

MONTANA Audubon



eNewsletter — November 2011



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Don't forget this
year's Christmas

Happy Thanksgiving & News from Montana Audubon

Giving Thanks

Here at Montana Audubon we are thankful for our Chapter members, volunteers, activists, donors, festival and tour participants, citizen scientists, colleagues.... YOU! We are thankful for wide-open spaces, birds whose beauty gives us pause, and our native wildlife--from wolverines to dragonflies and everything in between!

Wishing you and yours a fine holiday.

News from our Important Bird Areas

Kevin Rim IBA. Montana Audubon has a new web page dedicated to this IBA, a prairie bluff habitat that provides nesting sites for lots of raptors—and may soon feature wind turbines perched on top of the cliff face: to learn more, click [HERE](#).

Madison River IBA. In our Fall [Magpie Muse](#) newsletter, we featured an article about stream conservation measures being considered for the Madison River and its tributaries. Unfortunately, in late October the Madison County Commission decided not to vote on these regulations—and instead encourage people to voluntarily construct new buildings away from these streams. Historically, voluntary measures have been shown NOT to work in Madison County. Darn.



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Climate and Energy -- Thanks and News

Bird Count. Find details for [CBCs around Montana](#)

Deadline Extend for Bird Sightings!

It's not too late to submit your bird observations for the 7th edition of P.D. Skaar's *Montana Bird Distribution*.

The book will be released in 2012, and the **deadline for submissions is being extended to December 31, 2011.**

For more information on how to submit records, click [here](#)

Support Montana Audubon:



Interested in local **Audubon Chapter** activities this

A few things we are thankful for:

- The Keystone XL Pipeline delay. Here's the view from [Audubon's President](#).
- Forty-one years of the Clean Air Act. Current attacks are unprecedented. Here's our [opinion about these safeguards](#).
- Interest from our friends about everything from rooftop solar panels to "green" Thanksgivings to municipal Climate Action Plans to [Transition Towns](#).
- The film Carbon Nation to be shown in [Billings and Helena](#).
- Great UM students with a flair for sharing their [experiences](#).

There's always ways to [add your voice](#). Thanks!

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Turkey Vulture ~ November Bird-of-the-Month

Description: *"Common. Usually seen high overhead, cruising for carrion. Roosts in trees or on structures. Nests on the ground in crevices or hollow logs. Solitary or in small groups. Note large size, dark color and distinctive flight with wings raised in dihedral and tilting side to side."*

– From the Sibley Guide to Birds

Many times when birding on the open prairie, I've spotted a large, dark form soaring against the sky. Having finally learned not to be too quick to judge with birds, I give my eyes a moment to pick out diagnostic features of the animal. While it has large, obvious primaries and dark overall coloration similar to a golden eagle, I notice a much steeper "V" angle in its wing position and a tipping/rocking behavior that is more characteristic of another bird. I resist a feeling of disappointment as I identify this one as a Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*). If I'm out with others, there is a near universal sigh at this proclamation; "oh, it's just a vulture" is often the response.

In our society, the Turkey Vulture and other scavengers are generally considered to be filthy harbingers of death that completely lack nobility. Indeed, the word vulture itself derives from the Latin, "tearer", in reference to the bird's scavenging ways. But when we look at this creature more closely, we find some amazing adaptations in an animal that is widely misunderstood and maligned by our kind.

The Turkey Vulture (or "TV") is a large bird with a 67-inch wingspan. The overall coloring is dark and the bald, bright-red head of adults is where the turkey comparison arises. These birds summer in Montana and migrate in large

summer? [Visit each Chapter's website.](#)

numbers southward in the fall, in a similar manner as raptors. TV's do not possess a syrinx (vocal organ) that other birds do. Therefore, they are largely silent, occasionally making soft clucking or hissing sounds. These animals are strongly adapted for scavenging. They have a sense of smell, very rare for any bird, that can detect a few parts per *trillion* of certain odors that emit from decomposing carcasses. This, coupled with excellent eyesight and a tendency to soar for hours, makes Turkey Vultures a patient and effective forager. ...

At this time of Thanksgiving...

The rest of this essay is [HERE](#)

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Audubon Center Happenings

Wildlife habitats created by Billings 4th grade students

At the Audubon Conservation education Center, students have been busy. Here's a great example:

Those able to walk the Center trails may notice brush piles throughout the grounds. These piles were created by the 475 students within Billings and surrounding school districts who participate in our ANTS (Audubon Naturalists in the Schools) Program. Part of this program provides the students with the opportunity to learn about wildlife habitats and restore lost habitats at the Center. During fall field trips students created habitats for everything from foxes to mice by using fallen limbs, dead grasses and other found natural materials. These students will return in the winter and spring to check on their habitats and record evidence of use.



More about Center fall and winter programs: www.mtacec.org.

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Bridger Migration Surveys

In partnership with HawkWatch International, Gallatin National Forest, and Bridger Bowl Ski Area, Montana Audubon recently completed the 21st consecutive season of daily raptor migration counts in the Bridger Mountains. We conducted this count for 56 days (Sept 1 - Nov 4), and for those of you who know Steve Hoffman, our ED, he was thrilled to make this happen and watch the eagles soar!

This year the project counted the highest numbers of migrant raptors since 1999! We counted 2,862 raptors, including 1,431 Golden Eagles (exactly 50% of the total raptors). Golden Eagle numbers are not as high as they were from 1996-1999, but are substantially higher than the last 10 years.

We established a new season high for Peregrine Falcons (24), tied the record for Ospreys (14), and recorded the third highest totals for accipiters (838 - the combined total for Sharp-shinned Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, and Goshawks).



The official observers, Brian Connelly and John Martineau (above), did an exceptional job “scanning the skies” this season. The project enjoyed especially favorable weather for conducting the count, with warm temperatures and little snow cover throughout most of the season.

We'll have a complete report posted on our [website](#) early in 2012.

Happy Thanksgiving

The Montana Audubon Staff



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Montana Audubon
P.O. Box 595
Helena, Montana 59624
US

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