



# oice of the Meadowlark

Newsletter of the  
Meadowlark Audubon Society  
of the Big Horn Basin and Northwest Wyoming

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## President's Letter

Greetings! I hope everyone is having a terrific fall. I'm looking forward to the next season and a few things have come to mind. It would be fantastic to follow up on last year and award a scholarship to an outstanding student in 2011. Please donate if you can. It is a great way we can be relevant to the younger generation and help guide young naturalists on a path outside. Many think young people are tied to their video games and Internet. This may be true, but my experience leads me to believe that they also are analytical, pragmatic and responsible. Can a responsible person not care? I believe that love for nature is exhibited by people who feel that stewardship is a responsibility.

I also wanted to say thanks for the support in everything we have done this fall and all the participation from members. As you will read in this newsletter, we completed a great project this fall. This was one hard-working group of people, and the diverse talents made for an efficient workday. Building buck-and-rail fence is not easy, but we brought this project from inception to finish in record time, considering the difficulties involved in grant writing and in

securing landowner permission, project design, materials and labor. In fact, we beat the professionals at the BLM who will be building four more of these. (Granted, they have a bit more process to follow!)



*Members of the crew that built a buck-and-rail fence on Sheep Mountain in October pose for a photograph. Left to right: Mike Stokesbury, Rosemarie Hughes, Destin Harrell, John Ross, John Osgood, John Rumm, Sean Sheehan. Not shown: Dana Ross, Gordon Ross, Lyn Stallings, Alex Rumm.*

With our team, if you have any ideas or opportunities for projects to improve habitats, you have at your disposal a membership with the experience and capabilities to accomplish great things. Please contact me or any other board member if you have any ideas. Projects that are practical and possible are the best.

With snow flying and our Indian summer over, please make sure to look out for our wintering

birds and wildlife, and tell a friend to slow down when passing eagles feeding on carcasses next to the road or while speeding by the covey of chukar gathering stones in their gizzards.

Best regards for the holidays!

—Destin Harrell

## Meadowlark Erects Fence to Enclose Springhead on Sheep Mountain



*Located at the head of Spring Creek on Sheep Mountain, this springhead provides a riparian habitat for nesting Sage Thrashers and a resting-place for migrating songbirds. (Photo by John Rumm)*

**T**here's no time like fall to protect a spring!

Thanks to the efforts of a dedicated group of workers, Meadowlark Audubon demonstrated the truth of this when it successfully completed one of its largest conservation projects in recent years. On October 2 and October 9, we erected some 700 feet of buck-and-rail fence to enclose a springhead and riparian flat at the head of Spring Creek, on property owned by the Bales family on Sheep Mountain, some 15 miles southwest of Cody. The enclosure will keep grazing cattle from disturbing the springhead,

which is a known nesting site for Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*), a Species of Concern in Wyoming; the site formerly was used by Greater Sage-Grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), and serves as a stopover for migrating songbirds in the spring and fall.



*Construction crew installs section of buck-and-rail fence. Left to right: John Osgood, Destin Harrell (foreground), Dana Ross, Sean Sheehan, John Ross. (Photo by John Rumm)*

The project was supported in part by a grant from the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust Fund, with additional funding from Meadowlark Audubon. We're grateful to the Bales for letting us access their property to erect the enclosure fence!

We thank everyone who participated in the project: Meadowlark directors Destin Harrell, Rosemarie Hughes, Lisa Marks, John Rumm and Sean Sheehan, and volunteers John Osgood, John Ross, Dana Ross, Gordon Ross, Mike Stokesbury, Lyn Stallings and Alex Rumm. We hauled bucks and rails uphill and downhill, cleared brush, and took turns using power tools to assemble the fence and install a gate. It was hard work, but we all had a great time. We're especially grateful to John Ross, who tirelessly made runs back and forth between Midwest

Fence Company and the worksite to pick up and deliver materials, and to KaCey Ross for providing us with such delectable desserts!



*The completed buck-and-rail fence encloses nearly three acres. (Photo by John Rumm)*

Next time you're taking Old Stagecoach Trail over Sheep Mountain, watch for the enclosure, roughly halfway between the north and south sides of the mountain. We can all take pride in a job well done, one that makes a significant impact upon our local natural resources.

— John Rumm

## **Meadowlark Scholarship Fund Replenishment**

As you may have read in the August newsletter, in May Meadowlark Audubon awarded its first Deb Woodbridge Memorial Scholarship, named in honor of the individual who, before she passed away from cancer in 2008, championed the effort to award a scholarship to a deserving high school graduate from the four-county region we serve (Park, Big Horn, Hot Springs, Washakie). At their Board meeting in September, Meadowlark directors voted unanimously to put \$500 towards replenishing the scholarship fund, with a goal of raising an additional \$500 by year's end. Soon afterwards, we were contacted

by Dorothy Fuller, whose husband Ernest, the father of Cody mayor Nancy Tia Brown, had recently passed away. Dorothy told us that her late husband loved feeding and watching birds in their yard, and, as a tribute to him, she wanted to invite those who wished to do so to make a memorial contribution to Meadowlark Audubon. Through this wonderful gesture, we received, as of mid-November, contributions amounting to \$190, all of which we applied to the scholarship fund. Its balance is now \$790.

In this holiday season, we invite you to consider making a donation to the Meadowlark Scholarship Fund. Your contribution will be 100% tax-deductible, and every dollar we receive will be applied to the fund; should the balance exceed \$1,000, we will use any excess funds to seed the fund for 2012. Please think about donating generously to a worthy cause that will help ensure that a deserving young person has the opportunity to pursue a college degree that will advance Audubon's mission.

## **2010 Fall Bird Monitoring**

Fall bird monitoring started this year on September 20th and continued through mid-November. Each Monday morning, at one hour after sunrise, a group of six to eight people met near the west end of Beck Lake to begin counting and identifying birds. We then continued on to Alkali Lake, and Buchanan, New Cody, and Markham reservoirs. For the most part this season, the weather was beautiful and it was a pleasure to be outside. Usually after counting birds, we had lunch together for an enjoyable ending to an enjoyable morning.

In our nine sessions of monitoring, we saw a daily high of 1339 birds and a daily low of 54 birds. We observed 36 species of birds: Pied-billed Grebe; Eared Grebe; Western Grebe; Horned Grebe; American White Pelican; Great Blue Heron; Double-crested Cormorant; Canada Goose; Gadwall; American Wigeon; Mallard; Blue-winged Teal; Cinnamon Teal; Green-winged Teal; Northern Shoveler; Northern Pintail; Redhead; Lesser Scaup; Bufflehead; Common Merganser; Ruddy Duck; Bald Eagle; Osprey; Red-tailed Hawk; Harrier Hawk; American Coot; Semipalmated Sandpiper; Killdeer; American Avocet; Ring-billed Gull; California Gull; Caspian Tern; Belted Kingfisher; Common Crow; Common Raven; Red-winged Blackbird; Northern Flicker; Black-billed Magpie; Horned Lark; Marsh Wren; Brewer's Blackbird; and American Robin. We also saw some sandpipers and swallows that we could not identify positively. Of the species we monitored, Canada Goose was the most numerous.

Meadowlark monitor birds in and around Beck Lake each fall and spring. We always welcome anyone interested in joining us to come and learn about bird identification, take a guess what that "brownish bird" on the other side of the lake is, or just enjoy some good fellowship in the company of others interested in birding.

— Donna Haman

## **Cody CBC Set for December 26**

The Cody Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Sunday, December 26. If we should

have to reschedule due to weather conditions, the backup date will be the following Sunday.

Past count participants will be contacted soon to set up routes. If you did not take part in the count last year and are interested in joining us for this year's count, please contact Joyce Cicco, 527-5030, or Susan Ahalt, 527-7027. Each participant will receive an informational letter, a map of the route, and route partner names and phone numbers, prior to the count. Route partners should contact one another to arrange a meeting place. The organizers will secure any necessary trespass permissions from private landowners prior to the count.

If observers spot a rare bird during the count, they will need to fill out a CBC Rare Bird Documentation Form noting location, distance, viewing conditions, bird's plumage, shape, behavior, etc. Observers should, if possible, make a sketch of the bird at the time it is seen, noting their observations. If a camera is available, a photo of the bird can be very helpful, even if not of the best quality.

Following the count, participants will meet at 6:00 p.m. at Christ Episcopal Church, 825 Simpson Avenue, for the group tally of the day's observations. Chuck Neal has agreed to conduct the tally again this year, for which we are very appreciative, as Chuck is very knowledgeable about the birds in our area. After the tally, all participants, including spouses and children, are invited to join the group for a potluck supper. Hot soup, donated by Sunset House Restaurant, beverages, dishes and utensils will be provided.

Participants should bring a side dish of their choosing to share with others.

We thank all those who take part in the count, the private landowners who give permission for us to cross their lands during the count, the Church for allowing us to use their great facility, and Sunset House for donating soup. Please mark your calendar and join other area birders for an enjoyable day and evening!

— Joyce Cicco

## **Kane CBC Set for December 18**

The Kane Count is on for Dec. 18 at the Bighorn Canyon NRA visitor center. We will start at 6:30 a.m. (drinks and muffins provided) to assign teams and distribute packets. The count runs sunrise to sunset with a potluck supper and compilation afterward. Suzanne Morstad, our leader, will provide the chili and drinks but the rest of us need to bring something to share as well as your own utensils, binoculars, lunches, and water. The count is already on the website and The Park Service will be our host again.

The Kane Count Circle is in great habitat, but it seems lately that we do not have enough birders to do it justice. If you know another person who might like to participate in this year's CBC, please forward this message on to them.

Please put this date on your calendar, and I'd appreciate it if you would let me know if you can make it. Many thanks!

— Jennifer Miller, [njmiller@tctwest.net](mailto:njmiller@tctwest.net)

## **Editor's Notebook: Slow Birding: Shifting Your Approach from “*What Is It?*” to “*What Is It?*”**

It's been getting blustery of late, with trees swaying, leaves swirling and temperatures dropping. Days like these, when autumn seems ready to give way to winter, are tailor-made for settling down in a comfortable chair, putting your feet up, and watching the birds outside your window. Lately I've been doing just that, and I find myself paying special attention to House Sparrows. They've been flocking to our yard in large groups and foraging on the ground, picking up grass and hay seeds, bits of dirt or gravel, or whatever else suits their fancy. And, on several occasions, I've noticed some engaging in peculiar behavior. These sparrows—males, all of them—light on the top rail of the fence surrounding our horse corral, sit for a moment, and then suddenly “corkscrew” themselves into the air, rising about four feet and then spiraling back down to the rail. It's like nothing I've ever noticed them do before. I'm eager to learn more about their behavior. Is it some sort of display? Are they marking their territory? Are they alerting other sparrows to the presence of something tasty? What *is* it they're doing? I don't know—but I'm curious enough that I want to spend more time observing them.

Exploring the forests and fields of Trail Wood, their farm in Hampton, Connecticut, the naturalist-writer Edwin Way Teale and his wife Nellie delighted in finding species they'd never encountered before. “Whenever we discover a new [one],” Teale wrote,

our first question is: ‘*What* is it?’ But always there is a second question, or rather the same question with a different emphasis: ‘*What is it?*’ And that is a more difficult question to answer. It encompasses the abilities, the habits, the life story of the individual. That answer usually entails patient and prolonged study in the field” (*A Naturalist Buys an Old Farm* [1974], pp. 18-19).

As Teale noted, that second question requires a shift in emphasis, from “*what*” to “*is.*” But more than that, it also entails a shift in approach—from *identification* to *observation*, from *recognition* to *understanding*. Adopting this different approach can transform how we experience the world around us.

Here is how a day-long birding outing typically happens: You get up before the crack of dawn, wolf down a quick breakfast, grab your binoculars or spotting scope, a field guide or two, perhaps a notebook and/or a camera, lunch or some snacks, a thermos of coffee or some water, and rush out the door. Reaching your destination, you start looking and listening, hoping to find birds you’ve never seen before so that you can check them off your life-list. If everything works out well and you have a really great day, adding lots of species to your list, it’s liable to be one of those experiences you’ll treasure. On the other hand, if all you wind up seeing are the same old birds you’ve seen countless times before, your experience may seem tedious, even boring—one of those dreaded “slow” birding days.

No one, it seems, wants “slow” birding days, the days when you see only the commonplace or the familiar. If birding is a game, a spectator sport,

the worst that can happen is to invest in the effort to see new birds, yet come up empty.

In *The Feather Quest*, his account of the year he and his wife Linda spent birding across North America, Pete Dunne describes how, as birders hone their skills through experience, they find it “unnecessary to puzzle over common, everyday birds,” preferring instead to tackle increasingly difficult identification challenges. “There is a price, of course,” he writes, explaining that

As skills grow, the sense of wonder that supports beginning birders diminishes. What replaces it is discovery. Wonder is something a child can hold in its hand, a feather or a bird fallen from the nest. Discovery is a prize garnered by ambition and skill. It is not as great as wonder. But it is very close, and it is also very addictive. Once a birder has a taste for it, there is only one thing that can satisfy the craving, and that is *more* (p. 41).

Slow birding days fail to satisfy that itch, that craving, which drives hardcore birders farther afield in search of new birds for their lists.

Yet with all due respect to Mr. Dunne, whose writings I otherwise admire, I’d argue that we birders can’t, and shouldn’t, be so cavalier about losing that childlike sense of wonder. Keeping it alive requires that shift in emphasis of which Teale wrote—from “*what* is it” to “*what is it.*” Whereas birding involves *disaggregating* birds—quickly differentiating or identifying species through their distinctive, diagnostic field-marks—this alternate approach is *holistic*, based on observing the whole bird in relation to its environment over an extended period of time. And, instead of seeking new birds to check off on your life-list, this approach is aimed at seeking

to better understand those “common, everyday birds” you encounter all the time—like House Sparrows, for instance.

Think of it, in short, as *slow birding*.

A philosophical approach, *slow birding* is to observing birds what the “*slow food movement*” is to eating. As defined by the movement’s founder, the Italian gastronomist Carlo Petrini, “slow food means giving the act of nourishing oneself the importance it deserves, learning to take pleasure in the diversity of recipes and flavors, recognizing the variety of places where food is produced and the people who produce it, and respecting the rhythm of the seasons and of human gatherings” (Petrini, *Slow Food: The Case for Taste* [2004], p. xvii). Similarly, *slow birding* means deriving pleasure from the act—and art—of watching birds, delighting in the diversity of their forms, colors, sounds and behaviors, recognizing the variety of habitats they occupy, and respecting how they interact with the changing rhythms of the seasons, and with other birds.

Like slow food, slow birding focuses on the local—the birds in your backyard, neighborhood, or nearby wild area. You can even engage in it, as I have been doing, from inside your own home. It is leisurely and unhurried, with time in the act of observing birds being *passed* rather than spent. Simply put, as unobtrusively as possible, and with a minimal investment of effort, the “slow birder” observes the life of a familiar species of bird—its comings and goings, its behavior patterns, its

foraging and feeding, its changes in plumage, its courtship and mating, its nest-building and egg-laying, its parenting, its marking of territory, its defense against predators. And, in observing, the “slow birder” not only sees and listens, but also asks questions—looking at the birds around him or her with the wide eyes, and wondering curiosity, of a child. *Where is it right now? What is it doing? How and why is it doing that? How long has it been doing it? What was it doing before it started doing what it is doing now? Is it alone? What is it doing in relation to other birds, either of its own kind or other species? What is the weather like now, and how might it be affecting what the bird is doing?*

“I think the value of the game of identification,” Rachel Carson eloquently wrote in *The Sense of Wonder*,

depends on how you play it. If it becomes an end in itself, I count it of little use. It is possible to compile extensive lists of creatures seen and identified without ever once having caught a breath-taking glimpse of the wonder of life. If a child asked me a question that suggested even a faint awareness of the mystery behind the arrival of a migrant sandpiper on the beach of an August morning, I would be far more pleased than by the mere fact that he knew it was a sandpiper and not a plover (p. 83).

Deliberate, purposeful and patient, slow birding is a way to recapture that sense of wonder.

Peter Dunne may well be right that once a birder has acquired the taste for field identification, only “more” will satisfy it. More than a taste, however, slow birding offers the observer something to be savored and fully appreciated—a feast for the mind.

So, on one of those bracing fall or winter days, find yourself a comfortable chair, kick back, look out your window, and spend some quality time slow birding. But watch out—you may find yourself getting hooked on it!

— John Rumm

## Book Review: Douglas W. Faulkner, *Birds of Wyoming* (2010)



Meadowlark members and others interested in Wyoming's birdlife should make room on their bookshelf for Douglas W. Faulkner's *Birds of Wyoming* (Roberts and Company, 2010). Faulkner, an environmental biologist in Colorado, spent six years as a conservation biologist with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory before joining the faculty of the University of Wyoming. Four years in the making, *Birds of Wyoming* was funded by generous support from Robert Berry and the University of Wyoming. His 432-page volume fills a major gap in the state's ornithological literature, offering the first comprehensive account of the status and distribution of Wyoming birds in nearly 75 years.

Faulkner provides illustrated, page-length treatments of 224 resident species, non-illustrated accounts of 179 non-resident species,

and a digest of 28 species that are accidental or for which reports cannot be verified. For both resident and non-resident species, Faulkner includes information on status (i.e., frequency of occurrence), seasonality, taxonomy, distribution, and conservation status. Color-coded range maps, showing Wyoming's 23 counties, are provided for resident species.

The photographs in the "Resident Species" sections are superb—among the best I have encountered in any publication—and definitely warrant careful study before or after going into the field. Indeed, their quality is so high that Faulkner's decision not to include photographs of non-resident species, while understandable from a cost-saving standpoint, makes their non-illustrated accounts suffer by comparison.

*Birds of Wyoming* relies heavily upon data compiled by the Wyoming Bird Records Committee and, to a lesser extent, on Christmas Bird Counts (including those conducted in Meadowlark Audubon's four-county region) for information on bird status and distribution. As Faulkner admits, however, much of the data on Wyoming's avifauna incomplete:

*More work is needed in Wyoming to refine our knowledge of habitat use and distribution; of particular need is a breeding bird atlas. Studies conducted in Wyoming provide the best source of information, but little work has been done for most species in the state (29).*

*Birds of Wyoming* also seeks to redress a historical imbalance in record-keeping:

*Historically, birder vigilance was strongly skewed to the eastern plains, particularly around Casper, Cheyenne, and Sheridan. So too were the authors of many of the state's bird status and distribution*

*books, some of which, including this author, published books while at the University of Wyoming (277).*

For birders in northwest Wyoming—the area which seems to have suffered the most from this historical imbalance—perusal of Faulkner’s species accounts and range maps will prove both informative and frustrating. They inadequately reflect, for example, the occurrence of species such as Black-necked Stilt, Caspian Tern, American White Pelican and Snow Bunting—all of which have been observed in this area, occasionally in large numbers. Less than a criticism of Faulkner’s book, this serves to underscore his hope that “readers of this book will begin to contribute [sighting reports and documentation], if they are not already doing so, on a regular basis” (31). As has been so often stated in this newsletter, Meadowlark members render an invaluable service by participating in ongoing monitoring projects, taking part in the annual CBC and other tabulations, or simply keeping careful records of birds they observe in their own yards and neighborhoods.

As a bonus, *Birds of Wyoming* also offers several excellent essays by other authorities. Especially noteworthy are Jane Dorn’s richly detailed “History of Wyoming Ornithology,” Robert Dorn’s survey of “Landforms and Vegetation,” and Terry Rich’s succinct, though insightful, essay on sagebrush ecosystems.

Published in 1902, Wilbur Knight’s *The Birds of Wyoming* stood the test of time for much of the 20th century. Handsomely designed and richly informative, Douglas Faulkner’s *Birds of*

*Wyoming* will surely serve Wyoming birders for decades to come.

— John Rumm

## Mid-Winter Eagle Survey

Plans are underway once again for the BLM’s 2011 Bighorn Basin Eagle Survey. Anyone interested in participating must reserve a route ahead of time. If you would like to do a route in the north part of the Bighorn Basin (north of the Greybull River), please contact Destin Harrell at the BLM Office in Cody at (307) 578-5933 or at home (307) 899-0147. If you are interested in a route in the southern part of the Bighorn Basin, please contact Ted Igleheart, BLM Biologist in the BLM’s Worland Field Office, at (307) 347-5172. You can also contact either one by e-mail: [destin\\_harrell@blm.gov](mailto:destin_harrell@blm.gov), or [ted\\_igleheart@blm.gov](mailto:ted_igleheart@blm.gov).

Please let us know if you will be covering the same route and we will arrange to get your route information to you. After you have reserved a route, we will mail you the survey packet so you have it before the survey. Also, based on past conditions, please be prepared for any weather conditions! In previous years, temperatures have registered anywhere from balmy to subzero.

Please pass along this information to anyone interested, or have them contact us at the BLM. We thank everyone for their past efforts and hope to see everyone ready and eager to locate the eagles in January!

— Destin Harrell

## Meadowlark Strategic Planning Forum Set for January Meeting

It's time again to update Meadowlark Audubon's three-year strategic plan, and we welcome your input! National Audubon Society is asking each chapter to identify its top two local and state issues of concern. What do you consider them to be? Also, from the following list of "action issues" NAS has identified, which of these should Meadowlark engage with? Global Warming; Wind Power/Energy; Oil/Gas Energy Development; Bird Conservation/Funding; Invasive Species; Endangered Species; International Family Planning; Land Protection; Clean Water Act/Wetlands; Ecosystem Restoration; Other. Please come prepared to discuss these issues during our General Meeting on January 13, 2011. If you cannot make the meeting but would still like to provide input, you may e-mail feedback to our Webmaster, Joyce Cicco, [jcicco@tritel.net](mailto:jcicco@tritel.net), or send a letter to the mailing address below. Many thanks for your time and interest!

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### Calendar of Upcoming Events

*Unless otherwise noted, all events take place in the basement community room of Big Horn Federal Savings, 1701 Stampede Avenue, in Cody. Please make sure to check our website (<http://www.meadowlarkwyo.org>) for program details, announcements and updates!*

**December 9, 2010: Board Meeting, 6-6:45; no General meeting (prepare for Christmas Bird Count!)**

**December 18, 2010: Kane Christmas Bird Count (see inside for details)**

**December 26, 2010: Cody Christmas Bird Count (see inside for details)**

**January 13, 2011: Board Meeting, 6-6:45; General meeting, 7-8: Meadowlark Strategic Planning Forum (see above)**

**February 10, 2011: Board Meeting, 6-6:45; General meeting, 7-8: Robert Koelling, Ph.D. (English Department, Northwest College, and bird photographer), "Bird Photographs from the Bighorn Basin"**

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