

HAPPY
VALENTINE'S
DAY!



FAS MEMBERS RISE TO THE CHALLENGE!

Just over a month ago, members of Flathead Audubon's Board of Directors began an internal contest to see how much money they could raise for Flathead Audubon's Conservation Education Program. In a short time, they had pledges totaling over \$1600. The Board then put out a challenge to the Flathead Audubon membership to match the Board's total. And by January 18, our generous members had opened their wallets, purses and checkbooks and not only met the Board's total, but exceeded the amount! What an amazing way to start a brand new year! So, if you were a donor, thank yourself, thank every other donor, and please accept the thanks and awe of Flathead Audubon's Officers and Directors! You've proven that Conservation Education in the Flathead plays a worthwhile and valuable role in our quality of life!



OSPREY

Bill and Carole Jensen



SNOWY OWL

Denny Olson



MERLIN

John & Rosemary McKinnon

John & Linda Winnie

Linda DeKort

Mary & Gary Sloan

Richard Kuhl

Jane Lopp

Bruce Tannehill

Gael Bissell & Rick Mace

Kay Mitchell

John Hughes

Lewis Young

Paula & Bob Smith



KESTREL

Raylene Wall

Richmond Thomason

Brett Thuma

John & Ann Collins

Rod McIver

Art & Susan Burch

Barbara Dickison

Roy Dimond

Todd & Elizabeth Ham-



MY OWN VISION

Robert & Marcia O'Neil

Patricia McClelland

Eileen Carney

TD Little

June Ash

Bill & Judith Bruzek

Doris Shennum

Peter Saunders

Barb Boorman

Leo Libby

Help thy brother's boat across, and lo,
Thine own has reached the shore!
Hindu Proverb



FEBRUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, February 10, 2014: Flathead Audubon General Meeting. Gateway Community Center, United Way Conference Room. MT Wild Wings Recovery Center with live birds! See page 3!
Monday, February 3, 2014: FAS Board of Directors Meeting. 6 PM at 295 3rd Ave. EN. All welcome.
Friday, February 14 through Monday, February 17, 2014: Great Backyard Bird Count. (see page 8!)
Sunday February 16, 2014: Swan River/Bigfork Area Birding Field Trip (details on page 8)
Sunday March 2, 2014: Lower Valley Late Winter/ Early Migration Field Trip (details on page 9)

BIRD OF THE MONTH

By Lewis Young

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

The Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) is a small, very agile hawk of the forest and woodlands. With a wingspan of 17-22 inches and a length of 10-14 inches, it displays an amazing ability to fly rapidly through dense trees and shrubs in pursuit of prey.

Adults are a slatey blue-gray on the upper parts with narrow horizontal red-orange barring on the underparts. The tail is banded with a narrow white tip and the eye is red or orange. Juveniles differ from adults by having brown upper parts, mostly coarse vertical-streaked underparts, and yellow eyes. As with all Accipiters, when flying in the open, it has a distinctive pattern of several quick wingbeats followed by a glide.

It is the smallest of the 3 species of bird-hunting Accipiter hawks (Cooper's Hawk and Northern Goshawk are the other two) and can be difficult to separate from the Cooper's Hawk, which is the next largest, because their plumages are similar and size can be difficult to judge.

As in all Accipiters, the female is noticeably larger than the male; this can lead to confusion in identification. On flying birds, the Sharp-shinned's head is smaller, the leading edge of the wings is more hunched and pushed forward and the wingbeats are deeper with more flicking "wrist action," where the Cooper's head is larger and the leading edge of the wings are straighter with wingbeats that are stiffer and shallower. The Sharp-shinned's tail is more square-tipped and relatively shorter than the Cooper's tail which is more rounded. On perched birds, the Sharp-shinned has a relatively smaller bill size and leg thickness than the Cooper's, but these can be difficult to see.



Brian K. Wheeler/VIREO

Sharp-shinned Hawks live in and at the edges of mixed or coniferous forests and open deciduous woodlands. In the winter, they may be found in any kind of forest or brushy area but tend to avoid open country. Nests are a platform of sticks lined with bark strips, grass, and twigs and sometimes are built on top of an old crow or squirrel nest. The shallow, platform-like nest is usually 1-2 feet in diameter and 4-6 inches deep. Both sexes bring nest material, but the fe-

male may do most of the building. The nest site is very well concealed and usually in a dense conifer within the forest or a dense grove and 20-60 feet above the ground. In courtship, pairs circle above the forest while calling. The male may fly high and dive steeply into the forest. Usually 4-5 eggs are laid, then incubated mostly by the female for 30-35 days. The eggs are bluish-white fading to white and blotched and washed with brown. The male brings food to the female on the



© Jim Zipp / www.ardea.com

nest and may sit on the eggs while she eats. For the first 1-2 weeks after hatch, the female remains close to the young and feeds the nestlings prey that the male delivers. After about 3-4 weeks the young may move out of the nest onto nearby branches and can fly at 5-6 weeks. The Sharp-shinned Hawk diet is predominantly small birds up to about robin size. It is also known to eat small numbers of rodents, bats, squirrels, lizards, frogs, snakes, and large

insects. One hunting technique is to perch inside foliage and wait for small birds to approach, then burst out after them. Another technique is to fly rapidly through the trees, twisting and threading around obstacles, and take prey by surprise.

Sharp-shinned Hawks are found all across the U.S. and Canada where forests or woodlands are found. Most of them nesting in Canada and parts of the northern U.S. leave their breeding grounds and may winter in the rest of the continental United States or migrate as far as southern Central America. Sharp-shinned Hawks are found yearlong in the Flathead and northwest Montana, but the individual birds may be different between summer and winter due to the migration.

Although they are considered uncommon in all seasons in the Flathead, concentrations during migration often are large. At two sites in western Montana where concentrations of migrating raptors are counted, Sharp-shinned Hawks are recorded in large numbers. The Jewel Basin site in the Flathead has recorded 779-1142 per year from 2008-2012, and in the (Sharp-shinned Hawk, continued on page 5...)





January Program

OWLS OF MONTANA

Our February meeting will feature live birds from the Montana Wild Wings Recovery Center. Flathead Audubon member, Doug MacCarter, and other volunteers with the Center will introduce us to some of the owls that have been rehabilitated, but cannot be released back into the wild.

Montana Wild Wings Recovery Center is a center for animal rehabilitation and environmental education programs. Animals are examined and treated by non-staff medical volunteers and veterinarians in the valley. The goal is to release as many as possible back into the wild. The Center also provides educational programs.

The Center is located on a private ranch owned by Beth and Bob Watne on the east side of the Flathead River, off Highway 35 (formerly known as Gentle Giant Ranch).

Doug MacCarter is an educator and wildlife biologist who has been involved with birds of prey all his life. He and his twin brother are noted for the Osprey studies on Flathead Lake. Doug was born in Great Falls, Montana, and went to the University of Montana. He learned about wildlife rehabilitation while volunteering with Liberty Wildlife in Scottsdale, Arizona. Doug has been volunteering with Montana Wild Wings Recovery Center since this past summer. Doug and his wife Marylynn have homes in Arizona and in Kalispell.

To learn which owl species will be representing the Center on Monday, February 10, join us at 7 PM in the United Way Conference Room at the Gateway Community Center. The Conference Room is accessed from the west side parking lot. Look for the Flathead Audubon banner!

From Cornell Lab of Ornithology:

Introducing Merlin Bird ID: A New Kind of Birding App

Information overload is the bane of the beginning bird watcher—as anyone knows who has ever flipped through 40 species of sparrows in a field guide. What if an app could quickly tell you which birds are most likely based on your location, date, and a brief description? Not just which birds theoretically could occur near you, but which birds are actually reported most often by other birders. That's what Merlin Bird ID does. **And it's free**—because we want to make bird watching easier for everyone.

Merlin Bird ID covers 285 of the most common birds of North America (with more on the way). In addition to help with ID, it contains expert tips, more than 1,400 gorgeous photos, and sounds for each species. It's available now for iPhone and other iOS7 devices, and it's coming soon for Android.



- ◆ [Download Merlin Bird ID](#) from the App Store
- ◆ [Get more details](#) at our Merlin website
- ◆ Android user? [Sign up for notification](#) when it's ready

LOST & FOUND

Found at January's FAS General Meeting:

- ◆ Pair of ski gloves
 - ◆ Ladies bracelet
- Call 756-8130 to identify and arrange return.



HELP WANTED

There are THREE positions open on the Flathead Conservation District board of supervisors to serve a four-year term beginning 1/1/2015. Deadline to submit the petition for nomination form to the county election administrator is March 10, 2014. Conservation Districts work locally to conserve soil, water and other natural resources in Montana. Supervisors attend 2 evening meetings per month. The board administers the Montana Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act (310) Law which greatly impacts riparian species. Supervisors are reimbursed for mileage and time spent in the field. For more information, check the website at www.FlatheadCD.org or call 742-4220.



Josh Gubits
of the
Whitefish Lake Institute
receives FAS
Conservation Achievement Recognition

West Valley Naturalists February 6 program will feature the birds of West Valley. It will be at the West Valley School Library, 2290 Farm to Market Road, Kalispell beginning at 7 PM, Thursday, February 6. All are welcome, no charge. For more information contact Meliss Clark at 755-8990.

In keeping with this month's special look at owls, following is part of an article, edited for space, published by the New York Times on February 25, 2013. The article will be continued in next month's Post.

The Owl Comes Into Its Own

By [NATALIE ANGIER](#)



The day after a frigid, star-salted night spent tromping through the Alexandria woods with David Johnson of the [Global Owl Project](#), and listening to the stridently mournful cries of wild barred owls that remained hidden from view, I stopped by the National Zoo around sunset to take visual measure of the birds I had heard.



Amir Ezer

Barn owls communicate through a complex, rule-based series of calls, trills, barks and hoots, says Alexandre Roulin of the University of Lausanne. The two barred, or *Strix varia*, owls were just rousing themselves in the outdoor enclosure, and they looked bigger and more shaggily majestic than I expected, with capes of densely layered cream-and-coffee plumage draped on their 17-inch frames and pompous, Elizabethan feather ruffs encircling their necks. Like any good royalty, they ignored me. That is, until I pulled out my phone with the birdcall app and started playing the barred owl song. The female's languid eyes shot wide open. The male's head spun around in its socket by 180 of the 270 degrees an owl's head can swivel.

With the distinctive forward-facing gaze that can make owls seem as much human as bird, the barred pair stared at me. I played the call again, the male grew bored, and I was about to put the phone away when suddenly the female — the larger of the two owls, as female birds of prey often are — pitched her body forward on her perch, lifted up her heavy, magnificent wings and belted out a full-throated retort to my recorded call. After a brief pause, she hooted the eight-note sequence once more, at which point an astonished zoo-goer nearby burst into applause.

In the Western imagination, the owl surely vies with the penguin for the position of My Favorite Bird. "Everyone loves owls," said [David J. Bohaska](#), a paleobiologist at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, who discovered one of the earliest owl fossils. "Even mammalogists love owls."

Owls are a staple of children's books and cultural kitsch — here wooing pussycats in pea-green boats and delivering mail to the [Harry Potter](#) crew, there raising a dubiously Wise eyebrow in the service of snack food. Yet for all this apparent familiarity, only lately have scientists begun to understand the birds in any detail, and to puzzle out the subtleties of behavior, biology and sensory prowess that set them apart from all other avian tribes.

Researchers have discovered that young barn owls can be impressively generous toward one another, regularly donating portions of their food to smaller, hungrier siblings — a display of altruism that is

thought to be rare among nonhuman animals, and one that many a small human sibling might envy.

The scientists also discovered that barn owls express needs and desires to each other through a complex, rule-based series of calls, trills, barks and hoots, lan-

guage the researchers are now seeking to decipher. "They talk all night long, making huge noise," said Alexandre Roulin of the University of Lausanne, who [reported on barn owl altruism in the journal Animal Behaviour](#) with his colleagues Charlene A. Ruppli, and Arnaud Da Silva of University of Burgundy.

Other researchers are tracking the lives of some of the rarer and more outlandishly proportioned owls, like the endangered Blakiston's fish owl of Eurasia. Nearly a yard high, weighing up to 10 pounds and with a wingspan of six feet, Blakiston's is the world's largest owl, a bird so hulking it's often mistaken for other things, according to Jonathan Slaght of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Russia program. It could easily look like a bear in a tree or a man on a bridge. Or maybe Ernest Hemingway. This powerful predator can pull from the river an adult salmon two, three or more times its own weight, sometimes grabbing onto a tree root with one talon to help make the haul.

Ferocity is essential for a bird whose frigid, spotty range extends across northeastern China, the Russian Far East and near the Arctic Circle, one that breeds and nests in the dead of winter, perched atop a giant cottonwood or elm tree, in the open, in temperatures 30 degrees below zero Fahrenheit. Dr. Slaght's colleague Sergei Surmach videotaped a female sitting on her nest during a blizzard. "All you could see at the end was her tail jutting out," Dr. Slaght said.

Aeronautical engineers are studying owls for clues to better wing designs. Many owl species are renowned for their ability to fly almost completely silently, without the flapping noises and air whooshes to warn prey of their approach. Researchers have traced that silent flight to several features. The bulk of the wing is broad and curved — the ideal shape for slow gliding — and is abundantly veined with velvety down plumage to help absorb sound. Moreover, the feathers at the edge of the wing are serrated to effectively break up and smooth out air turbulence as a comb disentangles knots. At a meeting of the American Physical Society last fall, researchers from Cambridge University [proposed](#) that well-placed perforations in an airplane wing could have a similar smoothing effect on turbulence, leading to quieter and more fuel efficient flights — and mealtime voles for all.



CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

From

Kay Mitchell for the Flathead Audubon Board



Highlights from January 2014 Board Meeting:

- ◆ Accepted proposal with reduced cost by Chaney Ockert to convert FAS website to self-managed platform
 - ◆ Heard conservation reports regarding Glacier National Park bull trout plan revision, and grazing allotments in Shepherd Creek drainage. Steve Gniadek discussed the current collaborative process for updating Flathead National Forest Plan
 - ◆ Made suggestions on how to handle difficulty in getting volunteers to bring treats to monthly meetings
 - ◆ Agreed that President Lopp and another board member would visit Intermountain Home construction site and offer suggestions regarding the interface with nearby Blasdel Waterfowl Production Area
- Full minutes of every Flathead Audubon Board meeting are printed on Flathead Audubon's website, www.flatheadaudubon.org, after they are officially accepted at the following month's meeting. Click on "About Us," then "Board Meeting Minute Archives." Take a look!



Your Holiday Greenery Can Double as Winter Bird Habitat

In January and February, with no leaves on deciduous trees, shelter can be hard to come by. That's when birds turn to evergreens, whose dense needles offer protection from heavy precipitation and wind. Right now, you can breathe new life into your holiday wreaths and boughs by placing them near feeders and birdbaths. Read our [full set of tips on making a welcoming winter garden](#)—the birds will thank you.



From the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Remember the Flathead Audubon Society

Remember the Flathead Audubon Society with a bequest in your will.

You are a member of the Flathead Audubon Society and, in addition to enjoying *The Pileated Post*, the presentations at the monthly meetings, bird outings and activities, your membership supports the good work that FAS does, including its conservation education program and maintaining the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area.

You can leave a legacy in your name and insure that these programs continue by remembering to include the Flathead Audubon Society in your will. You can include a bequest in the body of your will, or if you already have a will, it is as simple as adding your bequest as a codicil at the end of your will, without the necessity of redoing the entire document. And, if you wish, you can specify which FAS program your legacy bequest will support.

For further information on helping FAS, please talk with any officer or board member.

Bird of the Month, continued from page 2 ...

Bitterroot Valley, the MPG Ranch has recorded 377-591 birds per year over the last 3 years. Sharp-shinned Hawks are detected on Christmas Bird Counts with some regularity.

Like other raptors, Sharp-shinned Hawks suffered population breeding failure when the pesticide DDT was in use in North America. Some carry high levels of this pesticide in their bodies even today, probably because much of their songbird prey spends winters in South America, where DDT is still used. However, yearly migration counts indicate that populations are now stable or even increasing.

Sharp-shinned Hawks may be attracted to the birds at feeders and although the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology says studies indicate a feeder doesn't greatly increase a bird's chance of being taken by a raptor, many bird watchers prefer to discourage this behavior. If a hawk begins to regularly hunt at a feeder, simply remove the feeder for a week or so and the hawk will move on and the songbirds return when the feeder goes back up.

As one of our yearlong residents, Sharp-shinned Hawks contribute to the variety of raptors in the Flathead and northwest Montana and play a role in the natural function of the forest and woodland ecosystems. Those folks who spend much time in the forest and woodlands or watching their bird feeder are likely to see these interesting hawks, although it may be a brief view. Whenever you see a Sharp-shinned Hawk flashing through trees, twisting and turning rapidly, consider it a privilege to have seen such an agile flyer in action.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Bigfork CBC 40th Anniversary Totals Compiler: Dan Casey

The 40th annual Bigfork Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 14, under cloudy skies with occasional rain showers. Volunteer participants counted 21,552 individual birds of 78 species. Overall numbers were up, but the species total was a bit below our recent average counts. With the addition this year of Rusty Blackbird and Common Grackle, our 40-year cumulative list now stands at 146 species. We had record high numbers of another six species: Canada Goose (6,389), Gadwall (24), Green-winged Teal (10), Bald Eagle (69), Eurasian Collared-Dove (85), and Bohemian Waxwing (7,017). Other highlights included five Trumpeter Swans, six "Harlan's" Red-tailed Hawks, four Northern Pygmy-Owls, an American Three-toed Woodpecker, and 84 Chestnut-backed Chickadees. Notable by their absence were Evening (count week) and Pine Grosbeaks, Gray Jay, Red Crossbill (count week), Common Redpoll, Clark's Nutcracker and Cedar Waxwing.



2013 Libby Christmas Bird Count Compiler: Pete Mickelson

The 2013 Christmas Bird Count for Libby, Montana was held on 21 December. There were four parties driving within the count circle and one party canoeing the Kootenai from Osprey Landing to the Highway 37 bridge. Nine people actively counted and another four parties watched feeders. Our total was 46 species adding up to 2,193 individual birds. An additional two species (Junco and Pine Grosbeak) were seen the following day. The weather was mild (26 degrees) and high overcast with no wind. There were no unusual species, although it's been several years since a Black-billed Magpie was seen. Despite the abundance of Mountain Ash berries and Crabapples, only two flocks of waxwings were seen. There were 68 European Starlings feeding and roosting at the Libby landfill. I would like to thank all count participants and particularly Kay Casperson for help organizing the count and providing the bulk of the food for the compilation in the evening.

21st Annual Eureka CBC Compiler: Lewis Young

The 21st annual Eureka Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 14, in mild weather after a preceding extended spell of bitter cold. Twenty-two people went into the field and another fifteen counted at their feeders. On count day, 64 species were tallied, which is our third highest total. The total number of individuals was 1,978, which is near the middle of previous totals. Although the total number of individuals was not high, we did have record high counts for nine species (Wild Turkey, Wilson's Snipe, Eurasian Collared-dove, Belted Kingfisher, Downy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Black-billed Magpie, Black-capped Chickadee, and European Starling). The 395 Wild Turkeys counted almost doubled the previous high count. New species to the count were Green-winged Teal and Wood Duck on count day and Trumpeter Swan during count week. Without a doubt, the most amazing find on count day was a Curve-billed Thrasher, a bird normally found in the desert southwest. Even more amazing is that this is the second time it has been seen on the Eureka CBC!

Troy Christmas Bird Count Compiler: Don Jones

The Troy count (1/4/14) was pretty low. It was a beautiful, sunny, calm day for the count. Total species was 45 with two additional species for the count week (1,518 total birds). There were 12 people in the field plus a couple of feeder watchers. Most of our area was inaccessible due to rough, icy terrain and icy roads making walking and driving very difficult. We were essentially cut off from the entire west side of our count circle and were forced to concentrate on main arteries and tributaries of Hwy 2 and Hwy 56 (Bull Lake Hwy). The highlight for the count was a Snowy Owl near the base of the Cabinet Mountains – first for our area. If you can believe it, we could not come up with a European Starling or House Sparrow, and our Rock Dove count came in late and at only three. I guess we would be the envy of some counts around the state with those numbers.

Even though we had access issues, it was a good group that met for breakfast on count morning and at my house for a potluck that evening – good fun. On a side note, the mean age of our local birders is getting younger. That's great until you're standing in the woods next to one of our younger members and they say, "you can't hear that bird?" Sucks getting older but it's good to know that the woods aren't as quiet as I thought they were.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Glacier National Park Christmas Bird Count

Compiler: Jami Belt

On December 15, 2013, 21 observers on 10 field routes recorded 424 birds of 38 species, and one observer at one feeder site (in West Glacier) recorded 46 individuals and three additional species for a count total of 470 individuals and 41 species. This year's count was the 40th Glacier National Park CBC (since 1973-1974), contributing to the 114th year of the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count. This year's count produced more species than last year. Temperatures lingered above freezing throughout the day; calm wind and overcast skies set the tone for the day. Two additional species were observed during count week.

On count day, the Common Raven was, once again, the most commonly observed species, observed on all 10 of the 10 routes, totaling 54 individuals. Abundant waterfowl were counted on the mostly unfrozen waters of McDonald Creek and Lake McDonald, dominated by Common Goldeneye (62 individuals), Common Mergansers (32 individuals), Barrow's Goldeneye (23 individuals), and Trumpeter Swans (12 individuals). A single Pygmy Owl, the only species of owl seen (or heard) this year, a Northern Shrike, two Belted Kingfishers, 20 Bald Eagles and one Golden Eagle also made appearances. A White-winged Scoter seen on Lake McDonald was a new bird reported for Glacier's Christmas Bird Count this year. Flocks of Black-capped Chickadee (45 individuals), Bohemian Waxwings (26 individuals) and Golden-Crowned Kinglets were active along several of the routes, and Goldfinches were busy at the feeder sites (30 individuals). Observations of a family of Spruce Grouse taking snow baths and American Dippers knocking caddis flies and small fish against rocks were a few of the highlights reported by participants.

Thanks to all participants for contributing their expertise, time and energy and for helping the new compilers to learn the ropes of this great event. Your efforts are invaluable to help us track this long-term information about which birds are visiting or making themselves at home in Glacier during this early winter season!

Kalispell CBC: 15th Count Results

Compiler: Dan Casey

The 15th annual Kalispell Christmas Bird Count was held December 29, on an overcast day with snow flurries. We had 37 people afield, and counted 20,487 individuals of 72 species, matching our recent average counts. No new species were found, but we had a **Snowy Owl** for just the second time, and our third-ever **American Three-toed Woodpecker**. We also tied or broke our previous high count for another ten species: **Great Blue Heron** (9), **Gadwall** (9), **American Wigeon** (10), **Ring-necked Duck** (13), **Sharp-shinned Hawk** (9), 197 **Ring-necked Pheasants**, 825 **Rock Pigeons**, 422 **Eurasian Collared-Doves**, 496 **Common Ravens**, and 1,569 **European Starlings**. Other unusual finds included a (feral) **Ringed Turtle-Dove** south of Kalispell, a **Glaucous Gull** at the dump, and single **White-throated** and **Harris's Sparrows** in the Evergreen area. **Northern Goshawk** and **White-crowned Sparrow** were seen during count week.



Ninepipe Christmas Bird Count

Compiler: Brian Williams

We had a strong turnout of bird-watchers this year and good results to show for it. We counted 77 species total, well above our 5-year, 10-year, and overall average of 71, 70, and 69 species respectively. We also had two new species for the count circle: American Pipit and Lapland Longspur. Some additional highlights include:

- ◆ Two species counted only once before: Barred Owl and Lincoln Sparrow
- ◆ High counts for: Wild Turkey (double previous total!), American Kestrel (36), Great Horned Owl (25), and Blue Jay (3)

Thanks to all who participated in the 2013 Ninepipe Christmas bird count.

Upper Swan 21st Christmas Bird Count

Compiler: Jody Wolff

On December 15, six of us ventured afield, while six more individuals watched their feeders. It was a reasonably nice day, with a morning low of 26 and a high of 37 degrees, cloudy but no precipitation, eight inches of snow on the ground, and frozen waters. Due to the lack of open water, no waterfowl were sighted this year.

We saw a total of 26 species with a total of 305 individual birds and three more species during count week. Once again, the Common Raven was our most common species with a total of 67. For only the second time in 21 years, two starlings were seen on count day. Thirty-one Wild Turkey were counted this year, a high for us. Prior to 2002, no turkeys were ever seen here in the Swan. No new species were seen this year. All in all, 2013 was a pretty average Christmas Bird Count for the Upper Swan. Thanks to all who participated in our 21st CBC.



CABIN FEVER?



HERE'S YOUR FAS OUTDOOR WINTER GUIDE!

The Great Backyard Bird Count February 14-17, 2014

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds, to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are. GBBC checklists can be accepted from anywhere in the world! Everyone is welcome--from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event.

It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds. Participants tally the number of individual birds of each species they see during their count period. They enter these numbers on the GBBC website. Participants may also send in photographs of the birds they see for the GBBC photo contest.

Why count birds?

Bird populations are dynamic; they are constantly in flux. Scientists use the GBBC information, along with observations from other citizen-science

projects, such as the Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and eBird, to get the “big picture” about what is happening to bird populations and to investigate far-reaching questions, like these:

- How will the weather influence bird populations?
- Where are winter finches and other “irruptive” species that appear in large numbers during some years but not others?
- How will the timing of birds’ migrations compare with past years?
- How are bird diseases, such as West Nile virus, affecting birds in different regions?
- What kinds of differences in bird diversity are apparent in cities versus suburban, rural, and natural areas?

The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada and sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited.

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP

Sunday February 16, 2014: Swan River/Bigfork Area Birding Field Trip

Join Flathead Audubon for The Great Backyard Bird Count! We will identify and count birds at local feeders, as well as explore our local fields and riparian areas for winter avian residents. Fledgling birders of all ages are encouraged to join in! This is a great opportunity to learn about local year-round, as well as wintering, birds. There are always surprises! Meet at 9 AM at Swan River School, east end of big parking lot. We will car-pool from there. We will return by noon, but if the birds are active and there is interest, we may continue on to other areas, so bring something to munch on just in case. Also, dress warm and bring binoculars and spotting scopes. Be sure to sign up early, since space is limited, by calling Kathy Ross at 837-3837. All ages and birding abilities are welcome!

Upcoming Education Events

Great Backyard Bird Count February 14-17

The 2014 GBBC will take place Friday, February 14, through Monday, February 17. Please join us for the 17th annual count! To participate in this wonderful citizen science event, go to www.birdsource.org to set up an account and get more information. It's all free!

Each year, Flathead Audubon assists local schools with the Great Backyard Bird Count. This year we are showcasing our new native plant gardens through using them for the Bird Count. We are looking for volunteers to help teachers and students find and identify birds. This is a great opportunity to get out, see some birds and see our beautiful new school gardens. If you would like to help with this effort, contact Ashley Mason at AudubonAshley@gmail.com.



GLACIER NATIONAL PARK WINTER SNOWSHOE WALKS

Saturday & Sunday, January 11 to March 22, 2014 at 10:30 AM & 2:00 PM

Explore Glacier National Park on a two-hour ranger-led snowshoe walk and take an intimate look at the park in winter. Search for signs of wildlife, discover the plants and animals of the park, and enjoy the solitude of winter during this unique experience. Not recommended for children under age 6. Meet at Apgar Visitor Center. Participants may use their own snowshoes or rent snowshoes for a nominal fee at the Visitor Center. Snowshoe rentals are also available in neighboring communities.

If you have questions regarding this offering, please call 406-888-7800 or visit Snowshoe Walks.

YOUR FAS OUTDOOR WINTER GUIDE – GET UP AND GET OUT!

MORE AUDUBON FIELD TRIPS!

You are invited to sign up for our **spontaneous winter tracking/birding field trip**. If snow conditions cooperate and there is interest, we will again arrange during January or February, a ski/snowshoe trip to Jewel Basin Ski area or Swan Refuge for winter tracking and birding. We will try to give a couple days' notice and it could be any day of the week. You are always welcome to sign up, even if you work or have a busy schedule. You may just have the day available for an outdoor adventure! To get on the list for one of these spontaneous field trips, email Kathy Ross at mtkat@montanaport.net.

Sunday March 2, 2014: Lower Valley Late Winter/ Early Migration Field Trip

Once again, FAS is offering a field trip exploring the Lower Valley with premier birder Craig Hohenberger. We will look for wintering raptors, snow buntings, nesting owls and, if the weather is mild and we have open water, we may possibly find Swans and early migrating waterfowl. Meet at 9 AM at Somers Park-n-Ride to carpool from there. We will return by noon. Dress warm, bring binoculars and spotting scopes. Please call to let us know you are coming. All ages and birding abilities are welcome! Kathy Ross, 837-3837.

From Gael Bissell and Kathy Ross, Field Trip Co-Chairs

Audubon Leads Bird Class for the FVCC Senior Institute

Learn about Northwest Montana's beautiful birds from Audubon educator Ashley Mason and other local bird experts. Gain insight into bird biology, behavior, song and identification. A range of local area birds will be covered, with a look at several of our nesting neighbors in depth.

These credit classes will be offered to seniors, age 65 or older, Fridays, from February 21 to March 28, 2014, 1 - 2:50 PM. Tuition and fees include a free lunch - 11:45-12:45 PM. Classes are in the FVCC Arts and Technology Building, Room 139. Enrollment is limited – Senior Institute registration starts at 8 AM on Tuesday, February 4, 2014. Cost is \$38. For more information, call 406-756-3813 or click here: [Senior Institute](#).

Second Annual Wilderness Speaker Series

50 Years of Wilderness: What Will The Next 50 Years Look Like?

Sponsored by the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation and Montana Wilderness Association Flathead Chapter
Thursdays, 7-8:30 PM

FVCC Arts & Technology Building, Room 139

No charge; everyone welcome

September 2014 will mark the 50th Anniversary of the Bob Marshall Wilderness and the passing of the Wilderness Act. In commemoration of this golden event, the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation (BMWF) and the Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) will host a series of speakers on topics involving wilderness from the perspective of scientists, managers, and recreationalists. Presentations will focus on the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex, the crown jewel of the Federal Wilderness System. Bob Marshall (the man) was instrumental in creating a public initiative for wilderness preservation and frequently hiked up to 30 miles in a day. The Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation continues to carry out Bob's passion for recreation and conservation by engaging volunteers in projects that maintain trails, give back to wilderness, and instill an appreciation of wilderness.

February 13

“Climate Change Effects on Landscapes and Ecosystems of Western Montana”
Bob Keane, U.S. Forest Service, Missoula Fire Research Station

March 13

“Leaving a Legacy; Passing on Wilderness to the Next Generation”
Panel discussion between elders and youth

Panelists: Roland Cheek, retired wilderness outfitter and writer; Dave Owen; retired USFS wilderness ranger, Frank Vitale, Farrier and wilderness advocate; Rebecca Boslow, University of Montana student; Jonson England, high school student and BMWF summer intern

April 10

“Hair Raising Encounters with Wildlife in Wilderness”
Jonathan Klein, USFS retired Wilderness & Recreation manager (34years), Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

Letter from National Audubon President—Eagles and Wind Power

On December 6, 2013, federal officials announced a decision allowing wind farms to receive permits to kill or injure Bald and Golden Eagles without penalty for 30 years, while producing wind energy. The decision dramatically contradicted a proposal that had been made by a collaborative group of wind energy industry and conservation groups. National Audubon President David Yarnold has released the following letter to Audubon members nationwide, discussing the “eagle take” decision.

All,

As you know, Audubon took a strong stand in the wake of the announcement by the Interior Department of a new rule that would grant wind energy companies 30-year permits to kill Bald and Golden eagles. Since the media coverage reflects a stronger tone than most of our balanced messaging on wind power, I want to take this opportunity to make our position clear.

First, there is no doubt that the greatest threat to both birds and people is climate change. We need to deploy renewable energy sources aggressively and use conventional sources more efficiently if we are to meet the challenge of our lifetime. Consistent with our board-approved policy, Audubon strongly supports properly-sited wind power as a clean alternative energy source that reduces the threat of global warming.

Audubon has a long history of involvement in wind-wildlife interaction issues, including efforts to develop state guidelines for wind development in California, Washington, Pennsylvania, and New York; providing substantive input regarding the Bureau of Land Management's policy for wind development on public lands; and working cooperatively to improve the siting, design, and management of wind facilities across the country.

Chapters have been at the forefront of these efforts and have taken the lead in developing conservation plans for local energy projects. As two current examples, the East Cascades Audubon Society used raptor data to inform wind energy siting in Oregon, and the Golden Eagle Audubon Society in Idaho is advocating for the movement of 150 miles of transmission lines to protect eagle nesting territory.

We believe that birds and conservation have to be central to energy siting decisions. That is why we are speaking out strongly about the new 30-year rule, and actively challenging the Interior Department on their commitment to monitor and enforce current bird protection laws including the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

We spent the better part of the last year working with the wind industry and a few other leading green groups to develop a workable permitting process that included eagle conservation as a fundamental tenet. For the first time, we were proposing Endangered Species Act-like protections for birds subject to harm by wind farms. The agreement we were able to reach with our NGO partners and the wind industry would have been a win-win and in keeping with Audu-

bon's best traditions and values.

In mid-summer, we put forward a joint recommendation to the Department of the Interior. But the Department walked away from this potentially game-changing deal--and instead moved forward with a 30-year rule that has highly questionable conservation value. The key point Interior makes is that the new rule allows for reviews every five years, but it was the head of the Fish and Wildlife Service who told us and others in the spring that he simply didn't have the dollars to do those inspections. We think those assurances are bureaucratic vapor.

When we pressed the Interior Department's Fish & Wildlife Service on two basic business questions -- how much would adequate policing cost and would it be possible to just get started on conservation planning without perfect science, we were flat-out stonewalled despite repeated attempts to have our questions answered.

I sent a letter to Secretary Jewell reinforcing all of these concerns. At this point, we think the best way for us to create balance is to do what NGOs are uniquely suited for: to push back publicly by mobilizing our members and friends.

- Send a message to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell online or via mail to: Secretary Sally Jewell, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington DC 20240
- Many chapters have contacts within regional U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offices. Voice your concerns about this permitting rule to the FWS biologists and others you work with.

Hundreds of local newspapers have carried this story. That's the perfect opportunity to submit a letter to the editor. You can do it as a chapter leader or as an individual. Letters to the editor are a great way to educate your community and alert decision-makers about an issue. [Here is a short sample you can use](#). We've posted a [Q&A about the 30-year rule](#), which you can also use.

We will continue to fight this battle--to ensure a sound future for eagles and other birds we're entrusted to protect while building a clean energy future.

Sincerely,
David Yarnold
President & CEO
National Audubon Society





FOR YOUR CALENDAR: Wings Across the Big Sky
June 6-8, 2014, Bozeman, Montana



Field Trips

It's not too early to begin planning your summer activities. During winter, when birds are sparse, it's easy to dream of long summer days and abundant birds. Where you will find plenty is in the beautiful Gallatin Valley and surrounding area. Come join us for **Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, this year co-hosted by Sacajawea Audubon Society, June 6-8 at the GranTree Inn in Bozeman.**

As for field trips, we have close to 40 planned!—almost 20 each on Saturday and Sunday—guided by knowledgeable birders and naturalists familiar with the species and their habitats in the Bozeman area. Here is a brief sampling of some of those trips to contemplate as you anticipate the upcoming Bird Festival:

Yellowstone's Northern Range

The Northern Range, often called "America's Serengeti," is home, seasonally or year-round, to a variety of birds. We start in the dry Gardiner Basin, where Horned Larks and Mountain Bluebirds are common along the Old Yellowstone Road. En route, we will stop at higher elevation woodland, willow, and wetland habitats, searching for ducks, grebes, woodpeckers, flycatchers, and sparrows. Breeding pairs of Harlequin Ducks are possible in the fast-moving waters of the Gardiner and Yellowstone Rivers. Osprey, Red-tailed Hawks, and American Kestrels, are likely along this route. The trip ends at the lower Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, where Peregrine Falcons have nested in recent years.

Deep Creek, Paradise Valley

We will visit recently burned habitats of the south fork of Deep Creek via a Forest Service trail that begins in the foothills of the Paradise Valley. We begin with a moderate climb (half-mile) through open grassland and shrub-dotted hills, observing a variety of towhees, sparrows, warblers and bluebirds. The trail then drops into a forested canyon as it crosses the south fork of Deep Creek and heads into the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. This area thoroughly burned during the 2012 Pine Creek Fire, so we will look for woodpeckers, sapsuckers, and other fire-dependent species and observe post-fire ecology.

Headwaters State Park Area

The Headwaters area includes sage/grassland and riparian, where species from Common Mergansers to Clay-colored Sparrows may be seen. A unique feature of the Headwaters area is the limestone cliffs, which support several cliff nesting species such as Prairie Falcons, White-throated Swifts, and Canyon Wrens. The park where Lewis and Clark camped, at the confluence of the Jefferson, Madison, and Gallatin Rivers is steeped in history. Besides the many nesting species here, numerous other birds use these river corridors as they travel between feeding sites, and during migration.

In early March: Festival Brochures with field trip information and schedules will be mailed and the online system for registration will be active. For more information, contact Montana Audubon Bird Festival Coordinator, Cathie Erickson, cerickson@mtaudubon.org, or call (406) 443-3949.

NEBRASKA CRANE FESTIVAL — SAVE THE DATE!

Dear Wildlife Enthusiast,

It's time to mark your calendar and save-the-date for the 44th Annual Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival (formerly known as the Rivers and Wildlife Celebration).

What: Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival

Where: Holiday Inn Hotel and Convention Center, Kearney, Nebraska

When: March 20-23, 2014

Online registration: <http://nebraskamaps.unl.edu/productcart/pc/viewPrd.asp?idproduct=12974&idcategory=596>

Website: <http://nebraskacranefestival.org> and check us out on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Audubons-Nebraska-Crane-Festival/211341456146>

More information: please contact Kevin or Chris at 402-797-2301.

Looking forward to seeing you there, **Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival Planning Committee**

Take a Road Trip

National Audubon's [Upcoming Bird Festivals](#) webpage makes it easy to plan your next birding destination. You can look through listings by calendar or on a map, so you can start planning your road trip right from the page. Happy Travels!





FEBRUARY 2014



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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: lindawin@centurytel.net**

Website: www.FlatheadAudubon.org
Conservation Educator - Ashley Mason: AudubonAshlev@gmail.com

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FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

Membership Individual or Family

- Basic Membership \$20
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(Extra \$15 funds local projects such as Conservation Education and Owen Sowerwine Natural Area)
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