

# THE FISH HAWK HERALD



Coeur d'Alene Chapter of Audubon

DECEMBER 2006

VOLUME 16 ISSUE 4

## BOARD MEETING

DATE: December 11, Monday

TIME: 4:30 p.m.

PLACE: Mt. West Bank  
125 Ironwood Dr.

## DECEMBER PROGRAM

NOTE: 2<sup>ND</sup> MONDAY

DATE: December 11, Monday

TIME: 7:00 p.m.

PLACE: First Presbyterian Church,  
521 E. Lakeside, Coeur d'Alene  
SPEAKER: Kris Buchler, Coeur  
d'Alene Audubon

PROGRAM: "Winter Bird  
Identification" Bring your field  
guide for a fun quiz on observtion  
skills.

AND

**A COOKIE EXCHANGE:** This is how  
it works: everyone who brings two  
dozen cookies gets to take home  
(or eat) two dozen cookies. Bring a  
container for your goodies©.

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

See the article on page 4

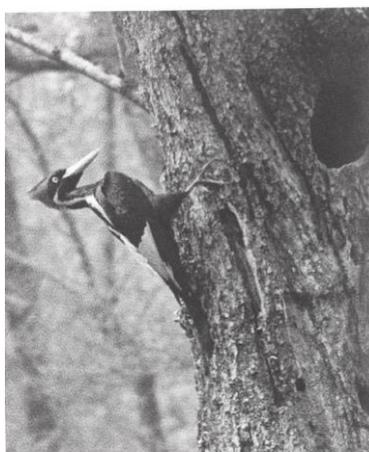
See Field trips on page 7

## YARD LISTS

Turn your yard list into Lisa Hardy  
during the month of January

## SEARCH CONTINUES FOR IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER

Judy Waring



"Photo by Arthur Allen,  
Copyright  
Cornell Lab of Ornithology".

The announcement in 2004 of a sighting in Arkansas of the thought-to-be extinct Ivory-billed Woodpecker astounded the birding world and has caused the collective crossing of fingers that the bird has somehow hung on to a precarious existence. The last confirmed sighting of the "Lord God" bird (referring to the reaction of people upon seeing one for the first time) was in 1944 in the Singer Tract in Louisiana. When the tract of old growth hardwood forest was cleared to make sewing machine cabinets and to plant soy beans, the habitat required by the huge woodpecker was destroyed. This bird, the largest woodpecker north of Mexico, once ranged from eastern

Texas to Florida and up the coast to the Carolinas. In Richard Rhodes's biography of John James Audubon, Mr. Audubon mentioned seeing the Ivory-billed several times as he traveled down the Mississippi River.



"Photo by Kevin McGowan, Copyright  
Cornell Lab of Ornithology."

After Cornell researchers announced in 2004 that recordings and sightings in the Cache River Wildlife Management Area in eastern Arkansas indicated the presence of the bird, organized searches began. While no new conclusive evidence has come forth, the faithful are out there in kayaks and on foot, continuing to comb the swampy forests for proof in the form of a clear photograph or video.

Excitement arose anew when scientists announced that the elusive Ivory-billed was seen 14 times between May of 2005 and the fall of

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER - Continued from page 1

2006 along the Choctawhatchee River in the Florida Panhandle. "The bird just flew over my head; I was in my kayak and it was just above me, going away," said Geoffrey Hill of Auburn University. The team in Florida was comprised of ornithologists and biologists and their search methods were impressive. Video and audio equipment was installed using the latest technology. They have gathered extensive recordings of the call and distinctive drill of the bird that compare favorably with recordings from the mid- twentieth century. Still, there is no photograph that would provide the final proof. Even NASA has been called in to help out by using laser sensors from research aircraft to identify areas of the southeast typical of habitats necessary to Ivory-billed nesting and feeding. Harvard University is also in on the hunt. It has the world's largest collection of Ivory-billed history, including specimens, recordings and data taken in the 1930s. Using tissue samples from one of the specimens, researchers analyzed the bird's DNA. They now have a reference that can be used. "If we find a feather in a nest, we will immediately know" said Scott Edwards, Professor of Zoology at Harvard..

Now comes the exciting part. The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and Audubon Arkansas are seeking volunteers to help search for the bird between January 3, 2007 and April 21, 2007. In all, 18 sites across the southeast are slated for organized searches including Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina and Texas. Volunteers must commit to a two week minimum and will aid full-time field biologists in active in-the-field searches, staffing observation stations, scouting unexplored areas, and looking for cavities and foraging signs. Volunteers will receive training and must be willing to use or learn to use digital technology and computers. Lodging will be provided. Here is your chance to be in on the hunt and possibly catch a glimpse of the bird yourself! To volunteer online go to: [www.birds.cornell.edu/ivory](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/ivory) and click on the Current Search link.

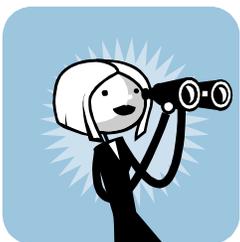
## BOARD MEETING SUMMARY

Lynn Sheridan

November 20, 2006

- Two chapters submitted proposals for the collaborative funding to National Audubon. A decision will be made soon. Janet Callen volunteered to be our representative.
- We voted to approve a motion to re-imburse Kris and Ed Buchler for their expenses for the care of injured raptors: up to \$500.00 for this fiscal year.
- Steve Johnson mentioned a possible conservation project - to preserve 40 acres wildlife habitat on the Rathrum Prairie. He will get more information.
- Carrie Hugo is planning to put up bluebird boxes on a trail near her home.
- At general meeting on Dec 11, we'll do our annual cookie exchange, and learn about winter birds from Kris. Also Wes Hanson will come and say a few words about conservation easements on private land.

## BROWN BAG BIRDING - November 21 - Lynn Sheridan



Shirley Sturts, Laura Bayless and I met at the western end of Fernan Lake at noon, in a drizzle of rain. Many Ring-billed Gull, Mallard and 5 identical pretty white and brown "farm geese" were near and on the shore. A dozen Bufflehead bobbed up and down and overhead we could hear Pygmy Nuthatch in the ponderosa pine. Driving along the lake a lone Wild Turkey crossed the road, odd, as they're usually in flocks. Soon we stopped to identify 6 Hooded Merganser and mixed in with a few Common Goldeneye. Further along 8 female "hoodies" flew off in a hurry. Laura spotted a row of larger birds, far off, with upturned yellowish heads and beaks: 8 Double Crested Cormorant, with 2 more soaring above. At the east end of the lake, 10 Mallards were in the small pond, and many more Bufflehead were in the marsh. We heard a Belted Kingfisher, and a squirrel --- rather similar! Seemed like good fishing for all.

**GREEN TIP:** Green tip is a monthly feature in our newsletter. It is designed to give you ideas for taking personal conservation action to improve the environmental health and habitat quality of our yards and neighborhoods. (Members are encouraged to send tips to the editor for inclusion in future.)



## HOLIDAY GIFT SUGGESTIONS FROM LISA HARDY

We often spend somewhat more than we intend over the holidays, so why not channel some of that spending into gifts that support migratory birds and wildlife in general? Here are some ideas for your gift-giving list.

1. Coffee and chocolate are beloved by many, and make no-fuss gifts that will likely be appreciated, unlike, say, a fruitcake. Audubon offers shade-grown coffee in 3 regular blends and 2 decaf blends, from \$8.99 to \$9.49 per 12 ounce bag, plus shipping. See the webpage for ordering: [www.audubon.org/market/licensed/](http://www.audubon.org/market/licensed/). While you are there, you can check out the other offerings at the Audubon Marketplace, such as calendars and kids' books.

If you are too late for mail-ordering, many stores in Coeur d'Alene offer shade-grown organic coffee, including Safeway and Fred Meyer. Prices are typically in the \$11/pound range.

Organic chocolates can be purchased at Fred Meyer, the Flour Mill in Hayden, and at Pilgrim's Natural Foods on 4th Avenue. The "Endangered Species" chocolates are organic, politically-correct bars that come in fun animal motifs, such as sea turtle and grizzly bear.

2. Purchase of any organic item, whether food, wine or cotton, supports the movement to reduce pesticide use on our planet. Organic foods and beverages can be found at the grocery stores mentioned above. Conventional cotton has one of the highest rates of pesticide application of any crop. For organic cotton products, try the Gaiam mail-order catalogue: [www.gaiam.com](http://www.gaiam.com).

3. Pure ecology plays a role in sponsoring a tree or a wild animal on behalf of another. In our area, one possibility is Birds of Prey Northwest, a non-profit run by local raptor rehabilitator Janie Fink Cantwell. You can donate any amount to BPN on behalf of your gift recipient, who will receive an acknowledgement card ([ladyhawk@smgazette.com](mailto:ladyhawk@smgazette.com)). Several of our chapter members volunteer for BPN, and you can be assured that donations go directly to rehabilitation of injured wild raptors and the maintenance of educational birds that cannot be released to the wild.

4. Consider gifts that do not require consumption of new materials. Possibilities are crafts using recycled materials, or services. A one-hour massage certificate from Life Center Therapies on Government Way will cost \$50 (667-3813). Telephone calling cards are available in \$10 and up denominations at many retail outlets.

## PRIEST LAKE FIELD TRIP

**Lisa Hardy**

I drew up a short list of common species not yet reported for the Bonner County Big Year list, as our field trip to Priest Lake on November 11 would be within Bonner County. The list was: Black-billed Magpie, Mountain Chickadee, American Dipper, and House Sparrow. Not too difficult a list, but I won't prolong the suspense, and will say here at the outset that we were skunked on every one.

We made a valiant attempt at finding a House Sparrow in the town of Priest River by driving by dumpsters and likely spruce trees and juniper clumps, but to no avail. So we drove directly to Coolin, where we glassed the south end of Priest Lake, finding a single Common Loon, several Horned and Red-necked Grebes, and a group of Hooded Mergansers. Next stop was Cavanaugh Bay, where Common Mergansers, Barrow's Goldeneyes and a few more grebes had found shelter from the wind. A Bald Eagle was spotted on the far shore.

At Lionhead, we scoped a Rough-legged Hawk on the far shore, and a few more waterbirds. Overall, the trip was not very birdy, and this is probably why we do not venture to Priest Lake very often. Though, if the wind had not been so brisk and roughening the water surface, we may have had better success scanning the lake for deep-water divers such as loons, scoters and Long-tailed Ducks. Perhaps we will try again next year...

*Trip participants: Kris Buchler, Janet Callen, Lisa Hardy, Jan Severtson, Shirley Sturts*

## COEUR D'ALENE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Lisa Hardy

Our first Coeur d'Alene Christmas Bird Count was held on December 19, 1991, and for the last 15 years, we have been contributing to a massive database that is currently fed by some 2000 counts throughout the Americas each year. The CBC was not designed as a scientific study - it is essentially a birding event whereby we test our skills and try to tote up as many species as possible. The 50,000 observers who turn out each year are participating because it is fun.

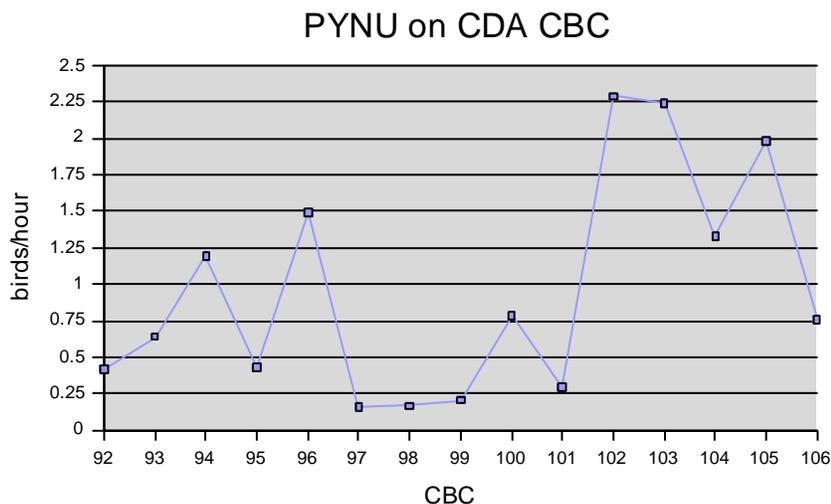
But because the amount of data collected over the last 106 years is so large, it turns out to be of scientific value, even though it was not collected using standardized survey techniques. So, while we are having fun, we can also enjoy a small glow of achievement, knowing that our observations will be used in a worthwhile cause.

So, what kinds of information can we extract from our 15-year count history? Several chapter members have commented that Pygmy Nuthatches seem to be much more common around town in the last few years, and that seemed to be a good starting point for exploring the CBC database, using the tools at [www.audubon.org/birds/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/birds/cbc).

Pygmy Nuthatches are tiny (10.5 gram) dynamos - I guess they have to be to withstand the occasional sub-zero temperatures here as do their even tinier brethren, the Golden-crowned Kinglets. Pygmies are closely associated with ponderosa pine stands, and are in fact considered an indicator species for the health of that forest type. For many years, the only reliable place to find pygmies around Coeur d'Alene was the NIC campus, but in the last few years, city-dwellers have reported that the little nuthatches are appearing more frequently at feeders. They can also be found on dry south-facing ponderosa pine-forested slopes along the Chain Lakes, but I have yet to see one in Shoshone County, presumably because the higher rainfall yields a more mixed forest, limiting the ponderosa pine stands to isolated small patches.

You will rarely see or hear just a single pygmy. They flock together in family groups, and are one of the few passerine species in which non-breeding relatives actively participate in raising the young of a breeding pair. In winter, they typically form flocks of a dozen or more constantly vocalizing birds, with groups of over 150 having been reported. The subspecies here (*Sitta pygmaea melanotis*) is the same as occurs through the Northwest and Rocky Mountains.

My first step in looking at the CBC data was to download the Coeur d'Alene numbers into a spreadsheet, so I could graph it in various ways to look for trends. I plotted Pygmy Nuthatches detected per party hour for each of the Coeur d'Alene CBCs:



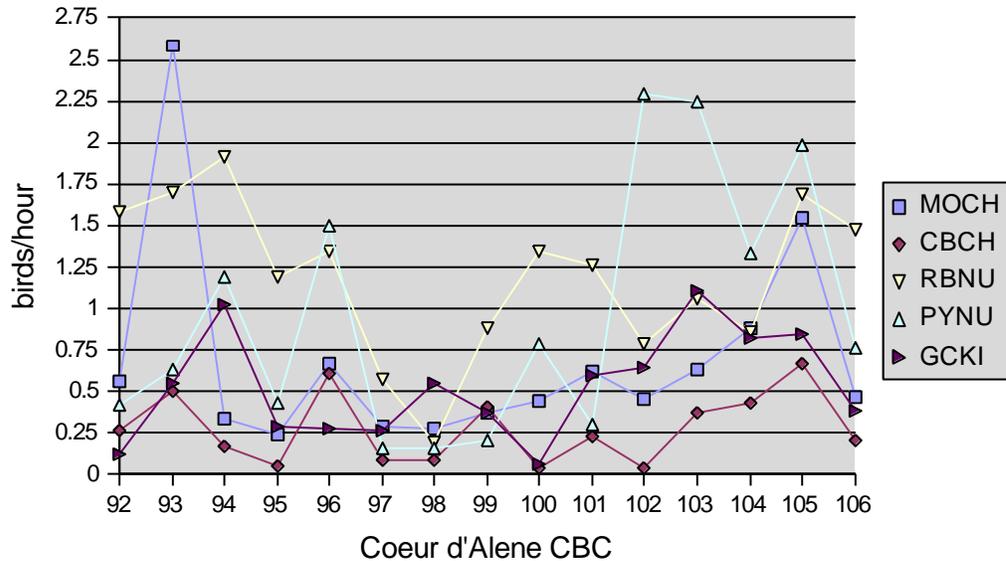
(The CBC numbers are one off from the year in which they occur. For example, the 92<sup>nd</sup> CBC was held in December 1991.) The number of nuthatches is erratic, and the biggest counts are in 3 of the last 5 years. I was

**Continued on page 5**

**COEUR D'ALENE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4**

curious about the very low numbers reported in the 97<sup>th</sup> through 101<sup>st</sup> counts. Could they be due to bad weather limiting detection? Or were there fewer Pygmy Nuthatches those years? Unfortunately, the weather data only goes back as far as the 99<sup>th</sup> count, so instead I looked at some species that occur in mixed flocks, and might be found with pygmies:

**Mixed Flock Birds**

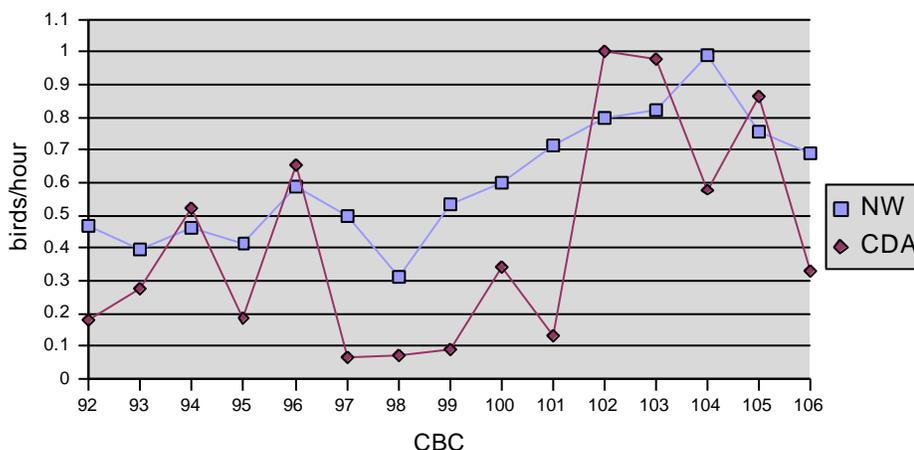


I excluded Black-capped Chickadees from this graph because their numbers show very large erratic swings. What is interesting on the mixed flock graph is that all the species show low numbers in the 97<sup>th</sup> and 98<sup>th</sup> CBCs. But also there is a rough correspondence overall. Note how all species increase from the 92<sup>nd</sup> to 93<sup>rd</sup> CBCs, and all decrease from the 94<sup>th</sup> to the 95<sup>th</sup>. In 5 of the 14 possible consecutive year pairings, all the mixed flock species increased or decreased together. The correspondence between just the Mountain and Chestnut-backed Chickadees is even stronger - they vary in tandem in 13 of the 14 years. Pygmies correlate with the chickadees half the time, with Golden-crowned Kinglets in 9 out of 14, and with Red-breasted Nuthatches in 11 out of 14 years.

So it appears that the Pygmy Nuthatches are responding to factors that influence other winter residents as well, though we don't know if those factors are affecting our ability to detect the birds or actually causing population changes.

It seemed to be time to put our local count into the bigger picture, so I looked at PYNU tallies from across the Pacific Northwest (Idaho, Montana, British Columbia, Washington and Oregon combined). Here is the Coeur d'Alene tally compared with the region:

**normalized CDA & NW Region PYNU**



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## COEUR D'ALENE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5



The data is normalized to facilitate comparison. Our local data shows much more abrupt up- and downswings, but still reflects the regional trend. Our numbers contribute from 0.3 to 4% of the total PYNU recorded each year in the region.

**Conclusions?** It looks as though Pygmy Nuthatches may have suffered a downturn in our area for several years centered on the winter of '97-'98, and then rebounded to a high in '01-'02, with a decrease since then. It seems likely that the '97-'98 nadir reflects a decrease in population, and not just the weather conditions affecting detectability, because the decrease is mirrored in the regional data. There are many other ways to examine the data, such as pulling out data for counts immediately surrounding Coeur d'Alene. The Spokane count routinely tallies big numbers of pygmies, and had the largest total (777 individuals) of any count circle in the 104<sup>th</sup> CBC.

So, how many Pygmy Nuthatches will we tally this year? Will the numbers rebound? Come out and join the fun on Thursday, December 14. Contact Shirley Sturts to sign up (664-5318).

Photographs by Wayne Tree

## RAPTOR REHAB UPDATE



Kris Buchler

Four Audubon members traveled to Jane Cantwell's home one morning to provide technical support in various projects. Lisa Hardy, Jan Severtson, Shirley Sturts and Kris Buchler spent a few hours helping with materials for future imping of raptors. In the process, we learned how to tell the relative age of many juvenile raptors by the shape of the feather edges. We also learned that most have 12 retrices, or tail feathers, and that the middle two have a different pigment pattern than the others. Despite a power outage caused by high winds the night before, we prepared enough materials for imping at least 8 birds of prey.

### Snowy and Great Horned Owl

After Lisa Hardy and I had completed our November IBA count at Wolf Lodge Bay, I returned home to several phone messages concerning two owls that needed medical care. Kate Rau, who works for the Coeur d'Alene Tribe in Plummer had an injured Great Horned Owl. Larry Rohloff, who does raptor transport for Birds of Prey Northwest, was at his Rotary meeting and had picked up an owl in Post Falls that he said looked like a Snowy Owl. It had been chasing a duck. He was right! It was a beautiful first year bird.

Shirley Sturts came up and helped hold the owls while I weighed them and gave them a general physical. The Great Horned had an injured left wing, two torn eyelids and blood on one foot. The Snowy showed no apparent physical damage but both birds were vastly under weight. That evening Ed and I started triage, a treatment of injected fluids, shots of vitamins and iron, and tube feeding. After 5 days of treatment (3 feedings per day), then surgery for the Great Horned, I took both owls down to Jane Cantwell's property where they were put into aviaries. Both owls are eating well and slowly gaining weight.

The last report on the Snowy – she ate 20 mice on Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>!! We will soon post pictures on the webpage.

## DECEMBER JANUARY FIELD TRIPS

### FIELD TRIP INFORMATION

1. **PLEASE REGISTER:** Dates and trips could change - check future newsletters or our website - or call the trip leader ahead of time
2. **COST:** Participants will share in a mileage reimbursement for the driver at a rate of \$0.25/mile, with the trip leader responsible for collection and distribution of the compensation.
3. **RADIOS:** We will ask participants to contribute \$1.00 toward batteries as needed.
4. **UNSCHEDULED TRIPS :** Sign up to be on the group email list for unscheduled trips with Shirley Sturts: [s.sturts@verizon.net](mailto:s.sturts@verizon.net). Those without email may get on a call list by calling Shirley at 664-5318.

### MICA BAY SURVEY

**DATES:** December 5, Tuesday ( Note: this is the first Tuesday this month due to conflicts)

**TIME:** 9:00 a.m.

**MEET:** Fairmont Loop and Highway 95

**LEADERS:** Janet Callen 664-1085 - Kris Buchler, 664-4739

**ACTIVITY:** We spend about 3 hours once a month counting birds in the Mica Bay area.

### BROWN BAG BIRDING TRIP

**DATE:** December 19, Tuesday

**TIME:** 12:00 - 1:00 P.M.

**MEET:** Independence Point

**LEADER:** Lynn Sheridan, 765-2603

**ACTIVITY:** Take an hour out of your busy day to enjoy the out-of-doors. See how many different species of birds one can find in an hour and get to know people that share your interest in nature. Beginner bird watchers are welcome.

### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Three Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) are conducted in the Coeur d'Alene area each winter, part of a larger Audubon program extending across the Western Hemisphere. No matter what your skill level, beginner or expert, you can be a part of this century-old tradition. Join an Audubon team for the day or half of the day, or count birds at your feeder if you live within one of the count circles.

For more information about the CBC, go to [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org) and click on "Science". For specific information about our local CBCs, or to sign up, contact Shirley Sturts - 664-5318 or email:

[s.sturts@verizon.net](mailto:s.sturts@verizon.net)

Cost: \$5.00 per CBC plus gas money for the driver

Coeur d'Alene CBC: Thursday, December 14, 2006 (firm date)

Indian Mountain CBC: Sunday, December 30, 2006 (tentative date)

Spirit Lake CBC: Friday, January 5, 2006 (tentative date)

### CHRISTMAS POTLUCK AT SEVERTSONS'

All are welcome to attend the annual Christmas Potluck after the Christmas Bird Count, Dec 14<sup>th</sup> at about 5 p.m. or when it is too dark to bird! Jan will be providing hot dish. Items needed: salads, desserts, break beverages (bring your own) and one or two people to bring bread, and of course your appetites, good cheer, and lists of those birds you spotted. Please RSVP Jan at 667-6209 and tell her what you will be bringing.

### GULL IDENTIFICATION

**DATE:** January 20, Saturday - **TIME:** 10:00 AM

**MEET:** K-mart parking lot south end

**LEADER:** Lisa Hardy 682-4808

**ACTIVITY:** We will look at the different gull species and hope for a rare one. This is a half-day trip around Coeur d'Alene (NIC beach, etc.) and we'll stop for lunch in a warm restaurant.