

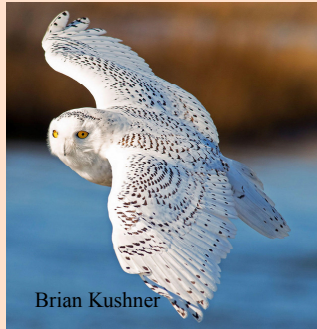


## Another Blizzard of Snowy Owls Could Be Coming

Four years ago, thousands of Snowy Owls stormed the northern United States, taking up posts in surroundings drastically different from the flat Arctic tundra over which they typically preside. They were part of the largest Snowy Owl irruption, or influx of a species into a place they don't usually live, the U.S. has seen since the 1920s.

If you missed it, you might be in luck. **Project SNOWstorm**, a volunteer-fueled Snowy Owl-tracking organization founded after that irruption, predicts another wave of Arctic raptors will hit North America this winter.

Though Snowy Owl migration patterns are mostly mysterious, there have been some tell-tale signs that the birds are on their way. For one, some Snowy Owls already seem to be retracing the last irruption's process. It appears that big southward movements occur about once every four years. That's because lemmings, their pre-



Brian Kushner

ferred prey, go through regional population explosions at about the same interval. No matter how many ultimately show up, these birds are tough. People often assume that if they see an Arctic bird in the lower 48, it must be sick or starving. In reality, these Snowy Owls are fairly fat and healthy, and will eat anything they find.

Early stateside migrators have also been spotted. Hundreds have flocked to the Northeast and Upper Midwest, and single birds have been spotted as far south as Oklahoma, Missouri, and North Carolina—and their numbers are building faster than they did in 2013.

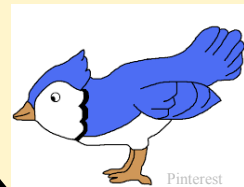
Numerous Snowy Owl sightings have just recently been reported east of the continental divide in Montana and one was sighted on the Bigfork Christmas Bird Count so get ready to enjoy these Arctic visitors!

*adapted from National Audubon newsletter*

## Kalispell CBC

The 19<sup>th</sup> annual Kalispell count will be on **Sunday, December 31<sup>st</sup>**. Centered at Reserve and Highway 93, the 15-mi diameter count circle includes Evergreen, much of the Flathead River corridor including the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, Happy Valley, Herron Park, and the Kuhn's Wildlife Area. This count has proven to be a popular New Year's tradition. This count is "young" enough that we still have much to discover. And yet it is "urban" enough to include the homes, bird feeders, and favorite birding spots of many of our members! Our traditional start to this count is a group breakfast at 7:00 AM; **this year we**

**will meet at Perkin's Restaurant at 1390 Highway 2 East in Kalispell.** It is here that we will finish assigning circle segments and field teams for the day's efforts. If you are interested in participating, please contact Pete Fisher at [pfisher@krmc.org](mailto:pfisher@krmc.org) or 406-250-9624.



Pinterest

### JANUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

**Tuesday, January 2, 2018. 6 PM. FAS Board of Directors Meeting,** Gateway Community Center, US Hwy 2 West, Kalispell. All welcome.

**Monday, January 8, 2018. 7 PM Flathead Audubon General Meeting,** Gateway Community Center, US Hwy 2 West, Kalispell. See page 3.

**Sunday, January 20, National Winter Trails Day,** see page 5 for details.

# BAT OF THE MONTH

## Silver-haired Bat

by Lewis Young

The Silver-haired Bat (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*) is well named. The body fur is black or dark brown but the hairs on the back are silver-tipped. The distinctive appearance makes it easily identifiable unlike several other species of bats in Montana. It is a medium sized bat with a wingspan of 10-12 inches and a weight of 8-12 grams (0.25-0.45 ounces). The membrane between the hind legs and the tail is furred on the top surface, and the ears are black, naked, and rounded with a distinctive light-colored area at the front edge of the base. The lifespan is not known, but one researcher estimated they can live up to 12 years, which is considerably shorter than some species that may live 2-3 times longer.

First described in 1831 in the eastern U.S., the word *Lasionycteris* means "hairy bat", and *noctivagans* means "night wandering." Considered slow flyers, occasionally some individuals emerge well before dark and may be observed relatively easy. They require open, still water for drinking which they do on the wing. Echolocation at frequencies above human hearing is used to find prey and navigate.

Foraging is often over still and running water and in openings surrounded by forest but sometimes at tree-top level. Although characterized by some researchers as "moth specialists," Silver-haired Bats consume a wide variety of relatively soft-bodied insects and occasionally spiders and harvestmen. Silver-haired Bats have been documented to feed on many insects perceived as pest species to humans and/or agriculture and forestry.

In summer, males and females are segregated. Males and non-reproductive females tend to roost singly and primarily utilize loose bark of trees but less frequently have been found in tree cracks and crevices, and tree cavities formed by other animals such as woodpeckers. These males and non-reproductive females change roosts frequently. Reproductive females

form small maternity colonies in tree cavities or small hollows where they typically give birth to twins, usually in late June and July. Mating takes place in early fall, and fertilization is delayed until the following spring.

Gestation takes 50–60 days, so that parturition of pups occurs in early summer when insect availability is high. Just before birth takes place the female will begin to roost with her head facing upward. She will hold her tail membrane forward to form a cup-shaped basket which will catch the pups as they are born. The pups are able to fly 3 to 4 weeks after birth.

In winter, Silver-haired Bats appear to hibernate alone mainly in forested areas, though they may be making long migrations from their summer forest to a winter forest site. Typical hibernation roosts for this species include tree cavities, beneath exfoliating

bark, beneath leaf litter, in wood piles, and in cliff faces. Occasionally, Silver-haired Bats will hibernate in cave entrances, especially in northern regions of their range. No large aggregations have been documented. They are true hibernators in that their heart rate drops from 200/per minute at rest in summer to 10-20/minute during hibernation, and their body temperature can drop to near freezing.

Silver-haired Bats are found all across Montana including the prairies. Prairie populations rely on trees in riparian areas and around farms (shelterbelts). Across the continent they range from southeastern Alaska, across southern Canada, all of the lower 48 states (except parts of the southern states), and into northeastern Mexico. Although range maps describe Silver-haired Bats as permanent residents in Montana, they are believed to be mostly migratory with some individuals possibly remaining year-round. There are no confirmed winter records in Montana to-date, but acoustic monitoring indicates some are likely present here in the winter.

*continued on page 3*



# January Program

## Wildfires in Western Montana

Presented by  
**Rick Trembath**

Flathead Audubon will have a special program on Monday, January 8 by Bigfork resident, Rick Trem-



Audubon.org

*Black-backed Woodpecker  
on fire-killed tree*

bath. He will provide a historical perspective on wild fires and how they affect flora and fauna based on fire intensities and behavior. Other fire-related topics include: how forest fires burn; forest fire management with examples of suppression and use; forest fire smoke, origins, drift patterns, inversion and smoke management and issues involved with protecting the wildland urban interface. The meeting will be held at the Gateway Community Meeting Room on Highway 2 West from 7-9 PM. The program is free and open to the public.

Rick's experience as a fire fighter began at the young age of 16 when he was recruited by his scout master in northern Minnesota to help put out wildfires. In 1967-1969, he was on the Flathead Hot

Shot Crew and fought fires for the US Forest Service until retiring in 2003 and worked for the MT DNRC from 2004-2017. He also served as the Team Safety Officer on the Northern Rockies Type 1 Incident Management Teams for 22 years. He was a structure firefighter for 35 years at the Bigfork Fire Department and served as chief for 5 years. He has taught a "Forest Fire Management" class for Natural Resource Students at FVCC since 2011 and teaches various wildland fire safety operations classes to fire contractors and structure firefighters.

Rick is no stranger to the Flathead Audubon Society. He helped establish our chapter in the 1970's.



clipartxtras

### *Silver-haired Bat continued from page 2*

Conservation concerns include wind energy facilities, forest management practices, and possibly white-nose syndrome. The Silver-haired Bat is one of the 3 bat species most commonly killed at wind energy facilities (Hoary Bat and Eastern Red Bat are the others). Research has found that high snag numbers (more than 8/acre) and large diameter snags are important but often forest management practices fall short. Managing forests for diverse age structure and maintaining forested corridors are important to these

bats. The causative agent of white-nose syndrome, *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, has been detected on a Silver-haired Bat in Delaware, although the same mass mortalities observed in smaller-bodied hibernating North American cave bats has not been observed.

Besides being tremendous consumers of insects, Silver-haired Bats are just plain fascinating with their appearance, ecology, and behavior. Some evening before dark, if you see a medium-sized bat flying back and forth over water or along the edge of a forest opening, you just may have seen one!



## FLATHEAD AUDUBON MISSION STATEMENT

THE FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY IS A LOCAL CHAPTER  
OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY.



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



## Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

In Northwest Montana, there is a different feel to walking in the woods. When I first resettled here, I had years of both casual and intense experiences under my belt in the boreal forest wild, and as I began to know plants, animals and the inanimate geography of those places, I gradually felt more at home in those woods -- and very safe.

Then I moved here, to avalanche, grizzly and cougar country. The standard attire for walking in the wild was similar and seasonal, with one small accoutrement added. On the belt was pepper spray -- industrial-strength. When a female grizzly brought her two small cubs down from the foothills to munch on a coyote-killed deer in my backyard field, I spent a couple of



evenings on the back porch being entertained by the cracking of deer bones out there in the black. Every nighttime walk the ten

yards to my storage shed was an adventure. Awareness, attentiveness, took a big uptick.

Not many weeks after the grizzlies had moved on, in those same foothills (but less than an eighth-mile from my house), I was returning home from afternoon explorations. I caught some movement ahead and to my left, and watched a large cat, with a very long tail, bouncing back through the trees toward the mountains. Cougar. Cool. But it had the look, or perhaps the feel, of a young one. I stopped. My head was immediately on a swivel, my ears tuned outward as far as I could hear. It was an open woods, with only a small thick fir tree to my immediate left offering any cover. And, there was a flicker of movement behind that tree. I glanced down and saw my right hand magically holding the pepper spray in ready position with the safety clip on the ground. The instructions to my hand had come straight from the brain-stem and had bypassed the conscious "me". I talked to the tree, explaining to whoever was there about the effects of pepper in the eyes. Sure enough, out comes mom.

She was bigger than I had imagined, being a rookie in cougar country, but something about her put me more at ease (relative to the situation). Her ears

were plastered back. Not good. Her hair was raised all down her neck and back. Also not good. She yowled -- easily the loudest thing I had heard in the woods for a long time, maybe ever. But that yowl, and the direction of her walk between more yowls -- angling away from me -- whispered "protective" in my subconscious. That was the good part. I was not considered prey. I was seen as a threat.

I wasn't so foolish as to put down the bear/cougar spray, but I instinctively knew that my survival depended on reassurance, not defensive behavior. I talked to her about how I really didn't mean to scare her child, and that I was just passing through her yard without seeing the no trespassing signs. When I talked, her erect hair flattened and her ears perked a bit. When I paused, she would resume her threat postures. But, critically for both of us, she kept walking away, finally feeling safe enough herself to bound away in the direction of her cub.

As I walked back toward my house, muttering "holy poop" or something similar, I found the reason for their presence, and her attitude. A large mound of leaves and sticks -- with a fresh, warm, but dead, young whitetail buck under it, was destined to be cougar lunch. And I had interrupted it.

That was the time I finally put words to something I had been practicing all along in my extended relationship with nature. I had learned to be attentive, very attentive, and to trust my instincts. It has served me well in many situations -- from something suspicious about a person that I just couldn't put my finger on, but later proved to be very good reason not to trust, to leading interpretive hikes with multiple bear encounters. Always (at least so far), my "feeling" about the attitude of the bear, or the person, has kept me, and my charges, safe.

Nature, especially wild nature if we are so lucky to have access, offers a "community" of teachers. We know that time in nature makes us happier, healthier and smarter. Lessons abound out there, but attentiveness is the bell that starts the class period. And it offers another benefit. We get to feel much, much more alive.



*"To those devoid of imagination a blank space on the map is a useless waste, to others, the most valuable part."* Aldo Leopold

## WINTER/SPRING FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU!

All Flathead Audubon 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 all Field Trips, dress for the weather, bring binoculars or spotting scope if you have them, wear sturdy footwear, and drive and pull off the road safely. All drivers must have their own vehicle insurance. For more information, contact Kathy Ross at 837-3837 or Cory Davis at 257-3166, or the individual field trip leader listed below. Also, a free brochure, "Birding Hotspots of the Flathead" is available at the Flathead Audubon general meetings and on [www.FlatheadAudubon.org](http://www.FlatheadAudubon.org).



**NATIONAL WINTER TRAILS DAY: WINTER BIRDS AND TRACKS IN OWEN SOWERWINE NATURAL AREA, Saturday, January 20, 10:00 AM-noon.** Join FAS Conservation Educator and long-time teaching naturalist Denny Olson on a winter hike of all the OSNA trails. Winter birds, bird songs, tracking, botanizing, and seat-of-the-pants interpretation will be the unstructured itinerary. This is one of the best spots in the area to see Pileated and other woodpeckers, many kinds of chickadees, Bohemian and Cedar waxwings in flocks of thousands, Pine Grosbeaks, Townsend's Solitaires -- and there's always an unexpected bird. Not just ID, but lots of natural history lore, which is Denny's trademark. Dress warm, bring binoculars and snow boots, and check with us on the need for snowshoes if the snow is deep. We have binoculars and field guides if you need them. Call Denny at 249-3987, or contact at [auduboneducator@gmail.com](mailto:auduboneducator@gmail.com) to register and get directions.

**FIFTH ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT, EXPLORING THE BIGFORK AND SWAN RIVER AREA, SUNDAY, FEB. 18, 2018, 10AM-1PM.** Join us for an exciting morning of birding and learning about our winter avian residents of this area. We will be visiting local feeders to ID and count our wintering songbirds including 3 different species of Chickadees and Golden-crowned Kinglets, as well as many other feeder surprises. Exploring the River corridor and surrounding fields by car, we hope to see Trumpeter Swans, Bald Eagles and perhaps resident Pygmy Owls. This is an excellent outing for families with children, as well as bird lovers of all ages. Minimal walking to some view areas. Dress warm, bring binoculars and/or spotting scopes. Contact Kathy Ross for information about meeting place and to sign up, 406-837-3837, or [mtkat67@gmail.com](mailto:mtkat67@gmail.com). Limited to 15 participants.

**WINTER/SPRING ECOLOGY OF THE OWEN SOWERWINE NATURAL AREA, Saturday, March 31, 2018 9AM-3PM.** Come with us for a magical mystery tour of one of the most unique areas in the Flathead Valley! Our guide will be Brian Baxter, forester and wildlife researcher, who has taught outdoor educational programs for over 16 years. We'll begin with a 1-hour classroom session to view and discuss the slide presentation "The Essence of Animal Tracking." Then we'll walk into Owen Sowerwine to visit its wetlands, and study the wildlife, vegetation, and predator/prey relationships that give this area its special flavor. As we quietly enter along the southern trails, we will search for and identify the track patterns and sign of the weasel family, muskrat, beaver, and water loving birds such as Great Blue Heron and American Dipper. All the while, we will scope for birds of prey, waterfowl, woodpeckers, and songbirds. Come prepared for the day, with proper layers, lunch, water, binoculars, spotting scope, bird books, and waterproof boots or snowshoes as conditions require. Trip is limited to 15 participants. To sign up and get the meeting location contact Brian Baxter at [b\\_baxter53@yahoo.com](mailto:b_baxter53@yahoo.com) or 406-291-2154.

**FREEZOUT LAKE AND THE SNOW GEESE MIGRATION, March 24-25, 2018.** The Snow Geese are moving from their California wintering grounds to their arctic nesting areas along with thousands of other waterfowl. There is nothing like Snow Geese and the Rocky Mountains at the same time and place. The place is Freezout Lake near Choteau; the time is the annual Flathead Audubon field trip. We will meet on Saturday morning at 10 AM, caravan/carpool to Choteau and arrive in time for the afternoon "fly-out." After spending a night in Choteau, we will head back out just before daybreak to watch the "mass ascension" of geese from the ponds of Freezout. After the morning's birding, we, too, will head home in the early afternoon arriving in Kalispell around 5 PM on Sunday. Bob Lee will provide a suggested schedule and route, and will be in the front of the group. Participants may choose to pursue the geese on their own as much or as little as they, the weather and the birds allow. Please make your own arrangements for lodging; primitive camping is available at Freezout WMA. Motel options include the Stage Stop (406-466-5900), Gunther (406-466-5444) and Big Sky (406-466-5318). Make your reservations early as these hotels will likely fill up. For more information, including the meeting location, contact Bob Lee at 270-0371 or [RML3@centurytel.net](mailto:RML3@centurytel.net).

## Education Committee News

The Flathead Audubon Society's Education committee met on December 4, 2017. We reviewed education activities and explored ways to offer more programs to area senior groups. New programs for elders will be presented in upcoming general meetings. Denny Olson reported about Owen Sowerwine access and the cottonwood tree regeneration International Baccalaureate project.

We also discussed the Audubon trunks and will introduce an 'Adopt-a-School' program to members in order to increase opportunities for teachers to use the trunks. Two of our members have successfully adopted schools.

Linda de Kort offers a naturalist program at West Valley School. Speakers are invited to talk about natural history topics for evening programs. She hosts

spring geology and botany field trips and helps teachers and students maintain the native plant gardens, judges at the school science fair and presents awards to students whose projects focus on natural history topics. Linda also encourages community members to help with the Christmas Bird Count and offers to pick up and return trunks.

Kathy Ross and our conservation educators have worked with Somers Elementary School sixth graders to engage the youngsters in the Great Backyard Bird Count. We will bring trunks to Audubon meetings and ask for volunteer help. Is there a school you could adopt to help children and youth learn about birds, climate change and conservation?

*by Gail Shay Linne, Education Chair*

## GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

You Can Be Part of the Team, Every Bird Counts

The 21st annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will be held February 16-19, 2018. The GBBC is a free, fun and easy event that engages bird appreciators of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations around the world. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes or spend the day (as long as you wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and then report their sightings on line at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org). All the instructions to participate are at this website, along with lots of bird-wise information and a photo contest

you can enter. Anyone can take part in the GBBC, from beginning bird watchers to experts and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world. If you know a local teacher in the valley, consider FAS Adopt-a-School (or classroom) program. The GBBC is a great way to engage young people in the world around them. For more information about the GBBC and how you can participate, contact Kathy @ 837-3837. Become a Citizen Scientist in your own backyard. You count, every bird counts!

## Science on Tap – Flathead Managing Grizzly/Human Conflict

"Why is this Grizzly Bear in My Backyard?," a talk by Tim Manley, will be featured at the next session of *Science on Tap – Flathead*, January 2, 6 PM, at the Flathead Lake Brewing Company.

Tim Manley is a Grizzly Bear Management Specialist with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Region 1, in Kalispell. Tim will give an overview of his work in northwest Montana to resolve human/grizzly bear conflicts, involving both public education, and the

monitoring, capturing, and handling of grizzlies. He will talk about some of the tools he uses in his work with grizzlies, which include Karelian Bear Dogs, remote cameras, automated bear traps, microchips, DNA analysis, GPS radio collars, and an Electro-Optic/Infrared imagery system.

For more information about the *Science on Tap* series visit [www.scienceontapflathead.org/](http://www.scienceontapflathead.org/).

## CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

### Highlights from December 4, 2017 Board Meeting

- ◆ The field trip schedule for the Montana Audubon Bird Festival is complete and will be sent to Helena by January 1, 2018.
- ◆ A grant application for the purchase of an iPad for the Hawk Watch was discussed.
- ◆ A work party is cutting the invasive species, European highbush cranberry, in OSNA.
- ◆ Glacier Bank is donating \$1250 to help pay for the MA Bird Festival in June.



# Thank You!

...to those below who have made donations to Flathead Audubon in November, 2017.

**Snowy Owl**  
Denny Olson



**Kestrel**  
Jennifer Graham  
Dennis J. Hester  
Vonda McGarvey  
Dean Robbins



**My Own Vision**  
John & Kris Bruninga



**Supporting Member + Donation**  
Laura Katzman  
Anne Lent & Charles McCarty

## 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

\*\*\*\*

*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:*

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*Please make checks payable to:*

## 2018 FAS CALENDAR STILL AVAILABLE!

It's not too late to get one of the wonderful calendars chock full of great photos and daily tips on what's happening out in Glacier Country. Pick up the calendar at our general meeting, on our website, or at various stores in northwestern Montana. Find out more at: [flatheadaudubon.org/calendar](http://flatheadaudubon.org/calendar).



# GLACIER COUNTRY

2018 Phenology Calendar



Find us on:  
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Be sure to check [flatheadaudubon.org](http://flatheadaudubon.org) for

- Late breaking FAS news and announcements
- Online FAS membership sign up or renewal
- Latest eBird reports on species being observed in the Flathead area



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Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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

JANUARY 2018

Downy Woodpecker



Non-Profit Org.
US Postage Paid
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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 PM and include a featured guest who presents a conservation or nature program. The Board of Directors meet the Monday preceding the general meeting, at 6 PM at Gateway Community Center, US Hwy 2 West, Kalispell. Both meetings are open to all.

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: lindawin626@gmail.com. Deadline for newsletter copy is the 18th of each month. Contact newsletter editor at 755-1406; email submissions to: lindawin626@gmail.com

Website: www.FlatheadAudubon.org

Conservation Educator - Denny Olson: auduboneducator@gmail.com

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Nominations Bob Lee 270-0371



MONTANA AUDUBON

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Executive Director: Larry Berrin lberrin@mtaudubon.org
Board Member representing FAS, Bob Lee rml3@centurytel.net 270-0371



FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY Membership Individual or Family

Basic Membership \$25 Pays for newsletter and operating costs

Supporting Membership \$40 Extra \$15 funds local projects such as Conservation Education and Owen Sowerwine Natural Area

Additional Donation of \$ To: Education Fund Owen Sowerwine Fund Wherever needed

Total \$

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Address

City

State Zip Code

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Email

Your email address is safe with us.

You may renew or join online on our website:

http://www.flatheadaudubon.org/

The Pileated Post is sent to FAS members by email. If you wish to receive a paper copy by USPS, check this box.

Mail this form with your check to:

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Kalispell, MT 59904