# THE FISH HAWK HERALD

Coeur d'Alene Chapter of the National Audubon **Society** www.cdaaudubon.org

#### November 2016

Volume 27 Number 3

# November Program

Date: November 8<sup>th,</sup> Tuesday Place: Lutheran Church of the Master 4800 N. Ramsey, CDA Time: 7:00 p.m. Speakers: Jim and Sheelagh Lynn Program: "Everything You Wanted to Know About Building a Bluebird Trail but Were Afraid to Ask" Jim and Sheelagh will be telling the story of the creation of their trail in the Athol area two years ago.

#### President's Message

May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears" -- Nelson Mandela

There is an election coming up that may direct the future of birds, animals and peoples of the United States into more threatened conditions. I am fearful for all of us. But I appreciate this quote from Nelson Mandela, to look "hopefully" and not "fearfully". And that's all I am going to say about that.

On a totally unrelated subject, November 12th is the start of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch. I have never participated before, but I registered (\$15.00 for Lab members/\$18.00 for non), and just received my packet of information. Project FeederWatch is a survey that individuals do at their own feeders, from November 12th to April 7th. Counts can be done as often as every week, or very infrequently, as one chooses.

Each surveyor delineates what time of day he counted, how long, the temperature, precipitation and depth of ice or snow, as well as the number of birds and species visiting the feeder area. The retrieved data is sent to the Lab, enabling scientists to track movements of winter bird populations, and note the long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. The details in the reports sent in show where the birds ARE as well as where they ARE NOT. This is extremely important for detecting, and discovering possible explanations for, gradual changes in the winter ranges of many species; information is provided about population biology that has not been detected by any other research method.

Taking this data, the scientists at the Cornell Lab have the necessary information to present to pertinent federal and state agencies, making evidence-based recommendations to further monitor, or take actions protecting, declining species. They can also discover the kinds of food and environmental factors that are most attractive to different species as well as how disease is spread among birds that visit feeders.

It is not too late to join the Watchers. Register at feederwatch.org. It is always fun watching and counting birds. With Project FeederWatch I can stay warm, in my own house, with my cup of tea as I do it.

Here's to Bird Counting, Midge

## Membership News

Membership dues continue to trickle in this fall. As of October 26<sup>th-</sup> we have received 67 of our 119 active membership dues for the 2016 fiscal year. Thanks so much to those of you who have contributed! If you have questions about your membership status please contact Peggy at 664-1616..

## Adopt-A Highway

#### Mike Zagar

Thanks to the 13 volunteers who assisted in the Highway 95 clean-up effort on October 1st. We collected 23 bags of refuse that are now safely tucked into a landfill and not obstructing your view of Highway 95!

## Did You Know .....

A team of researchers from McGill University in Montreal discovered that juvenile zebra finches who had learned their song from a real-life, realbird mentor sang better as adults than those who had learned from recordings of adult song. Jon Sakata, who led the work, said, "Songbirds first listen to and memorize the sound of adult songs and then undergo a period of vocal practice - in essence, babbling - to master the production of song."

Further investigation showed that "Adult zebra finches slow down their song by increasing the interval between phrases and repeat individual elements more often when singing to juveniles," said Sakata. They found that the young birds paid more attention to this baby-talk compared to adult songs, and the more they paid attention, the better they learned. *BBC Wildlife, August 2016*  Helping With the Poo-poo Project

Ryan Rock (U.S. Forest Service Employee).



Pictured is John Lee, a volunteer recruited from an email sent out to the CDA Audubon emailing list.

John and I went out together. We covered 13 of the vent tubes on outhouses to prevent cavity nesting owls and other cavity nesting species from getting trapped. Most of the vents we covered were in campgrounds or at trailheads along the north fork of the Coeur d'Alene River.

John was great to work with and his help allowed us to wrap up this project for the season.

# Bye Bye, Bird Count

Thanksgiving tradition ending with longtime organizer John Hewston stepping down

#### By Kimberly Wear

From the "North Coast Journal", Humboldt County, CA, October 27, 2016



#### Photo by Mark Larson

John Hewston inspects a hummingbird feeder in his side yard as the tiny birds were busy feeding on a rainy afternoon.

Retired Humboldt State University professor John Hewston heard the birding call early in life. Raised in rural corners of Washington state, a young Hewston was more likely to be looking for birds under bushes than tending a fishing line like his fellow elementary school students. He did the same walking home from school, writing down descriptions of what he saw. By junior high, Hewston had started his first birding newsletter — something the now 93-year-old still does today. "In those days that wasn't anything anyone did but little old ladies in tennis shoes," he says.

Back then, Hewston says, he was known as the "kooky Hewston kid" for his birding pursuits but his friends, classmates, teachers and family also embraced his passion for all things avian. When he convinced the kids in his neighborhood to vote for a community bird while he was in high school, the winner was his personal favorite: the Western Meadowlark. It turned out to be a slightly rigged election. "I found out later they kind of questioned each other, 'What does Johnny like?' and that was my influence. I didn't mean it to be," he says, smiling at the memory as he sat in the living room of his Arcata home amid bookshelves lined with bird books.

Decades later — after a career in natural resource management took him from a public relations role with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the classroom dais at HSU — birding continues to play a central role in his life, having taken him to the far corners of the world in search of the next sighting. He's also spent the last 25 years coordinating the Thanksgiving Bird Count for 12 western states, including Alaska, and compiling the results of observations from hundreds of participants. Last year, he received some 345 responses with 131 species reported, which he compiled into a report sent out to contributing birders.

Now, Hewston says, it's time for him to hang up his bird count binoculars — metaphorically at least — and with nobody stepping in to take over, this is slated to be the last round of the 50-year holiday tradition. "It's just time to do it," he says. "Of course, I'm 93 years old."

The count was started by professor Ernest Edward of Sweet Briar College in Virginia in 1966 — the same year Hewston arrived at HSU. He took over the tallying mantel in 1992. One advantage of the Thanksgiving Bird Count is its simplicity: Participants choose a 15-foot diameter-circle — often a portion of their yard that's visible from a window — and spend one hour counting the birds they see. "It's one count that you can do no matter what the weather is like, and it just takes an hour," Hewston says.

Hewston watches his circle — a terraced portion of his backyard that's dotted with bird feeders of all shapes and sizes — from his kitchen window. Continued on page 4

# Bye Bye, Bird Count Continued from page 3

Over the years, he estimates he's seen at least 120 species on the wooded lot where his house sits perched on a hill. Counts like this one have provided scientists with valuable data on bird populations over the years, according to Cindy Moyer, chair of the HSU Music Department and a member of the Redwood Region Audubon Society. "They are a good way of collecting data over a long period, so you can see changes over a long period of the time, the granddaddy of them all being the Audubon Christmas Bird Count," she says.

Part of a growing "citizen science" effort, the Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count has been collecting sightings for more than a century. One of the largest repositories of such crowd-sourced information can be found on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website, which notes it receives "tens of thousands of bird observations" every day via its citizen science projects. Those include eBird — which allows birders to track their own lists and share observations — and the Great Backyard Bird Count, both partnerships with the National Audubon Society. "They trace bird migration and document long-term changes in bird numbers continent wide," the lab states on its website. "The results have been used to create management guidelines for birds, investigate the effects of acid rain and climate change, and advocate for the protection of declining species."

While time may have slowed Hewston's gait a bit, he still counts birds from his kitchen window every day, a routine that can be traced back to his childhood adventures crawling through the brush. "I didn't take up drinking or smoking or anything like that," Hewston says. "I took up looking for birds." He has lists of birds from his backyard, birds he's seen in the county and birds he observed at different buildings on the THE FISH HAWK HERALD HSU campus. More recently, he set up a trail camera in his backyard and was pleased to find it captured a shot of "Fred," the neighborhood bear.

Following his "retirement" from the Humboldt State faculty after 21 years, Hewston continued teaching his Bird Awareness class through the university's extension program and for a time with Elderhostel. Another Elderhostel teacher and fellow birder Gary Bloomfield says Hewston had an intrinsic way of connecting with his students and sharing his passion for the natural world.

Hewston was able to transfer what Bloomfield termed his "ornithusim" during the classes which he taught for four decades. "He was welcoming, encouraging at the beginning level as well as keeping the interest of more experienced birders," says Bloomfield, adding that he incorporated Hewston's teaching style into his own classes.

Bloomfield's wife, Jane Epperson, grew up with Jyl Hewston, one of his three daughters. She recalls how Hewston would take them out birding at the Arcata Marsh back when the now restored area was referred to as "Mt. Trashmore." Epperson says she remembers sort of rolling her eyes at the offer, but went along with the trip. That's when Hewston showed her something that changed her mind: a Great Blue Heron viewed through a scope. "I had never seen anything so beautiful so close up," she says. "It just amazed me and so it's no wonder I ended up marrying a birder."

While the Thanksgiving Bird Count may be drawing to a close, Hewston notes there are still plenty of ways for the growing world of bird lovers to be part of similar efforts.

"It's a cool thing to do now," he says, "which it didn't used to be."

# Cat Wars: The Devastating Consequences of a Cuddly Killer. Peter P. Marra and Chris Santella. Princeton University Press.

Note: An important topic - something cat lovers (of which I'm one but currently have only 2 dogs) need to learn more about and consider keeping their cats indoors) - Shirley

#### Reviewed by Julie Zickefoose

It's not often that the word "important" floats up as a descriptor for a new book, but *Cat Wars* amply qualifies; in its treatment of a subject nobody wants to embrace, this fast-paced, gritty and occasionally terrifying book could sit comfortably on the shelf beside Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring.* Ornithologist Peter Marra, director of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, plunks study after scientific study on the table, while popular writer Chris Santella, author of the *Fifty Places* series, pulls back for the long view, then zooms in with anecdote, constantly changing both scene and topic. The resulting narrative pulls the reader in like a cat to a laser pointer.

The wake-up call to conservationists and cat owners alike began in 1989 with Stanley Temple and John Coleman's University of Wisconsin study, which attempted to quantify the number of birds killed by free-ranging rural cats in that state. Through direct observation of radiocollared cats, fecal analysis, and analysis of stomach contents of live-trapped (unharmed) cats, they established what their subjects were eating: primarily small mammals and birds. Using extremely conservative modeling, Temple and Coleman determined that at least 7.8 million birds die annually at the claws of cats in the state of Wisconsin alone. Subsequent studies by others refined the counts of cats as well as birds, taking aim at a nationwide figure. Even with the charitable guess that only one in ten free-roaming cats takes a bird per day, THE FISH HAWK HERALD

ornithologist Rich Stallcup arrived at the estimate of 4.4 million birds per day, or over one billion birds taken annually by **owned** cats in the United States. In his analysis, Stallcup didn't even address the problem of feral cats, which is likely much larger.

"Along the California coast it is common to see 10 to 15 during a day's outing (and these are nocturnal animals.) Certainly, there are many million, country wide. What do they eat? Wildlife. Nothing but wildlife."

Scott Loss and colleagues used two independent pet owner surveys to come up with a mean figure of 84 million owned cats in the U.S. as of 2013. Using eight independent studies, Loss was able to estimate that more than half of these are allowed outdoors, and about two-thirds of those animals hunt. An additional 60-100 million unowned cats likely roam the nation, and every one of them hunts to survive. Median estimates of the yearly national toll on wildlife run to 2.4 billion birds per year, 12.3 billion mammals, around 200 million amphibians and more than 600 million reptiles. This study points at cats as responsible for more bird deaths than all other anthropogenic (wind turbines, window collisions, car collisions, pesticides) factors combined. These figures, sickening as they are, are conservative. They do not, as cat enthusiasts claim. represent a subjective, emotional vendetta against cats. Nor would any scientist deny that habitat loss is a major factor in rapidly declining songbird populations. Direct mortality from cats is real, and it is preventable. This book sounds an alarm too long silent.

Cat Wars could serve as a textbook for its clear explanations of subjects such as the processes of extinction, island biogeography, and population modeling, as cat impacts on wildlife are discussed. But the book hits its stride in illuminating the rarely discussed and truly

# Cat Wars Continued from page 5

terrifying role of domestic cats as vectors for zoonotic disease in humans. What more perfect vehicle could zoonotic diseases employ than an animal that kills and eats sickly wildlife, then defecates around and **inside** human homes? Black plague, carried by rodent fleas, but now thought to spread through aerosol transmission, killed one third of Europe's population, starting in China the 1300's. It's still present in eight western states, infecting small rodents, the cats who eat them, and (rarely) the people who own those cats.

Far more common, and now taking hold in managed feral cat colonies in Maryland and elsewhere, is rabies. The baffling double standard where dogs and cats are concerned is here thrown into sharp relief. Dogs are registered, licensed, confined with fencing and leash; vaccinated yearly, and annual U.S. cases of rabies in dogs had dropped to 59 in 2014--a 34% decrease from 2013. Cats, on the other hand. roam freely; are not licensed and are often unvaccinated; and 272 rabid cats were reported nationwide in 2014, a 10 % increase from the 247 reported in 2013 (CDC data). While people managing colonies with TNR (trap-neuterrelease) vaccinate the cats against rabies on first capturing them, cats are clever. Once caught, a cat will very rarely enter a trap again, meaning they do not receive rabies boosters. About 13,000 post-exposure rabies treatments are given annually in the U.S. due to cat exposures, which is approximately 1/3 of all rabies exposures (Gerhold and Jessup, 2012).

Black plague and rabies are rare. There is a catspecific parasite which is extremely common; which finds its way into soil and drinking water; which works in silent, seemingly calculated concert with rodents, cats, and humans alike, and has been recently found to have public health implications undreamt of. *Toxoplasma gondii* reproduces wildly in the digestive tracts

of felines and is shed in oocysts in their feces; most people recall warnings that pregnant women should not clean cat boxes, as the parasite can cause birth defects in people. Rodents pick the oocysts up through contact with contaminated soil and water. And from here, it gets stranger and stranger. Controlled experiments with Toxoplasma-infected rats have shown that the parasite alters the limbic regions of their brains such that the rodents lose their fear of cats, and the smell of cat urine, which repels them when they're healthy, becomes irresistible. Seeking out cat urine, of course, helps ensure that the parasite-laden rodents end up in the guts of cats, where *T. gondii* reproduces and is shed in feces to start the cycle again. Most disturbing are findings that people are similarly affected by toxoplasmosis. It is the most common parasitic infection in humans, affecting up to 22 percent of the U.S. population. Outdoor cats defecating in children's sandboxes and the loose garden soil and mulch around homes present a concentrated risk of human and cat infection. Even more insidiously, the hardy cysts of Toxoplasma can persist for years, finding their way into streams, rivers and marine environments, as well as drinking water. Toxoplasmosis kills endangered monk seals in Hawaijan waters: sea otters and seals elsewhere.

Recent studies have shown that humans bearing Toxoplasma antibodies show some of the same behavioral changes as rodents, including decreased anxiety and an attraction to the smell of cat urine. If you actually like that smell, having more and more cats around you is a good thing. Along with these changes come a stringer of others, including tendencies toward severe depression, bipolar disorder, obsessivecompulsive disorder, and even schizophrenia. Toxoplasma-positive individuals were 2.7 times are more likely to develop that they schizophrenia than uninfected people. Wait. 22% of the U.S. population is Toxoplasma-positive??

#### Continued from page 6

In the face if scientific evidence that cats take a shocking toll on wildlife: that they are frighteningly efficient vectors of zoonotic diseases, some of them real doozies, it is puzzling that society has turned a blind eye to the impact of their largely unregulated, unchallenged, omnipresence in our ecosystems. Cats kept indoors for life are vastly less likely to come into contact with diseased animals, and transmit disease to their owners. They don't kill birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and are safe from cars, dogs, fights with other cats, and persecution by people who take exception to their presence. Indoors, they are graceful, loving, amusing pets. Left free to roam they are, collectively, a disaster for already-struggling songbird and small vertebrate populations.

A strong and vocal segment of the population lobbies for the "rights" of feral cats, such that municipalities nationwide have been convinced to sanction the maintenance of cat colonies in their midst. Over and over, TNR (trap-neuter-release) has been shown not to reduce cat numbers, but rather to provide obvious dumping places for unwanted pets, which go on taking prey as cats naturally do, subsidized with food and shelter or because it is presented not. Yet, to municipalities as a solution, however imperfect, for addressing the feral cat problem, TNR is endorsed, as a less politically repugnant option than advocating the removal of the animals once and for all. Cat Wars gives cat lovers and procat lobbyists a chance to be heard, profiling several devoted colony caretakers who work tirelessly to feed, water and care for street cats, and give them the best lives possible under the circumstances. It is clear that, along with the belief that free-roaming cats have a place in communities, goes denial at their real impact. The most vocal cat advocates hold the "right" of this domestic species to live free and kill wildlife

above any concern for affected wildlife, and stridently question the validity of the studies cited.

Calling any work--no matter how exhaustive, careful or conservative--that counters their conviction "junk science" is a defensive pose that looks all too familiar to scientists and citizens speaking out, for example, about climate change.

Ironically, it is a microbe-Toxoplasma gondiiwhich has been predicted to "dethrone" malaria as the protozooan most dangerous to humans that may hold the key to changing hearts and minds. In the end, the multiple public health threats that roaming cats present look to be the only force that could propel any real initiative to reduce free-ranging cat populations. Cat Wars gathers together an ironclad case for action over emotion; for a turnabout in public policy that in many municipalities literally supports the perpetuation of an introduced domestic predator of dwindling native wildlife; for an overhaul of the lassiez-faire attitude of more than half of America's cat owners. If we would have cats in our midst, we must learn to keep them inside, for they create nothing but havoc-and countless more cats--when they slip out the door.

If you'd like to do something about all this, please send donations to American Bird Conservancy, whose Cats Indoors educational campaign is the most effective I've seen. You can donate here. You can purchase Cat Wars Amazon. And pay no mind to the stack of one-star "reviews" from cat enthusiasts who haven't read the book. They flooded in before it was even released. Read the five-star reviews now rolling in, then get your hands on this book! It's a beautifully constructed and paced pageturner...I literally couldn't put it down. Thank you. Julie on NPR (from her blog) Birds and Beans



George Sayler

The Coeur d'Alene Audubon Society will again be selling Birds and Beans shade-grown, organic, fair-trade certified coffee this fall. This year, unlike previous years, we will only be sending in one order. Orders will be taken at the September through November meetings and online until the day after the November meeting. We do this as a fundraiser for our club and to protect bird habitat in Central America. It makes excellent Christmas presents, so plan now to get your coffee for your own pleasure or as gifts for other coffee lovers.

Prices are \$11.00 a bag (12 oz.) for regular and \$12 for decaf. Two pound bags are \$25.50 for regular and \$27.50 for decaf. The coffee is available in regular, fine and course grinds as well as whole bean. Please plan to pick up your coffee at the December meeting or make arrangements to pick it up from George Sayler.

If you would like to order online, please email George Sayler at <u>gsaylercda@aol.com</u>. Please specify what variety or varieties you would like, ground or whole bean, what grind, and what size bag. Payment can be made upon receipt of the coffee, but if you are unable to pick it up at our December meeting, you will need to make arrangements to pick it up from George.

# Online orders will be taken until November 16th.

# Olympic Birdfest April 7-9, 2017



Enjoy guided birding trips, boat tours, live auction & raffle, gala banquet, and more. Our featured speaker: noted nature photographer Bonnie Block. Join our festival pre-trip: a three-day, two-night birding/sightseeing cruise of the San Juan Islands, April 4-6, 2017. Register separately at www.pugetsoundexpress.com/audubon.

Extend your festival with our Neah Bay post-trip on April 9-11, 2017: two days exploring northwest coastal Washington. BirdFest registration at <u>www.olympicbirdfest.org</u>.

# Field Trips 2016-2017

**Please Register:** Watch the website or newsletter for updates to our field trip schedule. Additional field trips will be added if we have volunteers to lead them



Please contact our field trip coordinators Janet Callen 664-1085 or George Sayler 667-2787 to suggest or volunteer to lead a trip. Participants should contact the trip leader at least 24 hours in advance of the field trip

to find out if the meeting place/time or destination has been changed. Participants will share in a mileage reimbursement for the driver

#### Mica Bay Survey

**Date:** November 8th, Tuesday (held 2nd Tuesday of each month - times vary depending on month)

Time: 9:00 a.m.

**Meet:** Fairmont Loop and Highway 95 **Leader:** Janet Callen 664-1085

**Activity:** We spend about 3 hours once a month counting birds at Mica Bay. Beginner birders are welcome to come and learn bird identification skills.

# Mineral Ridge Hike, Fernan Lake, Wolf Lodge, Beauty Bay and Blue Creek Bay

Date: November 12, Saturday

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Meet: Fernan Ranger Station

Leader: Janet Callen 664-1085

This will be a three-quarter day trip. Bring a lunch, or snacks and water. Dress for the weather. We'll hike Mineral Ridge and search for waterfowl. Target birds will be loons.

#### Rathdrum Prairie Hawk Survey

Will take place once a month from November through March. Doug Ward is the leader. This two-hour fast-paced, one-vehicle journey across the prairie is a learning experience that is a lot of fun. We travel in one car for safety. To reserve a spot call Doug 762-7107 or 699-9327

#### <u>Christmas Counts</u>

Coeur d'Alene CBC

**Date:** December 15, Thursday

**Meet:** 6:30 a.m. for breakfast at Michael D's Eatery, 203 E, Coeur d'Alene Lake Drive

7:30 a.m. for those not having breakfast.

**Organizer/Compiler:** Shirley Sturts - 664-5318 <u>shirley.sturts@gmail.com</u>

We go in 6 or 7 teams and cover different areas of the count circle. You can sign up at the Nov. or Dec. meetings or call/email Shirley. You can also sign up to count at your feeder in the comfort of your own home and spend as much time at it as you want.

There will be a potluck dinner after the count to celebrate and compile the team lists. Theresa Potts has graciously offered to host the potluck at her home again this year. Thank you Theresa.

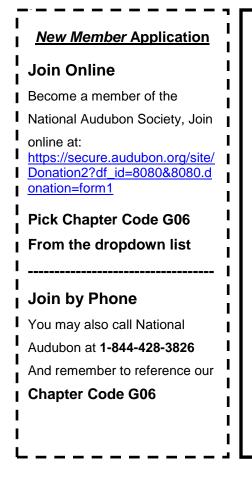
#### Spirit Lake CBC

This will not be held this year unless someone wants to take over organizing and compiling .

#### Indian Mountain CBC

Date: January 4, Wednesday (tentative) Organizer/Compilers: Don Heikkila and Lisa Hardy 208-783 1262 – <u>basalt@frontier.com</u>

There are two teams that do this from CDA if you want to join us: Kris Buchler and Shirley Sturts do the Heyburn State Park area and Lisa Hardy and Janet Callen do the east side of CDA Lake to Harrison.



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