

Five decades of Wolf Recovery in Montana and the West

By Dr. Diane K. Boyd



From Diane K. Boyd's collection

Dr. Diane K. Boyd holds a Ph.D. in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana. She has studied wolves in Montana and far beyond, like in Romania and Italy. She is the author of numerous scientific papers on wolves. She now divides her time between her home in Kalispell and her cabin in the North Fork.



Photo by Mimi Falivene

Dr. Boyd will discuss wolf recovery in Montana and the western US, through natural recolonization and reintroductions. She will discuss the ecology of Gray Wolves and the challenges of humans and wolves coexisting on a human-dominated landscape.

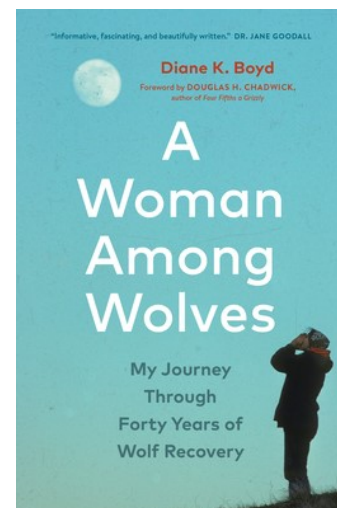
Please join BBA for our virtual program via Zoom on March 17, 2025 at 7PM. You will need to register in advance for this meeting with the following link before 5:30 p.m. on March 17, 2025:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/rT1rf7hQSSOgDehz9w5oIA> After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.



Photo by Becky Petrashek

Diane's book "Woman Among Wolves" is available at [Chapter One](#). [Paperback may also be pre-ordered; available 8/24/25].



Letter from the President

By Micki Long, BAS President

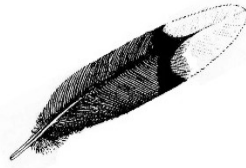
Phew—that was some tough February weather! As someone who loves snow, I really enjoyed XC skiing up my road. I did get tired of trying to get out of my driveway, but the very close-to-home skiing made it worthwhile. However, the cold felt like an assault at times! But Spring begins on March 20th, and I've seen a few male Red-winged Blackbirds. While American Robins get all the credit for announcing that Spring is imminent, some Robins overwinter, and we always see them on the Christmas Bird Count. So, for me, seeing Red-winged Blackbirds means Spring is near (but that doesn't always mean Spring weather, though on the day I'm writing this, the temps should rise above 50).

I will remember last month as the February of the Hawks. My yard was visited nearly every day by a Sharp-shinned Hawk, sometimes a juvenile and sometimes an adult. They watch and wait until a California Quail lets its guard down. I was lucky (unlucky?) to be looking out the window when an adult sharpie succeeded in capturing a quail. I sometimes find such a scene distressing, but I also appreciate witnessing bird behavior I rarely see; I think this is only the fourth time I've seen a hawk mantling over its catch. According to The Center for Conservation Biology, mantling occurs “when a raptor spreads its wings and haunches over its prey after capturing and while eating it and is likely a way to prevent other raptors or animals from seeing and stealing their prey.” Given the frequency of other hawks visiting the yard, this hawk was wise to keep the quail covered!



Photo by Micki Long

Sharp-shinned Hawk mantling over its prey, a California Quail.



In an earlier newsletter, I wrote about the juvenile American Goshawks who were spending quite a bit of time in the trees at my place. During February, an adult arrived and has visited fairly often. What a thrill to see this majestic, powerful raptor! American Goshawks are large, about the size of a Rough-legged Hawk. And, like other raptors, Goshawks display sexual dimorphism—female of this species are 25% heavier than males. While it's hard to tell when the bird is up in a tree, the one visiting my yard seems very large, so I'm guessing it's female. I hope she continues to visit!

Happy Spring and Spring Equinox!



Photo by Micki Long

Adult American Goshawk.

Upcoming Field Trips:

Mission Valley Raptors, March 22, 2025

(All day)

Join BBA's Alex Kearney for a trip to Mission Valley at the south end of Flathead Lake. While the focus will be raptors of the area, we will discover other early spring arrivals. Alex led the same trip one month ago and saw 39 species! We will meet at two locations to organize carpools (Stevensville and Ignatius) and will return to the Bitterroot Valley by the late afternoon. Bring clothing for short walks from the cars, snacks, lunch, and water. We'll make several bathroom stops. This trip has a limited number of participants, so please pre-register soon by contacting Alex Kearny at 406-360-2345.

Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge

March 25, 2025 (10AM-1PM)

Have a look at Five Valleys Audubon [events calendar](#) to see the field trips and classes they are offering. Most of their offerings will be closer to Missoula but Larry Weekes takes beginning birders on a walk through Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge near Stevensville on the third Saturday of each month.

Teller Wildlife Refuge's Great Blue Heron Rookery Viewing, May 8th, 2025 (5:30-8PM)

Join BBA's Alex Kearney and Teller Wildlife Refuge's Nicole Ballard to view one of the Bitterroot Valley's great blue heron rookeries. The parents should be busy at this time getting the next generation of herons off to a good start. Scopes and field glasses are suggested, but will also be provided for viewing. Please contact Alex Kearny (406-360-2345) to pre-register and get directions to the meeting place.

Big Creek Ranch, May 24, 2025 (8-11AM)

Walk just over two miles of mostly flat ponderosa forest and field habitat through a private ranch near Stevensville. We could see 30 to 40 species, which, if we are very lucky, might include a great gray owl. We'll meet at the ranch and the walk should take between 2.5 to 3 hours. Meet trip leader Jill Davies at Big Creek Ranch, about 500 yards off of Hwy 75 on Mittower West Road north of Victor.

Elena Ulev of [Blue Heron Nature Tours](#) teaches classes and leads outings that may be of interest to Bitterroot Bird Alliance members. Check out her website to see what she is offering.

Bitterroot Bird Alliance's Raptor Guardian/Montana Peregrine Institute Call for Volunteers

By Marrea Matthews

According to estimates, the number of Peregrine Falcons, PEFAs, has dropped 50% statewide. The cause may be Avian Flu. Our Raptor Guardian/Peregrine Watch program, affiliated with the Montana Peregrine Institute, is more important than ever, as our monitoring will help determine if the number of falcons who nest in Bitterroot canyons has declined.

We need more volunteers! We will hold a training session on Zoom on March 25th at 3PM. Dave Lockman, retired Bitterroot National Forest Biologist and experienced Peregrine watcher, will conduct the session. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact the program's coordinator, Marrea Matthews, at mmatthews5@aol.com, and register for the training session via the link below by 2PM. on March 25th.

If you haven't volunteered before, it may be helpful to go out with another team. Binoculars and a spotting scope are helpful. We have a list of canyons with designated areas where peregrines have nested in previous years. The time frame, procedure, precautions, etc. will be covered during the Zoom orientation meeting.

We plan to record the session, so contact Micki Long at mickilong@gmail.com if you want to volunteer but cannot attend the session at the scheduled time.

Link to register in advance for this meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/KGiALKiqSrQZIutbBOxMKA>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.



Photo by Micki Long

Peregrine Falcon.


Save the date and get reading!

Don't forget we have this event coming up in about a month, so please get reading! We're looking forward to interacting with people during this virtual happy hour. You can order the book from [Chapter One](#); hardback versions are available now, and paperback versions can be pre-ordered and will be available March 18th. There are also multiple copies available in the Montana Library system. You will need to pre-register. Click [here](#) to register, or use the QR code in the flyer.

Author Event!
Zoom Discussion with

Rebecca Heisman


Flight Paths tells the incredible scientific story of how we know what we know about bird migration, tackling the methods scientists use to track this amazing natural phenomenon – from the origins of bird banding to the latest in high-throughput genetic sequencing and space-based tracking systems – chapter by chapter.




How a Passionate and Quirky Group of Pioneering Scientists Solved the Mystery of Bird Migration



20% of sales to benefit the Bitterroot Bird Alliance. Paperback (out 3/18/25) available now for pre-order at Chapter One



APRIL 2ND
5:00 PM
by ZOOM



RSVP HERE

Welcome Back Waterfowl Day

By Kate Stone

Mark your calendars: WELCOME BACK WATERFOWL DAY will take place Saturday April 19th from 10 am to 1:00 pm. at the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge north of Stevensville. Bitterroot Bird Alliance members with high quality optical equipment will be available to assist in identifying, learning about and observing waterfowl and other birds that use the refuge wetlands. The scopes will be stationed along Wildfowl Lane on the county road between the ponds west of the Visitor Center. This special event is open to the public.



Photo by Kate Stone

Scopes out! BBA members help the public identify waterfowl at Lee Metcalf NWR.

Remarkable Birds: The Carmine Bee-eater (*Merops nubicoides*)

By Skip Horner

Many years ago I lived in a small house in Livingstone, Zambia, near the edge of Victoria Falls, where I managed the first season of whitewater rafting on the Zambezi River. We ran multiple one-day trips through the first ten rapids, deep in the basalt canyon, and several seven-day trips from the foot of the Falls to the head of Lake Kariba, 50 rapids and 100 miles downstream. Just across the river was the new African country of Zimbabwe, recently created from the remains of white-ruled Rhodesia following their civil war.

One of our seven-day trips was notable for two racist Rhodesian guys who came along, men who hadn't gotten over losing the war, and their country. Their stories made us all queasy for the racist rants they tried unsuccessfully to camouflage with politically correct rhetoric. This was particularly hard to take with our support crew of local Africans along, some of whom had also fought the war, and won, but were still looked down upon by the opposition. These stout young men remained stoic, however, as Africans largely do in the face of daily adversity. Lower down where the river widens, we encountered a colony of Carmine Bee-Eaters. These rapturous 14" birds flashed their brilliant crimson throats and backs, their turquoise crowns, rumps and lower bellies, and their long carmine tail streamers as they wheeled powerfully about snatching insects from the air. They uttered a sweet hollow call, "*scheeo, scheeo, scheeo*,



schrrip-schrrip”, that seemed to emanate from nowhere and from everywhere, more echo than song. Not an uncommon bird, it migrates throughout East and Southern Africa, ranging from South Africa all the way north to Ethiopia and west across the Sahel to Senegal. It frequently hawks insects from a perch, sometimes even from the backs of larger animals, including the Ground Hornbill. It’s attracted to range fires for the insects they flush. Highly gregarious, this particular flock numbered close to a hundred. We pulled into an eddy to drink in the dramatic midday

spectacle. They had bored dozens of tunnels in a twenty-foot-high sandbank next to the river, a colony site they would use for several years before moving on. Each hole would be up to eight feet deep and house a nesting pair raising a brood.

Two local village men clad only in loincloths sat back in the shade of an acacia. They had placed twig snares in front of every Bee-eater hole. They would catch them, and eat them.

The Rhodesians were livid. They jumped out of the boats and made a show of destroying every snare, snapping them into bits and throwing the remains into the river, all the while angrily berating the local guys in Shona, their own language. The locals were stunned, speechless. But they simply walked away, hungry.

The Carmine Bee-eaters would live a bit longer and perhaps their broods would fledge successfully, but the locals were likely to return at some point with new traps. Such is life, and death, in the bush. So too is it difficult to judge people by a single parameter. The racist Rhodesians cared deeply about wildlife. The hungry locals, reliant on wild meat, cared only about their next meal.

Attention all citizen scientists: Screech-Owl Surveys are back!

By Lauren Smith, MT Audubon

With Spring fast approaching and warmer days on the horizon, now is a great time to break out of hibernation to do some citizen science! March 1 marks the start of our second-annual citizen science survey targeting Western and Eastern Screech-Owls, and we are looking for dedicated volunteers anywhere in Montana to collect some much needed data on these Potential Species of Concern.

This survey consists of 10 nighttime callback stations a mile apart along a driving route to listen for any owl responses. These surveys can be completed anytime between March 1 and April 30, which lines up with the owls’ breeding season and heightened vocal activity.

Interested in participating? Fill out the interest form [here](#), or email Gwynne at gwynne@mtaudubon.org to get started. Also be sure to check out our citizen science website at www.montanabirdsurveys.weebly.com for more information on this survey and others like it!



Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival— May 30-June 1, 2025

Presented by the University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab

By Lauren Smith, MT Audubon

Join us this summer in Missoula for Montana Audubon’s annual birding festival, hosted this year with Five Valleys Audubon Society. We are pleased to announce that this year’s keynote speaker will be

Calendar of Events

- Monthly:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, 3rd Saturday of each month, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.
- Mar 17:** BBA Meeting/Program; *Five decades of Wolf Recovery in Montana and the West*, By Dr. Diane K. Boyd, 7PM.
- Mar 22:** Mission Valley Raptors field trip, (All day); see newsletter inset for details.
- Mar 25:** Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge field trip, 10AM-1PM; see newsletter inset for details.
- Mar 25:** Peregrine Watch Orientation via Zoom, 3PM; see newsletter article for details.
- Apr 2:** Author Event/Zoom discussion “Flight Path” with Rebecca Heisman, 5PM; see newsletter article for details.
- Apr 21:** BBA Meeting/Program; details TBA, 7PM.
- May 8:** TWR’s Great Blue Heron Rookery Viewing field trip, 5:30-8PM; see newsletter inset for details.
- May 19:** BBA Meeting/Program; details TBA, 7PM.
- May 24:** Big Creek Ranch field trip, 8-11AM; see newsletter inset for details.
- May30-Jun1:** Save the Date: *Wings Across the Big Sky* Festival; Missoula, MT. Further details TBA.



Dr. Erick Greene, Professor Emeritus in the Division of Biological Sciences and in the Wildlife Biology Program at The University of Montana. In his presentation, “Ospreys As Environmental Sentinels,” he will share an overview of the species, along with details from long-term studies on heavy metals in in Ospreys and what this research can tell us about the environmental clean-up of the Upper Clark Fork River, the largest EPA Superfund site in the U.S. Learn more on the Festival website:

<https://mtaudubon.org/events/wings/>

Registration will open in March- keep an eye out for more information coming soon!

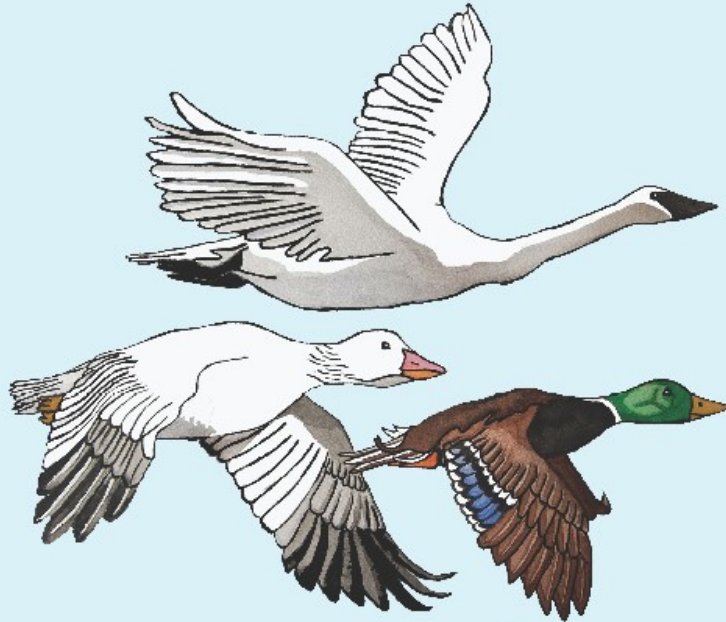


Photo by Micki Long

February moonset over the Bitterroot Mountains.

WILD WINGS

Light Goose Migration Festival



March 21-23, 2025  Choteau, MT

A FREE event with birding tours,
guest speakers, food & drink!

- Located at the Choteau Pavilion (204 1st St. NE)
Doors open at 4pm Friday

- Visit our website for schedule & info:



wildwingschoteau.org

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March 21-23, 2025

Events, which are free and open to the public, are located at the Choteau Pavilion, 204 1st Street NE.

Friday, March 21

4:00-6:30PM: Meet and Greet. Food trucks providing dinner and beverages for purchase, plus Blue Pine Wine with beverages. Educational booths from Montana and nationally-based wildlife conservation organizations.

7:00PM: Film *Flyways*. Follow a conservation movement of bird-loving experts and citizen scientists as they mobilize to better understand shorebird conservation needs. Shown at the historic Roxy Theatre (25 Main Av. N.)

Saturday, March 22

6:30-10:30AM: FREE! Guided tours of Freezout Lake WMA and vicinity targeting light geese activity in the area. Meet at Choteau Pavilion parking lot for van carpool and caravan options.

10:30AM-5:00PM: Educational booths with Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation, Boone and Crockett Club, Ducks Unlimited, Helena-Lewis & Clark National Forest, Montana Audubon, Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society, Montana Dinosaur Center, Montana Discovery Foundation, Montana Wetlands and Waterfowl, Montana WILD, National Wildlife Federation, Sporting Lead-Free, Sun River Watershed Group, and Teton Conservation District.

1:00-2:00PM: "A bridge between flyways: North Central Montana's Role in Maintaining Waterfowl Migration Across North America." **Cory Overton**, Wildlife Biologist with USGS Western Ecological Research Center.

2:00-3:00PM: "Montana WILD Wildlife Center: From Rescue to Release." Join **Ali Pons**, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Program Manager for the Wildlife Center, to learn about their efforts rehabilitating state wildlife.

3:00PM Raffle of Vortex Binoculars and more! (Must be present to win.)

Check out other community events!

2:00-5:00PM: Choteau Arts Studio, Spring Migration Show, with live music and refreshments. FREE.

5:30PM: Doors open for the Old Trails Museum Wild Game Potluck, a museum fundraiser. Admission free will donation. Potluck with game/non-game dishes, silent auction, live auction, and 50/50 drawing. Stage Stop Inn, Rocky Mountain Convention Center.

Sunday, March 23

6:30-10:00AM: FREE! Guided tours of Freezout Lake WMA and vicinity targeting Light Geese activity in the area. Meet at Choteau Pavilion parking lot for van carpool and caravan options.

11:00-1:00PM: Join **Pete Young** with Optics4Birding, an online optics business with the latest birding gear to showcase. Bring your questions about binoculars, spotting scopes, etc.! Location is TBD.



Wild Wings Website and Pre-registration!

General Information about Freezout Lake WMA



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Chapter Only Membership

The Bitterroot Bird Alliance Only Membership is \$15/year. These members will be supporting local chapter activities, receive the full color e-newsletter, and enjoy Chapter benefits. To join as a Chapter Only Member, complete this form.

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____
Email: _____

Send this application with \$15 to:

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