



HELP OUR LEGISLATORS HELP THE ENVIRONMENT



SIGN UP FOR 2005 LEGISLATIVE ALERTS!

An important role local Audubon chapters play while the Montana Legislature is in session is to participate in statewide legislative alerts. When crucial issues are at stake, Montana Audubon will contact interested members by phone or email, explain the issue and why we need to take action on it, and then ask members to contact their legislators. In general, the alerts will be made by email. Phone will be used when very quick or location-specific action is needed.

Alerts will be sent out only a few times during the session, but they provide a powerful way to lobby legislators on crucial bills and issues. They also offer you a good way to make sure your voice is heard on important conservation issues. By signing up, you will be one of the first to know what is going on at the legislature. You will also receive periodic progress reports during the session (no more than once a month).

It is important to sign up early in the session. Signup sheets will be available at the next FAS chapter meeting or you can email your signup information to Linda Winnie at lindawin@cyberport.net. Please provide your name, home address, phone number and email address. Even if you were signed up for the 2003 session alerts, you should sign up again for this session so that Montana Audubon lists can be updated.

A handy source of information about legislative activity is <http://laws.state.mt.us/pls/laws05>

**** {If the people lead, eventually the leaders will follow.} ****

JANUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, January 10, 2005: Flathead Audubon General Meeting begins at 7PM at the Summit, conference room #3.

Sunday, January 2, 2005: Kalispell Christmas Bird Count. Meet at Finnegan's at 7:30AM. Contact Dan Casey at 857-3143 or 756-2681 right away, to sign up.

Tuesday, January 4, 2005: Flathead Audubon Board of Directors Meeting, 6PM, 295 Third Ave. E.N., Kalispell

Saturday, January 15, 2005: Birding Blast, with Bob Rost. Meet at Creston School. For details, contact mobob@cyberport.net

Saturday-Sunday, March 26-27, 2005: Freezout Lake trip. View waterfowl migration from the water's edge! Contact Dan Casey at dcasey@abcbirds.org

Wednesday evenings, April 2005: Beauty of Birds classes, Flathead High School. Fun classes for all levels of birders! Contact Ansley Ford at aew333@yahoo.com

Friday-Sunday, June 3-5, 2005: Bigfork Bird Festival, mark your calendar and look for details soon in this newsletter!

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Gray Jay or Clark's Nutcracker?

This month I'm going to discuss the two gray members of the Jay family that reside in our area. For a long time, I had a hard time telling these two apart, maybe because I saw each only occasionally and therefore wasn't that familiar with either.

Recently, however, I've had a good opportunity to study the Gray Jays as they frequent our feeders and water. Even before we moved in, the Gray Jays found the water dish and we soon became familiar with their soft "whee-ah" as they glided from tree to tree, cautiously approaching the new water source in their neighborhood. That summer there were five and we continue to have a small flock visiting on a regular basis. You may have encountered this bird as the "Camp Robber" at your favorite campsite. This large (slightly bigger than a robin) gray songbird frequently approaches people for food and may also pilfer unattended food at campsites. With a white forehead, dark gray or black head patch and a rather short beak, the Gray somewhat resembles an overgrown chickadee. Grays feed on a

wide variety of items including small rodents, invertebrates, the young and eggs of other birds, fruit, berries and human food scraps. With the use of special mucus-secreting glands inside the bill, Grays form berries into balls, and store them for future use by sticking them to tree branches or lichen clumps above the height of the eventual snowline. This food storage behavior is one of the adaptations that allows them to live so far north though the winter.

Clark's Nutcrackers were first observed by William Clark on August 22, 1805, and were subsequently named for him. Because of the prominent beak, Clark thought he had discovered a new kind of woodpecker.

Today, Clark's Nutcrackers inhabit the high mountain, coniferous forests of the West and are closely associated with the regeneration of pine trees in this area. Locally, the Nutcrackers favor the



Drawing by James Coe

seeds of the Whitebark Pine that are very rich in protein and fat. Since this tree of the sub-alpine zone develops a cone that doesn't open and seeds that are wingless and hence unable to fly, it depends on its relationship with the Nutcrackers for regeneration. With their large beak for breaking the cones open and special pouches under their tongues for carrying seeds to a distant cache, Nutcrackers are ideally suited for this task. A single Nutcracker can harvest well over 100,000 seeds in the fall and then use them to feed their young during the next breeding

season. Additionally, experiments have shown that Nutcrackers can remember thousands of seed locations and are even capable of finding a cache that is covered by several feet of snow. Because it feeds its young on the stored seeds, the Nutcracker can breed as early as February despite the harsh conditions in its high mountain home. The Clark's Nutcracker is one of the few members of the Corvidae family where the male helps incubate the eggs and the male actually develops a brood patch on his chest just like the female and takes his turn

at the nest, keeping the eggs warm while the female goes off to feed from her cache. As they seldom consume all of the seeds they cache it is likely that they are the major "planter" of Whitebark Pine trees.

Clark's Nutcracker is a large (12 inches) gray bird with black wings and tail. Look for white patches on the wings and on the edge of the tail. To avoid confusing the Nutcracker with the Gray Jay, look for the white under the tail and the white flash on the wings during flight. The Nutcracker also has a much longer beak. The bird shown here is a Gray Jay.

Sources used to compile this article include:

www.birds.cornell.edu/program,
www.eldoradocnps.org, and
www.wbu.com/chipperwoods

By Jeannie Marcure

DID YOU KNOW...?

Although there are 46 species of birds that don't fly, the kiwi of New Zealand is the world's only wingless bird.

January 2005 Program

Flathead Audubon's January meeting will feature a video presentation by Timothy Barksdale. The program will consist of segments on Cuba, Atwater's Prairie Chicken, and more, with time between segments for question-and-answer about Barksdale's techniques and the conservation points made in his work. He will also include footage shot in Montana. Come and enjoy what promises to be an interesting and informative program. The meeting begins at 7PM in Conference Room #3 of the Summit Health Center. Coffee and refreshments served. Bring a friend!



Bigfork Christmas Bird Count Scores Some Surprises!

Hot off the presses!
We found 81 species (just slightly below our recent average) on the 31st annual Bigfork Christmas Bird Count, in spite of fog, drizzle and some unexpected misses. Highlights included our count-first Snowy Owl, a White-crowned Sparrow



(third time), Double-crested Cormorant (4, ties our count high), Blue Jay (18, more than double our previous high), a potential (new to count) Savannah Sparrow (no details yet), and, of course, our mascot, the Pileated Woodpecker. In general, numbers were down, particularly for waterfowl, ravens, sparrows and finches. We will publish more later, along with the Kalispell report, when results are complete.

From Dan Casey



Let's Super-size that utility trailer! After December's recycling collection, that's what we are going to have to do, just to carry all of the great contributions that everybody brought us. The mountain that we all created in that trailer in November looked like a molehill compared with December's haul. But look at what happened:

- * In November, we recycled 365 pounds and received \$44.39.
- * In December, we recycled 800 pounds and received \$13.60.

WHAT HAPPENED?

This is a good example of the how recycling and economics interact. In November, a lot of our load was metal - aluminum cans, copper wire, etc. December's collection was mostly paper - magazines, newspapers, shredded paper, etc. Nationwide, the prices of metals are very high, so the recycling centers can pay much more than usual. Paper is not in nearly such short supply, so the price is lots lower. A pound of aluminum cans brings us 26 cents; a pound of newspapers is worth a single penny. It's a nice little lesson in economics, but the real celebration comes from that 800 pounds of newspaper, milk jugs, styro peanuts, pop cans, and plastic bags, and cereal boxes that are not contributing to "Landfill Mountain" between Whitefish and Kalispell - priceless!

So what are you going to throw into the trunk of your car before the January FAS meeting? A few suggestions for **POST-HOLIDAY RECYCLING**:

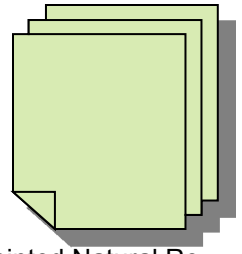
Aluminum pans from all of those pies you consumed (oops!), and maybe you cooked your turkey in a one-time-use foil pan. So wash it out and toss it in your recycling pile. Boxes! Any kind of box recycles well. Just pull apart the corners and flatten it for easy traveling in your trunk. If it's grey or brown inside, you can make it go away and come back in a different form. Peanuts (styro, not real ones!) and bubble wrap that end up under the couch and behind the TV. Colored holiday wrapping paper doesn't recycle, but the cardboard rolls it comes on does. Sorry, but so far, we haven't figured out any way to recycle fruitcake!

From Kay Mitchell

RECYCLING NEWS

FROM THE BOARD: **LINDA WINNIE**

PAST PRESIDENT



For those of you who have not seen the new Flathead Natural Resource Use Plan, here's an excerpt. The full document is 102 pages long, but this will give you a general flavor. This document was drafted by the County Commissioner-appointed Natural Resource Committee. If you want to see the full 102 pages, I can email them to you -- just let me know. This was one of the topics discussed at the Conservation Roundtable meeting on 15 December.

This document is full of goals and objectives that have far reaching impacts such as:

- Prohibiting the future loss of any private lands in the county from the tax base. This could potentially impact future federal and state land acquisitions or swaps under a variety of programs. Are conservation easements a loss to the tax base if they aren't fully developed?
- Under this document the county would become responsible for any management plan for potential lands proposed under the Wild and Scenic River Act. p. 51
- The county would be required to work with state and federal agencies on economic and social analyses of any impacts that designations under the Endangered Species Act would have. It would be the policy that such designations should not disrupt use of land consistent with the Flathead County Growth Policy. p 48.
- "Flathead County will forward to Congress and to the appropriate decision-making agencies its recommendations regarding areas proposed as wildlife refuges, wetland protection areas and conservation easements. Said recommendations will be based upon the evaluation of affects upon Flathead County and Northwest Montana." P 50.
- "If it is scientifically determined that introduced species are out competing, displacing, or harming the native fish populations, prior to taking any actions, the economic, social and recreational impact on Flathead County should be determined and considered." p 54.
- "Develop a consistent definition of riparian areas. The county shall encourage defining riparian areas as areas of land directly or indirectly influenced by permanent water. Riparian areas have visible vegetation or physical characteristics reflective of permanent water influence. Excluded are such sites as ephemeral streams or washes that do not exhibit the presence of vegetation dependent upon free water in the soil." p 20.
- "Any land use inventory, planning or management activities affecting point or non-point sources and water quality in Flathead County, either directly or indirectly, is coordinated through local government and is consistent with the Resource Use Management Plan of Flathead County. P 17.



The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. Edmund Burke (1729-1797)

Po'ouli Bird Feared Extinct on Haleakala

The New York Times reports a bird, a Po'ouli, the last known member of its genus and species, died in its cage on Maui on Nov. 26. The bird is a shy, nearly silent brown bird with a black face that lived on the upper slopes of the Haleakala volcano, climbing tree trunks and eating insects and snails. The species was not discovered until 1973, when the population was already in a death spiral. In 30 years its numbers fell from a few dozen to three. The other two are feared dead.

WHOOPING CRANE POPULATION REACHES RECORD SIZE

Record numbers of endangered Whooping Cranes have already migrated to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and the surrounding area in Texas. The latest census, on November 24, tallied 213 Whooping Cranes: 181 adults and 32 young. "This is the highest number of endangered Whooping Cranes wintering in Texas in the last 100 years," said Tom Stehn, Whooping Crane Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The increase is due to very good nest production last summer. The only natural, wild population of Whooping Cranes nests in the Northwest Territories of Canada and migrates 2,400 miles to winter at the Aransas and Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuges and surrounding areas. The Canadian Wildlife Service reported 54 nesting pairs fledging 40 chicks on the nesting grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park.

The current North American population of wild and captive Whooping Cranes is 468. Although the species remains endangered, the comeback sets a standard for conservation efforts in North America. The population in Texas reached a low of only 15 birds in 1941, before efforts were taken to protect the species and its habitat. The population has been growing at 4% annually and reached 100 birds in 1987.

Synopsized from a posting on the USFWS website: <http://www.fws.gov>.

From Bob Lee



Panel Recommends No Protection for Sage Grouse

Amid an intense lobbying effort by energy and ranching interests in the West, a team of Interior Department biologists has recommended that the Sage Grouse does not need to be protected under the Endangered Species Act. Steve Williams, the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, must make a final decision by 29 December. Not since the Spotted Owl achieved protected status has a proposed listing had as much potential economic impact. The recommendation was announced at the Western Governors' Association meeting. Environmentalists had sought the listing, saying that Sage Grouse populations, while now stable, are poised for a catastrophic decline because of development and invasive species, as well as diseases like West Nile virus. This past summer, several of the leading wildlife biologists who study the Sage Grouse and its habitat produced a 610-page "conservation assessment," reviewing the available scientific evidence about the bird. While the populations have been relatively stable since two decades of steep and steady

decline ended in 1985, they were not optimistic about the future because of long-term population declines coupled with continued loss and degradation of habitat.



In recent years, various states, private landowners and scientists formed local and regional partnerships to improve conditions for it. A few weeks ago, the Bureau of Land Management announced its own conservation plan. While the Service is likely to accept the recommendation, the fight is likely to continue in court. Mark

Salvo, director of the Sagebrush Sea Project, a petitioner, said no decision on legal action could be made until the final ruling from the Interior Department. Jeff Eisenberg, a director of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, said that cooperative conservation efforts will be given a chance to show that they are a viable solution for conserving the species.

Synopsized from an article by Felicity Barringer in the New York Times on 2 December 2004.

IF IT WALKS LIKE A GOOSE,

Note: The following letter was submitted to the Montana On-line Birding site (MOB) and discusses the new species called "Cackling Goose" in Montana. During Flathead Audubon's December program, presenter Dan Casey explained the differences between the Cackling and Canada goose designations.

Dear Montana Birders,

It is the season when Canada Geese begin to migrate through and into Montana. Does this provide an opportunity to observe the newly split species Cackling Goose in our state? As a long time observer of geese in the state, I would like to present some of my ideas on the prospects of identifying this "new" species.

The American Ornithological Union decided to split the Canada Goose species based upon a number of recent studies, including work with DNA. It has designated a number of the small-bodied subspecies of Canada Goose as a species all their own...Cackling Goose. Mostly, the small birds nest and winter in western North America. One of the small subspecies included in the species does nest in the high arctic of Canada and does migrate through Montana enroute to wintering areas in the middle south of the U.S. and even northern old Mexico. David Allen Sibley has placed a detailed and informative write-up regarding the two species on his web site.

In all of the millions of geese that I have looked at in Montana, I have seen only a surprisingly few of what are now Cackling Geese. Usually, special circumstances allowed me to confirm that they were members of what are now a separate species. Here is what I saw.

Visitors from California: In the spring of the year (usually in April) a very small number of the small Canada-like geese that had wintered in California will accompany the large flocks of Lesser Snow and Ross' Geese that migrate north through Montana. These birds stand out by being with the white geese (rather than in flocks of larger Canadas) and by their very small size. These birds are quite small, often very tiny (about the size of a wigeon). I have seen less than a dozen of these. Most were seen in the early 1990's and few, if any, have been seen in the last ten years. Interestingly, lack of recent sightings may correspond to a shift in wintering patterns of the smallest member of the Cackling Goose clan...once called Cackling Canada Geese...from winter grounds in central California (where they came into contact with the white geese) to new winter digs in Oregon. The shift has occurred in the last ten years.

Lessers: Each fall and spring, flocks of Canada-like geese migrate through our state. Large

numbers of "Canadas" will often spend much of the winter on the Missouri River in Great Falls and other rivers in the state. Within these flocks, it is quite easy to see geese that are quite small compared to other members of the flocks. We have called these small birds "lesser" Canada Geese. The flocks of dark geese are composed of Moffitt's Canada Geese, *Branta canadensis moffitti*, the large goose, Lesser Canada Goose, *Branta canadensis parvipes*, and Richardson's (or Hutchins's) Cackling Goose, *Branta hutchinsii hutchinsii*. So one form of Cackling Goose is a regular visitor to Montana. How frequently are they found in the flocks and, perhaps more importantly, can they be distinguished in the field from their cousins?

From 1991 through 1995, the Canadian Wildlife Service conducted an aggressive program to define the natural history of Richardson's/Hutchins's Cackling Geese (they were a subspecies of Canada Goose back then) that nest in arctic Canada. They placed yellow and orange collars around the necks of more than 20,000 small Canada Geese. Reobserving these marked birds nicely identified this subspecies' wintering areas and migration paths. The study found that some marked geese from the western Canadian arctic and, to a much lesser extent, western Victoria Island are seen in Montana. I made most of the Montana observations and saw only about 25 of the collared birds. This represented only a very small percentage of the approximately 4,000 geese that were collared in the western Canadian arctic in the study. It appears from a plot of all the sightings of the yellow neckbands that the majority of these geese stage their fall migration in Alberta and west-central Saskatchewan before leapfrogging over Montana to their winter range of the Texas-Oklahoma panhandles (to a limited extent western Utah and northern California). Their return, spring migration nearly bypasses Montana completely, favoring Nebraska and the Dakotas.

It appears that most of the lesser Canadas that we see in Montana are in fact Canada Geese (of the subspecies *Branta canadensis parvipes*). A very small part of the small geese are Cackling Geese, but can we sort them out in the field with a spotting scope? There appears to be only one sure way to distinguish Cackling from Canada Geese...size. Unfortunately, the Hutchins's is nearly the largest form of the Cackling Goose, and Lessers (*B. c. parvipes*)
(GEESE, continued top of next page.....)

(.....continued from page 6)

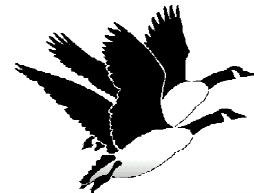
is the smallest form of the Canada Goose. Sibley shows in his figures 1 and 2 that culmen length (length of the top of the bill) of a *B. h. hutchinsii* is 39 mm., *B. c. parvipes* is 41 mm., body mass for *B. h. hutchinsii* to be about 2000 g and *B. c. parvipes* to be about 3000 g....differences probably not apparent in the field.

Sibley describes the Canada form *B.c. parvipes* as having a pale to dusky breast and the Cackling form *B. h. hutchinsii* as having a rather light, pale breast...not much help here. What about a white collar at the base of the black neck as a discriminator? Sibley reports on a study that found 50 percent of a mix of adult *B. c. parvipes* and *B. h. hutchinsii* had white collars...sounds like a coin flip to me. Sibley further says this feature currently "seems nearly worthless".

I am forced to conclude that unless you see a tiny Canada Goose-looking bird in a flock of white geese in the spring or observed a dark goose with a yellow neckband back in the early or mid 90's, Cackling Goose will probably not be included on your list of Montana birds in the near future. Prove me wrong. If you see a bird you are sure is a Cackling Goose submit a Rare Bird Report to the Montana Rare Bird Committee with convincing documentation. I can assure you, after observing the Committee's deliberations last week, that it will be given a fair evaluation.

Keep in mind that Cackling Geese can be added rather easily to your life list by visiting any number of national wildlife refuges in central California or western Oregon in the winter. If you would like a little more detailed information, contact me directly and I will send you a picture or two and the distribution maps of the yellow neckband observations from the early 90's.

Good goose observing,
Mike Schwitters
Choteau MT



A RESEARCHER'S REQUEST

If anyone sees any neck-banded Canada geese, please pass the information on to Kevin Dawson at the address below. Sounds like some of his marked geese may move through Montana. This is taken from a message posted on the MOB listserve by Kristi DuBois of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

My thesis project has to do with finding out just how sedentary the Humboldt Bay Canada Geese are. The thesis title is "Density dependent dispersal and mechanisms of molt migration in Western Canada Geese." Information to date suggests that approx. 20% of our birds leave Humboldt Bay, California, moving as far as Alberta and British Columbia. The majority of the dispersers were less than 3 years of age (nonbreeders), but entire families have also been documented in these movements. Many of

these birds do not return. We are hoping to retrieve more information this year. We have been marking birds here in Arcata (Humboldt County, CA) with black neck bands with 3 white letters over the last 6 summers. Our population estimate in November was approximately 2800 birds.

Kevin Dawson
Waterfowl Ecology Research Group
Department of Wildlife
Humboldt State University
1 Harpst St.
Arcata, CA 95521
707-826-3582
fender200123@yahoo.com



Teachers Workshop: Birds of Montana

Montana Audubon, in partnership with the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon chapter, is providing a Birds of Montana workshop for teachers, educators, and budding naturalists in Great Falls, March 17-18, 2005. We will explore common resident and migratory birds of central Montana, teaching techniques for identifying birds, and discuss methods for incorporating the study of birds into a classroom unit.

Participants will go home with bird education activities, the skills and confidence to start a birding unit with students, and will become part of Audubon's network of community naturalists to assist with field and classroom lessons. Two graduate credits or 15 OPI renewal units are available with the workshop. Cost is \$40. To register, contact Mary Fay at mary.fay@bresnan.net or visit Montana Audubon's website at www.mtaudubon.org.

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JANUARY, 2005



The Flathead Audubon Society is affiliated with the National Audubon Society and meets on the second Monday of each month from September through May. The regular meeting starts at 7:00 p.m. and includes a featured guest who presents a conservation or nature program. The Board of Directors meets the Tuesday preceding the general meeting, at 6PM at 295 3rd Ave. EN, in Kalispell. Both meetings are open to all those interested.

THE PILEATED POST is published September through May and is sent to members of the Flathead Audubon Society as a membership benefit. For membership information or address change, please call Mike Fanning at 862-8070.

Deadline for newsletter copy is the 20th of each month. Contact newsletter editor at 257-0363; email submissions to pileatedpost@hotmail.com

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

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