

Stephen played the *Sage Hen Strut* on his satellite radio as the rain drummed on the roof of the truck during our dinner break at the Regulating Reservoir in the Helena Valley. Memories flooded back for me – fond memories – of listening to that lively bluegrass music at 6:00 a.m. on yet another Birdathon morning of yesteryear. Jean Smith of our team, the **Sage Hens** – “*because we’re wise old birds*” – had found the tune, recorded it onto a cassette tape, carefully labeled it – including the name of the band as being the Lu Watter’s Yerba Buena Jazz Band – and gave it to me to play in the Subaru’s tape player.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVvvV4F4myI>

Throughout this year’s Birdathon effort I was constantly reminded of birding incidents with Jean Smith during the 13 years we were part of the same team, when she and Naomi tutored teammate, Lorna, and me on bird identification. We **dedicated our Birdathon** to Jean this year as she passed away just a few hours before we spied our first bird, a male Northern Harrier.

The Team this year included Stephen Turner, Jo Lace, Brian Shovers and me. We began on Sunday afternoon and finished 24 hours later, and had a lot of fun in between.

Sunday afternoon and evening we birded the Helena Valley and Mt Helena. Visiting our favorite haunts: Head Lane, Frontage Road Pond, Lake Helena, the Regulating Reservoir, Keir Lane, K-mart Ponds, and Grizzly Gulch.

Monday morning we drove north to Benton Lakes NWR and were delighted to find many species of birds there. For instance, there was a Swainson’s Hawk sitting in the hedgerow very close to the roadway, allowing us to take a good long look. Then, in a cottonwood tree amongst the buildings we spied five (5!!) Great Horned Owls, including three young owls branching, and their parents fretting.

Our challenge this year seemed to be birding by ear. There were several times when the bird won! We were stumped by the bird sounds we were hearing and couldn’t reliably identify the species making them. So, we could’ve had several more birds added to our list.

The Ferruginous Hawk is not always found on Birdathon, and this year we spied two of those beautiful buteos.

After Freezout NWR, we made a stop at Mel’s in Augusta for ice cream to fortify the troops! While enjoying the refreshments in the parking lot, we found an American Goldfinch. It pays to get ice cream!

This year the funds raised though Birdathon go for education. We at LCAS are creating a Scholarship for a local graduating senior planning to study biology or ornithology, or some field that holds similar goals as the Audubon Society. We are also planning to provide area school libraries with new birding field guides to update their shelf.

**Thank you** for your generous support. I’ve raised just under \$400 thus far, so I need \$1100 more to achieve my goal. I appreciate anything you can do to help – it’s for the future! Send your check, payable to **LCAS**, to me at Janice Miller, 815 11<sup>th</sup> Ave., Helena, MT 59601.