

# THE FISH HAWK HERALD



Coeur d'Alene Chapter of the National Audubon Society  
[www.cdaaudubon.org](http://www.cdaaudubon.org)  
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## Upcoming Events

Birding class Feb. 24; Next meeting March 12

As detailed in the President's message below, the chapter will begin its "Beginning Birding" classes at the Coeur d'Alene Library February 24.

The regular monthly chapter meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 12, at the Lutheran Church of the Master, 4800 N. Ramsey Road, Coeur d'Alene. Meetings were not conducted in January and February due to cold weather. The program for March is TBD.

## President's Message

Greetings to all!

I hope you are all wintering well. I was glad to see the sub-zero weather abate but not happy about the freezing rain we got. I had a flock of Snow Buntings staked out but I am pretty sure they probably moved on as ice covered ground makes foraging especially difficult for seed eaters. Maybe they will return or maybe more will arrive - we'll see.

Good things are happening in our club. The website committee is in the last stages of getting information and a template to the high school student that is going to do the website development for us. I won't say more because I would most likely misquote.

In other exciting news, our Beginning Birding class is scheduled and has a home. The course will be on Feb. 24, March 2, and March 9.

It will begin at 10:30 am each day and run till 12:30. The course will be limited to 20 participants and will meet in the Coeur d'Alene Library in the Nelson Room in the Research area. The Library is doing some advertising for us and is handling the class registration as well. Have I mentioned how much I love our library? What a wonderful resource for our community.

Also I want to alert you all to some more great news. Theresa Shaffer has been working hard, as our new field trip coordinator, to put together a lineup of fun trips for us. Watch your email for notifications of February opportunities and we will have a full calendar to you in the March newsletter. Till then happy birding and keep those feeders full and clean.

All the best, Ted

White-Breasted Nuthatch "just hanging around" a suet feeder/Cougar Gulch/Photo by Doug Albertson



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## Farmland Birds facing greater threat than Urbanites?

A December, 2023 article in *wired Magazine* indicates that farmland birds (meadowlarks, blackbirds, doves and other once-common species) are declining almost twice as fast as their city cousins—the unfortunate result of “intensive” agricultural practices.

The article focuses on Europe, following the efforts of a farmer named Alice Cerutti to save birds and other wildlife by setting aside a nature preserve on her property.

Cerutti’s farm has the sad distinction of being the last regular nesting place in Italy for the black-tailed godwit, a wading bird whose numbers are declining globally. Cerutti has turned her 115-hectare (284 acres) rice farm into a conservation project, planting thousands of trees, reestablished wetlands, and bringing in experts to help study and manage birds Cerutti sees on her farm. Local researchers found the godwit is clinging to existence on her preserve even as it disappeared from other locations.

This single effort will not be nearly enough to halt the startling decline of farmland birds in Europe, however. A comprehensive study covering analyzing 37 years of bird population data from 20,000 sites across 28 European nations found that farmland species had declined by approximately 58 percent, while urban bird populations dropped by 28 percent. The study authors considered the growing size of towns and cities, the loss of forested areas, temperature rises, and the intensification of farming as key factors. Of all these, intensification of farming—made possible by more efficient equipment and pesticides—was found to be the biggest threat to farmland species.

“To be utterly frank, the situation is pretty awful,” says Rob Robinson, a senior scientist for the British trust for Ornithology. Robinson says that around 70 years ago it was common for wheat farmers to leave 1 or 2 percent of their crop on the ground in fields.

“That doesn’t sound like very much, but if you add up large areas of farmland, it can sustain large bird populations,” he says. Technology and harvesting practices have become so good at catching every grain that this food source just isn’t there anymore

Although this huge research project underlines some of the problems birds face, we’ve known about these issues for many years, says Amanda Rodewald at the Center for Avian Population Studies at Cornell University.

“We’ve known enough for a long time to actually take active steps,” she says. “Our failure to do that has reflected that there hasn’t been a collective and strong will to act, in my opinion.”

There are ways to help, however. Countries can provide tax or other financial incentives to farmers willing to protect and encourage wildlife on their land, for instance.

In California, some rice farmers are paid to delay the draining of their fields in late winter to protect breeding areas used by wading birds. The project, called BirdReturns, has been running successfully for years.

In just a few years, Alice Cerutti has transformed multiple hectares of land and embraced wildlife—despite having known little about birds just 12 years ago. “The amazing thing is,” she says, “when you give back to nature, she really grabs it right away.”



Black-tailed Godwit

## Test Your Avian Awareness: Facts on Farmland Birds

(Answers on Page 4)

1. Killdeers get their name from:
  - a. The sound of their shrill call; b. The indigenous name for the bird c. Naturalist John Killdeer, who studied these birds
2. Yellow-headed blackbirds always build their nests:
  - a. In shallow gravelly holes; b. In the highest branches of trees; c. In hillsides; d. On water
3. The \_\_\_\_\_ is a particularly polygamous bird; one male mates with as many as 15 females in his territory.
  - a. Meadowlark; b. Mourning Dove; c. Red-winged blackbird; Yellow-headed blackbird
4. What farmland bird fakes a broken wing to distract predators from her nest?
  - a. Ring-necked pheasant; b. Killdeer; c. Prairie chicken; d. Barn owl
5. Meadowlarks are not a "lark" but actually a type of:
  - a. Blackbird; b. Dove; c. Plover; d. Sparrow
6. The Western Meadowlark is the state bird of how many US states?
  - a. None; b. Two; c. Four; d. Six
7. Prairie chickens' mating grounds are known as:
  - a. Boks b. Cupidos c. Leks d. Booms
8. Mourning doves typically fly in a tight formation of 3 during mating season; which bird is second?
  - a. The rival male seeking to oust the dominant male b. The rival female seeking to replace the dominant female; c. There is no particular order; d. The dominant male with females in front of and behind him
9. Mating mourning doves:
  - a. Fly high up and lock their feet together b. Kiss c. Feign indifference d. Fight
10. Barn owls:
  - a. Do not hoot; b. Swallow rodents whole and regurgitate the remains; c. Have "lopsided" ears; d. All of the above.

## Christmas tree farms—maybe not so bad for birds after all...

A recent article in the *New York Times* found a "bird friendly" side to the Christmas tree farms, a crop many folks believe is bad for wildlife.

The article notes that in the spring, grassy areas around the younger trees draw ground nesters like bobolinks, killdeer and woodcocks. Waxwings and robins often nest in older trees, their young fledging many months before harvest.

Mice and voles living on the tree farms provided food for migratory raptors such as kestrels and harriers, who feasted on exposed rodents when the grass was mowed.

As we are seeing in northern Idaho, suburban development rapidly accelerates loss of natural woodlands. Tree farms can provide habitats for wildlife, especially birds and mammals that prefer open spaces at forest edges.

A German study published last year found that conifer plantations could provide important refuges for four threatened species of farmland birds such as the common linnnet, tree pipit, woodlark and yellowhammer.

Tom Norby, the president of the Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association, says that a small portion of the trees are harvested each year, leaving roughly 90 percent growing and available for animals.

On his own farm, he says, he's seen deer, rabbits, a pygmy owl, bears, coyotes and cougars, who follow elk that forage in his fields when mountain ranges are covered in snow.

It may be that northwest birds can find at least temporary homes in Christmas tree plantations.

However regimented and artificial they seem, these tree farms may provide a respite from the barren suburban landscape rapidly replacing our farmland and forests.

Quiz answers: 1, a; 2, d; 3, c; 4, b; 5, a; 6, d; 7, c.  
8, a; 9, b; 10, d.

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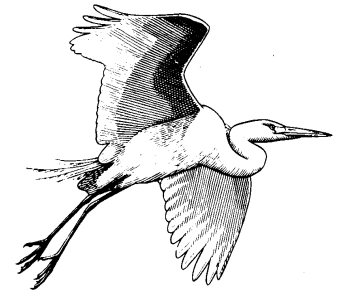
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*PO Box 361*  
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