



Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

February 2021
VOLUME 45, NUMBER 6



Mountain
Chickadee

ebird.com

Flathead Audubon Announces BIRD HELP starring Professor Avian Guano, Bir.D.



BIRD HELP is the third video in our light-hearted but serious video series designed to carry our bird education messages into the local schools.

In this new video, Professor Guano 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!

All three videos in the series feature Professor Avian Guano, Bir.D., our eccentric, slightly off-the-wall narrator -- doing his own brand of "edu-tainment" for our K - 12 students. They also feature some gor-



geous 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!

All three are available at <https://flatheadaudubon.org/educationvideos>.

"BIRDS ROCK" Birds are critical to our survival and add joy and wonder to our lives.

And they *invented* music as we know it.

"BIRD TROUBLE" We have not been kind to birds in the past (30% of North American birds are gone!). Their future depends on our own attention to science and evidence, and the changes we make in coming decades.

"BIRD HELP" There are lots of things each of us can do right where we live to help birds. Even little changes can make a big difference.

**Watch all three videos! Pass the word to friends!
Make the world better for birds!**



DO YOU REALLY STILL WANT A PAPER COPY?

Many years ago, Flathead Audubon introduced an electronic version of our monthly newsletter. We did this both as a convenience for members who prefer reading on an electronic device and to save money and labor for FAS. Currently about 60% of our nearly 400 newsletters are sent by paper. This is costing FAS in both money and labor, and is costing our environment in trees. We would like to reduce the these costs. So, we request that you give serious consideration to changing from the paper to the electronic version of the Pileated Post.

We recognize that not everyone will make the change and don't want anyone to feel they must do

so. We are only asking everyone to review his or her choice. Even if you still want to get the paper version, it would be appropriate for you to share your e-mail address with us since, from time to time between newsletters, we email the Flathead Audubon Fly-by to announce items of interest to our members.

To simply provide us your email address, send it to Mike at shrdlu@centurytel.net. To provide your email address AND shift from a paper copy to electronic, please contact Linda at lin-da@flatheadaudubon.org.

Thanks for your consideration.

by Mike Fanning and Linda Winnie

FEBUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, February 1, 2020. 6 PM. FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Will be held digitally. If you're interested in attending contact cory@flatheadaudubon.org

Monday, February 8. 7 PM. Flathead Audubon General Meeting will be held digitally. See page 3 for how to participate.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Wood Duck

by Kat Peterson

As birders, we search out extraordinary birds, whether that be a quick glimpse at a rare and elusive bird or to visually dissect beautiful plumage. The latter is just what is in store for us who are lucky enough to view a striking male Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*). This small dabbling duck displays rainbow feathers that are contrasted with white lining the striking colors in drakes. Females and juveniles, are drab brown with a unique and petite body shape, a white eye ring, and spotted flanks. Young ducks' diets consist of invertebrates and insects while adults eat mostly seeds of both aquatic and terrestrial plants. Unlike other ducks, their feet have claws that are able to grip and perch on branches. Each mating season the ducks will pair with a new mate and remain monogamous with that mate that year.

Wood Ducks, similar to many other waterfowl species, were brought to the brink of extinction in the early twentieth century by overhunting and habitat loss. The first major driver in their recovery was the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act which implemented regulations on hunting. Another contributing factor of Wood Duck conservation was the passage of the 1934 "Duck Stamp Act". This act assisted regulation of hunting seasons, and required hunters to pay an annual fee that went toward waterfowl management and habitat restoration. Although they are no longer a species of concern, woodies are still vulnerable to wetland habitat loss and deforestation, which negatively impacts their nesting sites.

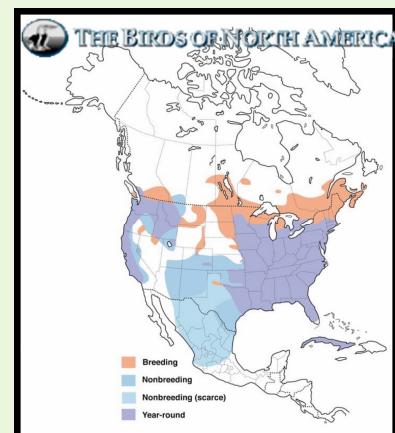
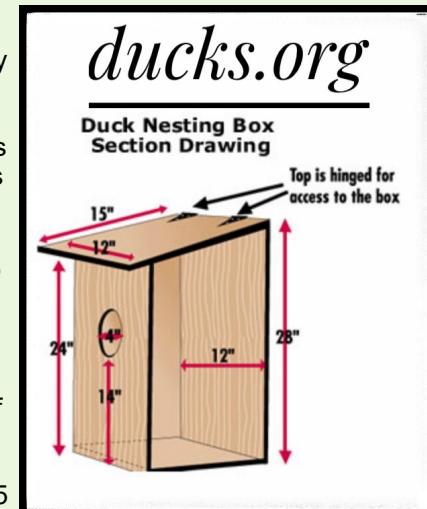
Wood ducks are cavity nesters who use pre-formed cavities that are already excavated. They will also readily take to nest boxes, therefore many conservation efforts have adopted building nest boxes. These little dabblers are the only duck species in North America to lay two broods of eggs per year (although this is more common in their southern range). Wood ducks are precocial, meaning they are hatched in an advanced physiological state where they can already eat and walk. This allows them to reach sexual maturity in their first year of life. In Spring, dozens of nestlings will safely jump out from their nest cavities that reach heights up to 65

feet above ground or water. These day-old ducklings climb to the cavity's opening when prompted by their mother's call.

A very interesting behavior that has recently caught the attention of ornithologists is the Wood Duck's intra-specific brood parasitism. In this case, one hen will lay eggs in another Wood Duck's nest and rely on them to incubate and raise their eggs to conserve the parasitic duck's own energy. In a single normal clutch, a hen will lay 11-15 eggs, but nests with brood parasites have been recorded as having as many as 40 eggs!

Sometimes a hen will lay a single egg in multiple nests all over the place. This is one reproductive strategy of the ducks, but hens have 4 different pathways they can choose to lay their clutch: They may not breed in a given year, only lay eggs parasitically, be traditional nesters, or do both! Researchers are still not certain how or why each hen chooses her reproductive strategy.

Some woodies are known to be permanent residents to Flathead Valley. A majority of them will migrate from Montana to California and Mexico resulting in their peak abundance being April through early May, and September to early November. These small ducks live in a variety of habitats in Northwest Montana including creeks, rivers, marshes, ponds, small lakes or wherever there is standing water among trees. They are found in pairs or small groups, but never in large flocks. Viewing Wood Ducks can be as easy as taking a stroll through Woodland Park in Kalispell, or spying them at Spring Creek, Ashley Creek, McWennerger Slough and West Valley Ponds.



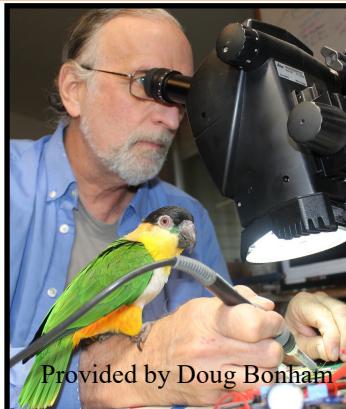
February Program

Instrumented Bird Nest Boxes and Wildlife Tracking Technologies

presented by Doug Bonham

Doug Bonham started birding in Maryland in 1966 with a guy named Chandler Robbins who had the audacity to publish a bird field guide to compete with what was then the only bird field guide - Roger Tory Peterson's Field Guide to Birds. He navigated the dramatic split in the birding community between those remaining loyal to Roger Tory and the renegades using the new book.

When Doug arrived in Montana in 1975 he discovered that Missoula had no Audubon chapter. So he



Provided by Doug Bonham

started one - Five Valleys Audubon which is still vibrant today. After earning degrees in Wildlife Biology and Electronic Engineering, he worked alternately as a biologist and engineer. His custom tracking devices have been used on dozens of critical wildlife species around the world. Today he has a day job with Microsoft's Surface Pro devices and weekends with his new Montana non-profit, Field Data Technologies which has obtained \$825,000 of US Department of Agriculture grants to design new types of wildlife instrumentation.

How to Attend the February 8 FAS General Meeting

Time: February 8, 2021, 7:00 PM Mountain Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87984683083>

Meeting ID: 879 8468 3083

+1 253 215 8782

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 difficulties for the January meeting. We'll probably get this right about the time we can start meeting in person again!

Natural Events To See This Month:

Great Horned Owls are on eggs.

Flathead Audubon Education Update

Available Now! The Flathead Audubon Education Committee and our conservation educator, Denny Olson, have had to retool how we provide educational opportunities to the public. As announced in previous articles, Denny, with the help of committee members, created three videos encompassing the most significant ideas and issues around birds. These videos, Birds Rock!, Bird Trouble, and Bird Help, can be accessed at the Flathead Audubon YouTube Channel, and soon at the Flathead Audubon website, along with teaching resources.

Coming Soon! Education committee members are working to scan paper copies of teaching documents included in our Flathead Audubon Educational Trunks to share online with educators and others wanting to learn more about birds. As part of this effort, FAS Education Ambassador and volunteer extraordinaire Shannon Donaldson has been busy scanning and digitizing hundreds of pages from the Ripari-

an Wetlands, Chickadee Who's Who, Hummingbirds and Snowy Owl trunks. Thank you Shannon!

These resources will be made available on the FAS website to help teachers bring a more local specific twist to their lessons. The online resources will include: *Chickadee Who's Who: Bird ID Basics*, *Owls of Montana*, *Snowy Owls*, *Riparian Wetlands: Birds and the River*, *Common Birds of the Flathead*, *Hummingbirds*, and *Cavity Nesters*.

Always! We would like to encourage educators to continue to enlist the help of conservation educator, Denny Olson. In December, Denny met virtually with a second grade class at Hedges Elementary in Kalispell, doing a ZOOM presentation with resources mentioned above. Denny can be reached at denny@flatheadaudbon.org.

Cindy and Tom Roberts, Flathead Audubon Education Committee Co-Chairs

Conservation Corner

What Happened to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act? Regulations Aren't That Bad

If you ask the average person if they want more regulations, most would answer "no". Recently elected leaders, especially in Montana, campaigned on reduced regulation. Perhaps the question should be different. Would you prefer to pay billions of dollars to replace the free services provided by birds? Would you like to pay more for fruit, grains and vegetables that have more pesticides? Are you willing to tolerate additional health risks and deaths to avoid some costs of life-saving regulations?

As of May 2020, the Trump administration has rolled back over 100 environmental rules and regulations. See the list: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks-list.html>

The EPA evaluated costs and benefits of the Clean Air Act from 1970 to 1990. It found that total costs over that time period were roughly \$500 billion and also found that a middle-range estimate of the health and other benefits from cleaner air was \$22 trillion—about 44 times higher than the costs. This analysis did NOT include the economic benefits of the ecological contributions of birds. <https://opentextbc.ca/principlesofeconomics2openstax/chapter/the-benefits-and-costs-of-u-s-environmental-laws/>

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (Act) has been "reinterpreted" to drop protections for unintended bird deaths resulting from actions such as powerlines, mines, oil and gas development (and spills), roads and other activities that would "incidentally" kill birds. The Act had involved processes where the USFWS would negotiate with project proponents to reduce the impacts of their projects on birds. The resultant changes to the projects allowed the project to proceed but included seasonal restrictions, minor modifications of routes and boundaries of projects (such as to avoid breeding areas), or changes to projects to avoid electrocutions, poisonings etc. When an action occurred that killed many birds, such as oil spills or mining wastes, fines were imposed, and the fines were used to mitigate the losses to the extent possible. The changes proposed by the Administration drops the Incidental take provisions of the Act. Despite many lawsuits protecting the long-term incidental take interpretation, the Administration is proceeding with eliminating the protections in an unprecedented EIS process that is short (decision expected by the end of Dec. 2020) and has no comment period. Other proposed (and implemented) changes have stopped enforcement of clean air and clean water regulations. In addition to reducing regulations, the Administration refused to enforce the MBTA. The Administration re-

fused to fine Montana Resources and Atlantic Richfield, the owners of the Berkeley Pit, for the 3,000 snow geese that died in the mine's toxic waters, leaving tax payers to pay the consequences of those bird losses. <https://www.hcn.org/issues/52.6/infographic-who-wins-and-who-loses-with-these-4-regulatory-rollbacks>

As of early January 2021, the measure, changes the implementation of the 1918 Act, so that companies that cause the death of birds as a side effect of that action will no longer be fined or prosecuted, including electrocutions, power lines, and "also intentional or even illegal acts, like the spraying of a banned pesticide—as long as birds are not the intended target of the poison." <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/05/climate/trump-migratory-bird-protections.html>

Despite several court findings saying the changes are not justified, and an appeal from 23 Senators in March requesting the changes be discarded, the Administration has moved forward to remove the incidental take protections under the Act. <https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2020/3/23-senators-urge-the-interior-department-to-reverse-course-on-proposed-changes-to-the-migratory-bird-treaty-act>

The new Administration is likely to address the issue, but that will take time and would not occur before many birds are lost to otherwise avoidable mitigations in the accelerated projects being approved before the transfer to a new Administration.

Birds, protected by regulations, offer some real economic benefits. For instance, *the estimated cost of replacing Clark's Nutcrackers' seed dispersal of whitebark pine is \$1,980 to \$2,405 per hectare and \$11.4 to \$13.9 billion across the range of whitebark pines in the U.S. Birds are thought to pollinate between 3 and 5 percent of more than 1,500 species of crop or medicinal plants, three-quarters of which cannot self-pollinate. Birds can reduce the intensity of spruce budworm outbreaks and mitigate damage on spruce tree plantations comparable to effective insecticides. In Washington, avian control of spruce budworm was calculated to be worth at least \$1,473 per square kilometer per year. In its lifetime a Barn Owl may eat more than 11,000 mice that would have consumed 13 tons of crops. Providing habitat for predatory birds can reduce populations of over-populations of birds living on or near airports. At airports, raptors can be especially important in keeping away birds that regularly collide with aircraft. The U.S. Air Force paid*

continued on page 10



Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

It felt like a coffin. I was lying on my back in what appeared to be a shallow grave, two feet deep and lined with old lichen-covered rocks. It was late winter on the prairie, but on this day the sun previewed summer, and there was no snow where I rested. As I lay there, watching the blue-white midday sky, a dark form silhouetted itself high overhead, flying in from the east, the direction my head pointed. Another one came in from the same direction. They began to circle each other lazily, and tightened the spiral until they were almost touching. Suddenly, one of the forms flipped over. The move was startling in its contrast to their smooth flight. Talons locked, they plummeted in freefall, flipping over like a critically injured kite. They separated, and began again to capture the updrafts in slow flight.

When I first found the old eagle-catching pit, I had only lay down inside from curiosity. I wanted to know what those young Mandan boys had felt during this rite of passage. In order to allow their own spirits to travel to Father Sky, they had to lure an eagle messenger down to them. The pit was covered with vegetation and a tethered live rabbit sat above the boy, as bait. When an eagle struck, there could be no mistakes. If the bird was not grabbed exactly right, above the powerful talons, there could easily be crippling injury. I tried to feel the euphoria and adrenalin they must have felt, knowing the danger and opportunity which came with the Eagle. If they were successful, they would pull two tail feathers, a gift from the spirit world, and let the Eagle return to the sky, a gift to the Wind and the Sun.

They usually lay in the pit for four days, knowing that the Eagle would not come with their new name until their own sacrifice was complete. I was given the gift of the Eagle mating dance only minutes

after I laid down. It was up to me to make sense of this pleasant surprise. I'm still working on it.

Eagles were the emissaries from the sky. Eagle feathers were sacred pieces of spirit -- never worn as casual adornment, but as reflections of a person's vision and accomplishments. They were expressions of bravery, good judgement, humility and special perspective. Feathers were, and are, constant prayers floating on the wind, back and forth from our world to another which is invisible to us. Eagle feathers are the dreams of the seer, the freedom of choices, the link between the material and the aether. The flight of the Eagle is the release of our earthbound nature, and the joyous passage to the next world. When we transcend any of our human limitations, we fly with the Eagle.

So here we are, in the mating season of Eagles. As of this writing, there has been no winter in the valleys, at least the kind to which this ex-Minnesota boy is accustomed. But that has been the least of this weirdness called 2020. We have been patiently waiting, sequestered in place, for the free flight of normalcy to return, waiting for the vaccine, hoping to take flight again. Politics has been surreal. The grand experiment of democracy has been threatened. Division seems the rule of the day.

It was so appropriate, despite the protests of turkey-lover Ben Franklin (blame it on his love for beer) for Americans to adopt the Eagle as a national symbol. To any cultures that have been privileged enough to watch the flight of Eagles, it has been a reminder of the promise of a new day, a new season, a new reminder of how much all people, and all species, have in common. The vision of the Eagle looks far, far ahead, and from enough distance to see our frailties, our insecurities, our smallness and our selfishness. We are better than this, but we need the vision to see the possibilities, and courage to spread our wings and get there.

2021 Montana Audubon Legislative Update

The 2021 legislative session has begun! Montana Audubon will lobby in our efforts to protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. As you may expect, the 2021 session is going to be very different by allowing Montanans the ability to testify without traveling to Helena. MT Audubon is ready.

We just delivered our first remote testimony this week, on Senate Bill 85, a bill that would double in some instances and quadruple in other instances, the taxes on wind projects in Montana. We joined two dozen opponents, including many wind developers and industry experts in this opposition. Later this month we'll start to hear bills about trapping, lethally removing grizzly bears, and a whole slew of changes

to land use planning regulation and subdivision development. We are definitely on defense!

As usual, we are going to need your help! During the session, through April of this year, we will email regular "Action Alerts" to help guide you to your legislators to submit comments on important committee hearings and critical votes. Make sure you are signed up, and have your friends join too. It's easy!

Find more information on how to get involved at: mtaudubon.org/conservation-policy/legislative-participation. Questions? Contact Amy Seaman (aseaman@mtaudubon.org) or Carmen Borchelt (carmen@mtaudubon.org). by Carmen Borchelt

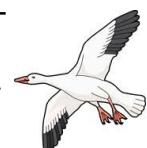
WINTER FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU!

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.

FREEZOUT LAKE AND THE SNOW GEESE MIGRATION, Friday and Saturday, March 26-27, 2021. The Snow Geese are moving north from their California wintering grounds to their arctic nesting areas along with thousands of other waterfowl. They stop over at Freezout Lake WMA near Choteau to rest and feed. We should go visit them! We will meet on Friday morning at 10 AM at the old K-Mart parking lot in Evergreen; from there, we will caravan to Choteau and arrive in time for the afternoon "fly-out." After spending a night in Choteau, we will head back out to Freezout WMA just before daybreak to watch the "mass ascension" of geese from the ponds. After the morning's birding, we, too, will head north to Kalispell in the early afternoon and arrive home around 5 PM on Saturday. Bob Lee will provide a suggested schedule and route, and will be in the front of the group. With the COVID pandemic and any relief unknown at this time, we will be taking precautions like masking and social distancing and no gathering for dinner. Participants may 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 Lake 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, contact Bob at RML3@centurytel.net or 406-270-0371.



Update on Owen Sowerwine Protection

by Laura Katzman, Flathead Land Trust

For years Flathead Audubon has worked with Montana Audubon to ensure the 442-acre Owen Sowerwine property owned by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), located at the confluence of the Stillwater and Flathead rivers just east of Kalispell, was managed as a natural area for use by the public for recreational and educational purposes. The Owen Sowerwine property has quality forested riparian habitat and wetlands, and has been identified as an Important Bird Area critical to the conservation of birds by Montana Audubon. The property is used by over 150 species of birds and wildlife and has been recognized and managed for its natural values for over 40 years.

Local citizens tried to get Owen Sowerwine protected as a natural area under the Natural Areas Act of 1974. The purpose of protecting it as a natural area was to ensure the perpetual protection of the natural integrity of the area while allowing for its use and appreciation by people with minimal impact. Although it was never officially designated as a natural area, Owen Sowerwine has been managed as a natural area since 1978 through leases and licenses held by the Flathead County Parks Board, Flathead Audubon, and Montana Audubon under two successive management

plans. The most recent 10-year lease, held jointly by Flathead Audubon and Montana Audubon, was set to expire in February 2020. But DNRC agreed to extend the lease if a permanent solution to manage Owen Sowerwine as a natural area was being pursued.

In 2020, Flathead Land Trust began working with Flathead Audubon, Montana Audubon, and DNRC on a permanent solution for maintaining Owen Sowerwine as a natural area through a purchased conservation easement. The conservation easement will maintain the integrity of the natural habitat of Owen Sowerwine for birds and wildlife and for the benefit of education and enjoyment of the general public in perpetuity. Most of the funding for the purchased conservation easement will be sought from the North American Wetland Conservation Act by Flathead Land Trust. The goal is to have a completed conservation easement by 2023.



Summary Reports of the Northwest Montana Christmas Bird Counts

Eureka Christmas Bird Count December 18

The 28th annual Eureka Christmas bird count was held on Friday, December 18 in mild weather that ranged from 34°F to 40°F. The count this year was conducted with appropriate Covid-19 protocols which accounted for a reduced number of field going observers. Sixteen people went to the field and 16 feeders were counted as well. Fifty-six species were recorded which is well below our record high of 72 species in 2014 but still pretty good considering our reduced number of field observers. The total number of individual birds was 3282 which is well within the range of numbers we have recorded in past years.

Canada Goose (759) was the most numerous species observed and other most common birds included Bohemian Waxwing (551), Wild Turkey (338),

Black-capped Chickadee (182), Common Raven (168), and Mallard (158). Only 1-3 individuals were seen for 16 species such as Ruffed Grouse, Common Loon, Golden Eagle, Great Horned Owl, Northern Pygmy Owl, Northern Shrike, Brown Creeper, Prairie Falcon, and Merlin. The species may change from year to year but the low numbers of numerous species happens every year. A record high count was recorded for Barrow's Goldeneye (12) and American Coot (18). No species new to the count were reported this year, leaving a total of 123 that have been seen at least once in 28 years.

Thanks to everyone that helped make this a successful count during the pandemic!

by Ellen Sullivan and Lewis Young

Bigfork Christmas Bird Count December 19

The 47th annual Bigfork Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 19, under cloudy skies, periodic light showers, with mild to moderate SW winds throughout the day. Snow depths were non-existent and/or limited to the higher eastern edges of the count circle; temperatures ranged from 36-46 degrees F. Lakes and ponds were mostly frozen and Flathead Lake and River were ice free.

Thirty-nine volunteer participants counted **13,879** individual birds of **78 species**. This is significantly down from last year's 93 species. The overall number of birds was above last year's total of 12,664 birds. There was no new bird species found this year

on the count. Highlights were a **Cackling Goose, Wood Duck, and a Brown-headed Cowbird**. There were many count week birds including an American Wigeon, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Glaucomys Gull, and Cedar Waxwing. There were no high counts for any species. Overall, perhaps it was the mild weather and the open habitat contributed to lower bird species and numbers.

Thank you to all the wonderful participants who helped make the Bigfork CBC count a very enjoyable and fantastic experience during this covid pandemic!

by Craig Hohenberger

Libby Christmas Bird Count December 19

The 51st Libby Christmas bird count took place December 19 with 16 field observers and 9 feeder watchers. The day was cloudy to partly cloudy with a low in the morning of 33 degrees and an afternoon high of 40 and calm to a slight breeze. It was a comfortable day for our count and a very welcome opportunity for a socially distanced activity. 53 species and 3678 birds total were recorded. It was not a day for rare species for us though we did pick up a North-

ern Shrike which is often hard to come by. Our Canada Goose number continues to grow from a low of 5 in 1985 to an all time high of 852 this year. Bald eagles were abundant at 137 (97 adults and 40 immature) with the Kootenai open and salmon available, but another year has passed with no gull species which have been common on many previous counts. We greatly appreciate 6 new participants this year.

by Gene Reckin

Upper Swan Christmas Bird Count December 19

As the season dithered between fall and winter on December 19, 12 devoted naturalists sought birds for the Upper Swan Valley CBC. The morning's heavy rain gave way to overcast skies with periodic wind gusts in the afternoon, when temperatures rose into the low 40s. While the ground remained white in

the mountains, this fitful combination thinned snow and lake ice at lower elevations. Such dynamic conditions stoked great curiosity among our birders, but the birds themselves did not match the activity. We tallied 176 individual birds, but only 17 countable species,
continued on page 8

Upper Swan CBC continued from page 7
the lowest we've had on record. This count fell well below our 2000-2019 average of 28 species, but it did

include a few notable sightings, especially a rough-legged hawk and a flock of 18 white-winged crossbills.
by Rob Rich

Glacier National Park Christmas Bird Count December 20

Glacier National Park (GNP) held its annual Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 20, 2020. Twenty-nine participants contributed to this event by covering 10 different routes in Glacier, and 2 bird feeders in West Glacier. Participants spent the day counting all bird species and individuals detected. The weather started dismally with rain, light to moderate winds, and temperatures around 34 degrees. The afternoon, however, defied the forecast and the weather became partly sunny, with temperatures reaching 40 degrees. There was little snow, so nearly all observers walked. Observers on two routes either skied or snowshoed. Nearly all water was unfrozen.

Counts in 2020 were very similar to counts in 2019, when we recorded 453 birds of 29 different species. In 2020, we also recorded 29 species and only two additional birds for a total of 455 birds. Pine siskins were the most bird ($n = 148$) detected, followed by Common Goldeneyes ($n = 102$), and then Common Redpolls ($n = 62$). Interesting to note, was the location

of the Common Mergansers. Almost all were on the Middle Fork of the Flathead River, likely because it was mainly open water. During count week (3 days before and 3 days after count day), we also added Buffleheads, Mallards, and a Northern Hawk Owl, which many of us have been lucky enough to see these past weeks! Perhaps the best part of the Christmas Bird Count in 2020 was just getting out with friends and/or family, forgetting about COVID for a while, and enjoying the natural world. After the rains quit, it truly was a lovely day.

Glacier's CBC started in 1962, and contributed to the 121st year of the National Audubon Society's CBC. Thanks to all participants for contributing their expertise, time, and energy for this annual event. Your efforts are invaluable in tracking long-term changes in species abundance, diversity, and range changes, in Glacier and throughout North America.

by Lisa Bate

Ninepipes Christmas Bird Count December 20

Most sections were counted twice (but not double counted) so everyone who wanted to participate had an opportunity within the Covid guidelines. There were 29 birders, who reported 74 species, one less than 2019.

Some of the highlights were: A ferruginous hawk (11 years since last); 3 peregrines, 2 together, all seen about the same time on opposite parts of the circle (only 9 seen in last 26 years); almost 2,300 red-

winged blackbirds (more than twice as many as any previous year), mostly in huge flocks in constant motion; in the forests, a practically uncountable irruption mix of nutcrackers, nuthatches and crossbills, including white-winged.

There were some misses of regulars (long-eared owls, mallards coming off the river) and a near-miss of a first ever, northern saw-whet owl seen a week before the count. *by Jim Oates*

Troy Christmas Bird Count December 26

We had 21 participants battle a snowy Morning. Thankfully the snow diminished by 9:30 AM leaving us a calm snowy landscape. An attempt at owling (3.5 hours) came up with a total of "0" Owls. Thankfully we had a volunteer take a drift boat down the Kootenai River and came up with some sweet birds. Bird numbers were again low (in my estimate) but were helped by a large # of Pine Siskins (2693 – an underestimate). Total species # were 57 for count day and 4 for CW, these numbers are up from our usual of about 43-47 species. Highlights from the count were Marsh Wren, American Tree Sparrow (Troy is not the best

habitat for this species) and the jewel was a Common Yellowthroat found along the Kootenai River (seen by 3 observers). Birds missing from this year's count but typically found were Waxwings (either Sp.) Pacific Wren, Golden Eagle and Common Merganser.

Like all counts around the country, Troy's count was anything but a social event – no group breakfast, no potluck dinner and caravanning rather than carpooling. So on that note *Thank You* to all that participated when in the past Troy's count was always seen as a big birding social event – next year, we hope.

by Donald Jones

Kalispell Christmas Bird Count January 3

The 22nd Kalispell Christmas Bird Count held on Sunday, January 3, 2021, recorded a total of 77 species, a number which is about average for this count. Highlights included the first ever Canvasback (small slough at southern end of Woodland Avenue) and first ever Short-eared Owl (hunting at dusk in West Valley near junction of Springcreek and Clark Roads). Also, the second ever Great Gray Owl was discovered (Bowdish Road) on count day. Amazingly,

two other count week Great Gray Owls were reported (Lone Pine State Park and Brady Way). Species that were found in record numbers included Trumpeter Swan (16), Green-winged Teal (40), Clark's Nutcracker (29) and Red-breasted Nuthatch (124).

Many thanks go out to the intrepid observers that contributed data despite the worst disease pandemic in over 100 years.

by Pete Fisher

THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

You Can Be Part Of The Team—Every Bird Counts

The 24th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will take place February 12-15, 2021. The GBBC is a free, fun and easy nationwide event that engages bird appreciators of all ages in counting birds to create a real time snapshot of bird populations around the world just prior to spring migration. 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. Choose the easiest way for you to report your sightings:

- Identify birds with **Merlin Bird ID** app and add sightings to your list;
- Use the **eBird Mobile** app;
- Enter your bird list on [eBird.org](https://ebird.org) for Desktop/laptop)

If you have **never** participated in the GBBC before, or have not participated since before 2013, you'll need to set up an account. Any of the three ways of reporting, Merlin Bird ID, eBird Mobile, eBird.org, will walk you through the process of setting up your free account. If you already have an account please use the same username and password for submitting your bird list for the GBBC.

Anyone can take part in the GBBC from beginning bird watchers to experts and you can participate from your own backyard or anywhere around the world. Use the following link to learn more about this important citizen science project <https://www.birdcount.org/participate/>.

by Margaret Parodi and Kathy Ross

First International Common Nighthawk Detection

The MPG Ranch in the Bitterroot Valley just found out that one of our Common Nighthawks was detected some 3400+ miles away in Colombia during fall migration!

Kate Stone banded this adult male (see picture below) on 8/21 in the shrubby draws of MPG Ranch (in an area we commonly call "Little Baldy Saddle"). Our Bitterroot array of Motus stations (see note at end of article) picked up this tagged bird everyday during the breeding season, until it flew off MPG Ranch on 9/5. It was then detected on 10/24, at the Capurganá Motus station in Colombia (see map). The antennas of the Capurganá Motus station detected this nighthawk for a whole 10 minutes, as it then likely continued to migrate southbound. Nighthawks from

eastern US and Canada are known to winter in Brazil and Argentina. We hope that the ongoing Motus expansion efforts in South America will continue to inform us on nighthawk migration



Provided by MPG Ranch

and winter destinations.

A big thank you goes to Nick Bayly and SEL-VA Colombia team for installing and maintaining the Capurganá station.

by William Blake, MPG Ranch

Note: MOTUS stations are an array of fixed point receiving stations for signals from the type of radio transmitter placed on this nighthawk.



CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

Highlights from the December 7, 2020 Board of Directors Meeting

- ◆ Treasurer Rod Wallette will complete the Montana Audubon Wildlife Grant application, which would be used to help fund Jewel Basin Hawk Watch 2021.
- ◆ Larry Berrin, Executive Director for Montana Audubon, joined the meeting to update on the status of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The final Environmental Impact Statement allows some troubling exceptions to protections for birds, and it appears it will be pushed through without opportunity for comment or changes. It's possible it could get stalled by legal action by some organization. Focus has shifted to working on the Migratory Bird Protection Act with the new administration.
- ◆ Tom and Cindy Roberts are working with Denny Olson to plan the publicity for the release of the new educational video Bird Trouble!, and the accompanying discussion guide.
- ◆ Cory Davis reported that the OSNA negotiation team set a timeline for all the steps needed in order to complete a conservation easement through Flathead Land Trust.

Highlights from the January 4, 2021 Board of Directors Meeting

- ◆ Darcy Thomas was appointed to the FAS Board of Directors, and will serve as Chair of the Refuges Committee. Welcome Darcy!
- ◆ The final reports for the 2020 Jewel Basin Hawk Watch and the state COVID grant for non-profits, as well as the FAS tax return, are all on track to be completed and submitted by their due dates.
- ◆ The process has started to complete the 2021 application to participate in Great Fish.
- ◆ A membership working group held a meeting (online), and divided up the tasks to complete to work toward making the handling of memberships more efficient and functional.

Conservation Corner continued from page 4

\$200,000 per year for trained Peregrine Falcons to drive away European Starlings, Canada Geese, and other birds around the McGuire Air Force Base.

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/analysis-the-economic-value-of-birds/#>

Birds reduced insect pest numbers in conventional alfalfa fields by 33%. <https://www.wildfarmalliance.org/how-birds-help-farms-who-help-birds>

Recent research shows "There is a strong, robust negative association between bird abundance and ambient ozone concentrations in the United States. Regulation reducing ozone precursors has resulted in air quality improvements over the past 4 decades thus stemming the decline in bird populations, and averting the loss of 1.5 billion birds, 20% of current totals."

Environmental policies nominally aimed at humans can also provide substantial benefits to other species. <https://www.pnas.org/>

[content/117/49/30900.short](#)

Dropping regulations on ozone productions could significantly add billions more deaths in the future to the recently published losses approaching 3 billion birds, or 29% of 1970 abundance. <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/366/6461/120>

Environmental regulations are complex, and each decision has consequences. Most were developed following extensive research, financial evaluation (usually NOT considering the economic benefits of birds), and negotiations among affected parties. We often won't realize the benefits of these regulations until they are stopped. Encourage our leaders to ask the right questions.

To help address the intentional weakening of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, please consider asking your elected leaders to support the Migratory Bird Protection Act. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/5552/text>

by Carole Jorgensen

Thank You Mary and Tom Nelesen

We have learned that Tom and Mary Nelesen will be moving from the Valley. Flathead Audubon would like to thank them for their long time support of FAS and service to the chapter. Mary was Donations Chair from many years, arranging donations and grants for FAS from individuals and non-profits in the Valley. She also organized fund raising projects such as FAS sale of birdseed through the local Western

Building stores and FAS sale of canvas bags sporting our Pileated logo. And she wrote many splendid Bird of the Month columns for the Pileated Post

Mary and Tom, Thank You for your generous support and service to Flathead Audubon. We will miss you. We wish you the very best in your new adventure.





Thank You!

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

Eagle

Walter Rowntree and Laura Reynolds



animalfactguide.com



[Wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

Snowy Owl

Sally & Allan Gratch

Merlin

Christopher and Francine Z. Hagar

Paula & Bob Smith

Richmond and Sarah Thomason



[merlinfalcon foundation](http://merlinfalconfoundation.org)



rspb.org.uk

Kestrel

Kirk Bryan

Volen E. Kemp

Rod Mc Iver III

Supporting Member + Donation

Joe and Lana Batts

Mayre Flowers

Nila Lauder



My Own Vision

Ellen Sullivan

Gail Sullivan

Natural Events To See This Month:

Redosier Dogwood branches turning darker red.

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 my choice

I want my gift to recognize another:

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Please do not acknowledge my gift in the Post

Please make checks payable to:

Flathead Audubon Society

P.O. Box 9173

Kalispell, MT 59904

Your gift is tax deductible.

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

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 Wallette	rod@flatheadaudubon.org

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Conservation	Carole Jorgensen	carole@flatheadaudubon.org llyoung@interbel.net
Education	Lewis Young	cindy@flatheadaudubon.org yellranger@yahoo.com
Field Trips	Cindy Roberts	margaret@flatheadaudubon.org shrdlu@centurytel.net
Finance	Tom Roberts	ibatts@me.com conniecohen@centurytel.net
Hospitality	Margaret Parodi	shrdlu@centurytel.net bob@flatheadaudubon.org
Membership	Mike Fanning	cory@flatheadaudubon.org shrdlu@centurytel.net
Nominations	Joe Batts	pam@flatheadaudubon.org linda@flatheadaudubon.org
Owen Sowerwine Natural Area	Connie Cohen	darcy@flatheadaudubon.org llyoung@interbel.net
Newsletter	Mike Fanning	manuwal2@centurylink.net jan@flatheadaudubon.org
Program	Jill Fanning	shrdlu@centurytel.net darcy@flatheadaudubon.org
Publicity	Bob Lee	jake@flatheadaudubon.org
Sales	Linda Winnie	
Refuges	Darcy Thomas	
Website	Darci Thomas	
	Jake Bramante	

CONSERVATION EDUCATOR

Denny Olson	denny@flatheadaudubon.org
FAS REP ON MT AUDUBON BOARD	bob@flatheadaudubon.org

Bob Lee



the Pileated Post

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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-](#)

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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



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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 \$ _____

Total \$ _____

New member? Renewal?

If you wish to receive a paper copy by
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Name _____

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Email _____ Your email address is
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Mail this form with your check to:

Flathead Audubon Society Membership
P.O. Box 9173
Kalispell, MT 59904

Christmas Bird Count Images



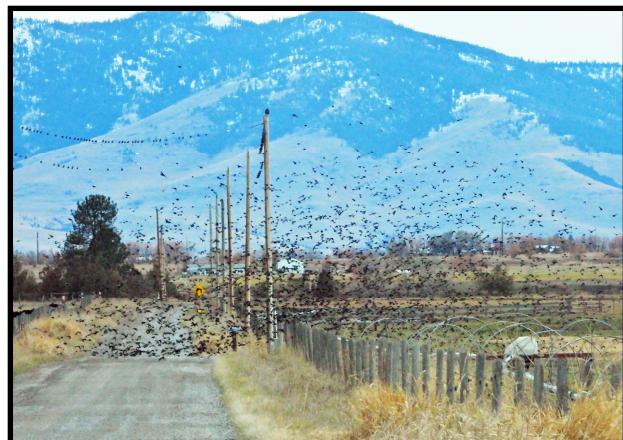
Gael, Michele, Marylane, Bigfork



Back Window Sign, Bigfork



Great Gray Owl, Kalispell
Tony Lloyd



Ninepipes,
Jim Oates



Short-eared Owl, Kalispell
Jake Bramante



Glacier Oxbow, Glacier National Park
Diane Lungren



Cedar Waxwings, Kalispell
Lewis Young