



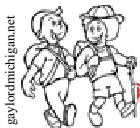
# Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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gylordmichigan.net

## A Case for Conservation Education...Part I

by Ashley Mason, Flathead Audubon Conservation Educator



goodhiker.com

Greetings from the FAS Conservation Education desk! This article is the first in a series that will explore the need for conservation education in our changing world. This article is based on research revealed in Richard Louv's 2008 book, *Last Child in the Woods – Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*.

If you are like me and most conservation-minded people, you carry a flame somewhere in your being for conservation education. You support it because you care about the natural world and want others to care about it too. You know that most people are better for having spent time outside - even euphoric if they have witnessed some natural phenomenon, like a Bald Eagle plucking a fish from the water or thousands of swans rising from a lake like a great shimmering cloud. You want these experiences to be around for generations to come and you know that our actions make a huge difference in whether the earth stays wild and intact or not. It makes sense that if we educate our young people, there will be stewards of the land in 30... 40...100 years. Let me fan your flame a bit.

The day after a big snow in our own Valley, one can walk a long way in search of children's footsteps in the snow. Neighborhoods are eerily quiet; the snow is undisturbed. I have witnessed this first hand. Where are all the children who would have been out in the snow before breakfast a century ago? Consider these alarming statistics:

♦ According to the Center for Disease Control, the U.S. population of overweight children between the ages two and five increased by almost 36 percent from 1989 to 1999. At that time, two out of ten of America's children were clinically obese – four times the obesity rate in the late 1960's.

♦ The CDC also reported that the amount of TV (and other screen time) that children watch directly correlates with measures of their body fat. In the U.S., children ages six to eleven spend about 30 hours a week looking at a TV or computer monitor.

Children live and learn through their senses – all of their senses. They learn through observation and experimentation in a multi-sensory, three-dimensional world, the richest of which is nature. They learn empathy and the laws of the universe through imitating and interacting with real people and living landscapes. More than ever, though, children are being raised indoors in front of two-dimensional, dual-sensory screens separated from the living world. Their direct and peripheral education is restricted to only what machines and material objects can teach them. So wherein lies the hope? Each year Flathead Audubon Conservation Education Program touches the lives of more than 2,000

*continued on page 4 ...*

## FEBRUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR



**Monday, February 13, 2012: Flathead Audubon General Meeting.** 7 PM at The Summit. Program will be: **"MAGEE MARSH—WARBLER MECCA & MIGRANT TRAP.** Details on page 3.

**Monday, February 6, 2012: FAS Board of Directors Meeting.** 6 PM at 295 3rd Ave. EN. All are welcome.

**Winter Field Trips.** Get out and spot our local birds! Schedule and details on page 4.

# BIRD OF THE MONTH

By Kathy Ross

## THE BLACK TERN - A WINGED SPECTER STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE

Scanning the marshy flats of the Swan River Refuge in June, an ephemeral flash of luminous, sunlit wings catches the eye and intrigues the sense of wonder. Yes, it is live and it is a bird with a buoyant unique flight pattern of graceful swoops and aerial dives. As the light-colored wings turn away from the sunlight, the jet black head and body and silvery-grey, reflective wings of the breeding adult Black Tern contrast against a blue sky - a gift of the late spring migration.

The Black Tern, *Chlidonias niger*, like other tern species, is a member of the *Laridea* family, along with gulls. Terns in general tend to be smaller than gulls, with a sleek profile of pointed wings and pointed straight bills. The Black Tern is one of the smaller species, being around 10" long with a wingspan of 24 inches. Like gulls, terns have webbed feet and are colonial-nesting, water-loving birds with a wide range of habitats, from fresh-water marshes, prairie potholes, northern coastal shorelines to tropical beaches. While most gulls maintain fairly stable populations, tern populations in the northwest, including Montana, are on the decline. In general, tern individuals or small colonies may be found roosting on sandbars and shorelines amid flocks of gulls. I have often had summer sightings of one to five Black Terns on a particular log jam in the Flathead River, but having no sightings for the last two years has been disappointing.

The distinctive black head and body, fading to grey on the rump, easily distinguishes the Black Tern from other tern species, at least during the breeding season. The females are slightly duller black, but it takes a keen eye to discern between genders. Both have a very dark bill that is almost as long as the head. Midseason, when eggs begin to hatch, post-breeding molt begins and the characteristic black feathers begin to change. First, around the eyes white feathers appear. Whitening progresses from forehead to neck and eventually into the abdominal area. The molt is completed during fall migration. This basic or winter plumage then becomes pure white on the underside, except for small dark patches on each side of the breast. The back becomes a grey similar to wings and tail. At this time the juvenile's plumage is similar to the adults except for a darker back, with wing coverts and cap that are barred and brown.

Often, vocalizations identify the Black Tern even before the silvery wings catch the eye. The shrill, metallic "kyew" can signal parents' interaction at the



nest and with young, foraging flights, and courtship flights. The "keek" call warns off enemies or threats to the nest. Both calls can have added syllables and variations depending on the intensity of the situation. It is well worth learning this call to experience these beautiful birds in flight or even be rewarded with the

opportunity to see the nest with young.

The nests are generally built on floating mats of vegetation amid cattails, rushes, canary reed grass and other emergent vegetation. In Montana, besides recorded breeding in small ponds, marshes and prairie potholes, man-made islands and islands in man-made reservoirs are used as nest sites. The nests are loosely constructed out of old vegetation from around the nest site. Although in Montana little information is available on the reproductive cycle of Black Terns, it usually begins in early or mid-June. In general, 'Black Terns are considered a single brood species', laying 1-4 eggs of an olive-like color with dark markings, which hatch around 20 days after laying. (Later nesting has been known to occur if the first attempt fails.) The nest is aggressively defended by both male and female, who together share in the feeding and rearing of



chicks. The young become mobile within days of hatching but typically do not fledge for 20 or so days.

Unlike many of the *Laridea* family species, Black Terns are not plunge-divers. They feed on insects caught on the fly and small fish or other aquatic prey skimmed off the water's surface.

Little is known about Black Tern migration patterns through Montana, but observations have noted May and June for the spring migration and any time after July and as late as September for fall migration. They will winter along the gulf coasts, in the open ocean and as far south as northern South America.

This species is much on the decline across its historical breeding areas, including our regional and state populations. Many tern colonies vanished on the Atlantic coast by the end of the 19th century when hundreds of thousands were slaughtered for their feathers by the fashion industry. They are listed as threatened or endangered in many eastern states. In Montana, their numbers are very localized. The last two years have seen a decline in individuals as well as confirmed breeding sites. This decline may be due to human impacts such as habitat loss and pesticide use. Also, late season high water levels the last two years may have had impact on breeding.

*(Black Tern, continued on page 8...)*



# February Program

## MAGEE MARSH—WARBLER MECCA & MIGRANT TRAP

Dick Walker says that Magee Marsh in northwestern Ohio is a must for everyone's "bucket list." At our February meeting, Dick will show us photographs that back up this assertion.

Magee Marsh, a 7-acre, heavily wooded swamp, sits on the southern shore of Lake Erie. It is unique because it offers a protected habitat for migrant bird species, especially warblers, en route from the tropics to their northern breeding grounds. After resting up and refueling at Magee Marsh, these large songbird populations are once again prepared to complete their migration across the lake to their summer homes.

Last spring Dick joined tens of thousands of others who arrived at Magee Marsh to witness this amazing annual migration. From late April through the end of May, it is possible to be dazzled by the breeding coloration of over 30 warbler species, as well as other songbirds, owls, wading and shore birds, waterfowl and raptors. Dick was able to observe 21 different warblers in three days. You can be sure that he will return to Magee Marsh to see the rest! The best birding is from Magee Boardwalk which offers six tenths of



Dick Walker Photography

a mile of differing habitats along its length. Magee Marsh also hosts an annual birding festival called "The Biggest Week in American Birding," held in early May.

Another famous migration site, Point Pelee, is also on Lake Erie, and across from Magee Marsh in Canada. The Ottawa Nation Wildlife Refuge, adjacent to Magee Marsh, does educational programs as well as bird banding to aid in research on these bird species.

The final portion of Dick's program will feature some of Dick's favorite places in Montana for photographing birds--Freezout Lake WMA, Ninepipe and the National Bison Range and the Lee Metcalf NWR.

Dick has lived in the Flathead since the 1970s. He and his wife Pam live in Kalispell. Both are photographers and enjoy hiking—always with their cameras! Their work may be seen on their website [Dick and Pam Walker Photography at www.dickandpamwalker.com](http://www.dickandpamwalker.com).

Please join us at 7 PM on Monday, February 13, in the Community Room of The Summit, 205 Sunnyview Lane in Kalispell. And don't forget your "bucket!"



saaudubon.org

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR! COMING SOON!

## BEAUTY OF BIRDS

APRIL 4, 11, 18, 25 ~ 6-8 PM

All for only \$10!

More details in the next *Pileated Post*



Learn about  
local birds!



## GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT—TAKE A LOOK OUT THERE!

SATURDAY — MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17 — 20



**You Count** in a family-friendly, educational activity that is lots of fun, costs nothing, and helps your local birds! And it's for birders from beginner on up! Each year, tens of thousands of people in the U.S. and Canada take part in the **Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)**. Participants count in their backyards, out their office windows, at local parks, lakes and nature centers, and absolutely anywhere else! You can spend as little as 15 minutes counting birds, or even make a whole weekend of it. People of all ages and all levels of bird-watching experience are welcome.

The GBBC is a great way to learn more about the birds in your community and connect with nature, and is perfect for fledgling birders. You can count by yourself, with your family, community group, school, or friends! It's an ideal way for more experienced birders to introduce children, grandchildren, and others to the wonderful world of birds.

You can explore which species have been seen in your community, state, or province using maps and charts on the GBBC website. Make the birds in your neighborhood count! Join in this year's Great Backyard Bird Count. For more information, you can visit [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) or you can contact Ashley Mason at [AudubonAshley@gmail.com](mailto:AudubonAshley@gmail.com).




**MID-WINTER FIELD TRIPS**

All FAS field trips are free and open to the public and are geared for all ages and levels of field experience. They are led by area biologists, retired professionals, and some of the best birders in the region. For more information, contact Kathy Ross, 837-3738 or Gael Bissell, 261-2255 or the individual field trip leaders below.

**IN FEBRUARY: A SPONTANEOUS AND AWESOME WINTER SKI ACROSS THE SWAN LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE with local naturalist, Kathy Ross.**



ClipartOf.com/433448

Join Flathead Audubon on one or more spontaneous cross-country skiing and/or snowshoe field trips exploring the Swan River Wildlife Refuge. (We're hoping for snow; if not, we can always walk or explore other areas in the valley.) Send your email address to Kathy Ross at [mtkat@montanaport.net](mailto:mtkat@montanaport.net). Kathy will email you as soon as the conditions are right for tracking and birding, about 1-2 days before the field trip. The trip may be on a week day or weekend. The Refuge is an exciting landscape of many stories written on the snow by the mammals and birds that winter there. These trips are 1-3 hours of easy skiing. Dress warm and prepare for all kinds of winter conditions; bring some food and water along with binoculars. Details for meeting time and place will be announced. Remember, the Refuge closes on March 1 to protect nesting birds. Access is still available after March 1 to the viewing area but not beyond signed areas.



**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17: GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT** with local naturalist Kathy Ross. The 2012 Great Backyard Bird Count is scheduled for February 17-20, 2012. Join Kathy for the first day of the Count to identify and count birds in the Swan River/Echo Lake area. This is a great opportunity for kids as well as adults to enjoy our local winter birds. Meet at the north end of the parking lot of Swan River School at 9:00 until noon. We will carpool from there, exploring the winter landscape along the Swan River for wintering waterfowl. We will also check out a few feeders along the way, as well as wooded areas for Pygmy Owls, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Townsend Solitaires, several chickadee species and hopefully, flocks of crossbills and Common Redpolls and various raptors are hunting the open fields. Bring binoculars, spotting scopes, warm clothing and your enthusiasm to experience our local winter feathered residents. Please contact Kathy at **837-3837** if you wish to join the field trip or have questions.



Common Redpoll (detail)  
by Larry McQueen

**SATURDAY & SUNDAY, MARCH 31-APRIL 1: FREEZOUT LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA FIELD TRIP.**

Spring waterfowl migration at Freezout Lake WMA is an experience not to be missed. Snow Geese numbers often total 100,000 or more, along with thousands of swans and a wonderful diversity of ducks and other birds (more than 40 species most years). The trip leaves at 10:30 AM Saturday from the west end of the downtown Super 1 parking lot on First Ave. East in Kalispell. We will arrive at the WMA in time to watch the white geese leave Freezout Lake for the surrounding barley fields that afternoon. Make your own reservation for Saturday night; Choteau options include the Stage Stop Inn (888-466-5900), Bella Vista Motel (406-466-5711), Big Sky Motel (406-466-5318) and the Gunther Motel (877-466-5444).



After watching the geese leave the lake at dawn Sunday morning, brunch, and one more visit to the WMA, we will head for home in time to arrive in Kalispell by 5 PM. Contact Dan Casey at 857-3143 or [danielcasey55@gmail.com](mailto:danielcasey55@gmail.com) to arrange carpools and to sign up for the trip.



Conservation Ed, continued from Page 1...  
... people in our Valley – through field programs, bird walks, in-class educational programs and educational trunks. At a time when schools are cutting back on field trips and outdoor experiences in order to meet all of their other requirements, Flathead Audubon is providing much-needed outdoor/nature experiences for our young people. This



year we hope to reach more students and a wider variety of socio-economic backgrounds. In a nutshell, we are on the front line of trying to combat these alarming trends.

In the words of naturalist Robert Michale Pyle, "[What is the] extinction of a condor to a child who has never seen a wren?"



## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT Reports

*Full tallies for all these CBCs will be available soon on <http://www.flatheadaudubon.org> under "Local Birds."*

### 90 SPECIES AT BIGFORK: A NEW MONTANA HIGH!

By Dan Casey



The 38<sup>th</sup> annual Bigfork Christmas Bird Count, Saturday, December 17, was an auspicious one. After some morning fog, it was a beautiful sunny day, with a high of 47°F and light breezes. Although many parties reported that the birding seemed a bit slow, the 35 observers (and a few feeder watchers) counted 15,902 birds of **90 species**.

This is the most species ever recorded on a Montana Christmas Count, a testament not only to the efforts of the birders, but to the wonderful variety of habitats in the Flathead Valley.



fish&gameidaho.gov

For the fourth consecutive year, we did not find any new species for our count circle, but we did count record high numbers of **Horned Grebes** (145), **Trumpeter** (2) and **Tundra Swans**, **Cooper's Hawks** (2), **American Coots** (5090), **Herring Gulls** (72), **Eurasian Collared-Doves** (18), and **Black-billed Magpies** (211). We tied our previous high counts for **Cooper's Hawk** (2) and **White-throated Sparrow** (2).

Three **Snowy Owls** were found, just the fourth time we have had them on the count, and we also had a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** for just the fourth time. Other unusual species included two **Red-necked Grebes** at Somers, a **Ruddy Duck** on the Swan River, and a **Wilson's Snipe** near Creston. **Hoary Redpolls** were seen during count week, but not on count day. Notably absent were Northern Pygmy-Owl (seen 25 previous years) and Gray Partridges (seen 18 previous years).

### NINEPIPE NWR CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT -- 2011

By Brian Williams



Nineteen participants observed 70 species during the Ninepipes CBC on Sunday 18 December, 2011, on an overcast, mild day. Though 70 species is just a hair below the 10 year average, we did have some treats on this Christmas Bird Count. We observed more species of raptors (14) this year than ever before, including a falcon grand slam of Gyr, Peregrine, Merlin, and Kestrel, a Ferruginous Hawk, and an accipiter trifecta of Sharp-shinned, Cooper's and Goshawk. We also found Snowy Owls, three total, for only the second time since 1992.



Other notable observations this year include a count-first Ruby-crowned Kinglet found by Dan Casey, high counts for Pine Grosbeak (30), Cooper's Hawk (3), and Northern Harrier (61), and, remarkably, the first time on the Ninepipes count that we recorded a Blue Jay, but NO Steller's Jay. Thanks to the all the participants, most of whom drove many miles to take part in this count.

### HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2011 EUREKA AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Lewis Young



hawkquest.org

The 19<sup>th</sup> annual Eureka Christmas Bird Count was conducted on December 17, 2011. In very mild weather, twelve field observers and 14 feeder watchers counted 61 species and 3061 individual birds. It was the second highest species total and the fourth highest total of individuals in the history of the count.

The highest number of a single species was the 1322 Bohemian waxwings. Other most numerous species were wild turkey, mallard, common raven, black-capped chickadee, and Eurasian collared-dove that ranged from 184 to 110 individuals. By contrast, only 1-2 individuals were sighted for 14 species, with a few examples being great gray owl, American coot, blue jay, Pacific wren, and American robin.



Two species new to the Eureka count were sighted on count day this year—gadwall and prairie falcon. The gadwall is seen regularly during migrations through the Tobacco Valley but is normally gone by count day. The prairie falcon is seen occasionally in the Valley, and finally one was sighted on count day. Record high counts were made of northern harriers (5) and Eurasian collared-doves (110). Snow buntings, gray jays, and a Cooper's hawk were sighted during count week but not on count day. Cooper's hawk has never been seen on count day. The blue-winged teal, great gray owl, and merlin were sighted for only the second time on our count.

### 2011 LIBBY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Sandy Gerber

Ten field participants and 4 feeder participants observed 50 species and counted 2707 birds during the Libby Christmas Count on Sunday, 18 December. Pending rare bird documentation, we also had 1 redneck grebe and 2 canvasbacks. The weather was not cooperative this year. Heavy fog conditions made it hard to count most of the day.



borealbirds.org



Nate Kohler Photography

## GLACIER NP CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Susan Sintt

On December 18, 2011, 18 observers on 10 routes and at one feeder site recorded 348 birds of 36 species, completing the 38<sup>th</sup> Glacier National Park CBC (since 1973-74) in the 112<sup>th</sup> year of the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count tradition.



utahbirds.org

This year's count produced the same number of species (36) as last year but with about 200 fewer individuals. The Common Raven was, once again, the most commonly observed species, having been observed on 8 of the 10 routes, as well as from the feeder site, totaling 25 individuals. The most abundant species was the Common Goldeneye, numbering 66 individuals. In this largely wooded habitat, this high number correlates with the mild winter thus far and the plentiful open water. Though waterfowl were making use of the open waters of Lower McDonald Creek and the lake, Canada Goose numbers only amounted to 13. However, there was a gracing of the waters with a five-some of Trumpeter Swans. Owls made a showing, with a Northern Pygmy and a Northern Saw-whet; a Northern Hawk Owl made an appearance during count week but was conspicuous by its absence on count day! Most unusual sightings were a Red-necked Grebe and six Green-winged Teal, both species not usually seen on the park waters in winter.

Weather was accommodating, with above-freezing temperatures and some rain, but scant snow made for hiking, not snowshoeing or skiing. Everyone reported a quiet day. Thanks to all the participants for adding this annual outing to their year's end holiday schedule and for duly gathering the data for another GNP-CBC!

## UPPER SWAN

By Jody Wolff



On Saturday, December 17, our 19th annual Upper Swan Valley CBC, 4 people went afield to look for birds while 4 people watched their feeders. We counted a total of 25 species, which breaks our record of last year for lowest species total ever. On such a nice day we had expected better results.



nationalzoo.si.edu

It was a warm and beautiful day in the Swan with temps ranging from 29 to 42 degrees. Our most numerous species once again were ravens at 87. We set a record low for black-capped chickadees at only 17 birds and 33 mountain chickadees, also a record low. The only new specie for the count was hoary redpoll (4) mixed with a small flock of common redpolls. Our total of individuals was also our lowest ever at 284 individual birds.

KALISPELL CHRISTMAS (NEW YEAR'S) BIRD COUNT - 1 January 2012

By Dan Casey



wikipedia.org

Thirty-eight people participated in the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Kalispell Christmas Bird Count on a partly cloudy New Year's Day. They found nearly 12,950 birds of **77 species**, a new high species count for this circle. These included four species new to the count: two **Turkey Vultures** near Batavia, an immature

**Ferruginous Hawk** photographed north of Glacier High, the **Snowy Owl** that had also been near the high school for some time, and a **Glaucous-winged Gull** at the landfill, the first ever on a Montana count (pending review by the Montana Bird Records Committee). These bring our 13-year total list to 116 species.

We also tied or broke our previous high for another nine species, including **Tundra Swan** (12), **Green-winged Teal** (4), **Lesser Scaup** (4), **Red-tailed Hawk** (58, including 6 "Harlan's" Hawks), **Rough-legged Hawk** (124), **Eurasian Collared-Dove** (409), **Downy Woodpecker** (49), **Steller's Jay** (11), and **Red-winged Blackbird** (300).

Another five species were seen during count week but not on count day. The most remarkable of these was one or more **hummingbirds** reported by two homeowners one-half mile apart in the days immediately preceding the count. Anna's Hummingbird is the most likely species, though neither homeowner got good enough looks to identify the bird(s). The other count week birds were **Gyr-falcon**, **Prairie Falcon**, **Glaucous Gull**, and **Varied Thrush**.

Thanks to all for making this one of Montana's most interesting counts!



utahbirds.org



On Saturday, January 7, Flathead Audubon assisted with the 2012 Winter Trails Day at

Blacktail Mountain cross country ski trails. This was part of the annual Winter Trails Day hosted by Flathead CORE (Community of Resource Educators). It was a beautiful, very wintery day at Blacktail. A light snow fell as 30 participants gathered with their snow shoes to begin the walk. Several familiar Audubon faces were there to enjoy the outing! It was especially exciting, however, to see many families with kids of all ages (babies on up). Several families were new to the area and this was their first time seeing snow – you can imagine their excitement! Walks were also offered at Lone Pine State Park, Glacier National Park and Swan Ecosystem Center as part of the event.

## Winter Trails Day

From Ashley Mason, FAS Conservation Educator

## SMOOTH PIPES A HAZARD TO BIRDS AND OTHER WILDLIFE

Lewis Young, Conservation Committee Chair

Plastic or metal pipes with a diameter less than about 12 inches, with a smooth interior, and in an upright position create a death trap for many birds. Birds, especially cavity nesters, investigate the pipes, but when they go inside, the sides are too close to open their wings to fly out and the sides are too smooth to crawl back out. As a result they are trapped and die. Small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians are also at risk.

Work in Nevada in recent years has highlighted the hazards to wildlife. In Nevada, 4 inch diameter PVC pipes are commonly used to mark mining claims. Metal pipes are also used to some degree. In 2009 a work crew removed 195 pipes and found 740 dead birds (photo). More recently, the American Bird Conservancy examined 854 pipes and found 879 birds, 113 reptiles, and 20 mammals. Of the 43 species of birds so far recovered from the pipes by the Nevada Department of Wildlife, most are cavity nesters. The Ash-throated Flycatcher and the Mountain Bluebird were the most frequent victims, but others commonly trapped included woodpeckers, sparrows, shrikes, kestrels, and owls.

What can be done to prevent these needless deaths? Securely capping the pipes with a solid cap would do the trick. If the pipe must allow air movement through it, then cap it with a sturdy piece of hardware cloth with 1/4 inch mesh. Metal pipes could possibly be crimped to close the end as an alternative to a cap. It is very important that whatever method is used must insure that the cap stays in place over time. In Nevada, it was discovered that about 1/2 of the pipes that had protective caps at one time had lost those caps and were once again open. If plastic or metal pipes are just being stored, insure that they are in a horizontal position so that animals can crawl back out after they investigate.



Nevada Department of Wildlife



## Pigeons rival primates in number task

By [Susan Milius](#), Science News Web edition: December 22, 2011



Pigeons, who aren't even distant uncles to monkeys, have matched primates in a test of learning an abstract numerical concept. Trained on one-two-three, the pigeons then put pairs of numbers up to nine in order, says comparative psychologist Damian Scarf of the University of Otago in New Zealand. Pigeons rivaled rhesus monkeys tested earlier at the same task.

The results "suggest that, despite completely different brain organization and hundreds of millions of years of evolutionary divergence, pigeons and monkeys solve this problem in a similar way," says Elizabeth Brannon of Duke University, a coauthor of the original study of numerical order in monkeys. Human-kind may be pretty proud of its numerical prowess, but numbers—four succulent fruits versus eight, one lurking lion versus three — matter very much in animal life, too. Research is uncovering various kinds of number-related abilities in animals as diverse as the honeybee, mosquitofish, grey parrot, *Plethodon* salamanders and a water bird called a coot.

So that pigeons could be compared with other species, Scarf used Brannon's numerical-order test, which baboons, lemurs and some monkeys, have passed. Pigeons saw computer screens displaying sets of three images, each with one, two or three shapes. The shapes varied, so a bird couldn't get the number order right just by pecking at increasing surface area. Scarf rewarded birds for pecking in one-shape, two-shapes, three-shapes order.

It took Scarf more than a year of sessions to get three pigeons' success rates up to 30 - 40 percent

on ordering the three images. Mere chance would have given the birds the correct answer only a bit more than 8 percent of the time. And no, he's not sick of pigeons. "They're very diligent workers," he says.

To see if all that training gave the birds an abstract sense of numerical order, he offered them pairs of shape clusters to peck. Birds had trained only up to three, but Scarf included all pairs possible with numbers one through nine. For the toughest challenge — when both numbers in a pair were unfamiliar from training — birds pecked the images in ascending numerical order about 74 percent of the time, matching the monkey score.

Seeing such similarity on the same task helps us with the puzzle of identifying the origins of numerical ability. The comparable success is a surprise, considering that pigeons don't seem to process order the way primates do in non-numerical matters, says comparative psychologist Dustin Merritt of Duke University. The difference shows up when pigeons and monkeys learn images in order. Monkeys can put selected pairs in order (B-D, A-C), but pigeons usually need one of the end images for success.

All this numerical ordering isn't technically counting, a complex business requiring specific tags for each number. Irene Pepperberg of Harvard University, however, has reported that a grey parrot named Alex actually did count and could indicate which of two Arabic numbers was larger or smaller. It's hard to compare Alex's numerical prowess with that of other species, though: He indicated his choices in experimental tests by speaking in English!



## 2012 Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival Workshops

By Larissa Berry, Montana Audubon

Join us for Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, this year co-hosted by Flathead Audubon Society, June 8–10, 2012, at the **Hilton Garden Inn and Conference Center, 1840 US Hwy 93 S in Kalispell.**

We are very excited about this new facility, which will be center stage for festival activities Friday through Sunday, including registration, birding field trips departure point, guest speaker presentations, meals, banquet festivities, and much more.

### 2012 Pre-Festival Workshops

We again are offering two pre-festival Conservation Workshops, plus one pre-festival Education Workshop, all on Friday, June 8. Sign up for the workshops from March 15 to May 22 on the festival registration form arriving in your mail box mid-March. Act fast—space is limited for each workshop! Workshop details are listed below:



Jeannie Marcure

#### Conservation

**1. Northwestern Montana Birds and Wildlife in a Warming World.** We'll tour local forests and, hopefully, Glacier National Park. Participants will get up close and personal with the flora and fauna of the area, discuss the impacts of our changing climate, and delve into ways we can lessen the impact by reducing carbon pollution and building resilient ecological systems that are best able to adapt to a changing climate. Limited to 20 participants, lunch included, tentatively 8 AM - 2 PM, cost to be determined before signup.

**2. River-to-Lake Initiative.** Since 2000, the River-to-Lake Initiative has been providing conservation and restoration expertise to private landowners along the Flathead River and around the North Shore of Flathead Lake. River-to-Lake partners, spearheaded by the Flathead Land Trust, work directly with landowners to craft conservation efforts that meet their needs. We'll meet many of these partners and visit several project sites, including two Important Bird Areas (Owen Sowerwine Natural Area and North Shore Flathead Lake). Limited to 20 participants, lunch included, tentatively 8 AM - 2 PM, cost to be determined before signup.

#### Education



**Develop a Bird Education Program in your Community.** This six-hour training is for any Audubon Chapter member looking to begin or improve bird education programs within their community. Each participant receives training and curricula-oriented materials from Flying Wild, a Council for Environmental Education program which introduces students to bird conservation through standards-based classroom activities and environmental stewardship projects. Instructors will share their expertise and experiences in developing new environmental education programs for all ages. (For more information on Project Flying Wild, go to [www.flyingwild.org](http://www.flyingwild.org).) Presented by the Montana Audubon Conservation Education Center, Darcie Vallant, Center Director, and Heather Ristow, Education Director. For questions on this training please contact Darcie at 406-294-5099, ext. 302. Limited to 30 participants, time to be determined before signup, cost \$25/per individual.

For more information about the festival, please contact Montana Audubon Bird Festival Coordinator Larissa Berry at [lberry@mtaudubon.org](mailto:lberry@mtaudubon.org)/406-443-3949, or any Flathead Audubon Board Member. For updates, visit <http://www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival.html> and "like" us at <http://www.facebook.com/MontanaAudubon>

*Black Terns, continued from page 2 ...*

\* "Waterbirds will often move breeding colonies as wetland conditions change, making localized surveys of limited value without regional comparisons. Thus, participation in a region-wide colonial-nesting waterbird inventory may provide critical information for conservation of Montana's waterbirds." The Black Tern, along with a number of other waterbirds, is listed as a 'species of concern' by agencies such as BLM and Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. These agencies encourage volunteers. Become a Citizen Scientist and assist in keeping these beautiful terns part of our landscape! Participate in inventories and/or report any sightings of individuals or nesting activities to the above government agencies.

#### *References*

*The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*, by David Allen Sibley

*Stokes Field Guide to Birds-Western Region*, by Donald and Lillian Stokes

\* "Mt. Colonial-nesting Waterbird Inventory - 2010 Report," by Catherine Wightman and Fred Tilly

#### *Websites*

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State

Montana Natural Heritage Program  
Montana Field Guide



## Business Sponsors of FAS Conservation Education Program

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*...to those below who have made special donations to Flathead Audubon from December 18, 2011 through January 18, 2012.*

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### My Own Vision

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## Photos Requested

*If you have a photo of Colin McLean, please send a copy to Sharon DeLong, The Courtyard at Mt. Tabor, 6125 S.E. Division St., Portland, OR 97206. Both were active Audubon members from Eureka.*



P.O. Box 9173  
Kalispell, MT 59904-9173

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](mailto:lindawin@centurytel.net). **Deadline for newsletter copy is the 18th of each month.** Contact newsletter editor at 755-1406; email submissions to: [lindawin@centurytel.net](mailto:lindawin@centurytel.net)

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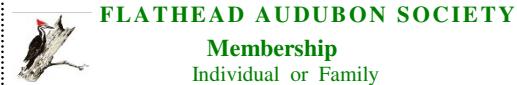
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