



# the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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## LOG ON AND BE COUNTED FOR GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT 2000

### Audubon and Cornell Need You to Put Their Bird Sightings on the Map

The National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology urgently need the help of North Americans of all ages to count birds this winter. By participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count 2000, February 18-21, bird watchers, regardless of skill level, will help scientists document the status and health of our winter bird populations at the turn of the millennium, at the start of spring migrations.

Taking part is as easy as 1,2,3. The Cornell Lab (<http://www.birds.cornell.edu>) and National Audubon Society (<http://www.audubon.org>) ask everyone -- kids, adults, seniors, families, classrooms, and community groups -- to count the birds they see at their backyard bird feeders, local parks, and other areas. Participants then enter their reports online at BirdSource (<http://www.birdsource.org>), a user-friendly, state-of-the-art website developed by the Cornell Lab and Audubon.

This year, BirdSource encourages participants to be especially aware of Bald Eagles. "In light of the proposed removal of the Bald Eagle from the list of Endangered and Threatened species, we encourage our birders to pay attention not only to common backyard birds, but also to our country's national symbol," said Frank Gill, Senior Vice President for Science at National Audubon. "This citizen science project will allow all Americans to monitor vigilantly the health and abundance of their national bird with an immediacy and breadth never before possible."

Widespread citizen participation will assist scientists in both the short and long term. "By helping us count birds, people from subtropical Florida to Arctic Canada and Alaska will help us to understand better the effects of changing weather and landscape on our birds' health and movement patterns," continued Gill. "Last year, some 42,000 reports -- triple the number of reports from the previous year -- tallied more than three million birds of 350 species."

"We're excited to see what this year's snapshot of bird distributions and densities will reveal," said John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Lab. "Each year of the count is vital to establish an accurate picture of North American bird populations. Over time, our results become more critical to understanding the environment. This count, the largest Internet-based bird census ever conducted, enables us to ensure our common birds remain common and tells us when to take protective measures for those species in decline."

Audubon and Cornell stress that amateurs can contribute essential information to this and other studies. "Birdwatching is the fastest-growing outdoor recreation in the U.S. is enjoyed by millions.

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## CHICKADEE CHATTER

A New Year is here, the year 2000, and the next 100 year installment on the human calendar of events begins. What will these next one hundred years bring I wonder? What will the Earth be like 100 years from now? Will we still have lions and tigers and bears roaming the wild places? Will there still be wild places to roam? Will all the good conservation deeds of the past 100 years ensure that there will be as many or more good deeds in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? It, of course, remains to be seen. Neither you nor I will be around to witness the year 2100 but we will bear witness to the beginning of this millenium. We may be able to make a difference in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

There have been several excellent articles, even whole magazine issues devoted to the past 100 years of the conservation movement. In fact, the National Audubon society has published a wonderful book on just this topic, it is called *The National Audubon Society Speaking For Nature A Century of Conservation*. It is a beautiful book with wonderful photography and well written. The book's chapters outline the 20<sup>th</sup> century by decades describing the trials of the conservation movement and the people involved, those who would speak for nature. From the near demise, at the turn of the century, of the American Bison due to over-hunting to the near demise of the Spotted Owl due to habitat destruction, at the ending of the century, the book relates it all.

It appears that humans have become aware of their folly only in the past 100 years. We humans have up until that time, I guess, been to preoccupied with the survival of our species to pay attention to the survival of all the other species that inhabit this Earth along side of us. President John F. Kennedy wrote in 1963, "The history of America has been the story of Americans seizing, using, squandering and belatedly protecting their natural heritage."

We are fortunate that so many now embrace conservation. Les Line, editor of the new Audubon book, writes about conservation as "a venerable term that is often defined as 'the wise use of natural resources,' a phrase that surely embraces air and water as firmly as the various pieces of the landscape mosaic, like forests and prairies and the lifeforms they support." And Gifford Pinchot, President Theodore Roosevelt's forestry chief, defined the word conservation in 1906 as meaning the careful husbanding of resources for wise use by human

(from an article in the Dec/Nov issue of National Wildlife, page 24).

Most are now aware of the need for conservation but are we in time? For example, in the contiguous United States in 1900 there were about 100 million acres of wetlands but by 1999 there are only about 180 million acres. We still use fossil fuel to propel our vehicles and heat many of our homes. The Earth's population continues to grow by leaps and bounds. We consume and consume and consume. Our human society is still very unequal, those who have can afford to embrace conservation those who have not cannot spare a thought for conservation only for survival.

One hundred years ago the issues were easier to define, stop hunting the bison and they survive, stop killing shorebirds for feathers and the shorbird populations increased, establish National Parks to preserve the land for the future. Conservation has become a very complex issue, global warming has no simple solution, the extinction of plants and animals in very small groups with specialized habitats such as Hawaii' Crested Honeycreeper is nearly impossible to stop, and the world population continues to grow. Everything we do now has far reaching effects, the solutions are not as simple as they once might have been. The human race has many challenges ahead in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Gifford Pinchot said in 1906, "Conservation means the greatest good to the greatest number for the longest time", what was valid in 1906 is still valid today.

Leslie Kehoe



**JANUARY MEETING**  
**MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 2000**  
**Fish, Wildlife and Parks Building**  
**490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell**  
**Business Meeting starts at 5:30PM**  
**Program starts at 7:30PM**

**January Program: "Wild and Beautiful Montana"** A slide show by Chuck Haney featuring pictures from Haney's new book, *Wild and Beautiful Montana*. Haney is a professional photographer who lives in Whitefish. He specializes in landscape and scenic photography. His pictures have appeared in various magazines including Montana Magazine and Montana Outdoors. Autographed copies of *Wild and Beautiful Montana* will be available for purchase at the meeting.





## THE GREAT ROGERS LAKE LOON RESCUE



How many days and how many people does it take to rescue one loon from being frozen into the ice? I don't have a jokey answer to that one, but can report that at Rogers Lake a few weeks ago it took 4 days and 10 people. Here is the story, complete with happy ending.

In the November issue of the Pileated Post I mentioned that at the end of October we still had a common loon hanging around Rogers Lake. That same loon continued to stay through November and into the first part of December. The lake is usually frozen over by that time, but this year warm weather and hefty winds kept it open an extra month.

Finally, on Wednesday, Dec. 8, we woke up to an almost frozen lake. But right in the center was a small region of open water, about 15 x 6 feet, with a loon swimming to and fro. "He will dive out to the larger patch of open water in front of the marsh," I assured my husband, John. But we watched and he didn't. (This is a generic "he" actually, I suspect he is a she, since we never heard a yodel call from this bird.) We also noticed that when the bird rose up to stretch its wings, the left wing was missing most of its flight feathers. No wonder he hadn't taken off for the coast this fall!

Alarm soon spread around the lake. Neighbors called neighbors and we consulted with Gael Bissell and Dan Casey at MFWP and Lynn Kelly of the Montana Loon Society; everyone looking for a way to get that loon out of its hole before the ice closed in.

By Wednesday we had gathered people and equipment to launch the first of a series of attempts to capture the loon. Picture this: two men (John and our neighbor Don Roe) with large nets in an old aluminum canoe, poling their way over the ice with sharp sticks, a long rope tied to the back with several people on shore ready to haul fast if the canoe should break through and toss out its passengers, Gael Bissell pacing the shore urging caution above all else. Eventually the guys reached the large patch of open water in front of the marsh, then paddled to the far ice edge, and began trying to break a path through to the loon. After taking 30 minutes to get 30 feet, we realized this strategy would not work.

Over the next three days, a number of other plans were hatched; some pretty half-baked and others plausible enough to spur other attempts. For example, about 10 p.m. Wednesday a neighbor called to say she couldn't sleep with

the loon still in danger. Would John please go out in a wet suit and a float tube with a flashlight and bring it in? John filed this under "half-baked" and went back to bed. Our Friday attempt was more promising. We tied the canoe to a small white-water raft for safety, attached these to about ¼ mile of rope, and sent John and Don out again with their sharp poles, this time from a place on shore that didn't require crossing open water to get to the loon. But by this time snow had accumulated on the ice, so the canoe wouldn't slide; and the ice was still too thin to walk the boat out more than 30 feet.

What finally worked? It was a plan hatched with the help of Gael and Dan. Late Friday afternoon we borrowed a tough little aluminum fishing boat with an outboard motor. Saturday morning, four guys were able to push this boat out to where the bow began breaking through the ice. Using chain saws they cut a hole in the ice for the motor's propeller. Then three guys climbed into the boat and turned it into an icebreaker. They would run the boat about half-way up onto the ice, then jump up and down in the bow until the boat broke through; then back up for another run, and do it again. After an hour, they had made their way about ¼ mile and reached the loon.

Though quite agitated at first, the loon soon figured out how to get away from its would-be rescuers. When the boat moved into the bird's hole of water, it simply dove under the boat to the path broken in the ice. Then as the boat moved back into the path, the bird would dive again and reappear in its original hole.

We had expected the loon to figure this one out. But we had yet to execute the rest of the plan. In recent summers the Montana Loon Society has sponsored banding northwest Montana's loons. Their strategy was to go after the birds in the dark, shining a high-intensity light in their eyes while approaching in a boat with nets. One theory was that the birds didn't dive away from the light because at this time of year they had chicks to protect. No one was really sure that a nighttime approach would work when chicks were absent, however. But all agreed that it was worth a try.

So Saturday night after dark, John, Don and I climbed into the boat and headed out through the previously broken path towards the loon. As we approached I shone the spotlight on the loon's eye, and he seemed to freeze in the beam. We got closer and closer, and still the bird did not move. Finally my neighbor, Don Roe, was able to reach out toward the loon with the big  
**(CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)**





## FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS



As many of you know, the individual chapters of National Audubon Society are autonomous, and the chapters sometimes take positions which differ from national. This most often happens because a chapter's local perspective of the issue is different from the national organization's.

Flathead Audubon Society is unique in that many people in our leadership positions have been board members, officers, and chairpersons for over 10 years. Turnover occurs, but it is slow, and this is what gives us our depth, our consistency, our perspective, our combined knowledge of issues and an understanding of our neighbors. The officers and board of directors, over time, have been responsible for setting the tone of our policies and the positions that have been taken on environmental, quality-of-life, educational, and related wildlife issues. Our positions change over time because the issues themselves are dynamic, scientific understanding gets better, and technology evolves (solving some problems and creating others).

Let's cite some issues and see, generally, where the FAS board of directors has been coming from:

- 1) **Birds:** We support them in our lives in every way, feed 'em, love 'em, watch 'em! The vast majority of "our" birds live much of their lives somewhere else; therefore, environmental issues somewhere else become important to us. Birds, because of their habitat requirements and relatively short lifespans, are good environmental barometers. Changes in bird populations and species give us a clue as to what's going on in our environment. Birds mirror the natural world; we have grazing geese, seed-eating grosbeaks, carrion-eating jays, insect-controlling woodpeckers, nectar-licking hummingbirds, and MURDEROUS, PREDATORY raptors – just like human life, huh?
- 2) **Air:** Oxygen is the most important environmental component for our human existence (and that of all animals). Clean air is not just desirable, it is necessary. Polluted air kills; miners sacrificed canaries who "told" them when the air in the mine was too toxic or oxygen-deficient for them to live in. Audubon supports legislation that protects our air quality from degradation. As an example, we would be against industrial incineration of medical and other wastes, if the emissions added toxic chemicals to our air.
- 3) **Water:** Clean water is the second most important component of our environment and we fight to keep it clean enough to safely drink. We actively oppose proposed developments which threaten water quality. So, truckstops and gas stations in a flood plain (as in the Bill Lincoln proposal for Willow Glen Drive), a poorly engineered garbage dump over our aquifer, a proposed parking lot over a wetland (as in the Whitefish Lake Lodge expansion), all will get us into the fray, because each affects our human need for clean water and quality habitat for our wildlife.
- 4) **Wilderness:** We support it, because wilderness is a vital component of wildlife habitat. It is also needed for study, because it provides us with a baseline of information on the mostly undisturbed natural systems. It is important scientifically, as it gives us a "control" area to monitor changes in the "managed" areas. Wilderness is also needed to give humans a place to "get away from it all," to find peace and quiet, clean air and water, and to become a closer part of nature.
- 5) **Forests:** We support forests, in part, because they support us, with oxygen, natural filtering for clean water, a buffer against noise, habitat for birds and other wildlife, wood for our houses, paper to print our newsletters on, and jobs to help sustain the economy and to allow us the luxury of buying bird seed for our feathered friends. Both water and forests are "managed" to benefit humans. We mechanically pump, chemically treat, store, and transport water for our needs; we mechanically harvest, transport, and process trees for our needs, too. Our job in Flathead Audubon is to see to it that we don't manage the forests to death. We strive for balance. Every tree is not a stick of lumber and every tree is not a snag or potential snag for a woodpecker. We've done fairly well in Montana at maintaining a balance; we have BMP's, SMZ's, and watchful citizens. In Flathead Audubon, we have not tried to stop logging and lumber mills, or forest management by the Forest Service. What we have done is to change the way logging and forest management is done. We have some influence over forest management here, because our idea is not to drive the Forest Service and timber industry to their knees. If all of our wood is imported, all of our forests are "saved," where will we get our wood? Try Canada and South America, where real environmental protection is not a reality. Will clearcutting and burning hundreds of thousands of acres in a tropical rain forest affect us here? You bet it will, in our air quality, our returning numbers of neotropical birds, in our local economy. We can't be idealistic NIMBY's. Flathead Audubon Society is very involved locally, and forest issues are BIG ISSUES in the Flathead.

Future articles will cover Audubon direction and issues, such as: human population, threatened & endangered species, recreation, hunting-fishing-trapping-birdwatching, game farms, and wildlife habitats.

**BY BRENT MITCHELL, CONSERVATION CHAIR AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS**





## FLATHEAD AUDUBON'S NEW WEBSITE

Check it out! Flathead Audubon Society now has its own web site: [www.audubon.org/chapter/mt/flathead](http://www.audubon.org/chapter/mt/flathead) When you sign on, you will be able to find out such information as who the board members are, what program is planned for the current monthly meeting, other events coming up—such as the Birding Festival in June 2000 in Polson. Other information listed: links to other sites, general chapter info and local birding areas. We hope to add other features in the future. Any questions or comments, email WebEditor, Gail Sullivan, at [gus@digisys.net](mailto:gus@digisys.net).

## THE GREAT LOON RESCUE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

capture net and scoop him up. Into the boat he went, hissing and hooting. We threw a blanket on top to calm him, and made our way back in the night, crunching through chunks of floating ice.

Once back on shore we had to extricate the loon from the net without getting stabbed by his long, sharp beak. The rescuers wore heavy leather gloves, and we put a sock over the bird's head, which calmed him and also made it harder for him to take good aim. Finally the net was removed, and we placed the bird in a large box with a lid. By this time it was late Saturday evening, so we kept him in the box in our hallway over night. As the rescuers sat around our living room celebrating, we occasionally heard the loon pecking at the side of his box. But he soon settled in and was quiet.

Sunday morning I couldn't resist lifting the lid of the box a bit and peek inside to be sure the loon was still all right. When the light entered the box, the bird slowly turned his head as he woke up. Finally he had turned far enough to see me looking in, and quickly drew back his head with a startled hoot. He was fine.

Dan Casey got out of bed early that Sunday morning and met us at the FWP headquarters to check the loon over. He determined that the defeathered wing was not broken and the bird was basically healthy. Then we drove with Dan to Somers Bay and released the bird onto Flathead Lake. It quickly moved away from shore, diving and calling and stretching its wings, and then made its way toward the distant part of the bay.

A week later, Dan spotted the bird during the Bigfork Christmas Count. Most likely Flathead Lake will not freeze over this winter and the loon will make it through to spring when it should grow new flight feathers. With luck we will see this loon back on Rogers Lake for the next nesting season. I'll let you know.

BY LINDA WINNIE



## GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

As information needs grow, the observations made by those who care about birds become increasingly important to conservation. It is vital to use this hobby to aid science," said Audubon's Gill. "With the cutting-edge Internet technology of BirdSource, the real time, continent-wide compilation of citizen-science reports fulfills that need."

In order for GBBC to be a success, Cornell and Audubon invite the estimated 60-million North Americans who feed or watch birds to take part. "It's important for birdwatchers everywhere to tell us what they're seeing. We need people to help by spending as little as 15 minutes -- on any or all days of the count -- recording the numbers and kinds of birds they see during their morning coffee break, while driving to work, taking a stroll, or while purposefully out birdwatching," said Cornell's Fitzpatrick.

Participants tally the highest number of each species seen at one time (so as not to count the same birds more than once). Observers go to BirdSource to report their sightings by clicking on their state or province. Within hours, they will see how their reports combine with others across the continent to create a "snapshot" of North American birds. This count has the added benefit of helping BirdSource assess the value of backyards as habitat and evaluate the species of birds dependent upon them.

To participate, go to BirdSource (<http://www.birdsource.org>), and click on Great Backyard Bird Count. Directions are provided at the site. Participation is free. No registration is necessary. For more information, prospective counters can call toll-free 1-800-843-BIRD (2473).  
**NEWS RELEASE FROM THE NATIONAL  
AUDUBON SOCIETY AND CORNELL LAB OF  
ORNITHOLOGY**