



# the Silent Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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FEBRUARY 2011

## Bigfork Cavers Recognized For Conservation Efforts

As Audubon members, most of us are used to looking upward from ground level to the sky to check on birds and their habitat. That is the area where we concentrate our conservation efforts. The Bigfork High School Cave Club is concerned with exploring and conserving the natural features of the underground world of caves. In recognition of their caving conservation efforts, Flathead Audubon will present our Conservation Achievement Recognition to the Cave Club at our February 14 meeting.

The Bigfork High School Cave Club was started in 2007 under the guidance of high school science teacher and experienced caver, Hans Bodenhamer. At first, the students concentrated on learning safe underground travel skills in a risky environment, including long rappels of over 100 feet and just having fun exploring places few of us ever visit. Soon the student members of the Cave Club were cleaning caves of trash and graffiti and monitoring cave conditions, using visitor impact mapping techniques developed by their advisor, Hans Bodenhamer.

Club members have monitored caves in

both Glacier National Park and local national forests. Using Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping techniques and photography, they make a resource condition record of a cave, listing visitor impacts and the condition and location of cave resources. They also measure cave temperatures and record the types of animal life found in the cave. When done, they have created original baseline data for the cave, which is used by the management agencies responsible for protecting the caves. Jack Potter, Glacier Park's chief of science and resource management, stated the club's efforts have been very useful for cave management in the park and he is recommending the club for cave monitoring in other national parks. The club earned a Presidential Environmental Youth Award from the Environmental Protection Agency in 2009 and club representatives addressed thousands of people at the world's largest GIS conference last year in San Diego.

The Bigfork High School Cave Club is continuing its monitoring efforts and is currently seeking funding that will allow them to monitor caves in the Grand Canyon area.

### FEBRUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

**Monday, February 14, 2011: Flathead Audubon General Meeting.** 7 PM, Conference Room 3, The Summit. See page 3.

**Monday, February 7, 2011: Flathead Audubon Board of Directors Meeting.** 6 PM at 295 Third Ave. E.N. All are welcome.

**Friday, February 18, 2011: Great Backyard Bird Count Field Trip.** 9 AM to Noon, meet at east end of Swan River School parking lot. Sign up with Kathy Ross by February 16. (Details on page 6)

**Saturday and Sunday, March 26 and 27, 2011: FAS Freezout Lake Migration Field Trip.** Leave Super 1 parking lot at 10 AM Saturday morning, return Sunday evening by 5 PM. (Further Details on page 5.)

**Friday through Sunday, June 3—5, 2011: Wings over the Big Sky.** Montana Audubon Bird Festival, Glagow, MT (See page 5 for details.)



# BIRD OF THE MONTH

By Lisa Bate

## Tree Swallow

It usually happens sometime in March. I am outside working on the farm when I hear what sounds like bubbling water flying overhead. Then I just smile knowing that the tree swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) have returned from their wintering grounds and with them, have brought the real beginning of spring to northwest Montana.



Tree Swallow, ©Dan Smith

These aerodynamic masters of the sky are the first of the swallow species to return every year. Their unusual diet allows this. Unlike other swallows in our area, which rely solely on insects for their food, tree swallows can subsist on fruits, seeds and berries for extended periods of time. In fact, up to 20 percent of their diet can be vegetative. In the east, they have wintered as far north as Long Island, New York, where they feed on the waxy fruits of bayberry or wax-myrtle (*Myrica* sp.). Here in Montana, their strategy is a little different. Remember the freak snowstorm we had in June 2008? That storm left about seven inches of snow on our farm. It appeared that the swallows had just left. That same day while out on a walk behind our place I found a surprise. There I witnessed a flock of about 40 tree swallows hovering above the snowy fields where grass seed heads protruded. I stopped to watch. The swallows were knocking grass seeds from the stems to forage on them along with a few insects and spiders!

The tree swallow is a medium-sized swallow with a slightly forked tail. As their species name (*bicolor*) suggests, tree swallows are bi-colored with white coloring below and iridescent blue/blue-green above (males). The upper sides of the females are a mixture of brown and greenish blue. Juveniles are brown above, with a light brown wash across the chest. They can be distinguished from violet-green swallows by the absence of a white flank and eye patch. Their genus name, *Tachycineta*, comes from the Greek words "tachýs" which means 'swift' and "kínēō" which means 'move.' Swallows are one of the most aerodynamic birds in the world.

Tree swallows breed throughout central and North America. Their northern distribution overlaps with the northern limit of the boreal forests. Male adults are first to arrive, followed by the females. Yearling swallows are the last to arrive. During very cold periods they will roost together in cavities on their breeding grounds. They spend winters in areas along the coasts of Florida, the Caribbean, Mexico, and

parts of Venezuela. They are highly social birds, especially outside the breeding season. During migration, these birds can roost in flocks numbering in the hundreds of thousands. They exhibit interesting behavior before settling into their nighttime communal roosts. About an hour before dusk, tree swallows form large moving clouds above the marsh or

forest canopy. Then they fly upward in a spiral like a bee swarm. Just before dark they begin flying back and forth over the trees or cattails. With each passing, large numbers will drop down from the cloud to roost.

Tree swallows are secondary cavity-nesters, meaning they rely on woodpeckers and other primary cavity-nesting birds to create the cavities where they nest. They also nest in natural cavities. Their populations are severely limited by suitable nest trees, and the competition for these sites is intense, as shown by their early spring arrival and intense territorial defense. The males pick the nest site, the female picks the male and builds the nest and incubates. Both adults help to feed the young.

Because tree swallows take readily to nest boxes, they are one of best studied birds in North America. On our farm we have had as many as 20 out of 25 nest boxes occupied in a single year by tree swallows. The great thing about this is that tree swallows feed voraciously on mosquitoes. Some estimates suggest they can take up to 1000 mosquitoes per day!

They prefer to nest in the open areas away from forest edges. In this way they avoid predation from house wrens which are known to destroy the eggs of many cavity-nesting birds.

Although they will nest in solitary situations, more often they nest in small groups. They prefer to forage in open meadows with tall grass or over open water. During the early part of the breeding season in Colorado, they have been documented flying over 100 km from their nest sites in the mountains to forage in open fields on the plains.

Although primarily monogamous, about five percent of birds will also mate with other individuals. This varies widely among populations. Up to 50% of nests in some brood studies contained chicks from different fathers. Infanticidal behavior is well documented in this species where independent males have killed chicks of widowed females to take over the nest site and subsequently breed with the widowed female.

(*Tree Swallow, continued on page 3 ...*)



## February 2011 Program Mysteries of the Underground World



Be sure to attend Flathead Audubon's General Meeting on February 11, as we learn about the work of a little-known group of adventurers from our own Bigfork area. The Bigfork High School Cave Club, with science teacher/caver/sponsor Hans Bodenhamer will present a program about their training, discoveries, and upcoming projects visiting caves in Glacier National Park and other sites. Learn how these citizen scientists monitor and provide baseline data for future cave explorers and for the agencies that manage and protect caves. The club will also be presented with Flathead Audubon's first Conservation Achievement Recognition of 2011. We meet at 7 PM in Room 3 of The Summit on Sunnyview Lane in Kalispell. See you there!

### BOARD MEMBER CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

From Richard Kuhl,  
Owen Sowerwine Committee Co-Chair



**TO ALL HARD WORKING  
MEN AND WOMEN**



Flathead Audubon seeks volunteers for summer work projects in the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area. No particular skills are needed. Must be willing to labor for a few hours despite the heat of the day and the buzz of mosquitoes!

Potential projects include trail maintenance, fence repair, weed control, monitoring and exploration of the island unit. These projects are **in addition to** our usual workday in September. Work will be scheduled as needed. The goal is to create a list of volunteers that can be contacted for specific tasks. Most tasks will require less than five people and will only be for two to three hours in duration. Work will be scheduled before and after high water so hip boots are not required.

If interested in Owen Sowerwine summer work projects, contact either Richard Kuhl or Linda Winnie. Their phone numbers and email addresses are listed on the Directory page of the newsletter.

### BIRD TRIVIA TO IMPRESS YOUR FRIENDS

- Largest Egg—Ostrich, measuring 7X4.5 inches
- Smallest Bird—Bee Hummingbird, 2.24 inches, .056oz
- Greatest Number of Feathers—Tundra Swan - 25,216
- Lowest Number of Feathers—Ruby-throated Hummingbird - 940
- Longest Tail Feathers—Crested Argus Pheasant 5.7 ft
- Slowest Flying Bird—American Woodcock, 5 mph

### Beauty of Birds

Believe it or not, spring is just around the corner, and so is our annual spring birding class! Whether you're a brand new birder or a seasoned expert, Beauty of Birds has something for you. The class offers helpful hints on field marks, songs and calls, habitats, and local birding hot-spots. Each class will feature a lesson, guest speaker, and local bird slideshow, with our final class culminating with practice in the field. Classes take place Wednesday evenings in April from 6-8 PM and are located in the large lecture room at Flathead High School. The cost for the entire series is \$10. To sign up, call FHS at 751-3500. We hope to see you there! Anselv Ford, Instructor

*(Tree Swallow, continued from page 3 ...)*

Also intriguing is the female version of infanticidal behavior. In these cases the females will kill nestlings at another female's nest. This is likely an attempt to gain access to a new nest site or one with better habitat. Contrary to what a lot of people think, tree swallows are not cooperative breeders, meaning that a pair may have "helpers" to feed and care for the young. Single males and young birds investigating cavities may have led to this erroneous conclusion.

Swallows are like the canary in the mine for some of our grassland areas, because they can indicate where high levels of certain pollutants such as PCBs and DDE persist. In areas where these substances are common, researchers have seen mortality rates of swallows increase with age. Introduced species such as house sparrows and European Starlings, which compete for the same nest sites, are also a threat to this species. That is why I evict these two species whenever I see them taking over my swallow (and bluebird boxes). But the most significant threat to this species is the loss of suitable nest trees. So remember, retain your snags, cut a tree or snag to a safe height if it is a hazard, and put up nest boxes. In return, you will be rewarded with the sound of water flying overhead, astounding aerodynamic flight displays, and FEWER mosquitoes! Thanks, swallows!





...to those below who have made special donations to Flathead Audubon from December 18 to January 18.

**Kestrel**

Nancy Svennungsen  
Mary Nelesen  
Anonymous



*In Memory of Loren Kreck*

**Sustaining Membership + Donation**

Dan and Susannah Casey  
Marge Rothfuss  
B.J. Worth  
Barbara Boorman  
Dean Robbins  
Joe and Lana Batts  
Vonda Mcgarvey  
Rod McIver  
Mary Wallace  
Mary Granger



**WeLoveBirds.org: Just in Time for Valentine's Day**

NRDC and Cornell Lab Launch New Social Networking Site for People Who Love Birds

The **Natural Resources Defense Council** (NRDC) and the **Cornell Lab of Ornithology** have launched **WeLoveBirds.org**, an interactive online community for bird enthusiasts. On Valentine's Day—or any day of the year—WeLoveBirds.org offers a free and open social network of people who are passionate about birds; access to information on birds and birding from a leading ornithology lab; and an opportunity to make a positive difference for birds and their habitats.

"Given the many threats to birds, they need all the help they can get," said Susan Casey-Lefkowitz, NRDC attorney. "WeLoveBirds.org gives bird-lovers a place to share information and make a difference."

WeLoveBirds.org features information on more than 500 species of birds, bird news, notes on scientific discoveries, and an open platform for bird enthusiasts of all levels to contribute their own stories, photos, birding observations, questions, and more.

The site represents a partnership between NRDC and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, nationally recognized

conservation organizations that offers NRDC's expertise in policy and advocacy and Cornell Lab's authoritative bird research, online birding resources, and citizen-science programs.

"WeLoveBirds.org is a place where birders can connect with one another around the issues that they care about," said Miyoko Chu, director of Communications at the Cornell Lab. "It's a place where they can also easily tap into a wealth of resources to enhance their enjoyment of birds and take their love of bird watching to the next level by helping birds through citizen-science projects or other actions."



**SPECIAL GIFTS**

I wish to help make Flathead Audubon's vision a reality. Here is my contribution to the continued success of our chapter.

- Eagle Donation, \$1000+
- Osprey Donation, \$500+
- Snowy Owl Donation, \$250+
- Merlin Donation, \$100+
- Kestrel Donation, \$50+
- My Own Vision, amount of my choice



Dave Menke, USFWS

\* \* \* \*

*The FAS activity which most interests me is:*

- Education Programs
- Owen Sowerwine Natural Area
- Scholarships and Grants
- Field Trips and Outdoor Events

\* \* \* \*

*I want my gift to recognize another:*

In memory of \_\_\_\_\_

In honor of \_\_\_\_\_

*Please send a notification of this gift to:*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

\* \* \* \*

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City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please do not acknowledge my gift in the Pileated Post

\* \* \* \*

*Please make checks payable to:*

Flathead Audubon Society

P.O. Box 9173

Kalispell, MT 59904

**Your gift is tax deductible.**

## BIRDWATCHING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERYONE!



### Freezout Lake Snow Goose Migration: A Rite of Spring

The annual Flathead Audubon trip to witness the extraordinary concentration of Snow Geese at the Freezout Lake Wildlife Management Area south of Choteau is once again scheduled for the last weekend in March. Every year, the majority of the Pacific Flyway population of Snow Geese stops at this wonderful wetland complex and the surrounding barley fields to rest and refuel on their trip from their central California wintering grounds to arctic nesting areas (some as far away as Russia). Their daily comings and goings against the backdrop of the Rocky Mountain Front make for an incredible spectacle. In past years we have seen as many as 400,000 or more geese, and many years we see well over 100,000. Thousands of Tundra Swans, tens of thousands of Northern Pintails, American Wigeons, and a wide variety of other waterfowl add to the excitement, and often the first White Pelicans, shorebirds and Franklin's Gulls of the spring are also seen.

This year's trip is scheduled for Saturday—Sunday, March 26-27, and will be led by Dan Casey. Meet at the west end of the Super 1 parking lot on First Avenue East in downtown Kalispell Saturday at 10 AM, and we will caravan/carpool to Choteau, planning on being at Freezout in time for the afternoon "fly-out" of the geese. After dinner and a night in Choteau, we will head back out before daybreak to again watch the geese leave the lake, heading for home sometime shortly after noon, once the geese have flown back in from the fields. We should arrive back in Kalispell by 5 PM Sunday. Dan will provide a suggested schedule and route, and will lead the group, but attendees can choose to follow the geese as much or as little as the weather (cold and windy) and the birds allow. You will need to make your own arrangements for lodging. The options include the Bella Vista (466-5711), the Big Sky (466-5318), the Gunther (466-5444), or the Stage Stop (888-466-5900). Contact Dan if you have questions about the trip, at 857-3143 or [danielcasey55@gmail.com](mailto:danielcasey55@gmail.com).



### Audubon Book Brings \$11.5 Million

A copy of "Birds of America" by **John James Audubon** was sold December 7, 2010, at auction in London for more than \$10 million, making it the world's most expensive printed book. The book, one of the best preserved editions of Audubon's 19th-century



masterpiece, with its 435 hand-colored illustrations, sold for £7.3 million (\$11.5 million) at a Sotheby's auction to an anonymous collector bidding by telephone. The book came from the estate of the second Baron Hesketh, a collector who died in 1955.

Source: *New York Times*

### Montana Audubon's *Wings Across the Big Sky* Bird Festival

Save June 3–5 for your vacation in Northeast Montana!



Cottonwood Inn, Glasgow, MT

Contact: Larissa Berry [lberry@mtaudubon.org](mailto:lberry@mtaudubon.org) (406-443-3949)

A small town like Glasgow, Montana, might not have a plethora of lodging choices, but we have come up with several ideas for our annual bird festival—thanks to the local Bird Festival Committee and Chamber of Commerce. The Cottonwood Inn ([www.cottonwoodinn.net](http://www.cottonwoodinn.net)), as the stage for festival activities - registration, lectures, meals, banquet, etc. - will likely be first choice for many attendees. We have 85 rooms blocked out for festival-goers on Friday and Saturday nights. (One Queen/King bed at \$70 per night or two King/Queen beds at \$75 per night) We suggest you make your reservations soon!



In addition:

Campbell Lodge, 534 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave S, Glasgow – 406-228-9328

La Casa Motel, 238 First Ave N-Hwy 2, Glasgow – 877-228-9311 / 406-228-9311

Fort Peck Hotel, 175 South Missouri Street, Fort Peck – 800-560-4931 / 406-526-3266

Lakeridge Motel & Tackle, 6004 MT Hwy 24 S, Fort Peck – 888-554-8125 / 406-526-3597

### Carbon Neutral & Transportation

Once again, *Wings Across the Big Sky* will strive to be a carbon neutral event. We will track our festival emissions, look for ways to reduce them, and offset what we cannot avoid (more information will be on our website soon). Please consider carpooling options! We also plan for vans to depart from major cities to Glasgow based on demand. If you are interested in this travel option, please notify Larissa Berry. Information on [www.mtaudubon.org](http://www.mtaudubon.org) has links to hotel websites. Moreover, look for your festival registration brochure to arrive in early March. As always, happy birding!

## ***BIRDWATCHING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERYONE!***



### **THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT- Feb.18-21 JOIN IN THE FUN AND ADVENTURE!**

The 14th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count begins on February 18. You can sign up to count one day or as many days as you choose during the four day period. Free and open to all ages, this is a great way to learn about and help the birds in your backyard and community. You do not need to be an expert birder to participate. Every single bird you identify counts, every chickadee, crow or eagle, whether it is one or 100. Your participation and information can make a difference!

Join family and friends or just spend time alone in an outdoor adventure identifying and counting in your backyard, local park, school, wildlife refuge or nature center.

For all information about how to participate on your own in the 14th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count, go to [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). At this website, you learn how to enter your data, learn about the results, enter the photo contest with prizes and get information and pictures of birds you might see in your local area. There is a wealth of birding information at this web site just waiting for you to explore!

If you would like to join a group count, on February 18 in the Bigfork area, and work with experienced birders as well as share your expertise and experiences, contact Kathy at 837-3837, by February 16, to sign up and for more information. Meeting place will be determined later by weather and how many folks sign up. We would love to have families and kids participate! You make this event a success by your participation. EVERY BIRD COUNTS, EVERY BIRDER COUNTS!



### **Montana Audubon's Tours**

***Take your pick of birding adventures across Montana, Alaska, Texas, Africa, and Peru!***

Montana Audubon is known for its annual tours to great birding destinations, and the 2011–12 tour season is packed with eight different adventures offered close to home or as far away as Africa. You can explore the northeastern part of Montana by joining the Westby Birding tour (then consider traveling on to Glasgow for the 2011 Bird Festival!), or marvel at the abundance of species at Red Rocks Lakes in southwest Montana. New on our Montana tour list will be the Raptor Weekend where you can witness and participate in the banding of hawks and eagles. Our tours also take birders to exciting places across the world to experience the global diversity of birds, habitats, and human cultures. Imagine discovering the African Finfoot in Gambia, Africa, or the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock in Peru!

#### **Save the 2011–12 Tour Dates**

South Texas Birding: April 25–May 2, 2011  
 Centennial Valley & Red Rock Lakes: May 27–29, 2011  
 Westby Birding: May 30–June 2  
 Alaska Denali/Kenai Peninsula: June 18–27, 2011  
 Raptor Weekend: September 23–25, 2011  
 Birding in The Gambia: October 28–November 11, 2011  
 Birds & Wildlife of Peru: February 15–25, 2012



To make your reservations, contact Larissa Berry at the Montana Audubon office (406-443-3949). For more information see our website: [www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/tours](http://www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/tours).

#### **South Texas Birding: April 25–May 2, 2011**

South Texas offers an unparalleled opportunity to observe birds in North America. Not only are there a suite of resident species with limited North American ranges like Green Jay, Tropical Parula, Ferruginous Pygmy-owl, Great Kiskadee, Altamira Oriole, and Olive Sparrow, but in late April, a huge variety of migrants sweep through the area. The first part of this trip involves birding the spectacular King Ranch, which encompasses a range of habitats from coastal grassland to thorn-scrub brush to stands of live oak that are home to nearly all of the South Texas specialty birds. The second part of the trip will be in the Rio Grande Valley, home to more birds with tiny U.S. ranges. We will see about 200 species, possibly more if conditions are good.

***The double occupancy price is \$1500/person (includes lodging, meals, and transportation from Harlingen, Texas). A \$375/person deposit reserves your place for this tour.***



## Results of Local 2010 Audubon Christmas Bird Counts

(The detailed tallies of the results for these counts will be posted on the FAS website soon.)



### 37<sup>th</sup> Bigfork Christmas Count, 2010: Redheads, white swans and Blue Jays By Dan Casey

This year 31 volunteers participated in the annual Bigfork Christmas Bird Count, Saturday, December 18. On a windy day with seasonal temperatures (6-24F) and snow in the afternoon, we found 10,654 birds of 83 species, our highest species total since 2003.

For the third consecutive year, we did not find any species new to our cumulative list, which stands at 142 "countable" species, excluding feral birds (e.g., Chukar), hybrids (e.g., Glaucous-winged x Western Gull), and forms (e.g., "Harlan's" Red-tailed Hawk).

This year we tied or broke our previous high count totals for 12 species, including Redhead (2,000), Greater Scaup (552), Bald Eagle (60), Great Horned Owl (9), Downy Woodpecker (42), and House Finch (526). The 39 Blue Jays we found more than doubled the previous high of 18 birds seen in 2004, and the 3 Wilson's Snipes were the most we had seen, and just the ninth time we have had them on the count. Similarly, 10 Trumpeter Swans were unprecedented; we had counted single individuals on just three previous counts.

A White-winged Scoter in Somers Bay, one of three present since November, was just the second ever recorded on the Bigfork count, the last one in 1989. Other unusual species on this year's count were a Ruddy Duck, a Prairie Falcon, and a Long-eared Owl.

Five additional species were seen count week, but not on count day (Red-necked Grebe, Western Grebe, Northern Pintail, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and Brewer's Blackbird). Notably absent were Gray Jay (seen 29 previous years), American Robin (21 yr), American Wigeon (19 yr), and Killdeer (19 yr).



### Upper Swan Valley 2010 Christmas Bird Count By Jody Wolff



The 18th annual Upper Swan CBC was held on Saturday, December 18, 2010. Eight of us braved the weather to venture out in search of birds. It was a cloudy, snowy, cool day with about a foot of snow on the ground. The temps ranged from 0 to 30 degrees valley wide.

Birds were difficult to locate, but we found 25 species on count day and one kingfisher for count week, with a total of 479 individual birds, some of our lowest totals ever.

The only new species for our count was a sharp-shinned hawk, an uncommon winter visitor here in the Swan, pending rare bird documentation. The most numerous species were 118 ravens, 75 evening grosbeaks, 54 black capped chickadees, and 52 white-winged crossbills, which is a new high for that species.



### Highlights of the 2010 Eureka Audubon Christmas Bird Count By Lewis Young

The 18<sup>th</sup> annual Eureka Christmas Bird Count was conducted on December 18, 2010. Twelve field observers and 11 feeder watchers counted 50 species of birds and 1406 individual birds. Although on the cold side, it was generally a good day for birding, with no strong winds or precipitation. Over the 18 years of the Eureka Christmas Count, the number of species sighted in any one year has ranged from a low of 42 in 1993 to a high of 66 in 2006. Altogether, a total of 109 species have been sighted over the 18 years.

The most numerous birds sighted were common raven, wild turkey, black-capped chickadee, mallard, evening grosbeak, and Bohemian waxwing. By contrast, only 1-2 individuals were sighted for 13 species, with a few examples being northern goshawk, northern pygmy-owl, Clark's nutcracker, and brown creeper.

Two species new to the Eureka count were sighted on count day this year—spruce grouse and cackling goose. The spruce grouse is likely a year-long resident but hard to find on count day due to its inaccessibility during the count, because it lives at higher elevations with deep snows. The cackling goose is considered an occasional migrant through the valley.

Record high counts were made for hoary redpolls (8) and red-naped sapsuckers (2). The only other time red-naped sapsuckers were sighted on the count was the first count in 1993. Although fairly common in summer, the sapsuckers are normally long gone by count day. For the first time in the 18 years of the Eureka count, neither a northern shrike nor a pine siskin were seen on count day, although a northern shrike was sighted during count week.



*CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS, continued on next page...*

## Results of Local 2010 Audubon Christmas Bird Counts

(The detailed tallies of the results for these counts will be posted on the FAS website soon.)



### 2010 Libby Christmas Bird Count By Sandy Gerber

Eleven field participants and 5 feeder participants observed 56 species and counted 2832 total birds during the Libby Christmas Count on Sunday, December 18.

A count first was two winter wrens, pending rare bird documentation. We had a pretty good day of birding until the snow hit us hard in the afternoon.



### Ninepipe NWR Christmas Bird Count -- 2010 By Brian Williams



Twenty participants observed 68 species and counted 10,535 total individuals during the Ninepipes CBC on December 19, 2010. The 68 species (plus two count week birds) is below the ten-year average of 72, but better than last year's 63. This count circle shows a lot of variability in species totals from year to year -- in the past ten years alone, we've ranged from 60 up to 82 species!

Birds of special note this year include White-winged Crossbills, the first record EVER for this count, found by Pat Jameson and crew at the Bison Range; Spotted Towhee, only the second record for this circle found by Kathy Ross and crew from the Kalispell area; and Harris' Sparrow, the fourth record for the count. We also established high counts for Merlin with this year's 8 Merlins being DOUBLE the previous high count of 4; Red Crossbill, 281; and, unfortunately, Eurasian Collared-dove, 105.

Thanks to all the participants, most of who drove many pre-dawn and post-dusk miles to come count birds in the Mission Valley.



### Troy 2010 Christmas Bird Count By Donald Jones



rspb.org.uk

The 2010 Troy Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 19. We had 10 participants this year in 5 parties. Weather was favorable, with sun in the morning and cloudy conditions in the afternoon. Ground was snow-covered and winds were weak with temps in the 20's.

As usual, a large hunk of our count circle (mostly west of circle center) was not covered due to weather, terrain and lack of participants. We were able to come up with 41 species and 6 additional species for the count week (highlights being a Snipe and White-breasted Nuthatch). Waterfowl species numbers were down a bit even though the Kootenai River was high, which leads to a lot of feed and cover areas for the ducks.

Finch species were normal but numbers were down (1 Redpoll, 2 Goldfinch, 6 Pine Grosbeak). Highlight of the count were 2 Yellow-rumped Warblers. The Warblers were seen by several members of the count at two different sites on opposite sides of town at the same time. One appeared to be a first year bird while the other looked to be an adult.

Again a Pot-luck at my house proved fun and fattening!



### Glacier N.P. Christmas Bird Count – 2010 By Steve Gniadek



On December 19, 2010, fifteen observers on 10 routes plus feeder watchers at one site recorded 550 birds of 36 species for the 37th Glacier NP CBC (since 1973-74). The most abundant species was the Pine Siskin, with 223 noted on 5 routes, a pretty good showing for this nomadic species. The Common Raven was the most commonly observed/ubiquitous species, with 18 seen on 7 of the 10 routes. Black-capped Chickadees were seen on 6 routes, with 36 observed. A new species for the Glacier CBC counts was the Long-tailed Duck, seen at the outlet of Lake McDonald. Notably absent were Canada Geese (there were 34 in the oxbow of Lower McDonald Creek on Dec. 11) and Black-billed Magpies. Likewise, no Common Redpolls or Bohemian Waxwings were observed.

Temperatures varied from 10 to 23 degrees F, with mostly cloudy to variably cloudy skies. Brief, light snow flurries came in with winds from the NE, up to 10 mph. Snow depth varied from about 6-36" (18" at official snow stake at HQ). Still water was frozen, though Lake McDonald was open.



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS, continued on next page...

## Results of Local 2010 Audubon Christmas Bird Counts

(The detailed tallies of the results for these counts will be posted on the FAS website soon.)



### Kalispell Christmas (New Year's) Bird Count By Dan Casey



Forty-five people participated in the 12<sup>th</sup> annual Kalispell Christmas Bird Count on a snowy Sunday, January 2, 2011, to start the New Year. They found nearly 18,000 birds of 69 species, both above our average for this count.

Three species were new to the count: a Eurasian Wigeon found in Evergreen, the second ever on a Montana count; and a Northern Hawk Owl near Batavia had apparently been there more than a month. It was still being seen two weeks after the count. Rounding out the new species was a Varied Thrush, which had been at a Happy Valley feeder for some time. These bring our 12-year total list to 112 species.

We also tied or broke our previous high counts for another eleven species, including Bufflehead (43), Common Merganser (44), Rough-legged Hawk (53), Merlin (11), Thayer's Gull (2), Downy Woodpecker (47), European Starling (1,213), and Evening Grosbeak (82). A single Prairie Falcon was found for the sixth time, and an American Three-toed Woodpecker was our second ever. In what is looking like an ongoing statewide trend, we shattered our previous high for Eurasian Collared-Doves, with 147 counted. These new arrivals seem to be here to stay.

Thanks as always to all the people who came out to contribute!



### What's With the Name?

From Dennis Hester



For over a week in early January (as of this writing), those fortunate enough to hear about its presence had the opportunity to observe a Northern Hawk Owl perching in the trees and on the utility poles and wires near Parsons' Kubota on Hwy 2 west. My first thought as I headed out to see this Hawk Owl was to ask; "What's with the name," is it a Hawk or an Owl? The answer to that came easy, because as speakers of the English language we usually place a descriptive adjective before the noun that it describes (don't quit me here), so I knew I was going to see an owl and not a hawk. But still, "What's with the name?" Are there birds named Eagle Robin or Chickadee Duck? Well there is the Fox Sparrow and the Sparrow Hawk, now named the American Kestrel. But why is the descriptive term Hawk ascribed to this Owl?

Unsurprisingly, there is a good reason for the name. In *Birds of America*, a compendium published in 1917 by The University Press, the name is discussed:

*The bird is appropriately named "Hawk" Owl; not only is its appearance Hawk-like but its manner of hunting is similar, in some respects, to that of the Hawks, or at any rate very unlike that of most Owls. For, besides its daylight hunting, the bird has the habit of perching conspicuously . . . in plain sight at the top of a tree, whence it watches for its prey with true Hawk-like alertness. When frightened from such perch, it usually swoops downward to about the level of the undergrowth and then flies rapidly to another good observation point, which it reaches by an abrupt upward glide. Its flight, however, is entirely Owl-like in its noiselessness.*

And if you were fortunate enough to have observed this approachable bird, you may have noted that the Northern Hawk Owl's shape is more like that of a falcon than a typical owl. Finally, check out Mary Nelesen's Bird of the Month article *A Very Special Owl* in the December 2007, issue of *The Pileated Post* – available at the FAS website [www.flatheadaudubon.org/content/birds/month/2007/1207.htm](http://www.flatheadaudubon.org/content/birds/month/2007/1207.htm). Now I'm off to find another answer to "What's with the name?" and discover exactly what attributes of a Fox are possessed by the Fox Sparrow.

Sources:

*Icenoggle, Radd, Birds in Place*, 2003, Farcounty Press, p. 287

*Pearson, Gilbert, et.al., Birds of America*, 1917, University Press, 1936 edition, *Doubleday & Co., p. 117*

### You Owe It To Yourself to Do This!

At the FAS January meeting, we asked any members who had photos of the hawk owl west of Kalispell to email their photos to be included on a special supplement page of our electronic version of the *Post*. We hope you enjoy the "For E-Your Eyes Only" Hawk Owl page this month. And if you are receiving your *Pileated Post* as a paper copy and would like to enjoy these special "E-Pages," just email Linda Winnie to sign up for email delivery. There's no charge, no sharing of email addresses, and your *Post* will be bE-autiful!



## Conservation Gardening Landscaping with Montana Native Plants for Montana Native Wildlife in Your Own Backyard



The Flathead Chapter of the Montana Native Plant Society invites all Flathead Audubon members to their next general meeting, Wednesday, February 16, at Discovery Square, 540 Nucleus Avenue in Columbia Falls (the old First Citizens' Bank). The program starts at 7 PM. Contact Terry Divoky at 387-5527 or [ttdivoky@centurytel.net](mailto:ttdivoky@centurytel.net) for more info.

Native plant gardening can be fun, educational, sustainable and meaningful. This talk will focus on using Montana native plants to create habitat for native wildlife and to create a sustainable garden for people to enjoy. David Schmetterling will share photos of his own garden in a small city lot in the middle of Missoula. His garden does not receive any irrigation (except the food vegetables), contains over 100 species of plants native to the Missoula area, and has been visited by over 60 species of birds. David will discuss how to use native plants to reduce water use, and to attract birds, butterflies and other insects, while still having a unique and beautiful garden all year long. David chronicles his home garden in his blog <http://montanawildlifegardener.blogspot.com>.

David Schmetterling is a biologist for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, where he is the state fisheries research coordinator. When not studying fish, he is an avid gardener, woodworker and birder. David and his wife, Marilyn, a botanist, are garden coaches and their business, Butterfly Properties, specializes in sustainable gardening with native plants for wildlife. The week after the talk, David and Marilyn will travel to southern Guyana to explore the unique flora and fauna of the remote rainforests.

### Question: How often do birds molt?

**Answer:** Molting (the process of replacing feathers) occurs once or twice per year, depending on bird species. Frequency of molting is related to wear rate of the feathers. Birds that frequent dense brush or migrate great distances experience more feather wear and, thus, often molt twice a year compared to once-a-year for species that occupy open spaces or don't travel long distances. Molting is often timed to meet

specific needs such as acquisition of breeding plumage in males in spring, and acquisition of more insulating feathers in fall in preparation for winter. Molting in most birds is a relatively gradual process and does not affect their ability to fly. However, some ducks, geese, and pelicans molt entirely over a few weeks, and are unable to fly during that period.

From Dr. Jim Story, Bitterroot Audubon

### Sign up for Action Alerts from Montana Audubon

The 2011 Montana Legislature will convene in January in Helena. Many important issues impacting wildlife, wildlife habitat, and our environment are at stake. Please consider assisting us with this effort by signing up for our action alert program, Armchair Activist, at your local Audubon Chapter meeting or at [www.mtaudubon.org](http://www.mtaudubon.org).

As the legislature faces tough problems concerning wildlife and the environment, it is important to have as many conservationists as possible calling their Representatives and/or Senators to encourage them to vote responsibly about critical issues. We will try to limit use of the action alert program to just the most critical times!

Montana Audubon has made the following bills their priority for the 2011 Montana Legislature:

- ◆ **Protection of Montana's Streams and Rivers** ~ Several bills will be introduced to encourage local governments to protect our streams and rivers from the impacts from new buildings.
- ◆ **Wind Farms and Wildlife** ~ Wildlife-friendly Best Management Practices need to be established for new wind projects.
- ◆ **Defending Current Environmental Laws** ~ There are lots of rumors of legislation that will attack our fundamental laws, from repealing the Montana Environmental Policy Act (which requires a review of environmental impacts before they develop new mines, large subdivisions, oil and gas wells, timber sales, etc.), to allowing gravel pits to be located anywhere, to prohibiting the purchase of any new public land.



Local Audubon Chapter members can help by making their voices heard on these and other crucial issues. When local input is needed, Montana Audubon will contact interested members by phone or email, explain the issue and why action is needed, and then ask members to contact their legislators. Alerts will be sent out only a handful of times during the session, but they provide a powerful way to lobby legislators on crucial bills and issues.





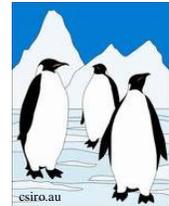
## Let's Learn More About .... *Feathered Friends*

By: *Anika Murphy, Sixth Grade, Somers Middle School*



baby99.co.uk

*The movie, The March of the Penguins, has raised a great amount of interest in penguins. If you're looking for facts on penguins, here they are. Did you know that the Empire Penguins are about 36 to 44 inches tall! Also, they weigh about 60 to 90 pounds at the most. They have yellow patches on their throat and around their ears. They have black on their back. Also, did you know all the Empire Penguins have brown eyes? The female Empire Penguin lays one egg which is kept warm from the male. The males don't eat anything when they are keeping the egg warm. When the males are keeping the egg warm, they can lose half of their weight. The Empire Penguins have short wings to let them dive into the icy cold water. Penguins eat shrimp, squid, fish, crustaceans, krill, and other smaller sea life. The March of the Penguins tells a lot of facts like I did here. I hope you enjoyed it.*



csiro.au

*More Bird Trivia to Impress Your Friends: Longest-submerged Bird—Emperor Penguin at 18 minutes!*



### **Bird Watching Answer Book**

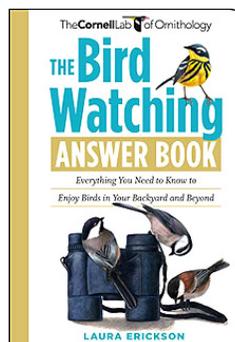
Author responds to real questions from real birders



Why is a cardinal attacking my windows? (p.87) Will birds explode if they eat rice thrown after a wedding? (p.17) How can I keep squirrels out of my bird feeders? (p.37) Do birds play? (p.268) Why don't sleeping birds fall off branches? (p. 305)

For years, bird expert and [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) science editor Laura Erickson has heard questions like these and hundreds more. Now, drawing on questions that come to the Cornell Lab, she's compiled answers to more than 200 common and not-so-common bird questions in a handy pocket-sized book that reads like a conversation with your friendly neighborhood "bird lady."

Author and bird expert [Kenn Kaufman](#) says, "This is a gem of a book! It's filled to the brim with solid, reliable information, as you would expect from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and it's written in Laura Erickson's clear, lively, engaging style. The organiza-



tion of the book, as a series of answers to hundreds of intriguing questions, makes it easy to look up quick facts or to just browse for fun. I would recommend *The Bird Watching Answer Book* to anyone with even a casual interest in birds."

*The Bird Watching Answer Book*, produced by [Storey Publishing](#), is organized into three sections: watching and feeding birds, bird behavior, and bird biology. In addition to down-to-earth scientific answers, readers will find plenty of quirky stories and interesting asides.

"Whether people like birds or not, they notice them," says Erickson. "I hope that with the book, people start noticing not just that birds are there, but that they're really cool beings sharing the planet with us."

Erickson has written three previous books and is a past winner of the National Outdoor Book Award. She also writes [Twin Beaks](#), the first blog by birds and for birds.



FEBRUARY 2011



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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. Meetings start at 7:00PM and include 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

Website: www.flatheadaudubon.org

FlockMaster - John Kyle: jkyle@fastmail.us

Conservation Educator - Nancy Zapotocki: naz@centurytel.net

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

OFFICERS

Table with 4 columns: Position, Name, Email, Phone. Includes President Bob Lee, Vice-President Paula Smith, Secretary Gail Sullivan, Treasurer Bruce Tannehill, and Past-President Mike Fanning.

DIRECTORS

Table with 4 columns: Year, Name, Email, Phone. Lists directors from 2008-2011, including Melissa Sladek, Richard Kuhl, Bill Schustrom, Ben Young, Dennis Hester, Steve Gniadek, Lewis Young, Ansley Ford, Jan Wassink, Linda DeKort, Kathy Ross, Linda Winnie, and Kay Mitchell.

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Table with 4 columns: Committee, Name, Phone, Contact Info. Lists chairs for Christmas Bird Count, Conservation, Education, Field Trips, Finance, Hospitality, Membership, Owen Sowerwine, Newsletter, Nominations, Program, Publicity, and Quality of Life.



FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

Membership Individual or Family

- Basic Membership \$20 (Pays for newsletter and operating costs)
Supporting Membership \$35 (Extra \$15 funds local projects such as grants, scholarships, meetings, and Christmas Bird Count)
Additional Donation of \$ to Education Fund, Owen Sowerwine Fund, Wherever needed

Name

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# FOR E-YOUR EYES ONLY

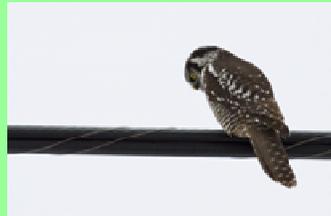
(SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT FOR READERS OF THE ELECTRONIC POST)

## NORTHERN HAWK OWL PUTS ON A SHOW WEST OF KALISPELL

Photos submitted by Flathead Audubon Members



Note the "eyes in back of head" profile



Dick Walker <http://www.dickandpamwalker.com/>



Good view of underside markings

John Winnie



Jeannie Marcure



Contrast hawk and owl tail appearance between these 2 photos

Dan Casey

*If you would like to see this fascinating bird, drive west on Highway 2 from Kalispell. The bird hangs out very near the corner of Highway 2 and Whalebone/Marquardt intersection. There is a parking area on Whalebone, right next to the bike path. Look near the tops of trees and on utility poles and wires.*