



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

January 2021
VOLUME 45, NUMBER 5

Snow Bunting



dkfindout.com

Flathead Audubon Premieres New Video Series!

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we decided to take our Conservation Education Program in a "virtually" entertaining direction, with a both light-hearted and serious video series, with our primary bird education messages front and center.

Professor Avian Guano, Bir.D. is our eccentric, slightly off-the-wall narrator -- doing his own brand of "edu-tainment" for our K - 12 students (you may not realize you have learned something until it's too late!).

They feature some gorgeous bird video footage gathered by Birds in Motion, a local company with the goal of video-documenting all of the bird species in North America!

Here are the YouTube links to each video:

"BIRDS ROCK!" Link: <https://youtu.be/LujJdivsZmi> Professor Guano outlines the seven ways that bird are critical to our survival and add joy and wonder to our lives. They are critical for insect



and rodent balance, seed dispersal and pollination, first responders in the great cleanup crew, and excellent indicators of the health of our own life support system! They also *invented* music as we know it, and function as mental health "ecotherapy" Evidence is

convincing that they make us happier!

"BIRD TROUBLE" link: <https://youtu.be/ZbfVHlwiakw> But, we have not been kind to birds in the past (30% of North American birds are gone!) and



their future prospects are completely dependent on our own attention to science and evidence, and the changes we make in the next few decades. Their life support system is our life support system. Professor Guano makes a strong case for science and evidence as our guide to a better future.

"BIRD HELP" link: (coming soon, stay tuned!) The Good Professor shows us how WE, with some minor labors of love, can make a big difference in the future of birds and the future of ourselves -- at home! Restoring habitat with native plants, becoming citizen scientists, modifying our windows, keeping our kitties indoors, becoming bird-friendly consumers and perhaps even activists -- WILL determine the future of birds, and therefore ourselves. And, most of these simple changes are FUN!

Watch these videos! Pass the word to friends! Make the world better for birds!

by Denny Olson

JANUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, January 4, 2020. 6 PM. FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Will be held digitally. If you're interested in attending contact cory@flatheadaudubon.org

Monday, January 11. 7 PM. Flathead Audubon General Meeting will be held digitally. See page 3 for how to participate.

Saturday, January 16, 2021. 1-4 PM. Winter River Bottomland trip. See page 6.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

African Penguins

by Anthony Nelson

Starting my career as an animal keeper, penguins were the last animal I wanted to work with. As fate would have it, the African Penguins were the only species needing a "primary" keeper at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, and so began my connection to these ridiculous birds.

There are around 18 species of penguins (some debate exists on the exact number), but the African Penguin is the only species that lives and breeds in Africa. With numbers that used to be in the millions, these birds have experienced huge difficulties resulting in less than 20,000 breeding pairs in 2019. The islands they once primarily inhabited were scraped for their guano (feces) throughout the early-mid 20th century, robbing the penguins of their nesting material. This guano was sold as fertilizer. Their eggs also became a local delicacy, and those collecting them would go out a few days beforehand and smash eggs. This would ensure they only served fresh eggs.

While guano harvesting is no longer a primary threat, new ones have emerged. I'd love to write a great underdog story about the African Penguin, but victory is far from reality. Human conflicts have not ceased. Along the southern rim of Africa, the fish populations are being devastated by overfishing. This is causing the penguins to swim further and further away from the shore to find fish, which is exhausting valuable energy and time. Breeding pairs will switch off sitting on the eggs while the other parent goes searching for food. With the duration of time increasing between feedings and the general decline in caloric intake, eggs are being abandoned by starving parents that can't wait any longer for their mate to return. The fisherman also sees the penguins as competition, and there have been stories of fishermen trying to run penguins over as they launch their boats or chasing them around on shore.

In the 21st century, these penguins are facing a new threat; the selfie threat. To explain, you need a little background information. African penguins molt their feathers once a year, and healthy individuals should be within a few days of molting on the same date every year. I used to track

this at the zoo as it was a good indicator of wellness if a bird was late in molting or skipped a molt. The average molt takes between 14-21 days, and happens in stages. They lose their fluffy down layer first, then their waterproof top layer. They are unable to go fishing during this time as the water is too cold without either of those layers. With this, the birds will gain about 40% of their bodyweight in preparation for the molt. So, they get really fat, then they get really fluffy. At the zoo they would hide during this time in their nest boxes. Even though food was still available, they would often go many days without eating.

In the wild, the penguins try to remain as stationary as possible during this time. It is imperative they don't expend too many calories moving around. This is why selfies are a problem. In an effort to get their next "like" on social media, people are getting far too close to the penguins on the beaches, especially the adorable fat fluffy ones. They are chasing the birds around, and molting penguins are literally dying of starvation after being chased around by tourists.

If there is one hope for the African Penguin, it is a conservation group called SANCCOB. Since 1968, they've admitted almost 100,000 seabirds to their rehabilitation center in Cape Town. I had the great pleasure of volunteering with this amazing group of humans for a few weeks in 2015, and was able to hand deliver a large check from our conservation efforts at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo. During my time at the zoo, we raised funds for a boardwalk to keep people off the sandy breeding grounds and several Rangers to monitor and protect the penguins at both mainland nesting sites. Without SANCCOB these birds would already be gone.

What can you do here in NW Montana? Adopt a penguin at www.sanccob.co.za. This makes a great gift for kids, and makes a huge difference for African Penguins. Feel free to reach out if you want to learn more, education is my best tool to help.

"You won't save what you don't love and you can't love what you don't know." -Jacques Cousteau

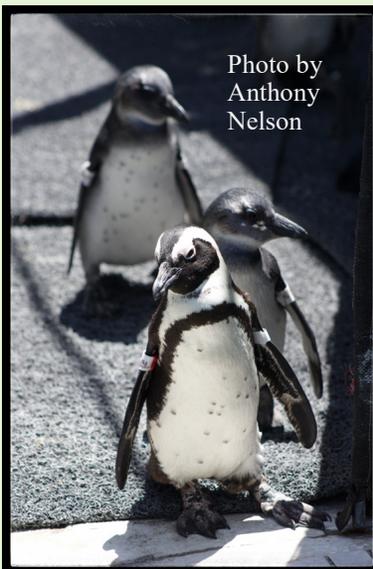


Photo by Anthony Nelson



January Program

Montana's Amazing Native Fish: where truth is stranger than fiction

presented by Beth Gardner

Have you ever heard of fish that doesn't like to swim? Or how about the one so primitive and bizarre that it is surely a ghost from very ancient times? Beth has picked out 7 odd-ball species found here in Montana and will give us the inside scope on their hidden life underwater. This will be a light-hearted and fun introduction to our aquatic friends.



Beth Gardner is a fisheries biologist with the Flathead National Forest. Beth is originally from Ohio

and studied at Michigan State University. She began her career with the Forest Service in northern Michigan and moved to the Flathead Valley in 1994. Her primary duties involve the conservation of cutthroat trout and bull trout on federal lands. Beth enjoys fishing, gardening and ice hockey. Her favorite bird is the Brown Creeper.

See below for how to attend

Beth's program on January 11.

How to Attend the January 11 FAS General Meeting

Time: January 11, 2021, 7:00 PM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89836584287>

Meeting ID: 838 0990 5082

Phone: +1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

If you have been hesitant to try Zoom, it is actually quite easy. For a brief tutorial contact

cory@flatheadaudbon.org

We apologize for the technical problems starting last month's general meeting. It was a Zoom glitch and nothing we could help. The meeting was postponed until the following Monday. Like everything this year, hopefully, we'll have more success in the new year!

Flathead Recon receives Conservation Achievement Recognition

Glass recycling in the Flathead Valley has been difficult in recent years for many reasons, but one local company has been trying to change that.

Using as their business mantra "Divert good materials from the landfill", Flathead Recon is northwest Montana's only glass pulverizing resource. Owner Dave Fischlowitz believes recycling should be done locally. After he and his partner started in the salvage and construction clean-up business, Dave saw how much potentially re-usable material was constantly sent to the Flathead County Landfill. On a road tour of communities in Oregon, Washington, and California he saw what others were doing and came home energized to try something new in

Montana. In 2018, they purchased a 20-year old glass pulverizing machine.

Located north of the railroad tracks and Nucleus Avenue in Columbia Falls, you'll find the glass recycling and reclaimed building materials facility. Dave emphasizes they are not a glass collection business, but a recycling facility. Consequently, their scope of services is different than what you would expect at the landfill. Currently, they are only taking glass during sched-



Photo by Flathead Recon

uled events, but Dave hopes to soon be able to continue a drop-off site for glass. In 2020, they held 2-3 events, but they hope to ramp that up to

continued on page 6

President's Column

Gael Bissell, Flathead Audubon President

BIRDS ROCK! and BIRD TROUBLE! and BIRD HELP!

As 2020 closes out, it is my sincerest hope that the new Covid-19 vaccines gradually take the vice grips off society and we get back to some type of normalcy...like in-person Flathead Audubon meetings, field trips, and many other group birding activities! Maybe we can even have a May potluck or June Warbler Weekend?

Although the novel coronavirus has had an overwhelming and direct impact on us humans, many other subtler political, economic, and ecological factors continue to move forward without regard to the pandemic. Things like the federal government's proposed weakening of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, opening up of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas exploration, and holding off funding for certain states' priority land conservation projects. Of high concern to Flathead Audubon's mission are our North American bird populations, our canaries in the coal mine who detect change we cannot detect. As most of you know, many bird populations including common songbirds and grassland species are declining, gradually, slowly. Why, you might ask?

Pushed by the pandemic, Flathead Audubon decided to use video technology this spring to laser focus our K-12 Conservation Education Program on the importance of birds, the reasons they are in trouble, and what we can do to help them. The resulting series of videos takes off from and expands on our "Birds Need Our Help" series of written articles that appeared in the January through May, 2019, issues of the Pileated Post. Using Denny's Olson's lifelong experience with video technology, and local photographer Bj Worth's incredible bird video library housed at Wings In Nature (WIN or WingsInNature.org), Flathead Audubon has now produced the first two of a planned series of educational videos that focus on the importance of birds, the reasons for their decline, and how we can help bring them back.

The first, **Birds Rock!** (<https://youtu.be/LujJdivsZml>) was released in July and explains why birds are so important to our world and are such a marvelous wonder. And we just finished the second, **Bird Trouble!**, to better explain the complex reasons (death by a thousand cuts) why so many bird populations are declining (<https://youtu.be/ZbfVHlwiakw>). These funny yet serious educational products run 15 to 30 minutes and are geared to middle school ages - but suitable for all. Both are or will be readily available through our website, www.flatheadaudubon.org.



Feel free to send any feedback to [in-fo@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:info@flatheadaudubon.org).

The next video, **Bird Help!**, is scheduled for release in early 2021. This film will shed light on what we can all do to help birds and make a difference. It will be followed by one more video on the value of Montana native plants and insects to birds (to be filmed when we have flowers, insects, and birds this spring). All of these videos along with related study guides will be shared with the Flathead Valley K-12 teachers, parents, and other educators.

I believe that we can all make a difference to the future of our birds and the underlying ecosystems if we first understand the problems that they face, and then we figure out how each of us can contribute to

reducing our impacts. I for one do not want to be part of Silent Spring II. For example, my family has added two new (albeit small) native plant gardens to our yard and we finally decided to trade in our old SUV for a newer hybrid car to reduce carbon emissions. We stopped using Roundup everywhere, especially along the gravel driveway (that was hard). Like many of you, we recycle as much as we can and use cloth bags at the grocery store. I have learned much from Flathead Audu-

bon's conservation and education programs and hope all of you have also. I encourage you to watch and share our new, locally-sourced and produced, bird education videos. Learning more about the issues together and each of us doing our part, we will be able to give birds the help they need.

2021 is not a year to sit back and wait for things to get better just for us. I encourage you to become more pro-active in protecting habitat, avoiding use of unnecessary chemicals, recycling and pre-cycling, writing letters to our legislators or agencies, and just general caring for our environment. Maybe you want to join our Conservation or Education Committees to help us get these messages out? Whatever comes easiest is the best place to start.

I want to thank all of you for your incredible support of Flathead Audubon, our Conservation Education Program, Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, Birds of Prey Festivals, and the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch throughout 2020. Thank you for your willingness to try Zoom (although it failed once in December) for our public meetings. At least 50 of you have logged on. I am impressed. Please be safe as we get through the first half of 2021 and I look forward to seeing you, probably on Zoom, the second Monday evening at 7 PM of each month through spring. Above all else, be well and be safe. Thanks.



Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

At my house, during this tumultuous year, unlike anything any of us has seen before, prompted a good-natured by-word that has been used for a lot of laughs at bizarre and sometimes semi-tragic times. "What NOW?" There have been many adaptations to life in general, and with most everyone sequestered, we at FAS have had to ask ourselves that same rhetorical question, and come up with answers.

At the beginning of the last school year, Laura Katzman with Flathead Land Trust, Chris Hammond from MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and myself (with a little field trip help from our own Jake Bramante) piloted the seventh-grade Bird Education sequence with three school programs and three subsequent field trips. We concentrated on Sandhill Cranes and the West Valley stopover area in the fall, winter birds of prey, and spring waterfowl migration. FAS completed the construction of Sandhill Crane and Common Birds of the Flathead educational trunks.

I also coordinated a full-day work session on upgrading the existing 12 trunks with the help of our Ambassador volunteers. In Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, I wrote a self-guided one-mile educational trail, completed by volunteers, with 65 trail-marker stops and an 8-page guide to the trail.

Meanwhile, Suzy Waldron, graphic artist extraordinaire, and myself were plugging away at content and artwork for two large vertical display banners for our events on "Why birds Matter" and "Why Birds Rock, which we finished in the summer -- ironically about when person-to-person events were fading into the COVID sunset. It was OK, We knew the banners would be around for years, whereas the pandemic would not.

Work was ongoing for completion of a 15-minute "Birds Rock!" video, a light-hearted view of why birds are critical to human survival. We had no idea at the time how important that "remote" and digital approach to our mission was going to be when we could not work face-to-face. Two Christmas Bird Counts in Bigfork and Kalispell areas, a monthly 600-word column in the Pileated Post Newsletter, completion of another overflow 6-week FVCC Senior Institute course on "Birds of Northwest Montana" all progressed normally into March. I also was MC and Judge for the Flathead County Science Fair and presented two Audubon awards to students at the ceremony. We were in the middle of a 48-day stretch of daily 4-part "Bird Trivia" quizzes through the FAS website and Facebook site toward the end of March, which also fit the "remote" needs nicely.

All of these efforts proved to be serendipi-

tous. In early May, Board, Committees and staff had a planning and re-tooling session that set a course through a sequestered and quarantined world of unknown duration. I still managed to do 14 in-person (distanced and masked) programs for schools, teachers and state park attendees. We realized that the popularity of "Birds Rock!" presented an opportunity to plug a full-sequence learning process into our School Bird Education Program by creating follow-up videos on "Bird Trouble" (past 30% bird population declines and how climate will affect them during the rest of this century), and also a third, upbeat video, "Bird Help", empowering our audience to mitigate the bird trouble with personal efforts in their own homes and circles. "Bird Trouble" was completed in November, and "Bird Help" will be done within a few days of you reading this.

Because our major autumn event at Lone Pine State Park was not possible (we averaged 800 participants the last few years), we did a week-long series of smaller

group and remote workshop activities, with some help from Wild Wings Rehabilitation Center and Montana



Audubon. One of those activities began with me drawing, painting and laminating 27 full-sized silhouettes of birds in flight for a course preparing citizens to help with our Jewel Basin Hawk Watch counts (this was our 14th year!). They proved popular enough that they now hang in the Lone Pine State Park Visitor Center classroom as a semi-permanent display. We created a self-guided process and "key" for learning and practice, hopefully recruiting new citizen scientists "remotely". MT FWP liked our vertical educational banners enough to display them indefinitely in the same class and meeting room. (Go see them!)

Our wonderful FAS Education Committee and Volunteers is busy digitizing all of our 14 educational trunks to make them much more accessible to teachers doing remote teaching.

After the 3-video sequence is completed and properly promoted, I will be working to make all of my in-person PowerPoints audio-narrated and self-standing for classroom use. And, hopefully, we will be transitioning back to whatever "normal" resembles in 2021 -- but with new tools and products that will continue help us educate about birds.

These adaptations to the "year from hell" as some have described it, will be useful far beyond the pandemic. As is our style, we made lemonade. We hope you like it.

WINTER 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. Please read our field trip guidelines at www.FlatheadAudubon.org. 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 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. Check the FAS webpage at <https://www.flatheadaudubon.org/activities-and-field-trips/> for updated information on upcoming field trips.



Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic we are taking precautions to ensure safety for all participants. Masks and respect for others' personal space will be required, and we ask you to not share binoculars or spotting scopes. The number of participants allowed on trips will be limited as will carpooling.

WINTER RIVER BOTTOMLAND: BIRDS, TRACKS, HYDROLOGY AND PLANT ADAPTATIONS

Saturday, JANUARY 16, 1 - 4 PM (weather permitting). Join FAS Conservation Educator and long-time teaching naturalist Denny Olson on a winter hike in Kalispell. 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 is 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. Call Denny at 249-3987 or e-mail denny@flatheadaudubon.org to sign up and get directions. Space is limited. MASKS AND SPACING ARE REQUIRED.



Montana's 67th Legislature Will Convene January 4th

By Amy Seaman, Montana Audubon

The 67th Montana Legislature is setting up to be like no other. Major changes in the legislature's make up make it hard to know what to expect. And Covid precautions will mean that our physical presence in the Capitol halls will be limited. But we are not backing down from the challenge. We are ready to research, organize, testify, and lobby, remotely or not, to defend Montana's wildlife, wildlife habitat, and bed-rock environmental laws.

Though there will likely be considerable reduction in federal pressure to reduce the powers of foundational laws like the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Clean Water Act, we already know that a number of state-level challenges to our primary conservation issues are coming. Like challenges we saw

in 2019, this includes efforts to halt the continuation of the Habitat Montana program (a Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks habitat protection program), and challenges to the state Greater Sage-grouse conservation program, conservation easements, keeping public lands in public hands, and increasing clean energy and climate change solutions.

As always we will need your help to succeed with the important legislative work that lies ahead. During this legislative session we will again maintain an active "Action Alert Network" that will provide you with the information you need to make your voice heard when important issues come up!

To sign up for Network alerts visit www.mtaudubon.org.

Flathead Recon *continued from page 3*

10-12 events per year. Dave is hoping to resume events and a self-service station where customers "pay to process" their glass (current cost is \$0.25 per pound, glass must be sorted by color) this spring. He also hopes to develop more contracts with local businesses for regular collection of glass.

The difficulties in making this type of business economically feasible are many. First, maintaining and keeping the pulverizer running has been a challenge. However, the biggest obstacle has been finding a sustainable market for the crushed and smoothed glass. Even though the product is safe, attractive, and firewise it is not suitable for all situations.

The product comes in packages and Dave says the best uses are for landscaping in low traffic areas. The pandemic has also slowed business opportunities and made events more difficult.

Flathead Audubon celebrates and recognizes Flathead Recon for their innovative and dedicated approach to local conservation solutions. Non-profits can schedule events as fundraisers and businesses can deliver their glass on a negotiated contract basis. Flathead Recon (<https://flatheadrecon.com/>) can be reached at flatheadrecon@gmail.com. Flathead Recon also provides property clean-up and deconstruction services as well.



Thank You!

...to those below who have made donations to Flathead Audubon through November 2020.

Merlin

Billyann Burch



merlinfalcon foundation

Kestrel

Carol Bibler
Leslie Kehoe
Robert Lee
Anne Lent & Charles McCarty



rsfb.org.uk

Supporting Member + Donation

Eileen Carney
Carroll Lorang
Kat Petersen
Kathy Ross



granderie.ca

*Natural Events To See This Month:
Spruce Grouse are in trees now except
for nighttime roosts in powder snow.*



SPECIAL GIFTS

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



usfws.gov

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

I want my gift to recognize another:

In memory of _____

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Please send a notification of this gift to:

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Please do not acknowledge my gift in the Post

Please make checks payable to:

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Kalispell, MT 59904

Your gift is tax deductible.

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OFFICERS

| | | |
|----------------|--------------|--|
| President | Gael Bissell | gael@flatheadaudubon.org 406-261-2255 |
| Vice-President | Cory Davis | cory@flatheadaudubon.org |
| Past President | Kay Mitchell | kay@flatheadaudubon.org |
| Secretary | Pam Willison | pam@flatheadaudubon.org |
| Treasurer | Rod Walette | rod@flatheadaudubon.org |

DIRECTORS

| | | |
|-----------|------------------|--|
| 2018-2021 | Jan Metzmaker | jan@flatheadaudubon.org |
| 2018-2021 | Jake Bramante | jake@flatheadaudubon.org |
| 2019-2022 | Will Beyer | beyer59901@yahoo.com |
| 2019-2022 | Margaret Parodi | margaret@flatheadaudubon.org |
| 2019-2022 | Dave Manuwal | manuwal2@centurylink.net |
| 2020-2023 | Bob Lee | bob@flatheadaudubon.org |
| 2020-2023 | Mike Fanning | shrdlu@centurytel.net |
| 2019-2020 | Derrick Rathe | Drathe33@gmail.com |
| 2020-2023 | Carole Jorgensen | carole@flatheadaudubon.org |
| 2020-2023 | Joe Batts | jbatts@me.com |
| 2020-2023 | Cindy Roberts | cindy@flatheadaudubon.org |
| 2020-2023 | Tom Roberts | yellranger@yahoo.com |

CONSERVATION EDUCATOR

Denny Olson denny@flatheadaudubon.org

FAS REP ON MT AUDUBON BOARD

Bob Lee bob@flatheadaudubon.org

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

| | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------|--|
| Conservation | Carole Jorgensen | carole@flatheadaudubon.org |
| | Lewis Young | lyoung@interbel.net |
| Education | Cindy Roberts | cindy@flatheadaudubon.org |
| | Tom Roberts | yellranger@yahoo.com |
| Field Trips | Margaret Parodi | margaret@flatheadaudubon.org |
| Finance | Mike Fanning | shrdlu@centurytel.net |
| Hospitality | Joe Batts | jbatts@me.com |
| | Connie Cohen | conniecohen@centurytel.net |
| Membership | Mike Fanning | shrdlu@centurytel.net |
| | Jill Fanning | shrdlu@centurytel.net |
| Nominations | Bob Lee | bob@flatheadaudubon.org |
| Owen Sowerwine Natural Area | Cory Davis | cory@flatheadaudubon.org |
| | Bob Lee | bob@flatheadaudubon.org |
| | Pam Willison | pam@flatheadaudubon.org |
| Newsletter | Linda Winnie | linda@flatheadaudubon.org |
| | Darcy Thomas | darcy@flatheadaudubon.org |
| | Lewis Young | lyoung@interbel.net |
| Program | Dave Manuwal | manuwal2@centurylink.net |
| Publicity | Jan Metzmaker | jan@flatheadaudubon.org |
| Sales | Jill Fanning | shrdlu@centurytel.net |
| Refuges | Kathy Ross | mtkat67@gmail.com |
| Website | Jake Bramante | jake@flatheadaudubon.org |



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Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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The Flathead Audubon Society is affiliated with the National Audubon Society and Montana Audubon (www.MTAudubon.org). We meet on the second Monday of each month September through May. Meetings start at 7 PM and include a featured guest who presents a conservation or nature program. The Board of Directors meets the Monday preceding the general meeting, at 6 PM. See page 1 for locations. 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. To become a member or to renew your membership, go to the FAS website or use the membership form below. **Deadline for newsletter copy is the 18th of each month. Contact newsletter editor at 755-1406; or lin-**

Check our website www.FlatheadAudubon.org for
Late breaking FAS news & announcements
Online FAS membership sign up or renewal
Newly scheduled field trips & events

THE PILEATED POST is delivered BY EMAIL!

So be sure to include your email address when joining or renewing.

If you currently get a paper copy by mail please consider switching to email; send your request to linda@flatheadaudubon.org.

To report a change of address - postal or email - contact Mike at shrdlu@centurytel.net

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FLATHEAD AUDUBON FLY-BY

You will receive occasional short emails with last minute updates, reminders, and breaking FAS news.



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 \$ _____

New member? Renewal?

You may renew or join online on our website: <http://www.flatheadaudubon.org/>

If you wish to receive a paper copy by USPS, check this box.

Name _____

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Mail this form with your check to:

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