# THE FISH HAWK HERALD

Coeur d'Alene Chapter of the National Audubon Society



April 2002

**VOLUME 11, ISSUE 8** 

Visit our website: www.cdaaudubon.org

#### **COMING EVENTS**

#### **BOARD MEETING**

<u>DATE</u>: April 2, Tuesday TIME: 4:30 p.m.

PLACE: Mountain West Bank 125 Ironwood Dr.

#### **APRIL PROGRAM**

**DATE**: April 15, Monday

TIME: 7:00 p.m.

PLACE: First Presbyterian Church,

521 Lakeside

PROGRAM: "Amphibians and Reptiles of Northern Idaho"

Reptiles of Northern Idaho"
Dorothy Bowers., Nongame Biologist for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, will present an informal slide show and discussion on local amphibians and reptiles, highlighting rare species and species of special interest. This discussion will also include slides and discussion on amphibian malformations, including malformation types, regional occurrences, and potential causes.

### **FATAL ATTRACTION**

Birds are inexplicably drawn to lighted towers and buildings

A reprint of an article from <u>Bird Conservation</u> issue 17 A magazine of Partners in Flight and The American Bird Conservancy Photograph by Wayne Tree

Ask an ornithologist to explain the intricacies of bird migration and chances are the response will end up posing more questions than it answers. How is it possible, for instance, for a migrating warbler to navigate its way from Canada to South America, having never flown the route before, and yet be unable to avoid dashing into a telecommunications tower on its way back north again? After all, when compared to the size of the warbler's flyway, a cell phone, TV or radio tower is about the equivalent thickness of a flag on a golf course. Surely a bird could see and avoid that. Yet each



**Common Yellowthroat** 

year, communications towers around the country are the sites of dozens, hundreds and even thousands of bird deaths in a single night. Songbirds have been observed circling towers in total confusion, crashing into the structures, each other and even the ground. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) estimates conservatively that four to five million nocturnally migrating passerines die each year in collisions with tall towers, but admits that it could be falling short of the true figure by as much as a factor of ten.

Why do so many migrating birds die at these structures? What is it about the towers that have millions of birds drawn to them like moths to a flame? Certainly their height, more than a thousand feet in many cases, far exceeds any natural obstacle the birds might encounter, but that alone cannot explain the almost magnetic attraction they possess. High frequency signal output has been ruled out as a possible cause because even towers that do not transmit a signal are responsible for bird deaths. Research has elicited one likely cause - the lights that sit atop the towers. Ironically, these lights that are designed to prevent collisions with aircraft, are likely the cause of the bird strikes. Birds that navigate by stars are still able to find their way even on nights of thick fog or low cloud, perhaps by switching to another navigation method. But when the birds see a tower safety light they are confused into thinking that they can switch back to their celestial system and are drawn even closer. Eventually becoming trapped in the corridor of light and spiraling inwards to their death. But this is a theory that has never been scientifically tested.

#### **Continued on Page 2**

#### **FATAL ATTRACTION**

Continued from page 1

Fuertes' Eastern Bird Collection

When American Bird Conservancy produced its report on tower kills in 2000. no controlled study of tower lighting could be found among 147 papers



Eastern Kingbird

describing bird deaths at towers. Most studies simply listed the birds found at the base of a tower after a single, foggy night. Some were more long-term studies, lasting for an entire migration season or many years (25 years in the case of a study at one tower in Florida). When compiled, the studies produce dramatic results --230 some species identified as having been killed by towers, 52 of which are listed on either the Partners in Flight Watch List or the FWS Species of Management Concern Declining birds such as Golden-winged, Prothonotary and Prairie Warblers, Bobolink, Veery and Gray-cheeked Thrush are in the top quarter of birds killed at towers. Swainson's and Cerulean Warblers. and Bachman's Sparrow, all listed as top priority by the Partner's in Flight Watch List, are also killed in large But the studies are numbers. incomplete. None makes a controlled comparison between lighted towers and unlighted. None seeks to correlate the color of light or the flash rate of strobe or pulsing lights with bird kills. None attempts to find a simple solution to this devastating problem. With more than 77,000 lit towers in the United States,

and an many as 10,000 new towers erected each year -mostly to fill the rapidly growing cell phone and digital television markets--ABC has taken on the task and is pushing for solutions. But the atmosphere around the table of the Communication Working Tower Group, stakeholders gathering of involved in the bird strike issue-federal agencies, industry representatives, scientists, and conservationists --is one skepticism and discouragement. As the FCC (who license the towers) and the FAA (the agency that requires the aviation lights) pass on taking responsibility, the industry maintains that it is only providing a service that the public demands. That the problem even exists to the extent outlined in report is repeatedly ABC's brought into question at each meeting by industry representatives. **FWS** has produced a set of guidelines for the building of towers, but these are only voluntary, and to date there is little evidence that they

are being heeded. Thus, the Working Groups seems to have reached an impasse in its efforts and now ABC is reassessing its approach. Having attempted to reach cooperative with consensus willing stakeholder participation, ABC is now considering other avenues, from finding funding for research to litigation. With such intractable problems as habitat loss, invasive species, and global warming threatening the survival of so much of America's avifauna, a problem as potentially simply solvable as bird deaths at communication towers should not be passed over. For more information, visit www.abcbirds.org;.

For additional reading see these two articles in the April **Newsletter on our Webpage** 

"Citizens Convince Sprint To **Install Bird-Friendly Towers**"

and

"Making A FLAP - The Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP) Is Working To Save Birds In Toronto And North America.

### THIRD ANNUAL **AUDUBON GARAGE SALE**



When: Saturday June 1 Time: 9 a.m. 3 p.m.

Where: Home of Theresa Potts'

We will take just about anything you would care to donate!!!. We have had tremendous success the past 2 vears both in items to sell, and you, the members. volunteering to help in this very worthwhile event!! The fun begins there on Friday, the day to organize and for those helping, a chance to peek at some neat items! Plant starts are a "hot" item and are the first to sell out. Please, if you have extra plants to share, put them in a container and donate. It would be appreciated if all other items be "pre-priced" saving time for us on Friday. A sign-up sheet for helping will be at the May meeting or call Jan at 667-6209 or Theresa at 765-0229. See you there!!

## **APRIL FIELD TRIPS**

#### FIELD TRIP INFORMATION

- 1. Please register with the leader ahead of time.
  - a. It helps the leader plan the trip.
  - b. You will be informed if the trip time or location is changed or if the trip is canceled.
- 2. Fees: (to paid to the driver of the car) \$5.00 all day trips \$3.00 1/2 day trips.
- 3. We sometimes use radios to communicate between cars. If the radios are used we are asking participants to contribute \$1.00 toward batteries.

#### **CHAIN LAKES**

DATE: April 6, Saturday TIME: 8:00 a.m. – all day trip

MEET: Cove Bowl (at the Sherman Ave. exit of I-90) Meet leader at Rose Lake Junction cafe at 8:25 a.m. LEADER: Lisa Hardy 682-4808 basalt@earthlink.net

ACTIVITY: We will bird the Chain Lakes from Rose Lake to Harrison; there should be large numbers of migratory waterfowl, and many arriving migratory songbirds. Wear walking shoes so that, weather permitting, we can hike a bit on the new "Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes". Bring a sack lunch, and water.

#### **MICA BAY SURVEY**

DATES/TIME: April 8, Monday and April 25, Thursday / 8:00 a.m. (NOTE - EARLIER TIME)

MEET: Canal Street (Fairmont Loop) and Highway 95

LEADERS: Shirley Sturts, 664-5318 - Kris Buchler, 664-4739

ACTIVITY: We spend about 3 hours twice a month counting birds in the Mica Bay area. Beginner birders

are welcome to join us.

#### **BROWN BAG BIRDING TRIP**

DATE/TIME: April 9, Tuesday, 12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

MEET: 3<sup>RD</sup> Steet entrance to Tubbs Hill

LEADER: Lynn Sheridan (leave messages for Lynn with Kris Buchler 664-4739)

ACTIVITY: We will walk as far as time permits along the trail that goes around Tubbs Hill.

Come enjoy both spring flowers and birds with Lynn.

#### **FARRAGUT STATE PARK**

DATE: April 20, Saturday TIME: 7:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

MEET: K-Mart parking lot – behind Fast Burger LEADER: Lisa Hardy 682-4808 basalt@earthlink.net

ACTIVITY: The park has a good mix of habitats, and we will explore all of them looking for newly arrived

migrants. Wear walking shoes for a limited amount of hiking, and bring water and a snack.

#### **BIRDING BY EAR – BIRDS OF THE GARDEN**

Can you identify birds that you cannot see? Susan Weller will lead a workshop to teach us to identify the songs of common birds of the garden. Join her at her home on Wednesday morning, May 22 and learn to distinguish the individual notes of the spring chorus. More information in the May Newsletter.

#### Lisa Hardy

Five Auduboners squeezed into one car for a full day trip to Sandpoint on Sunday, March 10. The weather was inauspicious, but the waterfowl were not put off by a cold rain. Our first stop was City Beach, where we found a flock of Common Redpolls feeding in a deciduous tree. On the beach, we studied a gull whose dark mantle stood out from the surrounding Ring-billed, California and Herring Gulls, but we couldn't get a good look at the legs, or the bill tucked under its wing. After a warm-up stop at Starbuck's, we returned to the beach, driving out to the end of the jetty north of City Beach. Here we had front-row seats for a Bald Eagle gathering, as one bird caught an American Coot, and seven more eagles quickly materialized to watch the dining process. The eagle catch also attracted the gulls, which lifted off the beach to check out the possibilities. The dark-mantled opportunist eventually settled back down on the beach near the ietty, allowing us to identify it as a winter Western third Gull. (Further study of this gull resulted in its identification as a Slatybacked Gull, a first state record. See related story.)

Next we turned down Sunnvside Road. The southfacing slope above the lake vielded Varied Thrush, Townsend's Solitaire and Rubycrowned Kinglet. A loose group of 26 Great Blue Heron waited on the mudflats of the Pack River delta, near a few dozen Tundra Swan feeding in shallow water, while small numbers of Redhead American Coot offshore. In addition to Common Loon, four species of grebe were present in the delta area: Western, Horned, Red-necked and Pied-billed. Near the end of the day, a gull with pale wings flew over; we put it down as a probable Glaucous-winged, making a total of 5 gull species for the day.

Trip participants: Janet Callen, Lisa Hardy, Theresa Potts, Jan Severtson, Lynn Sheridan

47 species total; see the webpage for complete trip list: www.cdaaudubon.org

#### **SLATY-BACKED GULL**

Lisa Hardy



Photograph by Shirley Sturts

Gulls are a challenging group to sort out, and the story of the first Idaho record of a Slaty-backed Gull is a good example of this. The gull was first spotted by the Coeur d'Alene Audubon field trip to Sandpoint, reported by me to the birding public as a Western Gull, and then underwent ten days of serious birding scrutiny before being unanimously labeled a Slaty-backed Gull by the experts.

The first stop on the March 10 chapter field trip to Sandpoint was City Beach, where we found a flock of thirty gulls standing on the shoreline. One gull was much darker than the others, and obviously "something different". Surrounded by California Gulls, it was noticeably larger and much darker than the others, being the same size as a Herring Gull at the edge of the flock. We were

able to agree that the legs were some kind of pink. This narrowed our choices to Western or Slatybacked. We decided it was not a Slaty-backed because the legs were not bright pink nor was there a streaky line through the eye as illustrated in Sibley. The gull was so dark-mantled that we thought it might be of the southern race of Western.

When I got home after the trip, I was surprised to see that Western Gull sightings in Idaho need to be documented, so I asked Janet Callen to note her observations independently, and I filled out a report. There are only Western sightings four documented for the state. After posting the sighting (third-winter Western Gull) to the Inland Northwest Birders listserve. several birders responded along the lines of, "Are you sure?"

No, we were not sure. A number of people suggested that it was a Glaucous-winged X Western hybrid – the Glaucous-winged and their hybrid offspring have more of a wandering tendency than the Westerns, which rarely leave saltwater. But this bird was on the dark end of the Western spectrum, while the Glaucous-winged genes would vield a lighter bird, if anything.

Dave Trochlell said, "One other troubling species that could be confused with a Western, and one that I've been expecting to show up in Idaho for years is Slaty-backed Gull. Unfortunately, Slaty-backs can be difficult to identify, because their mantles can be as pale as those of California Gulls or as dark as Lesser Black-backed Gulls."

Stephen Lindsay made three trips to Sandpoint in the next week to observe the gull, finally getting pictures on his third visit. He posted the most complete description of the bird, wavering between an identification of

Western or Slaty-backed – the gull had characteristics of both.

Photograph by Shirley Sturts

Before
his pictures
were
developed,
Shirley
Sturts and I
traveled to
Sandpoint
on Tuesday
the 19<sup>th</sup> to
try to get
more
pictures. As
soon as we



stepped out of the car clutching our bags of bread, the dark gull appeared overhead. We took turns throwing bread and snapping pictures, until after 3 loaves, "Blackie" had had enough and flew off to the water's edge. Neither one of us had had time to clearly study the bird while it was within 12 feet, so we now viewed it in the scope for a bit. Though we spent another hour or so waving bread at it, we were unable to lure it in again so closely. We hoped that our pictures would turn out.

Meanwhile, Stephen posted his pictures on the internet, and the consensus came back: Slaty-backed Gull. A similar, probably the same, bird had been seen at Nakusp, B.C., less than 150 miles to the northwest, in January.

So how did the experts identify the Slaty-backed based on the fuzzy posted photos? They mentioned four features: the heavy and distinct streaking on the head and neck, the very dark mantle, the wide white trailing edge of the wings and the straight bill, not "blob-ended" enough for a Western.

Once the experts had weighed in, listers across the inland northwest gassed up their cars and headed to Sandpoint, where the gull obliged them all by being easy to locate.

Shirley got her pictures back – they turned out beautifully (see photo).

Grant, in "Gulls - A Guide to Identification", describes the Slaty-backed Gull "an as exclusively coastal gull of northeastern Asia, breeding around the Kamchatka Peninsula and the Sea of Okhotsk south to Northern Japan." Small numbers appear in Alaska each year; our Idaho bird has wandered far, indeed.

#### **WOLF LODGE BAY**

Lisa Hardy

Ten Auduboners explored the northeast corner of Coeur d'Alene Lake on Sunday, March 24. We pulled up at our first stop at the head of Blue Creek Bay and noted an empty expanse of water under a dull gray sky. Of course, it was not actually empty, and twenty minutes of scrutiny yielded 3 species of grebe (Horned, Piedbilled and Red-necked), species of waterfowl (Canada Goose, Mallard, Green-winged Teal, Bufflehead and Common Goldeneye), plus a Great Blue Heron and a California Gull.

Next we turned up Wolf Lodge Creek Road, where an out-oftown birder had noted a house with numerous feeders. We found the house easily, the feeders were stocked, and the owner came out to chat while we racked another dozen species, including Common Redpoll and Pileated Woodpecker. Kris found our single Pygmy Nuthatch of the trip, while Ellen spotted a Varied Thrush in a group of robins behind a flock of Wild Turkey. Janet glimpsed a pair of swallows flitting over a small pond; with their white fronts, they were either Violet-green, probably the latter as they are usually our first swallow arrivals in the spring.

Theresa suggested we continue along the road to look for shorebirds. As we crossed over Wolf Lodge Creek, Shirley said, "We should look for dippers here," followed immediately by Ellen saying, "Look! There's a dipper!" Leaving our vehicles parked on the bridge (it's a free country, right?), we crowded the rail to watch the American Dipper, which stood its ground in the face of ten pairs of binoculars trained on it.

On our way back to the lake, Shirley spotted a late Roughlegged Hawk.

Tundra Swans were feeding at the head of Wolf Lodge Bay near the interstate exit. We found Killdeer and Northern Pintail in the flooded fields to the east. A final stop on Beauty Bay turned up a few more ducks, including Common Merganser. Overall, there were very low numbers of waterfowl on this corner of Coeur d'Alene Lake.

As Ellen and I headed home (east), we stopped to look at a large swan next to the wide chain-up area at the bottom of the pass. It proved to be a lone Trumpeter Swan, a good bird on which to end the trip.

We had two guests on this trip, Robin and Tom, writer and photographer, who produced an article about the trip that appeared in the Monday, March 25 edition of the Spokesman-Review.

Trip participants: Kris & Ed Buchler, Janet Callen, Roland Craft, Lisa Hardy, Theresa Potts, Ellen Scriven, Shirley Sturts, Judy & Phil Waring (and Tina!). 42 species total (see the complete trip list on the website www.cdaaudubon.org) Thanks to Roland for keeping such careful records during the trip!

## IDAHO WILDLIFE SPECIAL LICENSE PLATES

The Effect of Senate Bill No. 1359

#### **Janet Callen**

The Idaho Legislature recently passed Senate Bill No. 1359, which created a third non-game wildlife license plate. This plate will depict Idaho's state fish, the cutthroat trout. Two previous nongame wildlife plates are in circulation; one depicts Idaho's state bird, the Mountain Bluebird, and the other an elk.

The initial purchase of all of these license plates, in addition to the regular operating fee, is \$35 and each renewal an extra \$25. Out of these fees, \$10 goes to the state highway account to fund the cost of administration. Before Bill No. 1359 the remaining funds (\$25.00 or \$15.00) went to the Idaho Fish and Game set-aside account for use in the non-game wildlife program.

With the passage of this bill \$1.25 from the issuance of each new elk wildlife special plate and \$.75 from the renewal will go to the Idaho Fish and Game's wildlife disease laboratory program. These funds will be used for testing, surveillance and detection of diseases that may affect wildlife, such as chronic wasting disease. An equal amount will be transferred to the Department of Agriculture's livestock disease control fund to be used for testing and detection of wildlife diseases and domestic livestock diseases that may affect wildlife, including but not limited to brucellosis and chronic wasting diseases. The balance of either \$22.50 or \$13.50 will remain in the non-game wildlife fund.

From the initial purchase of a cutthroat trout plate, \$2.50 will go to an Idaho Parks and Recreation fund for the construction and

maintenance of non-motorized boating access facilities for anglers. A renewal will generate \$1.25. As with the elk plate, the non-game wildlife fund will receive the balance of either \$22.50 or \$13.50.

This bill <u>WILL NOT</u> affect the funds from the renewal or purchase of an Idaho Mountain Bluebird license plate. Either \$25.00 or \$15.00 depending on initial purchase or renewal will still be transferred to Idaho Fish and Game for use in its non-game wildlife program.

#### **BROWN BAG BIRDING**

March 12, 2002

Lynn Sheridan

Kris Buchler, Gary Goeke and Shirley Sturts met me at noon at the south end of Fernan Lake. The lake was partially frozen, but 3 Bufflehead bobbed in and out of the water, and the usual flock of about 25 Mallard milled about. The Great Blue Heron rookery seemed empty, until 2 heron flew in. Gary, a nearby resident, says at this time of year they mostly fly home in the evening.. He joined us is finding a Song Sparrow, a Northern Flicker and some Pygmy Nuthatch.

We 3 women continued along the lake, seeing 2 male Common Merganser and most exciting, 2 Bald Eagle sitting on their rather exposed nest, high on the far side of the lake. Among the reeds in open water we counted 33 Common Goldeneve. 23 Bufflehead, 1 Ring-billed Gull, 1 American Coot and a muskrat! A few Redwing Blackbird called and a Canada Goose honked, as we started for home. Oh! The joys of spring awakening.

## 9<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL BIRD

#### **FEEDER SURVEY**

This year 10 participants counted 28 species at their feeders. Adding up the totals of the four dates the following birds were the most common. Pine Siskin 246, Dark-eyed Junco 212, House Finch 184, Black-capped Chickadee 155. Europian Starling 129, Pygmy Nuthatch 110. What put the Pine Siskin at the top was the flock of 112 that visited the feeder of Kris Buchler December. The Dark-eyed Junco had higher numbers for the other three count periods. Also, Dark-eyed Junco were counted at 9 feeders. Pine Siskin were only reported at 4. Pygmy Nuthatch numbers continue to increase both in the number of feeders where it is found, and in the numbers counted at those feeders.

I want to thank this years participants: Marilee Benson, Kris Buchler, Janet Callen, Carolyn Cozzetto, Barbara Dorrell, Lisa Hardy, Theresa Potts, George Sayler, Jan and Herb Severtson, Lynn Sheridan, Shirley Sturts.

For the results visit our website at: www.cdaaudubon.org and click on Projects/Events /Birding

## BLUEBIRD BOXES ARE AVAILABLE!

Idaho Fish and Game has a supply of bluebird boxes for sale at \$3.00 a piece. They go fast so get yours now at the Regional Office on Kathleen Avenue.

Nest boxes should be put up this month. Western Bluebirds have been seen already in our region. Bluebirds and Tree Swallows favor boxes mounted on posts at field edges. Chickadees, wrens and nuthatches will use houses mounted on trees. Violetgreen Swallows and House Wrens will use houses mounted under eaves of buildings.

For more information, call an Audubon member.

#### BE A VOLUNTEER!

Our Audubon chapter will end its fiscal year June 30th. We welcome and encourage new

#### **POST**

OBSERVERS:) Kris Buchler (KBUC),), Roland Craft (RCRA), Dick Cripe (DCRI) Rochelle Fairfield (RFAR), Ed Haglund (EHAG), Jerry Hanson (JHAN), Lisa Hardy (LHAR), Steve Lindsay (SLIN), Ellen Scrivin (ESCR), Jan Severtson (HSEV,) Shirley Sturts (SSTU), Judy and Phil Waring (JWAR,PWAR)

Common Loon 1 Mica Bay Survey March 11 (JSEV,RCRA,DCRI,RFAR) Tundra Swan 2 flocks (14, 23)

Fernan Lake Mar.15 and 29 Fernan Lake March 27 (SSTU,KBUC); 100+ Mica Bay Survey March 25 (SSTU,KBUC, RCRA,RFAR)

**Wood Duck** 1<sup>st</sup> arrival Mica Bay, CDA Lake March 15 (JHAN) March

Eurasian Wigeon 1 Mica Bay Survey March 25 (SSTU,KBUC, RCRA, RFAR,JHAN); 1 Wolf Lodge Bay. March 26 (JWAR,PWAR)

Osprey 1<sup>st</sup> arrival 1 Junction of Highway 53 and 95 March 16 (SLIN)

Red-tailed Hawk 2 circled over yard Coeur d'Alene March 3 (JCAL)

Great Horned Owl 1 Armstrong Hill March 17 (KBUC)

<u>Barred Owl</u> 1 pr Killarney Farm off and on all winter (ESCR)

<u>Violet-Green Swallow</u> 1<sup>st</sup> arrival Cougar Bay, CDA Lake March 1 (EHAG)

Brown Creeper 1 in her yard Coeur d'Alene March 16 (TPOT) Bewick's Wren 2 Mica Bay Survey March 11 (JSEV,RCRA,DCRI,RFAR)

Western Bluebird 2 Cougar Bay, CDA Lake March 27 (KBUC, JCAL)

Townsend's Solitaire 1 in yard Ocean Ave. Feb. 28 (JCAL) and 1 Stanley Hill March 5 (DCRI)

<u>Varied Thrush</u> several at area feeders (DCRI, SSTU,LSHE. JCAL,TPOT,JWAR,PWAR, PSWE)

**Spotted Towhee** 1st arrival Fernan Lake March 6 (SSTU); 1 at feeder Coeur d'Alene March 17 (JWAR,PWAR)

Fox Sparrow 1 North Fork CDA River in her yard March 2 (LHAR)

Western Meadowlark 1 North Fork CDA River in her yard March 22(LHAR)

See our webpage for more observations

## KOOTENAI COUNTY BIG YEAR

Stephen Lindsay has compiled a "Kootenai County Check List of Birds". It contains all the birds that have been seen in Kootenai County. Last year he did a Kootenai County Big Year. He attempted to see 200 birds in the county during the year 2001, talling up only 199. On January 1, 2002 he found a Snowy Owl on Rathdrum Prairie, which would have made 200 if he had seen it the day before.

For the year 2002 we are going to see if we, as a group, can reach that 200 mark. On our website www.cdaaudubon.org you will find the Kootenai County Checklist marked with species seen so far this year. Or, you can request a list from Shirley 664-5318 e-mail s.sturts@verizon.net . To get credit for being the first to see a species for the year call or email Shirley.

#### **OBSERVATION**

THE FISH HAWK HERALD

## <u>CHECK IT OUT</u>

Top Ten Tips for Bird-Friendly
Living