise CBC in 1981, when two green herons were found, and wood duck, pied-billed grebe, and mourning dove were found during count week but not seen on count day, I thought it might be fun to look back on the 54-year history of this count. In 2020, we had participants that had done their first CBC, anywhere, in the mid-1960s, and some others who were contributing to their very first. In recent years we've greatly increased efforts along foothills trails, so our coverage in the past few years has been as complete as ever.

Some noteworthy species:

- These are the 18 species that have been recorded in all 54 years that the Boise CBC has been conducted; a few others have occurred in more than 50 years.
 - Mallard, American wigeon, belted kingfisher, downy woodpecker, northern flicker, American kestrel, black-billed magpie, black-capped chickadee, ruby-crowned kinglet, American robin, European starling, cedar waxwing, dark-eyed junco, white-crowned sparrow, song sparrow, house finch, American goldfinch, and house sparrow.
- Extirpated (locally extinct):
 - Mountain quail – recorded first six years then not since.
 - Meanwhile, California quail was absent first two years (1967-68), then increased through 1970s and have been common/abundant since.
- Increasing:
 - Pied-billed grebe – irregular first 20 years, annual since 1987.
 - Lesser goldfinch – two found for first time in 2000 and annually since, averaging well over 100 lately.
 - Red winged blackbird – less regular in early years

but annual since 1980.

- Hermit thrush – more regular since 1990.
- Bewick's wren – first in 2001 then long gap, annual and increasing since 2014.
- Anna's hummingbird – first counted in 1978, but irregular until 2000s, annual and increasing since 2010.
- Mourning dove – irregular and much less common until 1980s, annual since 1983 and especially numerous since 2000.
- Wood duck – much more numerous since 1990
- Cackling Goose – recorded annually since the split (2004-2020).

Nampa Christmas Bird Count - December 19: 39 counters spend a full day out in the field counting birds for the 67th annual Nampa Christmas Bird Count. It was a beautiful day with some of the lake unfrozen, which helped the birders counting lake species. With COVID restrictions in place there was no before or after meeting, but that didn't stop the birders or the birds. We ended the day with 105 species and added two more for the Count Week with a total of 107 species for this year's CBC. The 10 year average for this count is 103 species, and the most species counted has been 109 in both 2017 and 2018. We thank all the counters who came out for this CBC and look forward to more normal times in 2021.



Great blue heron

Photo by N.S.Nokkentved

In Memoriam

Stephany Erwin

The birds lost one of their most devoted and enthusiastic fans when Stephany Erwin died on Christmas day. Stephany was passionate about birding and proud of the bird sanctuary she developed in her yard. She once proudly posted a picture of eleven lazuli buntings that had visited.

Stephany served on the GEAS board of directors for several years, eventually serving as secretary and then as treasurer. An active member, she helped out at promotion booths, participated in field trips and served on the banquet committee. When Stephany learned that, as a board member and committee member, she would be asked to secure auction donations, she was scared and nervous, never having done this before. But not only did she rise to the challenge, she owned it. Her most creative idea was to fill a bird-themed cookie jar with her delicious gingersnaps. She acquired donations of pottery and jewelry. When Kenn and Kim Kaufman came to Boise to speak at the banquet, Stephany asked them for autographed donations of their books to offer at auction. She continued this request for several more years and was always successful.

Stephany was unfailingly cheerful, positive and full of life. She had a sunny, warm personality that endeared her to those fortunate enough to know her. A celebration of her life will take place on the day of the summer solstice, at 2 p.m., June

20, 2021, at the Idaho Botanical Garden. There will be a brief service, a visit to the garden and, of course, birding. All are welcome.

Susan Hazelton

Jessie Somerton

Some of you may also have known Jessie Somerton, as I did. She died recently, as reported in the Statesman in the fall. Her obituary (link below) pays wonderful tribute to quite a person! I remember Jessie from the 1980s, when she was one of Golden Eagle Audubon's core group of hardy birders and outdoor enthusiasts. She was very active and helped our chapter grow and prosper back then. Her obituary mentions her bluebird-box efforts in Valley County, which followed somewhat later; it warmed my heart.

<https://westerncremation.org/jessie-somerton/>

Jim Lyons

Don Riley

Golden Eagle Audubon Society extends our deepest condolences to the family of Don Riley, a long time member of our chapter. We are grateful for their generosity by including our organization in his memorial. We hope that our work will honor his legacy.

Great Backyard Bird Count

24th Annual • Feb 12-15, 2021

Count birds in your backyard, local park, or wherever you spot a bird, and submit your observations online.

birdcount.org



Black-capped Chickadee. Photo: Jessica Ann McConahay/Great Backyard Bird Count

Join GEAS for a fun challenge! Let's see how many birds we can count together during this year's GBBC.

Spend at least 15 minutes birding during the GBBC, record what you see on eBird, and then share your list with the GEAS eBird account.

We will tally up everyone's totals and share the results. Let's see how many birds we can find together!

Learn more at www.goldeneagleaudubon.org/Great-Backyard-Bird-Count

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Golden Eagle Audubon Chapter Donation Form

Donations to the Golden Eagle Audubon Society support local conservation and education efforts and help us to reach more members of our community to nurture a love of birds and wildlife for years to come.

Please make checks payable to Golden Eagle Audubon Society, Inc.

Mail to Golden Eagle Audubon Society, PO Box 8261, Boise, ID 83707.

You may also donate online at goldeneagleaudubon.org/donate.

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Golden Eagle Audubon Society is dedicated to building an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the natural world in order to conserve and restore natural ecosystems for birds and other wildlife.

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.

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