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### [\*\*Why do Bighorn Sheep Lick Your Car? – Aly Courtemanch, Wildlife Biologist, Wyoming Game and Fish Department\*\*](#)

It's that time of year again when bighorn sheep migrate from their summer ranges high in the mountains to the valleys to spend the winter. Miller Butte on the National Elk Refuge is a well-known wintering area for a portion of the Jackson bighorn sheep herd (animals also go to the Red Hills and Gray Hills in the Gros Ventre drainage and the Camp Creek area).



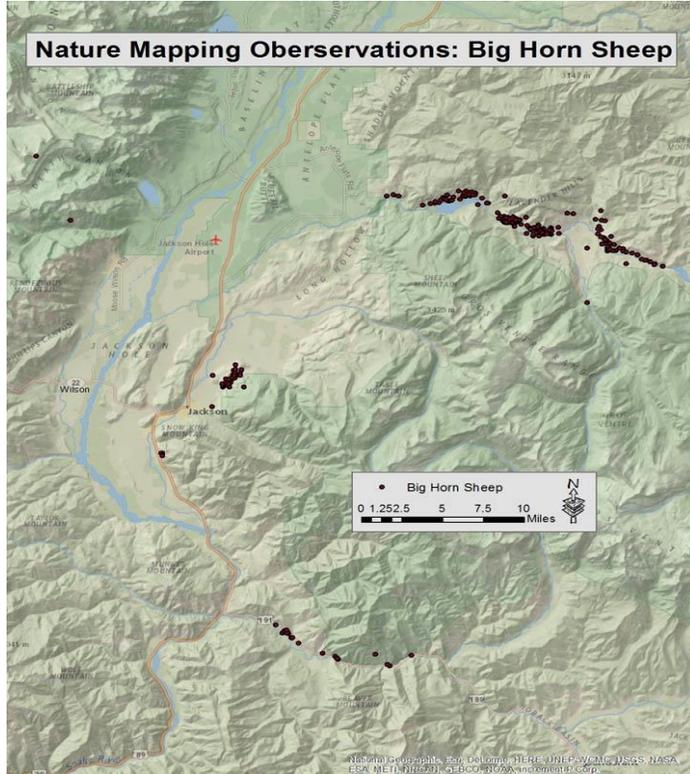
A common sight near Miller Butte in the winter time is bighorn sheep licking or eating dirt on the Elk Refuge Road, as well as licking passing cars. Bighorn sheep, like other ungulates, have a strong desire for salt. They are often seen at natural salt seeps in the mountains, ingesting crumbly rock and dirt. Both rams and ewes will rake their horns against certain areas of rock cliffs to cause the loose rock to crumble, and then they ingest the dirt. This behavior is called geophagy, which means “the practice of eating earth or soil-like substrates”. Most ungulates are attracted to salt, but they gain other important micronutrients from these natural licks, including calcium, phosphorous, and selenium.

Ungulates are drawn to road sides during the winter because we use various mixtures of sand and salt compounds (usually sodium chloride or magnesium chloride) to de-ice roads. Bighorn sheep on Miller Butte have also learned that cars and trucks often have salt encrusted on their bumpers and wheels, which makes for a tasty treat. The types of salt commonly found on vehicles and on the Elk Refuge Road are not toxic to bighorn sheep and don't pose a threat to their health. As soon as animals get their “salt fix”, they will move off the road and forage on their natural winter range.

Miller Butte provides excellent bighorn sheep viewing opportunities throughout the winter, but late November and December are especially exciting because rams can be seen battling each other during the rut. Bighorn sheep are one of Nature Mapping's focal species: visit our website to find out why.

**Map: Bighorn Sheep -- Paul Hood and Aly Courtemanch**

Bighorn sheep observations from the Nature Mapping database. Nature Mappers have captured the winter distribution of the Jackson bighorn sheep herd well: Miller Butte, Camp Creek, and the Gros Ventre drainage. Observing sheep on their high elevation summer ranges in the Gros Ventre Mountains and Teton Range is much more difficult, although Nature Mappers have recorded a few observations (see the Tetons).



**Noted – Bert Raynes**

The 2014 Jackson Hole Wildlife Symposium attracted a restless herd of biologists more used to being in the field chasing wolverines, wrestling grizzlies, collaring cougars, and dealing with raging computers. Pausing at feeding time, they awaited the awarding of the 2014 Craighead Conservation Award.



Two Craighead Awards, rather than one, were granted...one to a non-game biologist strongly involved with birds, Susan Patla of Wyoming Game and Fish Department. The second award went to Susan's sister, Debra. Debra studies amphibians.



Birds and frogs, beating out the charismatic top of the food chain, tooth and claw wild things. Delicious.

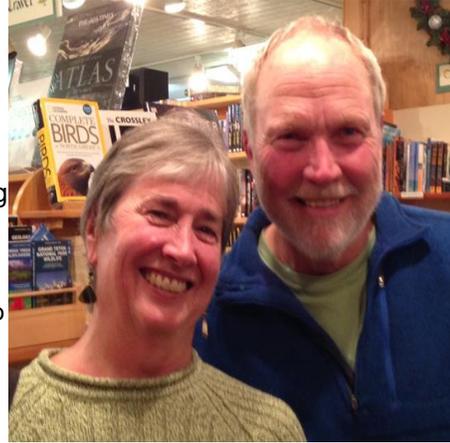
Frankly, two more worthy choices could not have been made by the Craighead Awards. Congratulations all.

Two other people won deserving recognitions: Carol and Chuck Schneebeck. This couple was honored by the newly created Raynes Citizen Conservation Award for all their volunteered work over many years.

Chuck and Carol inspire and lead. Great citizen scientists.

Each awardee was, well cute in their acceptances. Also Charlie and Lance Craighead are always enchanting. Doug Wachob commendable. The co-sponsors of the Symposium, Northern Rockies Conservation Consortium and Teton Science Schools, are to be thanked for recreating wildlife symposia in Jackson Hole. Even the weather was fine.

[Editors note: All four awardees are Nature Mappers. (Photo of Bert Raynes by Mary Lohuis)]



### November 2014 Data -- Paul Hood

**Total Observers:** 23 **Most Observations:** Susan Marsh (42); Louise Haberfeld (30)

Mammals:	97 observations	17 species	1091 individuals
Birds:	143 observations	41 species	1039 individuals
Total:	240 observations	58 species	2130 individuals

**Projects:** Backyard – 155, Casual Observations – 85

**Notes:** In October (data not shown) we had the last views of cold-blooded amphibians and reptiles and hibernating least chipmunk. Elk were obviously on the move, along with pronghorn. For the first time in months, sightings of mule deer (25) outnumbered moose (22) in November. Also in November, the first winter specialties began to show up: rough-legged hawk, cedar and bohemian wax-wings, gray-crowned rosy- finch. American three-toed and black-backed woodpeckers, a northern shrike with vole, and a goshawk topped the list of unusual bird records.

Thank you Nature Mappers!

### Specialties of the Season to Nature Map – Frances Clark

While common species are always important, it is fun to pick out and map the unusual for the season.

Special, small winter birds are most readily seen at bird feeders. Look for appearances of winter sparrows--Harris', tree, and fox--amidst house sparrows; also, common redpolls among American goldfinches, pine siskins, and dark-eyed juncos. Depending on the year, red and possibly white-winged crossbills and gray-crowned rosy-finches may show up. Beaks help in identification.

Note slightly larger birds with heavy bodies and big beaks: pine grosbeaks and evening grosbeaks. Occasionally more elegant Bohemian waxwings join groups of cedar waxwings: look for cinnamon vs. yellowish white under the tail.

Out on the sage flats, sharp-tailed grouse are possible in lone cottonwoods or aspens. Low, flighty groups of snow buntings and horned larks may be searching for dark seeds contrasting on white. Rough-legged hawks may be hunting voles in grasslands with barely 4-5" of snow—shallow enough for talons to reach their unsuspecting prey.

Taza Schaming is still researching Clark's nutcrackers. Sightings both at feeders and in the wild will help her research on this vital Focal

Species: <http://www.naturemappingjh.org/content/doc/Clarks%20Nutcracker%20Info.pdf>.



Susan Marsh and Susan Patla have provided a powerpoint on tips for winter bird id: <http://www.naturemappingjh.org/content/doc/WinterBirdIdentification121914.pdf>, and there are other opportunities (see Calendar below).

As for mammals, when you are out skiing you may be lucky to see a mustelid. In winter, short-tailed weasels (also known as ermine) and long-tailed weasels both change pelage from chestnut to white and have black tips to their tails. Identification is tricky due to size overlaps. Their larger relative pine marten stays dark brown and pops up at feeders and scrambles through dense evergreen tree-fall. Or look for sign of river otter: long slides in snow.

Tracks of snowshoe hare can be locally abundant under conifers. Mice, voles, and red squirrels can also be traced. Be sure to enter "sign" in the "activity" box for species identified by tracks. If you are in doubt of species, take photos and measurements of track and strides. We have a source to help confirm ID. Have fun, stay warm, keep on mapping!

## Volunteer Opportunities

**Monday, January 19, Volunteer Day, National Elk Refuge - Bluebird Project:** Help clean out nest boxes for the next season of mountain bluebirds. Dozens of bluebird boxes were placed along the fence of the Elk Refuge several years ago. The boxes were monitored for presence and productivity of bluebirds according to standards by Cornell Ornithology Lab. The JH Wildlife Foundation is planning to clean and repair the boxes in January and then monitor the boxes starting in spring. We are recruiting volunteers. Let us know if you are interested! [frances@jhwildlife.org](mailto:frances@jhwildlife.org)

**Thursday, January 15, Nature Mapper Training - 5:30 p.m.** Jackson. We are recruiting new Nature Mappers! Please spread the word that we are offering our two-hour training on how to Nature Map. We will cover program objectives, methods for using both smart phones and home computers to enter data, and tips on wildlife natural history. Contact Frances: [781-259-9819](tel:781-259-9819) or [frances@jhwildlife.org](mailto:frances@jhwildlife.org) by Jan. 12. And if this date doesn't work, let us know. We will try another.



Gigi Halloran Moose Day 2014)

**Saturday, February 28, Moose Day, 7:00 a.m. to noon.** Calling all Nature Mappers to help on our 7th Annual Moose Day, in association with Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Pairs of Nature Mappers are assigned specific areas to survey using Nature Mapping protocols. If you don't have a partner, we will team you up. Aly Courtemanch and Ben Wise of WGFD will provide a special training session the week before to hone your moose observation skills. Interested? Contact Frances Clark: [frances@jhwildlife.org](mailto:frances@jhwildlife.org) by Feb. 21. (Photo by

**"Big Game Migrations and 50 Years of Wilderness"** sponsored by the Biodiversity Institute's Wyoming Migration Initiative. Aly Courtemanch recommends this 5-minute video: <http://vimeo.com/112181503>. View at your leisure.

## Calendar of Events

**Early January: National Elk Refuge: Birds, birds, birds** will be the emphasis of several programs throughout the month. We will keep you posted, and you can also check the website right after the holidays [http://www.fws.gov/refuge/national\\_elk\\_refuge/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/national_elk_refuge/). These and other bird programs this month will be great opportunity for Nature Mappers to learn to ID birds “without a doubt”.

**Monday, January 12, "Game of Thorns - Invasive ant threatens African savannas"** -- 6-8 p.m. Auditorium, Teton County Library -- Corinna Riginos (Teton Research Institute of Teton Science Schools) will take us on a trip to the savannas of Kenya, where diminutive ants protect trees against enormous and destructive elephants in one of nature’s most famous mutualistic partnerships. But wait! The ants are struggling to protect themselves against a new invader that is threatening to radically alter some of the most iconic landscapes of Africa. Sponsored by the JH Bird and Nature Club. Free.

**Tuesday, January 13, "Talon Nights: Winter Raptor ID and Ecology"** – 6 p.m. Old Wilson School House Community Center, Wilson -- Presented by Bryan Bedrosian of Craighead Beringia South, and Roger Smith of Teton Raptor Center. This is the first of three programs focused on raptors: hawks, eagles, falcons, and owls--in cooperation with Teton Raptor Center, Craighead Beringia South, JH Bird and Nature Club, Nature Mapping, and the National Elk Refuge. Free.



**Tuesday, Jan. 27, "Native Plant Society Social and Plant Collage"** – 6-8 pm, Auditorium, Teton County Library—Bring 3-5 slides, a piece of artwork, or other plant related items to show off. Also, a tasty treat to share. Open to all. Free. Details: [www.tetonplants.org](http://www.tetonplants.org)

**Saturday, Feb. 28, Moose Day, 7 a.m.-noon** -- see above.

**Nature Mapping Potluck-TBA:** We are in process of setting the date and we are looking for volunteers to help in the planning. If interested, let us know: [frances@jhwildlife.org](mailto:frances@jhwildlife.org)

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Nature Mapping is a program of the Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation and is sponsored by the Meg and Bert Raynes Fund and other generous contributors.

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