

# THE FISH HAWK HERALD



Coeur d'Alene Chapter of Audubon

FEBRUARY 2007

VOLUME 16 ISSUE 6

## BOARD MEETING

DATE: February 19, Monday

TIME: 4:30 p.m.

PLACE: Mt. West Bank  
125 Ironwood Dr.

## FEBRUARY PROGRAM

DATE: February 19, Monday

TIME: 7:00 p.m.

PLACE: First Presbyterian Church,  
521 E. Lakeside, Coeur d'Alene  
SPEAKER: Mike Denny, Blue  
Mountain Audubon Society, Walla  
Walla

PROGRAM: "Bats, Birds and  
Blades", a study of wind turbines  
to generate electricity, their impacts  
on our native birds and bats.

## YARD LISTS

Last Call: Turn your yard list into  
Lisa Hardy by February 12<sup>th</sup>

Visit our website:

[www.cdaudubon.org](http://www.cdaudubon.org)

## GET READY TO "COUNT BIRDS FOR THE RECORD!"

Great Backyard Bird Count combines the fun of bird watching  
with conservation

(reprinted from the "Birdsource" Website)



What mid-winter activity is fun, easy, free, and helps bird conservation? What can parents and teachers do with children that connects them to a whole new world of natural wonders? This February, the tenth annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, will give everyone a chance to discover the birds in their neighborhood and "Count for the Record."

During February 16–19, 2007, people of all ages, from beginners to experts, are invited to join this event which spans all of the United States and Canada. Participants can take part wherever they are – at home, in schoolyards, at local parks or wildlife refuges. Observers simply count the highest number of each species they see during an outing or a sitting, and enter their tally on the Great Backyard Bird Count website at [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc).

Visitors to the website can also compare their sightings with results from other participants, as checklists pour in from throughout the U.S. and Canada. Together, these counts offer a real-time snapshot of the numbers and kinds of birds that people are finding, from Boreal Chickadees in Alaska to Anhingas in Florida.

"The Great Backyard Bird Count is a community celebration of birds, birding, and nature," said Janis Dickinson, director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "We often fail to notice how rich our surroundings are, but counting birds, even for just 15 minutes, is not only educational—it can provide a lasting source of enjoyment, turning a daily walk into a treasure hunt."

"We are encouraging people to go outside and count birds for the first time this year," said Paul Green, Audubon's director of Citizen Science. "By submitting their counts online, birdwatchers can quickly see how the dots they put on the map form new patterns that tell new stories about the birds that share the world in which we live, including our own backyards and parks."

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## Great Backyard Bird Count Continued from page 1



**Photograph by Bill Linn**

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the GBBC, and Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology are challenging people everywhere to “Count for the Record,” by participating in greater numbers than ever before. Greater participation, with more checklists submitted, provides more information about bird population trends – and helps to better inform conservation efforts.

Last year, participants submitted more than 60,000 checklists – and reported 7.5 million birds overall and 623 different species. The count helped chronicle the early spring migratory routes of Sandhill Cranes, documented lingering migrants such as Orange-crowned Warblers and Tree Swallows, revealed the ongoing range expansion of introduced Eurasian Collared-Doves, and recorded declining numbers of American Crows.

Participants who want to hone their bird watching skills can learn more from the Great Backyard Bird Count website, which offers identification tips and access to photos, sounds, maps, and natural history information on more than 500 bird species. People can also submit photos to an online gallery showcasing the dazzling array of winter birds found during the GBBC. Competitions add another element of fun, including a photo contest, rankings for most numerous birds, and the coveted “checklist champ” title for towns, states, and provinces with the highest participation.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is a free event, sponsored in part by Wild Birds Unlimited. Find out how you can promote the GBBC in your town and download a free 2007 poster.

*The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a nonprofit membership institution interpreting and conserving the earth’s biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds.*

*Audubon is dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Our national network of community-based nature centers and chapters, scientific and educational programs, and advocacy on behalf of areas sustaining important bird populations, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in conservation.*

### **GREEN TIP: WINTER SALT**

**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.**

Lisa Hardy

The use of salt to melt ice on roadways and sidewalks prevents innumerable accidents, but what impact does this practice have on the environment?

The 1999 Canadian Environmental Protection Act determined salt to be a toxic chemical due to its effects on vegetation, wildlife and aquatic organisms. Each year in this country, some 8 to 12 million tons of salt are applied to roads. Nearly all of this salt ends up in our groundwater and waterways, and it tends to enter streams in surges during periods of thawing, whether natural or induced by the application of the salt. During these surges, the salinities can exceed the tolerance of aquatic dwellers.

You might not be aware of the impact of salt on birds. Finches and other seed-eaters will congregate on roads in winter to pick up the grit they require to process seeds, and, being unable to distinguish grains of rock salt from sand, they can ingest toxic quantities of salt.

Mammals are also affected by the application of road salt. Though salt toxicity is not an issue with ungulates, many moose and elk are killed each year because they are struck by vehicles while eating salt from highway surfaces, causing injuries and fatalities to drivers and passengers as well. Suzanne Audet of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service spoke to our chapter two years ago on the woodland caribou of North Idaho. She noted that the number one cause of mortality in this threatened population is animals being hit by vehicles while they are eating salt from roadways.

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## WINTER SALT continued from page 2

The long-term effects on human health are more subtle, with some researchers suggesting that increased sodium levels in drinking water lead to increased levels of hypertension.

Even more invisible are the effects in soils, where salt use can kill bacteria, resulting in more friable and easily eroded soil.

Many highway districts have turned to alternative deicing chemicals. This is probably more due to the corrosive effects of salt on vehicles and bridge decks than to the negative health and environmental impacts. Interstate 90 through Idaho, for example, is deiced with magnesium chloride. All the alternative products are more expensive than salt, and most of them have negative environmental effects to some extent.

What does all this mean for you, the homeowner, the individual? Is there anything you can do to minimize the problems associated with deicing chemicals?

First, you can minimize your home use of deicing chemicals. Although each of us uses only a miniscule amount of deicer compared with the quantities used each year on the nation's highways, the effect is cumulative. The best practice is to apply deicer before the snowfall, or clear the snow before applying deicer. Use a handheld broadcaster for even distribution. Gardeners know that salt use can damage foliage and roots of horticultural specimens, so any reduction in the amount of chemical needed is helpful. While you may need to use chemical deicer on sloped walkways, application of traction sand or kitty litter on level stretches may suffice. But inert traction material can be a problem when it is washed into storm sewers, where it can clog the works, so sweep it off walkways instead of allowing it to be washed into the waterways.

Second, consider using a deicing chemical with minimal environmental impact. The downside is that these products can be considerably more expensive than rock salt. The most benign of these alternative deicers, including a product called "SafePaw", break down into nitrogen compounds which have a slight fertilizer effect. These nitrogen compounds contribute to nutrient overload if they wash into surface waters, but the impact is tiny compared to the application of fertilizer to suburban lawns. SafePaw is advertised as safe for pets, children and the environment. It can be purchased at Petco in Coeur d'Alene (8 lb.3 oz. jug for \$14.99, or 35 lb. pail for \$49.99).

**For more information on ways to reduce your use of chemical deicers, and how the different chemicals work, see: [http://www.plantops.umich.edu/grounds/Mother\\_Earth\\_News.pdf](http://www.plantops.umich.edu/grounds/Mother_Earth_News.pdf)**



### BROWN BAG BIRDING - Januray 16 - Lynn Sheridan

At Independence Point, Judy Waring joined Roland Craft and me at noon. The temperature was 20 F degrees and clouds covered the sky. Judy had her scope with her, which helped a lot. On the beach, a line of Ring-billed Gulls were sitting on a narrow strip of sand between snow and water, so that it tinted their breasts a dingy gray. Among them, I found 3 California Gull with a gleam of red on their lower beak. Out on the lake, we saw a Red-necked Grebe in winter plumage, and a crisp black and white male Common Golden-eye.

To save time, we drove to the western end of Rosenberry drive and walked along the river. Mallards and Canada Geese were there in small numbers, and no gulls at all. A Common Raven flew by, and several Pygmy Nuthatch flitted into view.

Where the river and lake meet, we looked in vain for Double-crested Cormorants. We found 4 Great Blue Heron and a Red-breasted Merganser.

Thank you fellow birders.

## TOWN AND COUNTRY GULLS

Lisa Hardy



Photograph by Wayne Tree

The January gull trip consisted of Roland Craft and myself. Next year, in an attempt to increase the turnout, I think we will offer cash to any participant who comes out for the duration.

No, seriously, I guess the gulls only appeal to a certain personality. My friend Scott Rea says that long after humans have gone extinct, gulls will still be wheeling across the skies, congregating in noisy flocks, and looking for opportunities. They are opportunists, no question about it, and I think of them as all-round, adaptable kinds of birds, at home on land and on water as well as in the air. The gulls also are characterized by a complex, plastic gene pool

that has befuddled the ornithologists who try to draw the boundaries of discrete species within this genetic mass. In fact, there is no other group of birds that we can study in this area that forces such a rigorous shakedown of the proposed theories of what constitutes a species. For a birder, this genetic plasticity creates serious identification challenges, which in turn have led to the formation of a relatively small cadre of fanatics who spend every spare moment observing, thinking about and, especially, discussing gulls.

There are none of these gull fanatics in North Idaho, however, and so, on a snowy Saturday morning, Roland and I headed down highway 95 to the Fighting Creek landfill to see what visitors from the north might be present. At the landfill, we found the gulls loafing nearby in a pasture at the elk farm, where they were settled onto a half foot of fresh snow. We estimated 230 birds in the flock, which periodically would spring up, fly around, and then settle back down. These birds were nearly all adult Herring Gulls; four Ring-billed Gulls kept to the edge of the group of bigger gulls. Herrings primarily breed in the far north across Canada, and migrate south in the winter.

We scanned the Herrings for any individuals with dark eyes - these could be Thayer's Gulls. Thayer's look quite similar to Herring Gulls, differing only in subtle features like head shape, bill shape, eye color and leg color. Only the patterning of black and white on the primary tips is diagnostic, and these birds were mostly folded up and facing us. Thayer's Gulls breed north of Herring Gulls, in High Arctic Canada. In the fall, they migrate south and west to winter along the Pacific coast from British Columbia to Baja California. Thayer's Gull was considered a subspecies of Herring Gull from 1931 until 1973 when the A.O.U. designated it a full species.

But the story is not that simple. "Kumlien's Gull", which the A.O.U. considers to be a subspecies of Iceland Gull, is intermediate in appearance between Thayer's and Iceland. It is also geographically intermediate in terms of its breeding range. These facts in combination with observations on the interbreeding of populations, have led some researchers to propose that the Thayer's - Kumlien's - Iceland complex is a single species exhibiting systematic variation through its range from west to east. Others prefer to consider the Thayer's and Iceland to be two separate species, with the Kumlien's representing the hybridization of the two. The Kumlien's, incidentally, was regarded as a separate species until 1931. The British Ornithological Society now regards the Thayer's as a subspecies of the Iceland Gull, though the A.O.U. has so far resisted the revision. The Thayer's has traveled quite a path - from subspecies of Herring Gull, to full species, to subspecies of Iceland Gull (at least in the U.K.). It is ironic that the Thayer's is much easier to distinguish from a "type" Iceland Gull than from the less closely related Herring Gull. Rather, I should say "American Herring Gull", because, once again, the Europeans have diverged from the A.O.U., and split the Herring Gull into New World and Old World species.

In the meantime, Thayer's are still countable - if you are a North American. Back at the landfill, with listing in mind, we located four or five birds with the caramel-brown eyes typical of Thayer's that contrasted with the pale yellow eyes of their neighbors. But some 1% of the population of American Herring Gulls can show such a dark eye, and so this by itself was not definitive. And while one of the five also showed a relatively diminutive bill, also a suggestive field mark for Thayer's, it was still not definitive. After a lengthy perusal of the suspect birds, we still were unable to reach a conclusion on a possible Thayer's ID. We need more practice, and perhaps a camera so we can study the birds in flight.

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## TOWN AND COUNTRY GULLS - Continued from page 4

Next, we returned to Coeur d'Alene and checked along the Spokane River from NIC to below the highway 95 bridge. A scattered flotilla of gulls were continuing to feed on the water surface in the vicinity of the bridge as they had been for the past week, perhaps on a hatch of some aquatic invertebrate. These were all Ring-billed Gulls. We stopped along the Centennial Trail below the bridge and scattered some cat food on the pavement. Within two minutes we had a group of 50 Ring-bills "Hoovering" up every crumb. One of these Ring-bills had a patch of neon yellow-green dye on its tail which I am guessing was the result of being hit by a paintball.

At Coeur d'Alene City Beach, an adult Mew Gull mingled with 25 Ring-bills, while three California Gulls lounged on the floatplane dock. Burleigh's "Birds of Idaho" (1972) makes no mention of Mew Gull, but they seem to be winter regulars now in our area.

Our last stop was NIC beach, where we scoped a group of 30 Herring Gulls on the river in front of Harbor Center. A young couple pulled up with a bag of bread and began to feed the geese, ducks and gulls. Next, a woman and a boy arrived carrying a box from which they started to feed the birds, too. The box was full of deli sliced turkey and the gulls were quite pleased with this largesse. A single adult Mew Gull joined the dozens of Ring-bills in the lunchmeat feeding frenzy. We wondered what other sorts of things people bring and feed to the birds...

## A WILDLIFE DRAMA From the Journal of Kris Buchler



Photograph by Bill Linn

Saturday, January 12, 2007. Roland Craft and Stephen Johnson joined me for our 3<sup>rd</sup> Midwinter Eagle Count for the BLM, beginning at 9:00AM. We try to keep the team consistent with the same number and same participants, as well as cover the same roads in our territory, which is the Spokane River from Lake Coeur d'Alene to Stateline. What is not consistent is the weather. Our first year we did the count in a very heavy snowstorm and came up with a whopping 0 eagles! We did have fun, however, exploring new roads and river views we had not seen in the past.

Last year our visibility was much better but it didn't help us much. Our lone Bald Eagle was a flyover at Greensferry Road on the south side of the river. We do record other species while on the count and this location always has abundant waterfowl.

This January, despite freezing temperatures, we started off with a bang! Our first stop produced a Bald Eagle, an immature flying up the river. We were curious about how the declining numbers at Wolf Lodge might affect our success. It would seem that birds found along the river would be attracted by the large numbers of waterfowl. Many of our bays are now iced over while the river remains open. Our third stop produced another eagle, an adult also flying up the river. We already had set a new record on this count with 2 birds! Bald Eagle number 3 was a perched bird high in a ponderosa pine at Greensferry Road. Roland also spotted a nice Cooper's Hawk who observed us as intently as we watched him. "Eagle Eyes" Stephen has a knack for spotting a flying bird just as we turn away and did just that as we were leaving Q'melin Park. Two more adults were spotted flying over the river from the north side for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> birds.

Our last eagle for the day produced awe in all three of us. We were at Templin's, overlooking the river and pilings without an eagle sighting. True to form, as we turned to go, Stephen looked back over his shoulder and called, "eagle!" As we watched, this adult circled several times over diving Bufflehead and Common Goldeneye, then suddenly dropped from about eight feet, snagged a female Bufflehead and then flew to a nearby piling where he plucked her and ate his lunch. We were frozen in place as we watched the deftness of the whole maneuver and the ease with which the eagle caught the bird. It made us wonder why we don't see it more often.

I spotted our largest eagle of the day in the woods along Breezy Way. Among the trees was a huge metal Bald Eagle sculpture that any birder could not miss, even when she is driving.

## SPIRIT LAKE CBC

Shirley Sturts, Compiler

When I woke up at 5 a.m. on the day of the Spirit Lake Christmas Bird Count, it was pouring rain. I thought to myself, no one in their right mind will show up to do this count today. However, birders are a hardy group, even if they don't know when to come in out of the rain, so I knew they wouldn't let me down. Sure enough, almost everyone showed up at our usual meeting place, Rustler's Roost, for breakfast.

We welcomed three new observers to our count. Paul Sieracki, a long time birder from Priest River, and Geoffrey and Catherine Cant from Sandpoint teamed up to do the northwest quadrant of the circle. Kris Buchler and Theresa Potts headed to Bayview to cover the northeast quadrant. Janet Callen and Roland Craft took on the southwest quadrant, while Lisa Hardy and I concentrated on Farragut State Park and the southeast quadrant.

When we set out to do our assigned areas, the rain clouds seemed to close in on us; it was one dark, dreary day. However, we were not about to let the rain dampen our spirits and we set out with smiles on our faces.

Lisa suggested we do the water first because the water birds would be out, rain or shine. The only way to count the birds in Idlewilde and Buttonhook Bays is to go by boat or walk the Shoreline Trail in Farragut State Park. On past counts, teams have sometimes rented a motor boat. One year Bill Gundlach, brave soul, did the route by kayak. This year the trail was free of snow and Lisa and I were able to walk from the boat launch to Buttonhook Bay. Lisa provided us with umbrellas to keep us dry and we found it very pleasant walking and birding. Our list along the lake consisted of several Canada Goose, Mallard, Bufflehead, Common and Barrow's Goldeneye and Common Merganser. New to the count list was 1 Lesser Scaup. The 1 Long-tailed Duck that Lisa spotted is only the second time it has been seen on the count. It is always fun to see a Common Loon and we had two. Our grebe count consisted of 1 Pied-billed, 2 Red-necked, 56 Horned, and best of all, 1 Eared Grebe - rare for North Idaho and new to our count. Our only mistake was not taking food on our walk. When we reached Buttonhook Bay it was 1:00 p.m. and our stomachs reminded us that we had left all our food back at the car. We hiked uphill to the South Road for our return trip.

In the meantime, Kris and Theresa were outdoing us on the loon count. They found 7 Common Loons in Bayview and 18 Horned Grebes. When we added our 56 to their 18 we found we beat the record for highest number seen over the past 11 years. The old record was 65 in 1999. They also found 1 Double-crested Cormorant, another new species to our count list. Double-crested Cormorant are increasing in North Idaho; they have been seen in greater numbers on both the Coeur d'Alene and Sandpoint CBCs, so it is not surprising that one finally showed up on the Spirit Lake Count. Kris and Theresa also located a Varied Thrush, and 2 Pine Grosbeak, both species that we pick up in only one out of every four counts or so.

Janet and Roland came up with the only Gray Jays on the list. Four were found at a feeder. This same feeder produced a Pileated Woodpecker, which the owners called into Janet later that evening. Their biggest surprise of the day was a flock of 108 American Crows in Spirit Lake. This number far outdid the previous record of 41 in 2005.

Geoffrey assured me that, in spite of the rain, they enjoyed doing the count and, being new to North Idaho, they appreciated seeing a new area. Paul, Geoffrey and Catherine came up with our only Northern Shrike, Black-billed Magpie and Common Redpoll, a flock of 20. Paul said they watched the Northern Shrike chase insects across the snow. The shrike put on a very interesting show for them.

The rain continued all day until just before dark, and so I was amazed that we came up with our second highest species count for the eleven year history of the count. We had 53 species this year, while the highest species count was 57 in 2002. Our lowest was 36 species in 2004. We didn't do too badly in the number of individual birds either; we had 1132 birds. Our highest number was 1686 in 1998. Our low count, 606 in 2004. I wonder what the weather was like that winter. We would have had higher song bird numbers if the sun had been out. Twelve of our species were represented by only a single team.

THE FISH HAWK HERALD

## BOARD MEETING SUMMARY

January 15, 2007

Lynn Sheridan

- We are drawing up rules for field trip leaders to ensure safety. This prompted us to buy 10 orange vests for participants to wear on field trips.
- We authorized the move to purchase 500 "business cards" for regulars to carry, with our chapter name, P.O. Box address, and Website address.
- 137 classrooms have signed up for Audubon Adventures. They are generously paid for by The Margaret Reed Foundation.

### FEBRUARY 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.

#### BEGINNING BIRDERS TRIP

**DATE:** February 3, Saturday - **TIME:** , 9:00 AM

**MEET:** Fernan Ranger Station

**LEADER:** Lisa Hardy 682-4808 or Roland Craft 457-8894

**ACTIVITY:** This is a half-day trip around the Coeur d'Alene area to look for winter species, perhaps going out as far as Wolf Lodge Bay

#### MICA BAY SURVEY

**DATES:** February 13, Tuesday **TIME:** 9:00 a.m.

**MEET:** Fairmont Loop and Highway 95

**LEADERS:** Shirley Sturts 664-5318- 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:** February 20, Tuesday **TIME:** 12:00 - 1:00 P.M.

**MEET:** Blackwell Island - meet at Fairmont Loop Road

**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 who share your interest in nature. Beginner bird watchers are welcome.

#### OWL TRIP

**DATE:** February 17, Saturday evening and into the night - **TIME:** 2:30 PM (leaving promptly)

**MEET:** K-mart parking lot, south end (please register ahead of time so we know who is coming)

**LEADER:** Lisa Hardy 682-4808 or Roland Craft 457-8894

**ACTIVITY:** We will drive to the home of Ron Dexter on Forker Rd. in the Mt. Spokane area. Ron has Short-eared, N.Saw-whet, Barred, W.Screech and Barn Owls on and near his property. Ron will be leading the trip. We suggest you dress warmly and bring food and water for yourself.

