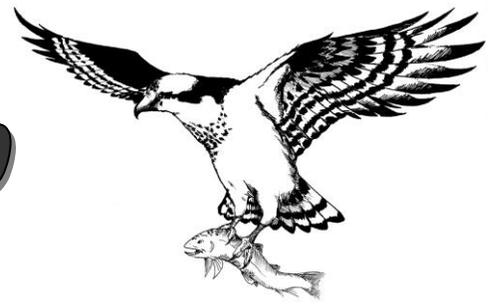


THE FISH HAWK HERALD



Coeur d'Alene Chapter of the National Audubon Society

January 2005

VOLUME 14 ISSUE 5

COMING EVENTS BOARD MEETING

DATE: January 17, Monday
TIME: 4:30 p.m.
PLACE: Mt. West Bank-125 Ironwood Dr.

JANUARY PROGRAM

DATE: January 17, Monday
TIME: 7:00 p.m.
PLACE: First Presbyterian Church, 521 E. Lakeside, Coeur d'Alene
SPEAKER: Ned Horner, Idaho Fish and Game
PROGRAM: "North Idaho's Fisheries: Past, Present and Future" Find out which of our local fish are native, which are introduced, and how fish populations have been managed over the years.

Visit our website: www.cdaudubon.org

BLUEBIRD TRAILS

(Editors note: This is the third in a series of articles on bluebird conservation and bluebird trails)

CHARLIE ELLIS

Charlie Ellis holding a Tree Swallow in one hand and white feathers in the other hand, as well as his hat



Condensed by Bob Niebuhr
Reprinted from "Bluebird Tales"
the newsletter of Mountain
Bluebird Trails, Inc. (MBT).
Their website is:

www.mountainbluebirdtrails.com

Charlie Ellis was born in Jumping Pound, Alberta in 1902. His sister, Winnie, was born in 1905. Charlie and Winnie moved with their family in 1906 to

homestead in the Lacombe area of central Alberta. After the passing of their parents, Charlie and Winnie remained on the farm, where they operated a very successful mixed-farming

operation.

When Charlie put up a bird box on his front lawn in the spring of 1955, he had no idea how much this simple act would change his life or the lives of thousands of other people. Charlie was intrigued with a simple nest box plan that he came across in a farm magazine, so he decided to build one. Shortly after he set it out, he was thrilled to see a pair of Tree Swallows take up residence. But House Sparrows soon moved in, killing the female swallow and building their own nest on top of her and her dead nestlings.

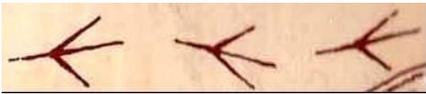
Charlie was outraged. He decided he would spend the rest of his life helping native birds by providing them with secure nesting sites, and by controlling local populations of the exotic, destructive House Sparrow through an extensive trapping program. Charlie started building more boxes, and within a few years maintained a 300-box trail around his farm. He would get up at five o'clock every morning during the summer to walk his trails. In his pockets he would carry a supply of white feathers, an eagerly sought commodity by nesting Tree Swallows.

Mountain Bluebirds soon found his boxes, too, and Charlie was rewarded by witnessing his bluebird population grow from just a single pair in 1956 to about sixty pairs in the late 1970s. It is now believed that the Ellis farm had one of the highest nesting densities of Mountain Bluebirds ever recorded.

In addition to maintaining their extensive bluebird trail, Charlie and his sister Winnie transformed their backyard into a haven for wildlife. Orchards and flower gardens were planted specifically to attract birds, while water ponds around the farm attracted deer and other wild creatures. Backyard birdbaths were kept full, and a myriad of bird feeders was placed around the yard. During the winter, Charlie would shovel up to two tons of sunflowers seeds into large cattle troughs, which he used as bird feeders. Huge flocks of Evening Grosbeaks would descend on these feeders to gorge on the seeds.

Continued on Page 4

BIRD TRACKS



Audubon Members make a difference

2005-YARD LIST CHALLENGE

Lisa Hardy

As the calendar year turns over, it is time to make a new list of the bird species you see (and hear) in or from your yard. Then, at the end of the year 2004, submit your list to be judged in categories to be decided at the whim of the judging panel. And don't worry about your list being small – every list adds to the big picture.

For those of you who find the lister approach a bit too "serious", think of it instead as a motivation to hone your observational skills. You may, for example, have to spend a little time with the book in order to sort out the Cassin's and House Finches so that you can tally both on your list. Also, many people add notes to their lists of odd and interesting bird behavior.

TIME TO TURN IN YOUR 2004 YARD LIST

Turn your list into: Lisa Hardy
basalt@earthlink.net
 2153B Old River Road, Kingston,
 Idaho 83839

You will need to submit a list of species and information about your location. Note whether you are in city limits, urban, suburban or rural, whether you have a water view, type of vegetation and cover available, feeders provided etc. Remember, your list should include all birds seen or heard *from* your yard, so you can include, for example, the geese

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that flew over at 3000', or the owl you heard one night in the neighbor's yard. What was your favorite bird? Share any interesting bird behavior you noted while observing birds in your yard.

Look for the results in the February *Fish Hawk Herald*

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT February 18-21st, 2005

The "Great Backyard Bird Count" GBBC is a fun, citizen science joint project of the National Audubon and Cornell Lab of Ornithology and sponsored by Birds Unlimited. To participate and learn more, go to: www.birdsource.org, where you can enter your own bird counts and view maps and data from past years. Statistics from 2003: 48,346 checklists reported, 512 species counted and 2,233,327 individual birds were reported.

NEWS FROM THE PEREGRINE FUND E-NEWSLETTER

December 6, 2004: The first flights were successful for both of the California Condor chicks wild-hatched in Arizona this spring.

The Thanksgiving holiday was truly a time of thanks and celebration for all those involved with and following the California Condor restoration project. Biologists, volunteers, and condor supporters have held their breath during November, waiting for two wild-hatched chicks to stretch their wings and take their risky inaugural flights. By Thursday afternoon (25 November 2004), both chicks, just over six months old, had successfully fledged

BRENDA MUSGRAVE DOSS, WILDLIFE ARTIST (Taken From her website)

"There is nothing quite as fragile as Nature. I can't think of a more rewarding way to use my art."

Born in McMillan, a small rural town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, I acquired a great love for the outdoors. Hours were spent studying and appreciating nature, and as my interest grew so did my fascination to capture it as I saw it.

So I started a dream, and at the age of eleven, with my parents' help and encouragement, I began a life-long career in art. As my love for wildlife grew so did my need to paint it. I feel a closeness toward each animal as I work with it. "An animal's eyes, just as ours do, tell a story. I want my animals to come alive as you look at them, and speak to you. Their eyes can do that."

My studio is in a quiet town in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, in northern California. The town is aptly named, Paradise. From there, with my husband Gene, and Welsh terrier, Shauni, I travel to sell my work. I am pleased that my original artwork is owned and hangs in homes all over the world, and I am honored to include the White House on that list. See Brenda's website: www.BrendasArt.com



"If I were to make a study of the tracks of animals and represent them by plates, I should conclude with the tracks of man"

Henry David Thoreau

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 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 be 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.

MICA BAY SURVEY

Change of time for winter

DATES: January, 12 and 26, Wednesday

TIME/MEET: 9:30 a.m. at 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 encouraged and welcome to join us.

BROWN BAG BIRDING TRIP

DATE: January 18, Tuesday

TIME: 12:00 noon - 1:00 p.m.

MEET: Independence Point

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

ACTIVITY: This is a good time to look for rare winter gull species: Glaucous, Glaucous-winged, Thayer's and Mew. Other possible species: Double-crested Cormorant, wintering grebes, and White-winged or Surf Scoter if we're lucky.

ANNUAL GULL SEARCH

DATE: January 22, Saturday

TIME: 9:00 a.m.

MEET: K-Mart parking lot, south end

LEADER: Roland Craft, 457-8894

Dick Cripe 665-0010

ACTIVITY: 1/2 Day Trip, We will check all the usual gull hangouts: Independence Point, the Dike Road, Spokane River and possibly drive down to the landfill at Fighting Creek. Gulls are not all the same. Come and learn the difference between Ring-billed, California and Herring Gull. Help us find the rare ones: Glaucous, Glaucous-winged, Mew, and Thayer's.

LOWER COEUR D'ALENE RIVER

DATE: February 5, Saturday

TIME: 9:00 a.m.

MEET: K-Mart parking lot, south end

LEADER: Dick Cripe 665-0010

ACTIVITY: 3/4-Day Trip, We will look for wintering birds from Rose Lake Junction to Harrison.

Dress for the weather - bring a lunch - lattes are available in Harrison! 😊

To volunteer to lead a trip, or to suggest places to go, call or email Lisa Hardy 682-4808 or basalt@earthlink.net

CHARLIE ELLIS

Continued from page 1



Charlie Ellis adjusting his sparrow trap.



Winnie Ellis filling one of the large bird feeders at the Ellis Farm.

For several winters Charlie and Winnie also fed large flocks of Bohemian Waxwings. Winnie would stir up apples and raisins by the case lot, and Charlie would serve their hungry visitors on pie plate feeders.

In the early 1980s, Charlie's greatest concern was the fate of "his" bluebirds should he no longer be able to tend his nest box trail. Coincidentally, Union Carbide was looking for a site to build an ethylene glycol plant. Following a suggestion by the Red Deer River Naturalists, Carbide agreed to continue the Ellis legacy through a non-profit charitable company, Ellis Bird Farm Ltd. Union Carbide was

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recently purchased by a large multi-national, Dow Chemicals Canada Ltd. Fortunately, the new company remains committed to supporting the work of Ellis Bird Farm.

Charlie passed away in 1990, but Winnie, now 97, continues to take an active interest in the affairs of Ellis Bird Farm. She visits the site each summer to view the gardens and see her beloved bluebirds and swallows. The legacy of Charlie and Winnie Ellis lives on.

CAREFUL IDENTIFICATION SKILLS

Dennis Fast: Kleefeld, Manitoba
 Taken from the North Dakota Birding Listserve "great discussion from our friends to the north..."

Hi All,

I had initially decided not to wade into the "Tufted Titmouse" debate but several things prompt me to write after all. Not the least of these is an experience with a bird on Saturday that will illustrate the points I wish to make first. If you do nothing else (because this may be a fairly long and rambling piece) DO read the incident I just referred to which I will describe at the end of this article.

First of all, my apologies to Luc Blanchette if he will interpret this as an attack on him and his birding skills. It is not! It is an attempt to write something instructional about bird identification, and Luc's call of the Tufted Titmouse simply provides an appropriate springboard at this time.

It's been almost 30 years since I first bumped into George

Holland at Oak Hammock Marsh and he taught me the difference between the calls of Long-billed (Marsh) and Short-billed (Sedge) Wrens as they were then called. I was amazed that anyone could confidently "call" a bird without even seeing it. Since then I have spent many birding outings and Big Days with the likes of Gord Grief, Rudolf Koes, and Peter Taylor whose birding skills I was determined to emulate. I have probably disappointed them in that regard because they have been witness to many of my misidentifications along the way.

I have been consoled, somewhat at least, by the fact that I have seen others make mistakes too. In 1986, Rudolf Koes and I were privileged to spend a day birding with Roger Tory Peterson in Southern Manitoba, thanks to Dr. Bob Nero. The very first bird that Roger Tory Peterson called out was a clear misidentification, but Rudolf and I were hardly going to correct the guru of all birders. Fortunately, after some reflection and another listen, he corrected himself and did two things with that: he said in effect that "I can make a mistake" and secondly that "I can admit it".

Why did Roger Tory Peterson initially misidentify the bird? It was certainly not because he was not familiar with both species!! Perhaps it had to do with being in a new jurisdiction where he was not quite sure what to expect and called out what to him was the logical first guess. It is something I do all the time because I want to be the "first" to call a bird, but first impressions are not always accurate.



Snow Geese
Photographed by Wayne Tree

Years later I was to read two articles in *Birdwatcher's Digest* about this topic that really fascinated me. One was by none other than Roger Tory Peterson, who was a regular contributor till his passing a few years ago. In a remarkable display of humility and insight he described in great detail some of the "birds" he had identified incorrectly over the years. I put "birds" in quotations, because at least one case involved a decoy planted in a marsh by "friends" to mislead him deliberately. The other involved a blue bottle at a landfill site that he called two different species before turning glassy eyed (sorry, I couldn't resist that) to those around him and admitted his mistake.

The other article was by Erik A. T. Blom who wrote countless bird ID pieces over the years, as well as conducting workshops and leading bird outings. My favorite story was his account of a field trip he was leading after conducting a series of workshops for beginning birders. When he spotted a group of Snow Geese feeding in a field, he was delighted to be able to get the scope on them and to point out to each student in turn (as they looked through the scope) the particular differences between blue and white-phased birds. Later, as they were driving down the road, one of the students asked, "But if those geese were feeding, why weren't they moving?" As the realization of his misidentification slowly

sank in, he turned the van around, set up his scope again, and proceeded to tell his students how to recognize decoys in the field! The other lesson he taught them was that anyone can make a mistake on a snap call, but that you should never be too big to admit it, and you SHOULD consider all the possibilities.

Over the years, I have been a frequent guest on CBC questionnaire, and more recently on CHSM, to answer people's questions about birds. As a result, I get many calls from all over southern Manitoba from people reporting "rare" birds, or asking for my ID help. Two things always amaze me: one, is the tendency for people to believe they have a rare bird because they are not aware of all the options; and the other is to defend themselves when I try to raise any questions about their possible misidentification. This is usually exhibited by one of two reactions:

"What else could it be?" (they don't want to hear the answer to that), or "No, I know the species you are talking about, and it definitely wasn't that."

All of this brings me to the "Tufted Titmouse" and several things I feel need to be said about bird ID's like that. First of all, when anyone sees or hears a bird that is rare for the Province (or out of season, for that matter) every attempt should be made to confirm the ID. In the case of a "heard only" bird it MUST be followed up by a visual ID, and, if possible, a photograph. Be prepared to be wrong, to have the sighting questioned by everyone who didn't see it, and to experience the frustration of having your skills questioned. That is not

only human nature, but imperative in order to have a reasonably accurate checklist for the Province.

A rare bird should IMMEDIATELY be shared with other competent birders, not so late that nobody has a chance to confirm it. It's much more satisfying to have a rare sighting confirmed than to keep it to yourself and have everyone disbelieve you. But equally important (as you will see in a moment) is to weigh all the possibilities before declaring anything rare. Every call out there is a common bird until proven otherwise.

Now here are two personal examples that my ramblings have been leading to. The first one concerns the Slaty-backed Gull I was lucky enough to find at the Delta dump a few years back. When Frieda and I pulled into the dump which had thousands of gulls milling about, I saw the bird in question sitting about 75 meters away among a host of other birds. Immediately I blurted out Western Gull because I had just been in California for three weeks and thought I recognized the bird as such. Now I will freely admit that I am no gull expert. The finer points of "feather counting" have never fascinated me, and I do not profess to have any kind of expertise there. But I did recognize that the bird was different and reported it tentatively as a Western Gull. It didn't take long before Bob Luterbach from Saskatchewan and others were emailing to ask why I had not considered Slaty-backed Gull or even some other species.

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Fortunately, I had captured the bird on video, and after Rudolf Koes and Peter Taylor had a good look at it, I became convinced by them (and the detail revealed in the video) that I had been wrong. I had made two mistakes: I thought I "knew" the Western Gull, and I had not considered all the options.



Editors Note:

Slaty-backed Gull, Sandpoint
City Beach March 10-30, 2002

Some of the birders from Coeur d'Alene Audubon can relate to Dennis Fast's gull misidentification story. The above gull was also first identified as a Western Gull on a Coeur d'Alene Audubon Field Trip. When it was reported, gull experts questioned our identification. Had we considered Slaty-backed? It was considered but not seriously enough. Another visit to the beach for another look and more photographs showed us that indeed this was a Slaty-backed Gull - a first for Idaho.

Photo by Shirley Sturts

Finally, the other example brings me back to the Tufted Titmouse. Like Gene and Andy, Harv Lane and I drove out to Carman to attempt to add a new species to our Provincial list. I have had extensive experience with Tufted Titmice, most recently while spending 5 weeks in Southern Texas in March/April of this year, but I had my trusted tape with me to back me up. For about half an hour, Harv and I lingered at the pond in question, playing the various calls and scolding notes of the Tufted Titmouse every few minutes. The sharp call notes on the tape were so similar to a House Wren's that it was actually responding while keeping out of sight. I "knew" it was a House Wren, but under the circumstances I made very sure I finally got a good look at it. The mewling calls on the tape were very similar to the mewling calls of the Warbling Vireo, several of which were present.

Unfortunately, we did not see or hear the Tufted Titmouse. This, of itself, does NOT prove that there was no Titmouse present or that it had not been there the day before. All of us have chased many a rare bird that had simply disappeared by the time we got there. It does emphasize, however, how important speed of reporting is when it comes to rare birds. Because they are out of range, they are usually not setting up territory and their presence may be fleeting at best.

Two days after that experience I was sitting on my back patio deck when I suddenly sat up with a start. A bird began calling incessantly from the woods about 75-100 meters from our property. My repeated playing of the Tufted Titmouse tape a few days before was still

ringing in my ears, and I thought I was hearing it again. I ran for my binoculars in case the bird approached and waited impatiently. After about half an hour it appeared in the trees between Harv Lanes' and our house. To my surprise, it was an immature Baltimore Oriole. I ran for my Tufted Titmouse tape and then called Harv. Without telling him what the bird was, I asked him to step out onto his patio deck. While he was listening to the oriole, I played back the song of the Tufted Titmouse, and Harv was having a hard time even differentiating between the two. The call had none of the rich staccato bubbling quality of the adult Baltimore Oriole. Instead, the notes were sharp, clear, and measured in groups of 4 or 5 - almost identical, in fact, to my tape recording of the Tufted Titmouse.

What does all of this prove? Perhaps not much, except that one should never eliminate the possibilities regardless of how sure one is. Rudolf was certainly right in suggesting that the Baltimore Oriole should not have been ruled out. If you have birded a lot you doubtless have heard birds singing songs quite uncharacteristic of their species. Mimicry, or at least "alternate learned songs" are not limited to the species we generally consider the Mimidae. In the case of rare birds, it never hurts to err on the side of caution.

I hope all of this is seen as instructive. Manitobabirds Listserv is frequently filled merely with sightings including the "listing" of common backyard birds. I understand the excitement of beginning birders (I hope I continue to enjoy the American Robin for years to come) but a little more emphasis

on unique bird behavior or the sharing of expertise wouldn't hurt. Above all, keep reporting possible rare or out of season sightings promptly, but keep an open mind about the possibility that it may have been something common after all. Good birding everyone.

Cheers, Dennis Fast

SANDPOINT AND PEND OREILLE RIVER.

Sunday 28 November 2004

Dick Cripe



Six Coeur d'Alene birders traveled to Sandpoint today for a morning of birding Pend Oreille Lake and River.

Highlights included a pair of Red-breasted Merganser off City Beach, and an American Tree Sparrow along the river. We see female Red-breasted Merganser on Coeur d' Alene Lake from time to time, but it seems like Pend Oreille Lake is the only location for male Red-breasted around here. The real crowd-pleaser, though, was a Great-horned Owl sitting on a fir limb in the sun and preening itself. It appeared unconcerned by our presence in parked cars 150' away, and reminded me of nothing so much as a fat tabby cat cleaning itself.

We saw an estimated 10,000 ducks on the water between the Sandpoint Bridge and Priest River. Most were too distant to identify, but American Wigeon appeared to be most common, followed by Redhead, Lesser Scaup, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck and Mallard. A surprising 25 Double-crested

Cormorant were seen from the 3rd Street dock.

We began at City Beach and 3rd Street Dock, then proceeded west on the north side of Pend Oreille River and back on the south side to Hwy 95 via Dufort Road. This trip had multiple purposes. We visited a couple of sites along the river that no one had been to previously, notably Riley Creek campground at LaClede and the wildlife observation site at Priest River. In addition, we stopped at Seneacquoteen and Morton Slough on the south side of the river. These sites will be included in the Idaho Birding Trail. The Century Bird Count this Memorial Day weekend will be in Bonner County so each of these sites will be visited that day.

Participants included Roland Craft, Janet Callen, Kris Buchler, Lisa Hardy, Dick Cripe and his son-in-law from Portland, Yorck Franken.

WINTER BIRDING CRUISES

Fantasy Cruises will be offering "Winter Birding Cruises" beginning February 2005. The 130' M/V "Island Spirit" will cruise north from Seattle through Skagit Flats, Deception Pass, San Juan Island, Anacortes and LaConner. We can accommodate 32 passengers in 16 staterooms, each with private head & shower. All meals are included, prepared by our on-board chef. We carry an 8-person pontoon skiff and kayaks for closer viewing opportunities. For more information, please call or e-mail. Our web site is: www.sanjuanislandcruises.com.

Thank you,
Brenda Plantz (360) 981-5116
charliesdaughter@hotmail.com

OBSERVATON POST

2004 Kootenai County Big Year - Total to date, 201 for the year 2004
Our goal of 200 was reached!

White-winged Scoter: 3 Mica Bay, Coeur d'Alene Lake, Nov. 24, Mica Bay Survey - Shirley Sturts, Roland Craft

OTHER SIGHTINGS

Rough-legged Hawk: 12 Rathdrum Prairie, Dec. 5, CDA Audubon Field Trip

American Kestrel: 3 Rathdrum Prairie, Dec. 5, CDA Audubon Field Trip

Trumpeter Swan: 7 Sawmill Pond on Dredge Road near Cataldo, Nov. 15, Lisa Hardy

Snow Goose: Sawmill Pond on Dredge Road near Cataldo, Nov. 15, Lisa Hardy

Gadwall: 151 Chain of Lakes, Nov. 25, Lisa Hardy

Barrow's Goldeneye: 2 Wolf Lodge Bay, Coeur d'Alene Lake, Dec. 16, Steve Johnson

Canvasback: 64 Chain of Lakes, Nov. 25, Lisa Hardy

Merlin: 1 Armstrong Hill, CDA, Nov. 21, Kris Buchler

Killdeer: 3 Cataldo Area Dec. 5, Lisa Hardy

Bonaparte's Gull: 7 Harrison (CDA River Delta), Nov. 25, Lisa Hardy

Mew Gull: 1 Wolf Lodge Bay, CDA Lake, Nov. 22, Lisa Hardy

Northern Pygmy Owl: 1 Armstrong Hill, CDA, Nov. 21, Kris Buchler

Clark's Nutcracker: 14, St. Maries, Nov. 13, Linda Stackow; 7 Harrison, Nov. 25, Lisa Hardy; 4 Tubbs Hill Dec. 12, Bill Gundlach

Northern Shrike: 1 Mica Bay, Coeur d'Alene Lake, Nov. 24, Mica Bay Survey, Kris Buchler, Shirley Sturts, Roland Craft

Brown Creeper: 2 Enaville, Dec. 11, Bill Gundlach

Bewick's Wren: 1 Enaville, Dec. 11 Bill Gundlach

Harris's Sparrow 1 Lockhaven Hills, Hayden Lake, 1st found on Nov. 20. Doug Ward) seen again Nov. 21, Gina Sheridan, Matthew Moskwik