



The Golden Eagle

Newsletter of the Golden Eagle Audubon Society

November/December, 2015

Backyard Wildlife Ecosystem Offers Lessons

By Crista Videriksen Worthy

We moved from California to the back side of the Boise foothills on Halloween 2011. I hung bird feeders outside the kitchen window and threw seed out for the quail. Soon the Grim Reaper, in the form of a Cooper's hawk, brought daily terror from above. One slow bird would pay the ultimate price, the Reaper would



Flicker at the feeder.

Photo by Crista Worthy

move on, and within three minutes the yard would be full of birds again. On snowy mornings, we found fox and deer tracks and learned the deer will empty any feeder left out overnight.

The following summer we grew tomatoes. Dozens of them were almost ready for picking when they disappeared. The next day I saw a deer eating the few that were left. Thus began the tomato wars. The deer would come; I would run out and chase them off. Soon they learned to trot just in front of me. When I stopped, so would they. One young buck walked back into the yard right past me. Finally I gave up and let the deer have them.

I had also planted wildflowers and the yard was full of bright yellow goldfinches snacking on pink and purple bachelor button seeds. A thistle appeared in the lawn and I decided to leave it so the goldfinches could eat those seeds too. That was a mistake: ever since, we have thistles everywhere.

We had interesting visitors last summer—a family of northern flickers. Both parents and a large fledgling spent a few weeks with us. For years I've known there is a large black ant colony

just outside the kitchen window in the sand between the flagstones near the bird feeders. The ants stay underground all year except on spring mornings, when they mass above. They've never bothered us so I've left them alone. The male flicker discovered them, however, and pecked holes in the sand. Like an anteater, he used his long tongue to eat his fill each day. While he probed the sand for more ants, the female would hang on the bottom of the feeder and gobble copious quantities of sunflower chips. Then she'd fly up to the awning and feed their fledgling. After relieving us of most of our ants, they moved on.

Any uneaten sunflower chips that spill from the feeders enrich the soil beneath, which is home to some particularly healthy earthworms. Our robin family has feasted on them all summer. A badger stopped by as well to dig some up. I stayed inside—you don't want to mess with a badger.

Each year, I have planted Mammoth Sunflowers from seed, to no avail. After reading the wonderful Hal Borland book, "This Hill, This Valley," I followed his wife's example this year and planted them in the rain. Soon we had 15 sunflowers coming up—14 after my husband accidentally ran one over with the mower. As I write this in late September, they are 10 feet tall, all crowned with huge blossoms that face south and now droop from the weight of their seeds. Alas, the goldfinches I grew them for just fled for the winter. We'll dry the seeds, keep a few to plant next year, roast some, and give the rest to the quail.

Last month I began to find piles of poo in the lawn. My neighbor and I suspected his dog. The piles were multiplying so the neighbor came over, took a look and said, "That's from a raccoon!" Of course. The week before, as I stepped out after dusk to collect the feeders I almost tripped over a small round animal that bolted so quickly I wasn't sure what it was. I froze, and then saw a movement from the other direction.

A huge raccoon strode across the patio. It stopped, stretched up on its hind legs and stared right at me, unafraid. It then ambled over to its youngster, the one I almost tripped on. We began to hear them on our roof nightly. I took a flashlight out back



American goldfinch

Photo by Crista Worthy

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President’s Message

By Sean Finn

Dear Members of Golden Eagle Audubon Society,

By the time you read this it will be known far and wide: the greater sage-grouse is “not warranted” for listing as a threatened or endangered species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published this decision on October 2 after a multi-year population and habitat analysis coupled with extraordinary political and material gains toward collaborative conservation.

I, for one, applaud this decision though not without a healthy dose of trepidation; much of the decision hinges on our collective ability to stop—or at least slow down—a consistent trend in the loss and degradation of sagebrush habitat that’s gone on for decades. The Fish and Wildlife Service bases endangered species listing decisions on what’s known as a 5 Factor analysis that considers, among other things, “damage to, or destruction of, a species’ habitat,” and “inadequacy of existing protection.” For sage-grouse, Fish and Wildlife determined that “the primary threats ... have been ameliorated by conservation efforts implemented by federal, state, and private landowners.” No doubt, we have collectively initiated conservation efforts at scales never before seen. However, as the recent Soda Fire shows us, factors that damage or destroy sagebrush are extremely formidable as well.

Because we’ve historically treated the vast arid intermountain west shrub-steppe landscape as disconnected piecemeal, we have wounded it with a thousand small cuts. The healing will have to come from a committed, coordinated effort among public agencies, private landholders and the community of stakeholders—like GEAS members—who hold the land and our wildlife so dear. The “conservation efforts” Fish and Wildlife cited are really just the beginning; it can take 30 years for burned-over sagebrush to recover back to functional grouse habitat. To live up to the decision’s expectations we all must commit long-term.

Agency contributions include adjusting wildlife response policy, coordinating habitat protection and restoration and, in some cases restructuring to a “landscape-scale” approach with an emphasis on reconnecting both habitats and inter-agency coordination. Private landowners are adjusting their grazing and land use strategies and entering into conservation agreements to ensure long-term habitat availability. You and I, the citizen stakeholders, have opportunities to volunteer on habitat restoration projects, to encourage good conservation **(Continued on page 5)**

GEAS CALENDAR

November-December 2015

Field Trip: CJ Strike	October 31
Family Birding Walk	November 8
Saturday Stroll	November 28
GEAS Monthly meeting	December 8
Family Birding Walk	December 13
Christmas Bird Count: Garden Valley	December 16
Christmas Bird Count: Boise	December 19
Christmas Bird Count: Cascade	December 19
Christmas Bird Count: McCall	December 20
Christmas Bird Count: Nampa	December 26
Christmas Bird Count: Bruneau	January 2

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News From the Board: New Meeting Location

Board members have learned the road to Lucky Peak has been improved, though it still needs work. They will continue to work with Idaho Fish and Game and the Bureau of Land Management on a long-term solution.

The field trip team will be adding local, shorter trips called "Saturday Strolls." Look for the first one on November 28—check events calendar on Page 4 and the online calendar.

The Board voted to support a lawsuit initiated by our partners at Idaho Families for Clean Water. The suit is intended to force the U.S. Forest Service to monitor the status of seeps and springs before any exploratory drilling is allowed in the proposed CuMo mine site. See story on back page.

The Board approved a conflict of interest policy which will be an appendix to the upcoming revision of the bylaws.

Final approval will be through member voting.

Our highly valued board member and volunteer coordinator, Gerrie Satz, resigned for personal reasons. We will miss your great work and dedication Gerrie!

Until further notice, the board will meet at the Sage School on Park Center Boulevard.



Merganser nursery in the Boise River.

Photo by N.S. Nokkentved

Volunteer News

We'd like to thank Dr. Megan Jones, Genny Gerke, Mark Urban, and Liz Urban for all the time they gave to make the 2015 New Roots Program a success. They gave hundreds of hours of their time to coordinate and run the two-week long camp that took place in June.

Thanks also to all the GEAS partners that participated: Boise National Forest, Intermountain Bird Observatory, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Foothills Learning Center, Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge, Idaho Office for Refugees, and the World Center for Birds of Prey. Many thanks to Sean Finn, Kristin Gnojewski, Danette Henderson, Kate Smith, Josh Connell, and Edna Rey-Vizgirdas for volunteering. Look for an article in the next newsletter for a summary of this program!

Thanks also to the people who helped with preparation for printing and for mailing the newsletter: Louise Maley, Susan Hazelton, Suzanne Woodcock, Ann Swanson, Sue Norton, Niels Nokkentved, Jessica Fuzek, Leah Dunn, and Harold Ward.

Volunteers Help Gather Bluebird Trail Data for 2015

This past season has been another good one for our bluebirds.

Combining records from six locations with more than 350 nest boxes, the total of nestlings fledged comes to 873. This puts the number of birds fledged in the top third fledged in the past 30 years. Species fledged were 713 mountain bluebirds, 160 western bluebirds and undetermined numbers of house wrens, tree swallows and mountain chickadees.

Bluebirds were nesting early this year because of the mild spring weather. This gave hopes of a bumper crop. Then came the usual cold spell when some of the nests were abandoned. Many nests had fewer than the usual number of eggs. Some nests had only three or four eggs while the normal average is five eggs. Tree swallows and house wrens were on hand to take over nest boxes when early broods of bluebirds fledged. On at least one occasion swallows commandeered a bluebird nest with large nestlings that died before fledging.

The area affected by the recent fire at

Prairie has grass and forbs replacing the burned out sagebrush. Evidence of the fire is witnessed mainly by the dead charred pine trees left standing. Many of the nest boxes burned in the fire were replaced on the same tree as before.

The recent Soda fire in Owyhee County did not affect the SIBA bluebird trail on Trout Creek.

Trips were made to each bluebird trail when the estimated age of the oldest nestling was 14 days. This resulted in 41 trips from Boise, embracing six trails and driving about 6,300 miles. Al Larson was accompanied on 37 of these trips by volunteer driver-assistants. Al is grateful and wishes to thank all of those wonderful people for their support.

Anyone receiving a paper copy of The Golden Eagle who would like to help save GEAS some printing and postage expense, please sign up to receive our newsletter via e-mail message every month by sending an e-mail so stating to: membership@goldeneagleaudubon.org

GEAS EVENTS for November and December

Field trip information is subject to change. Please check the website <http://www.goldeneagleaudubon.org> and go to the Calendar and Field Trips section 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, November 8

Family Birding Walk – Especially for children or the child in you
Time: 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Location: Kathryn Albertson Park parking lot, 1001 N. Americana Blvd., Boise

Contact: Alex Takasugi alextakasugi@cableone.net, 484-9132
We will walk the paved loop around the park looking for geese, ducks and herons on the water, as well as songbirds in the brush. Bring the whole family, especially the young ones. We go over the basics of using binoculars. We have binoculars and field guides you can borrow. Sign up the kids in our Frequent Flyer



Backyard visitor

Photo by N.S. Nokkentved

Club where they earn rewards for birding. We will finish at noon.
NEW! Saturday Strolls will be shorter, more local field trips we'll have in addition to the longer, all-day, trips to interesting places farther afield. We'll hit the local hot spots, enjoy the birds for a couple of hours, and then be home by early afternoon. New birders and those new to the area, as well as veterans with other time commitments are especially welcome!

Saturday, November 28

Saturday Stroll! Garden City Nature Trail

Location: Meet in the parking at Riverside Park in Garden City, on W. Riverside Drive across Glenwood from D & B Supply.

Time: 9 a.m.

Trip Leader: Lew Ulrey

Contact: Alex Takasugi alextakasugi@cableone.net, 484-9132

The Garden City Nature Trail is a delightful 1.4 mile long stretch of dirt path Greenbelt extending west from Glenwood St. We will walk west 1.4 miles, cross the river on the new Garden City West Bridge, view the waterfowl in the dredge ponds on the south side of the river, and bird our way back to Glenwood Street on the south side of the river, which is a different sort of place than the north side. At this time of year we will observe a great variety of duck species. We will also hear a number of bird calls, which are important to learn since often they are the only evidence we have of a bird's presence.

Sunday, December 13

Family Birding Walk and Kids Christmas Bird Count – especially for children or the child in you

Time: 10 a.m.

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

Contact: Alex Takasugi alextakasugi@cableone.net, 484-9132

This trip will be our fourth Children's Christmas Bird Count. We will see what species we can find and keep count of the numbers we see. Bring the whole family, especially the young ones. We go over using binoculars. We have binoculars and field guides you can borrow. Sign up the kids in our Frequent Flyer Club where they can earn rewards for birding. We will finish at noon.

Christmas Bird Count Dates and information

There is no cost for the bird counts. Info will be available on the web rather than sending out a report afterwards.

Wednesday, December 16, Garden Valley CBC

Leader: Gary Worthington, garyhworthington@outlook.com, 853-2599

Location: Meet at Gary's home, 8109 W. Powell, Boise at 6:15 a.m. to carpool/caravan; or meet at Wild Bill's Coffee Shop, downtown Crouch at 7:30 a.m.

Time: see above.

Saturday, December 19, Boise CBC

Event: The National Audubon Society's 116th Annual Christmas Bird Count, Boise's 49th.

Time: 7 a.m.

Location: Trophy Room at Idaho Fish and Game, 600 S. Walnut, Boise, northeast entrance (in rear) Co-compiler/primary contact: RL Rowland, rrowland@centurylink.net, 336-9808 best, or 297-9953. RL will provide breakfast pastries to get one's sugar jump-start, participants provide own breakfast beverage of choice.

Right now, a team of volunteers is in the process of redrawing the interior of the Boise circle to reflect the changing times/demographics/accuracy (with the rise of GPS data) of the circle, so please do attend the Count Day morning meeting for the latest info, registration and to choose assignments. A Count Day data collection point is to be determined, check the GEAS website calendar for updates or get final info at the Count Day meeting. For those not able to participate in the field on Count Day, there is a Bird Feeder Count component. Note: **(Continued Page 6)**

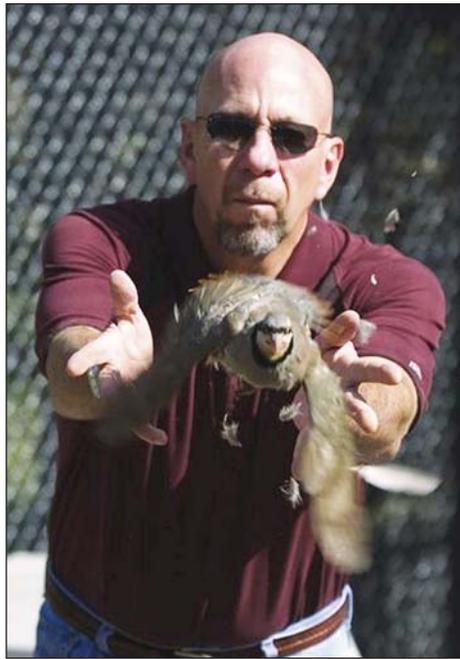
2016 GEAS Banquet Speaker, Kenneth Dial, to Discuss the Evolution of Flight

The GEAS banquet committee is pleased to announce that Kenneth Dial will be the speaker at the 2016 Annual GEAS Banquet and silent auction this coming March.

Dial will talk about “Waxing and Waning of Wings: Ecology and Evolution of Avian Locomotion.” We are excited to have him and look forward to a great evening. Mark Saturday, March 12 on your calendars!

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. He took a keen interest in aeronautics and biology as a teenager. For more than 20 years, he was acting director of the University of Montana Flight Laboratory as well as director of University’s 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 backcountry flying to hidden dirt and grass airstrips. He hosted 26 episodes of “All Bird TV” on the Discovery Channel’s Animal Planet. He is in transition from his professorial duties to wildlife conservation efforts in Tanzania, Kenya, southern California and western Montana.

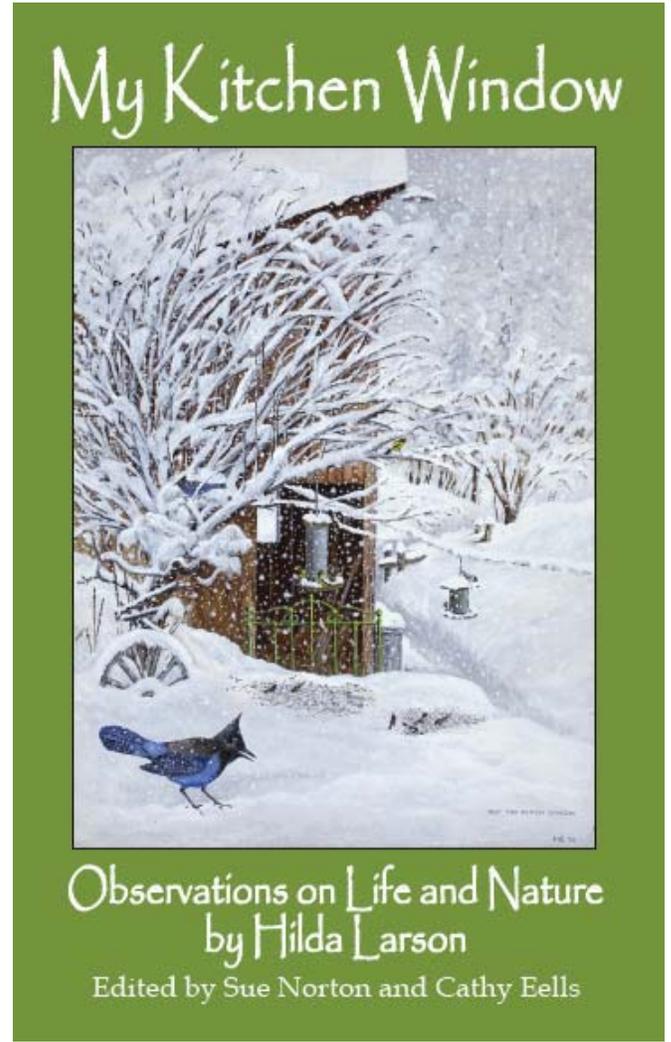


Todd Goodrich, University Relations photographer, University of Montana

University of Montana biology Professor Ken Dial helps one of his chukar friends take to the air.

Hilda’s Columns, Sketches Collected

GEAS members Susan Norton and Cathy Eells have been hard at work gathering, sorting and editing a collection of Hilda’s columns and sketches. Their work is nearly done and, with some help from Niels S. Nokkentved, has been assembled into a book titled “My Kitchen Window: Observations on Life and Nature.” It should be available by the end of October.



Backyard Wildlife, continued from Page 1

and found one sitting in a cottonwood, its beady eyes looking right into mine from just a few feet away. We weren’t leaving any food out, but from their messes I saw they were feasting on someone else’s whole sunflower seeds and corn. I figured the furry bandits would eventually climb the giant sunflowers and get the seeds, but I was OK with that. However, I read that raccoon poo is not something you want around; it can be loaded with roundworm (*Baylisascaris procyonis*) eggs, which can cause serious illness in humans. The eggs take two to four weeks to become infectious, so I cleaned up right away. Fortunately our furry friends moved on; maybe the badger drove them off, or the coyotes I heard yipping at the blood moon during the lunar eclipse.

Now at night the yard again belongs to the great horned owls, hooting in the trees.

President’s Message, continued from Page 2

by engaging with management agencies and elected officials, and to remind friends and neighbors of how important a healthy, well-functioning environment is to our collective—people and sage-grouse—well-being.

One small example of how GEAS contributes to sagebrush conservation is highlighted in the new publication: Cooking Up Conservation Success at <http://www.audubonaction.org/site/R?i=qT82bdTvOHtSqXRv6QOO0A>. The Blacks Creek “recipe” (p. 63-64) is just one example of how we can act locally. Contact us at info@goldeneagleaudubon.org if you are looking for opportunities or have a great idea you’d like to share.

Sincerely,
Sean Finn, President

Events continued from Page 4

all feeders must be within the confines of the circle. Contact RL (above) for more information on feeder counts or any questions about the CBC and participation. There are no fees. Only costs are your time—maybe some shoe leather and a bit of gasoline. Come on out and “Let’s find some birds!”

Saturday, December 19, Cascade CBC

Leader: Ingrid Brudenell, 336- 4136, ibrudenell@gmail.com
Location: Meet at the Ashley Inn, Highway 55, on the north end of Cascade.
Time: 8 a.m.

This count will focus on the area around Cascade Reservoir, north fork of the Payette River, and surrounding country side. Be prepared for cold and wind. We will warm up with a chili lunch and exchange bird counts and stories. Final counts will be compiled at the end of the day. Please RSVP to Ingrid Brudenell (ibrudenell@gmail.com) for a head count for lunch.

Sunday, December 20, McCall CBC

Compiler: Charles Swift, chaetura@gmail.com, 301-8173
Location: IDFG/McCall Resource Management Complex, 555 Deinhard Lane
Time: 7:30 a.m.

Please contact compiler Charles Swift if interested in participating. This will be the second official McCall count. The count circle includes McCall, Payette Lake, Ponderosa State Park, N. Fork Payette River and portions of Meadows Valley and Long Valley. If there is sufficient snow some areas may be covered on skis or snowshoes. McCall is likely to be one of the highest and most scenic CBCs in the state!

Saturday, December 26, Nampa CBC

Leaders: Denise Hughes, deniseh449@gmail.com 850-5885 or Cheryl Huizinga bhuizinga@cableone.net, 880-5687
Location: Deer Flat NWR Visitor Center
Time: 7:15 a.m.

We will split into area groups and start the count at 8 a.m. We will meet back at the Visitor Center at 5 p.m. to hand in the count sheets and have a hot chili and soup supper to warm-up afterwards. There is also a Feeder Count part for those not able to be in the field. Please contact Cheryl or Denise for more information.

Saturday, January 2, 2016, Bruneau CBC

Leader: Larry Ridenhour, 863-5596, ridenhour.larry@gmail.com
Time: 7 a.m., for all day trip
Location: Meet at Boise BLM Office, 3948 Development Ave. This is expedition quality birding around CJ Strike Reservoir and the Snake River from below the dam to Bruneau Dunes State Park. Be prepared for bitter cold and relentless wind—and great birds! We will finish at the CJ Strike Bridge at sunset to watch thousands of common goldeneye fly in for the evening. Then we will go to the Y Bar Cafe in Grand View to compile numbers and exchange stories. Dinner will be about \$12 – spaghetti (vegetarian sauce will be available) with soup or salad, and French bread, dessert – \$4, either a cheesecake or caramel apple crisp; wine/beer extra, depending on type and kind. Gratuity not included and always welcome. They put on a great dinner for us! Please RSVP to Alex Takasugi 484-9132 alextakasugi@cableone.net for a head count for dinner at the restaurant (helps them plan).

GEAS Accepting Small Grant Applications

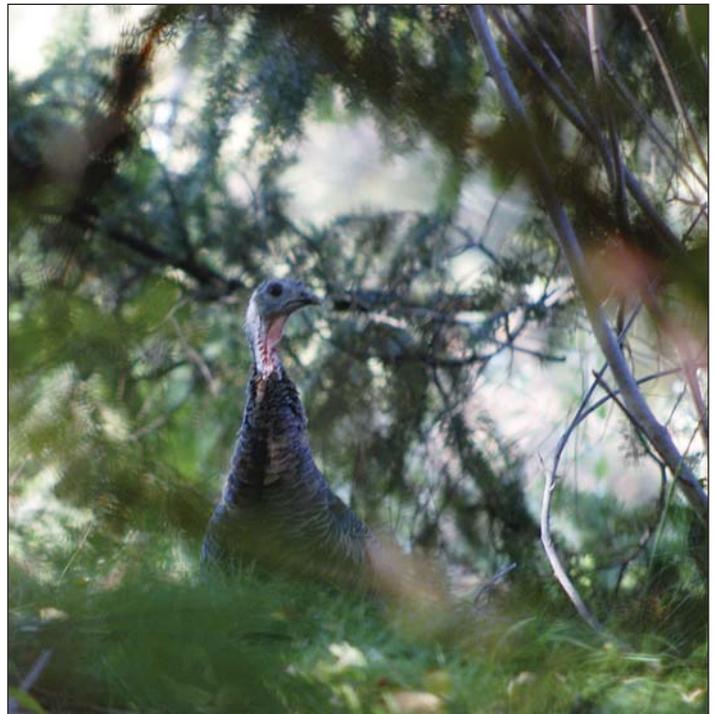
GEAS is now accepting small grant applications for our semi-annual review. We encourage those organizations or individuals with conservation or education related projects to apply for funding assistance.

Grants of generally less than \$500 will be awarded. Preference is given to projects that directly benefit wildlife or their habitats in Idaho or that align with our education goals. The short application form is available on the GEAS website under “What We Do – Small Grants Program” or by emailing Liz Urban at urbanhawk137@gmail.com. We ask that completed applications be submitted by December 14 to be considered for this review period. Applications will be reviewed by the grants committee and voted on by the board in January. Applicants will be contacted with final decisions by early February.

In the past year, GEAS has supported multiple projects in our community. We continued to support the Idaho Bird by Bird Program financially; a wonderful program that brings bird education into classrooms. Please visit www.birdbybirdidaho.com for more information.

The Intermountain Bird Observatory was awarded two grants to help fund an education intern at the Lucky Peak Field Site and to improve the road to make the site more accessible to the public. We awarded a grant to a BSU graduate student researching American Kestrels as well as provided funding for Liberty Elementary to purchase binoculars. We supported the educational taxidermy of two owls for display at the Morrison Knudsen Nature Center. The Council School District also was awarded funding for binoculars to be used at its new outdoor classroom site.

We hope to continue supporting the important work of those improving education and conservation in our area. Please feel free to share this grant opportunity with anyone who might be interested.



Wild turkeys roam Kathryn Albertson Park in Boise.

Trip Report: Monhegan Island with Bryan Pfeiffer

By Susan Hazelton

Though it is only about 1.75 miles long and half a mile wide, with a three mile trail that circles it, Monhegan Island is well-known as a superb birding location during migration. The island is famous for its warbler fallout in autumn.

It lies on the Atlantic Flyway about 10 miles off the coast of Maine. Migrating songbirds, pushed by north winds in the fall, have a tendency to veer off course during their night time flights. When it's light enough to see, birds see the speck of green that is Monhegan and stop to rest and feed.

My husband Dave and I visited Monhegan several years ago, and when we learned that Bryan Pfeiffer led trips there, we signed up and convinced Sue Norton to go with us. We first met Pfeiffer at the 2012 Audubon Banquet, when he discussed his search for the ivory-billed woodpecker. One of his favorite haunts is Monhegan Island, where he says he will continue to lead autumn field trips "for as long as I walk this Earth."

On Saturday, September 19, we left Port Clyde, Maine, on board the Elizabeth Ann, which ferries passengers and mail to Monhegan year round. We left in dense fog, which didn't bode well for birding, but halfway to the island we broke out into bright blue skies and warm air. After settling in at the Monhegan House, we walked to Lobster Cove, where Pfeiffer taught us about four species of gulls that we were seeing: ringed-billed gull, herring gull, lesser black-backed gull, and the greater black-backed gull. We also watched northern gannets perform their aerial acrobatics and learned to identify common eiders by their "Roman noses."

Each morning at 6:30, after coffee, fruit and warm homemade muffins, we headed down the road through the village, stopping at the marsh, the grove of lilacs and ending up at the ice pond. On our first trip to the pond, we saw both yellow-crowned and black-crowned night herons. The routine stayed pretty much the same; early morning birding followed by a hearty breakfast and then more birding until lunch. After a brief afternoon break, we headed out along one of the many trails along Monhegan, usually to the east side and its many ocean vistas and rocky cliffs. It was on an afternoon hike to the lighthouse that Bryan found the fringed gentian, my target species.



Black and white warbler.

Photo by Bryan Pfeiffer

North winds and storms generate the warbler fallout for which Monhegan is famous. But the weather on this trip was sunny and warm, too nice to push the birds into migration. Nevertheless, on the third morning, although disappointingly slow for Pfeiffer, we had a thirteen warbler day. On the whole, we saw several species of warblers: black-and-white warbler, Tennessee warbler, Nashville warbler, common yellowthroat, Cape May warbler, pine warbler, northern parula, magnolia warbler, yellow warbler, blackpoll warbler, palm warbler, yellow-rumped warbler, prairie warbler, black-throated green warbler, and Wilson's warbler. Terrorizing the warblers were many merlins and sharp-shinned hawks. On one day, we were excited to spot a dickcissel, only to see it later in the talons of a merlin, who was feasting on it for lunch.

Bryan is an excellent teacher, able to describe the differences between the sparrows we saw and still keep it interesting. We saw swamp sparrows, song, savannah, Lincoln's, chipping, clay-colored, white-throated, and white-crowned sparrows. His energy and enthusiasm are infectious; his knowledge of the natural world is wide-ranging, from birds to butterflies to dragonflies and wildflowers.

The star of this adventure is Monhegan. The beauty of the island has been an inspiration to artists such as William Henry Singer, Rockwell Kent, Edward Hopper and Jamie Wyeth. Year round residents make their living from the sea; summer months bring artists and tourists. Put Monhegan on your bucket list.



Sunrise on Monhegan

Photo by Susan Hazelton

Road Building and Drilling Could Pollute Boise River Headwaters

On Monday, October 5, the U.S. Forest Service issued a Decision Notice authorizing the next phase of exploration for the CuMo Project in the Grimes Creek watershed in the headwaters of the Boise River.

The project entails constructing up to 10.2 miles of roads, clearing up to 137 drill pads and drilling as many as 259 exploration holes. The purpose is to further delineate an ore body that Canadian mining company CuMoCo hopes to develop into an open-pit copper, molybdenum and silver mine.

This is the second time the Forest Service has authorized this exploration project. In 2012, a federal judge determined that the Forest Service had not adequately considered potential groundwater impacts from the exploration project and instructed them to do additional analysis.

After reviewing the new analysis, local conservation groups representing citizens who live downstream from the project area

remain concerned that the approved project is not as protective of water quality as federal law requires.

While much of the Grimes Creek watershed was damaged by historic dredge mining, the upper stretches of Grimes Creek support native fish and wildlife.

“The CuMo exploration area is in the best of the Grimes Creek watershed, which flows into the Boise River,” said Pam Conley, of the Golden Eagle Audubon Society. “The area is also

home to the largest known populations in the world of the rare plant *Sacajawea’s bitterroot*. The Forest Service needs to do a better job of protecting this area from the hazards of mining exploration.”

Liz Paul, Idaho Rivers United’s Boise River campaign coordinator, said, “The Forest Service is putting the Boise River at risk by allowing this mineral exploration.”

Historic mines in the area have high arsenic levels and the groups are concerned that drilling operations could change groundwater flows or contaminate local springs. The groups argue that the Forest Service has not established the necessary baseline studies to see what effect drilling operations may have on water flowing from springs and seeps.

“The Forest Service is still not doing its due diligence to protect public water supplies in advance of issuing this decision,” said John Robison, public lands director for the Idaho Conservation League. “We are examining our legal options to protect the Boise River headwaters.”



Photo by John Robison, courtesy EcoFlight
The CuMo project area looking southwest.

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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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