



the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

VOLUME 32

NUMBER 1

SEPTEMBER 2007



FREE! FUN! FOOD! Highlight Owen Sowerwine Natural Area Work Day Challenge



Set aside September 29th (Saturday) for two hours of fun working with your friends and neighbors on the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area. To qualify for a generous cash grant offered by Prudential Insurance/Jane Lopp & Associates as part of International Global Volunteer Day, our challenge is to gather at least 20 people to work for two hours. Meet at the Montessori School on Willow Glen Drive at 9:00 AM. At the school, we will hold a brief safety meeting and receive team assignments. Everyone is welcome; you definitely don't have to be an Audubon member to come to the work day. In past years, we have had many non-members who have helped out. Bring your friends!

This year's main project is the start of work on the Leisure Island part of OSNA. In order to get to the work site, **everybody gets a free boat ride!** The Leisure Island section is more open and grassy than the Mainland section. We will put in a small trail and open a path for the next part of the OSNA fence. On the Mainland, the projects this year include mowing the main trail, putting up some signs, and doing a little fence repair, where a few trees have fallen. There will be jobs for everyone, every skill level, and every ability. ("Many hands make light work.")

You will need to wear long pants, long-sleeved shirt, and shoes that can get a little muddy. Water bottles, hats, gloves and safety glasses help a lot, too. If you have them, please bring loppers and pruners, gas weed eaters, and hand saws. All of the other equipment and supplies will be provided.

OSNA Work Days are really satisfying. You start in a "riparian jungle" and in two hours, you will see the fruits of your labors – friendly, open walking paths, new signs on fences and marking trails, and a good pathway for a new run of fence. So bring your Audubon "can-do" spirit to Montessori School on Saturday the 29th (rain or shine) and let the fun begin!

Brent Mitchell, OSNA Co-Chair

FAS MEMBERSHIPS EXPIRE IN OCTOBER

All FAS memberships except those submitted since April must be renewed by October 15. The October Pileated Post will be the last issue for those who do not renew. Don't miss an issue, and continue your generous support to our local chapter. You can renew at www.flatheadaudubon.org, or by sending in the form on the last page of this newsletter. Thank you!

SEPTEMBER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, September 10, 2007: Flathead Audubon General Meeting, 7 PM, The Summit

Tuesday, September 4, 2007: Flathead Audubon Board of Directors Meeting. 6 PM at 295 Third Ave East North, Kalispell (Jane Lopp & Associates Building) All are welcome.

Saturday, September 29, 2007: Owen Sowerwine Work Day (see article above for details)

BIRD OF THE MONTH

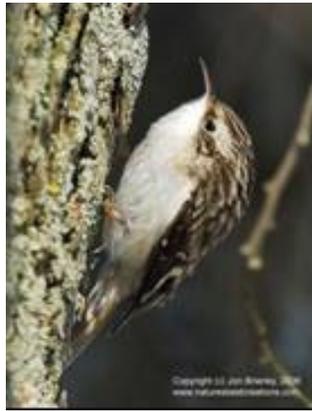
By Gail Cleveland

A SPECIAL "LITTLE BROWN BIRD"

I am partial to nuthatches, whether Red-breasted, Pygmy or White-breasted, especially as I watch them come head-first down a fir tree in the backyard. So naturally, I am also partial to the inconspicuous and quiet Brown Creeper when I see one spiral up the trunk of a tree, probing bark crevices with its narrow, curved bill.

There are only six species in the Brown Creeper family Certhiidae, and our Brown Creeper is the only species in North America, ranging as far south as Central America. There are no South American Certhiidae; the other five very similar-looking species reside in Europe and Asia.

I was sure that the Brown Creeper was related to the wood-creepers of Central America—those brown or russet birds with long, curved bills that can be seen creeping up trees and are so difficult to distinguish from one another. However, David Sibley says that woodcreepers are more closely related to flycatchers. Brown Creepers have several physical features like woodpeckers, but are not closely related. Their closest North American relatives are gnatcatchers and wrens.



According to a distribution map, Brown Creepers either reside as year-round residents or as a breeding population in every state in the U.S. Surprisingly, Brown Creepers reside year-round as far north as northern British Columbia, Canada. More often, they breed across Canada, but migrate to the southern U.S. and Mexico for the winter months. We are lucky to have them here all year in western Montana. They are rarer in eastern Montana during the breeding season and migrate south for the winters.

It seems that winter is the time that I see them the most as they creep up a tree looking for food and then fly down to the base of another tree to start up again. These "Little Brown Birds" are able to winter over because they forage primarily on tree trunks and the undersides of limbs, gleaning spiders and their eggs, insects and other small invertebrates. In summer they are exclusively insectivorous. During winter they will also eat seeds and nuts and can be found at birdfeeders. If you are interested in attracting the Brown Creeper, put out suet.

Their tweezer-like thin curved bill is perfect for removing insects from the cracks in the bark of trees. But winter can be a challenge for creepers,

and, like other small birds, they have been found roosting in groups, huddling together in a crevice of a tree. More than ten in a roost is not uncommon.

Brown Creepers breed in northern coniferous forests. I have never found a Brown Creeper nest, but I keep looking. They build a nest against a tree trunk, usually concealing it under loose bark. Less often, it is concealed by a limb or is inside a cavity. The foundation of the nest is built of twigs and bark. Built solely by the female, nests are lined with finer bark shreds, grasses, feathers and moss. The male may supply her with a few building materials, but she does the construction. The building may

be too mundane for the males who have been observed performing high-speed display flights among trees, circling trunks and weaving in and out of branches perusing potential mates.

But once the female has laid five to six eggs, the male gets to work, feeding her for the two week incubation period. Both sexes feed the chicks for about two weeks after hatching, before the young are able to leave the nest and cling to bark with their sharp claws.

The Brown Creeper leg is short, but the toes, especially the hind toe is particularly long, with a long, curved claw. While at a banding station on Lake Superior, I had the opportunity to hold a Brown Creeper in my hand. What I found most amazing were the feet and claws, so delicate, long and sharp as needles. This design of their feet is similar to nuthatches and other tree-clingers like woodpeckers.

Like woodpeckers, and unlike nuthatches, the Brown Creeper has a long, pointed tail that is stiffened at the end for use as a prop when climbing. Plumage is predominantly brown and speckled with white, buff and black, the underparts paler than the upperparts. This mottled brown plumage conceals it from predators as it inches its way up the bark.

Until several years ago, I could not tell you that the Brown Creeper had a song. However, for two years in a row, in the spring when the warblers are arriving, my husband Bruce and I have heard a high, warbling sound unlike the normal warblers arriving in our area. Both times we found a Brown Creeper. I have a feeling that the combination of the length of the mating season, the numerous other singing passerines, and the scarcity of Brown

BIRD OF THE MONTH, continued, page 3...



September 2007 Program
**GENERALIZED GLACIER NATIONAL PARK GEOLOGY
WITH A REGIONAL APPROACH**

Have you been intrigued but mystified as you travel through Glacier National Park about its geologic origins? Come to Flathead Audubon's September 10 meeting. **Chris Ruffatto** will totally demystify park geology for us. Of course, the park's geology cannot be understood in isolation from that of the surrounding region. Chris' slide show and talk will not only be about plate tectonics, but about climate change. He will also show us results of United States Geological Survey plant mapping in the Gunsight Lake area and data collected on Sperry Glacier.

Chris Ruffatto was honored with a stewardship award last year by the Flathead Basin Commission for his 20 years of work on conservation issues. He is a member of the Whitefish Critical Lands Committee and also the staff scientist for the Whitefish Lake Institute, where he combines scientific inquiry with technological skills in collecting data to preserve the lake.

Chris earned a BA in Geography and Water Resources and Land Use Planning from the University of Montana, as well as a second BA in Industrial Technology from Montana State University. He has taught Earth Sciences at Whitefish High School for the past 23 years. He has worked for Glacier Wilderness Guides for 18 years and taught at the Glacier Institute for six years.

Chris likes to get kids involved in examining land use issues and decisions related to Flathead Valley public and private properties. At Whitefish High School, he heads up Project Free Flow--an ongoing water quality monitoring program on Haskill Creek, which supplies drinking water for Whitefish. Students in Project Free Flow have published two comprehensive documents—a watershed survey and a stream reach inventory. These break the land into its physiographic provinces and students study the land use limitations for particular types of land.

We look forward to seeing you and to meeting Chris Ruffatto on Monday, September 10 in the Community Room at The Summit at 7:00 PM.



FAS Recycling Rides Again!

The good news is that The Green Team from Flathead Valley Community College has agreed to a partnership with Flathead Audubon that will benefit both organizations. Student volunteers from the college will have a trailer at the west side of the north parking lot of The Summit from 6:30-7:00 PM before each month's Audubon meeting to receive our recyclable items, as in the past. The only change will be that, because they will not have the large barrels, like the Mitchell Recycling Wagon

has had, they will not be able to return your containers to you. So bring everything sorted into bags or boxes that you can leave with them. All of the same recyclables will be accepted as in past years. Next month's Pileated Post will have a list of recyclable items and sorting categories. So bag up everything you've been saving over the summer and bring it all to the September 10th meeting!



Bluebirds belong to the thrush family, which includes the American robin and the veery.

BIRD OF THE MONTH, continued...

Creepers, makes this a rarer birdsong than most. The song can be described as very high, with a thin series of accelerating, cascading notes. Sibley describes it as "trees trees pretty little trees."

Breeding Bird Survey Data indicates that the Brown Creeper population is stable with some local declines. There can be temporary population increases where trees have died from disease, with Brown Creepers taking this opportunity to feast on insects. However, where there is extensive logging, the Brown Creeper will disappear. At the moment, here in western Montana we are lucky enough to view and occasionally hear this elusive, camouflaged Little Brown Bird as it scours our fir and pine trees for a meal.

Brown Creepers spend most of their time on main trunks or major limbs, bracing themselves with their tails like miniature woodpeckers. These inconspicuous quiet birds are easy to overlook as they spiral up the trunk of a tree, probing into bark crevices with their narrow, curved bills. After a Creeper gets to the top of a tree, it flies to the bottom of the next tree to start over. Outside of the breeding season, Brown Creepers often flock with kinglets, nuthatches, and chickadees.





Presidential Protestations



From Mike Fanning, FAS President

Well, we begin a new year with a new president. Allow me to introduce myself. My academic background is in mathematics. I began my career doing mathematics and soon was involved in managing computer and management consultants for Boeing in Seattle. I retired in 1993 and moved to Whitefish. You will find me on the ski slopes all winter. During the summer I play golf, backpack, hike, mountain bike, swim, and run rivers. I find the Flathead the perfect place to live. Given my choice of anywhere in the world to live (and the resources to live there), I would not move from the Valley or even from my home. I feel incredibly lucky and grateful for getting to live here.

I joined Audubon in 1973, after backpacking in the Cascades had shown me the ill effects of massive clearcuts. I neither knew anything about birds nor did I have any particular interest in them. I joined because Audubon was opposed to, and effective in fighting, the then-current timber practices. While in Seattle, I never attended a Chapter meeting. My life-list consisted of the American Robin. Shortly after moving here, my wife Jill and I began attending the monthly Flathead Audubon meetings. Somehow I became membership chair and have been on the board for about 8 years. Now my interest in birds is what keeps me involved with Audubon. I remain a lousy birder but learn a few new birds each year. Jill and I have a fairly elaborate set of feeders and particularly enjoy seeing and identifying our local birds.

As a consultant, I observed the actions of lots of organizations. I found much that I didn't like, mostly involving struggles for power and bad interpersonal relations. After retiring, I had no interest at all in reinvolving myself with any organization. My experience with Flathead Audubon has persuaded me that this organization is truly different. We have an incredible Board of active and cooperative people. Board meetings are never the occasion for petty personality disputes; instead everyone cooperates in solving problems. I've worked with 6 past presidents of FAS and each one has been an invaluable asset to the organization. I'm not sure I will measure up to their standards, but I will try.



GOT BINOCs?

Frank and Linda de Kort are heading south to Chihuahua, Mexico again this November and will be delivering the rest of the contributions from FAS members that could not fit into their pickup last year. We have additional space if you have items that you would like to send down with us; these items will be distributed to the Tarahumar Indians who live on the high plateaus of the Copper Canyon. We will be distributing these contributions again through the local medical clinics, the Habitat for Humanity affiliate and the indigenous immersion school. Please bring donations to the September and October Board meetings or call us at 755-3704 for pick up or if you have questions. Items needed are:

- Chewable multi vitamin pills
- School supplies
- Coats, hats, gloves and socks for all sizes
- Blankets and towels
- Toys
- Baby clothes
- Binoculars (we are initiating a local bird study program!)



FLATHEAD AUDUBON MISSION STATEMENT



THE FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY IS AFFILIATED WITH
THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY.

- OUR MISSION IS TO CONSERVE BIRDS, WILDLIFE HABITAT, AND ECOSYSTEM DIVERSITY.
- WE PROMOTE AWARENESS AND APPRECIATION OF THE NATURAL WORLD THROUGH EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND ADVOCACY PROGRAMS.
- WE WORK WITH DIVERSE GROUPS AND AGENCIES TO ACHIEVE SOUND DECISIONS ON NATURAL RESOURCE ISSUES.
- WHILE FOCUSING OUR EFFORTS IN NORTHWEST MONTANA, WE BELIEVE IN THE PROTECTION OF THE EARTH AND ALL OF ITS INHABITANTS.



FAS RECEIVES GENEROUS GRANT

FAS was recently granted \$5000 from the Sustainability Fund, which is managed by Lex Blood. This generous donation is being matched by Flathead Audubon to support our educational outreach programs. Nancy Zapotocki has been hired in this capacity and has already been hard at work this summer promoting conservation education; please see related article. We are grateful to the Sustainability Fund for once again supporting environmental education in our community.



A Busy and Exciting Summer for the Audubon Education Program

A Report from FAS Education Coordinator Nancy Zapotocki



It has been a summer full of exciting, new, as well as established, education activities! Beginning in June, I presented at Creston Hatchery Day using the *Common Birds of the Flathead*, *Bird ID Costume* and *Hummingbird* education trunks to 135 fourth graders from Somers, Stillwater Christian, Deer Park and Helena Flats schools; at Literacy Volunteers' English as a Second Language summer program to 12 children and adults using the *Bird ID Costume* and *Hummingbird* education trunks; and at Buffalo Hills Terrace Assisted Living facility to 22 residents on the common birds of the Flathead, using a variety of props from several education trunks, as well as the slide program.

School was out, but coordination and loaning of Audubon's education trunks continued with loans to summer programs such as, FWP's Becoming an Outdoors Woman program at Lubrecht State Forest near Missoula; a Lone Pine State Park bird workshop, and Lone Pine State Park's Little Saplings.

I participated in a workshop given by the Northwest Curriculum Cooperative titled "Writing in

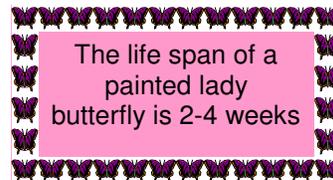
the Content Areas: Science," to learn ways to include more writing activities in the education trunks for teachers to use to meet the Montana Content Standards, continued active participation with the Flathead Community of Resource Educators (CORE) and began researching grants to bring additional funds to Audubon for educational programming and coordination.

In August, I will be presenting at the Northwest Montana Reading Council Back-to-School Conference for teachers on using birds and Audubon's trunks in teaching the Communication Arts. And the grand finale to the summer – Raptor Day in Memory of Rod Ash on August 25th in partnership with Lone Pine State Park. I'm looking forward to the school year and working with teachers on using the education trunks in their classrooms, and continuing to work with community organizations. Enjoy the final days of summer – hope to see you at Raptor Day!

To reserve an Audubon education trunk or request an education program contact me at naz@centurytel.net.



Celebrating 30 Years of Presidents. Former Presidents of FAS were honored at the May Potluck. Pictured above are (left to right): Bob Lopp (2005-07), Linda Winnie (2001-03), Dave Hudak (1981-83), Lynn Kelly (1984-86), Brent Mitchell (1990-94), Leo Keane (1994-98), Neal Brown (1999-2001), Linda de Kort (2003-05), Mike Fanning (2007-present). Unable to attend the celebration were: Dan Sullivan (1977), Rick Trembath (1978), Wanda Jamieson (1978-80), Robin Magaddino (1986-90), Jim Rogers (1998-99).



The life span of a painted lady butterfly is 2-4 weeks

Sometimes "the majority" only means that all the fools are on the same side.

Now's the time to get those bird feeders out in your yard and scrub them with some soapy water and bleach. Rinse and then set them in the sun to dry. Then, bring on Ol' Man Winter!

Traveling this Winter?
Take The Pileated Post with you - electronically! Send your email address to lindawin@centurytel.net for delivery (in beautiful color) right to your computer screen!



J Marcure Photo

Audubon: Common backyard birds becoming less common

June 14, 2007

By Marsha Walton



Central Maryland, Audubon

(CNN) -- Some of the most common birds seen and heard in American back yards are becoming a less frequent sight and sound in much of the United States, according to a study released by the National

Audubon Society. Twenty common birds -- including the northern bobwhite, the field sparrow and the boreal chickadee -- have lost more than half their populations in the past 40 years, according to the society's research. "These populations are not yet on the endangered species list, but it is noteworthy, and we need to take steps to protect their habitat," said Carol Browner, Audubon chair and former Environmental Protection Agency administrator. And like the proverbial canary in the coal mine, the health of a region's bird population is often a harbinger of the health of other wildlife and of human populations as well. "The focus isn't really on what's happening to these 20 birds, but what's happening to their environment," said Greg Butcher, the society's conservation director.

The researchers say many factors play into the decline in bird numbers, including intensification of agriculture, other loss of habitat, pesticides, invasive species, and global warming. Scott Weidensaul, an author and expert on bird migration, said he remembers waking up to whistles of bobwhite quail, and falling asleep listening to whippoorwills. "Today you can't find a bobwhite in Pennsylvania, and hearing a whippoorwill is a red letter day," he said at an Audubon news conference Thursday morning.

The report shows the current northern bobwhite quail population is 5.5 million, down from 31 million in 1967. That's a decline of 82 percent in the past four decades. There are currently about 1.2 million whippoorwills now, down from 2.8 million 40 years ago, a 57 percent decline.

The Audubon Society created its list of "common birds in decline" by analyzing annual sight-

ing data from the Audubon Society's century-old Christmas Bird Count program, and results of the annual Breeding Bird Survey conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey. The data will also be submitted for scientific peer review.

Changes in farming practices have created distress for some bird species. Some farmers are now using land once set aside for conservation to plant more corn for use as ethanol. And the disappearance of smaller family farms in favor of larger corporate farms has led to the disappearance of hedgerows -- fences of trees or bushes that reduce erosion and lessen the force of the wind on crops, and at the same time serve as protection and nesting areas for many grassland birds. Other farms have simply disappeared and been replaced by housing and commercial development, further reducing bird habitat.

The Audubon Society, incorporated in 1905, lists five priorities for Congress to consider to slow the decline of these bird species: reduce global warming, support wetlands, fund ecosystem restoration, ensure biofuels are eco-friendly, and improve conservation programs in the next farm bill.

While federal legislation is an important part of protecting bird habitat, Butcher said individuals can also make a dramatic impact on bird health. "You don't have to have a lot of land, just a corner of your back yard for native plants," he said. The berries on native dogwoods, for example, provide a food source for migratory birds. And he suggested that bird lovers not cut down flowers in the fall, instead leaving them up as groundcover for birds in the winter and as a source of seeds. Introducing just a few native plants to perfectly manicured, sterile back yards can make a huge difference, Butcher said.

Other household names on the list of diminishing bird populations are the common tern, ruffed grouse, common grackle and rufous hummingbird.



OWL MYTHS AND LEGENDS

From World Owl Mythology:

- * **Illinois:** kill an Owl and revenge will be visited upon your family.
- * **Louisiana Cajuns** thought you should get up from bed and turn your left shoe upside down to avert disaster, if you hear an Owl calling late at night.
- * **Arctic Circle:** a little girl was turned into a bird with a long beak by magic, but was so frightened she flapped about madly and flew into a wall, flattening her face and beak. So the Owl was created.
- * **Australia:** Aborigines believe bats represent the souls of men and Owls the souls of women. Owls are therefore sacred, because your sister is an Owl - and the Owl is your sister.





A Snagging Issue



Tree snags - dead or downed trees in various states of decay - provide vital habitat for as many as 1200 species of wildlife nationwide. Despite the importance of snags to wildlife, many modern forestry practices encourage the removal of dead wood from the forest floor in an attempt to control fire, pests and fungi, as well as for aesthetic reasons. You can create a refuge for hundreds of woodland creatures by keeping snags in your yard (or constructing artificial snags if no natural ones are present).

Different species use different parts of the snags. Nearly every part of the dead tree is utilized in every stage of decay. Hollow cavities in standing dead wood make excellent nests for woodpeckers, while insects in the bark provide a ready food source. Other animals use the bark, too, but for a different purpose. Bats, tree frogs and beetles all make their homes in the crevasses between the bark and the trunk. Higher branches become excellent look-outs from which raptors spot potential prey and, later, where they may safely clean and eat their meals. Invertebrate communities also thrive in decaying trees. Mosses, lichens and fungi all grow on snags and aid in the return of vital nutrients to the soil through the nitrogen cycle. Moreover, they provide an important source of food for a variety of wildlife.

Decaying logs on the forest floor help in another way, too. By acting as "nurse logs" for new seedlings, moisture-rich dead wood can help to ensure that the next generation of forest has a place to grow. These young trees, in turn, produce additional habitat variety for wildlife.

Below is a chart which shows a just a few of the myriad habitats and uses for tree snags:

How can you help?

By some estimates, the removal of dead material from forests can mean a loss of habitat for up to 1/5 of the animals in the ecosystem. You should never allow dead wood to rest against your home and any trees which may fall on your home should be removed, but in other cases it is safe to allow standing dead trees and downed logs to remain on your property. As long as the snags are a reasonable distance from your home, there is no risk of damage by termites or other pests, and this will be a tremendous help to the wildlife that make their homes in your yard. You will also gain additional benefits in the form of soil runoff prevention as the trees help to hold the soil in place.

If there are no natural snags in your yard, you can create artificial ones by trimming branches on live trees of varying sizes and types. Hardwood trees tend to make better nesting habitats while softer wood is better for food foraging. Learn more about creating snags in your yard.

Three snags per acre is a good estimate for most areas, but you should check with your local wildlife management authority to get specific recommendations for your region. If you do not wish to create snags from living trees, the use of nesting boxes can be a good alternative. Be sure to use boxes whose construction is appropriate to the type of wildlife you wish to attract. Place the boxes in the most favorable areas for each species, and provide predator guards and other protections as appropriate. The boxes will need to be maintained and cleaned at least once a year so that wildlife can use them effectively. Be sure to do this when the boxes are vacant so as not to disturb any residents!

Want to know more about trees? Learn about the Northern Forest!

From Jeannie Marcure

| Species Name | Type of Habitat Use |
|--|--|
| Flying squirrels | Nesting sites |
| Wood ducks | Natural cavities in standing dead wood used for nesting sites |
| Chickadees  | Cavities excavated by woodpeckers used as nesting sites |
| Western fence lizards Gopher snakes Dusky shrews Chipmunks Mice | Cover provided by settling logs on the forest floor |
| Ground squirrels | Loose bark or ground-level cavities provide winter food storage |
| Grouse | Soil exposed where dead tree has been uprooted -- used for taking dust baths in drier months |



SEPTEMBER 2007



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The Flathead Audubon Society is affiliated with Montana Audubon and the National Audubon Society. Flathead Audubon meets on the second Monday of each month from September through May. The meeting starts at 7:00PM and includes a featured guest who presents a conservation or nature program. The Board of Directors meet the Monday 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 Flathead Audubon Society as a membership benefit. For membership information or address change, please call Mike Fanning at 862-8070. To receive this newsletter electronically, email your request to: lindawin@centurytel.net. **Deadline for newsletter copy is the 18th of each month. Contact newsletter editor at 755-1406; email submissions to: pileatedpost@flatheadaudubon.org**

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

Website: www.flatheadaudubon.org

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| 2007-2010 | Mary Nelesen | (mnelesen@centurytel.net) | 755-7678 |
| 2007-2010 | Rod McIver | 975 Rose Crossing, Kalispell 59901 | 756-9445 |

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| | Mary Nelesen | 755-7678 |
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| Conservation | Lewis Young | 889-3492 |
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MONTANA AUDUBON

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FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

Support local programs
and receive the Pileated Post.

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