



the

# Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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Ruby-Crowned  
Kinglet



Birdwatchingdaily.com

## BIRDS, BUGS, BERRIES AND BEDS FOR THE CHICKS Nature provides it all with NATIVE SHRUBS IN YOUR GARDEN

by Kathy Ross

Tanagers, grosbeak, solitaires, chickadees, vireos, woodpeckers, robins. In a small dense patch of native serviceberry, chokecherry, dogwood, mountain maple, and juniper I have watched with delight on a late summer afternoon, song birds feeding on the berries and the insects of these native shrubs.

The ideal garden for birds has many layers and elements. It calls for tall canopy trees, understory shrubs, forbs, grasses and ground covers, living soil, water. Each layer is vitally important for the needs of different species.

And native shrubs in particular have a bird-world of advantages. We think of them mostly as the mid understory layer. Whether you have a large or a small space to work with, native shrubs can be pruned to be shrubby and dense. Many such as serviceberry or mountain maple can be encouraged to grow as the taller canopy layer. Shrubs such as Oregon grape and kinnikinnick make great ground cover in their appropriate growing conditions.

### Planting native shrubs benefits our birds in all seasons



Oceanspray

Kathy Ross

Year-round dense cover provides protection from predators and insects to browse in every season, yes even in winter! Leave the leaves of shrubs for mulch.

They hold moisture and create habitat for the wintering insects. Juncos and redpolls always appreciate leaf litter while duff-digging for insects in the winter.

In spring, native shrubs offer perfect nesting environments.

And their beautiful blooms have evolved to bud out and attract pollinators and insects just when our migrators and local birds are breeding and need to feed hungry chicks those juicy nutrient-rich caterpillars.

The hatch of native caterpillars has evolved to take advantage of the new leaves of native chokecherry, ninebark, willows and a host of others. Celebrate the munched leaves. Nature has orchestrated the timing perfectly for native insects to be available to feed hungry chicks. Did you know more than 90% of terrestrial birds need insects to raise their chicks, especially the protein and nutrients of caterpillars? Adult birds need those same nutrients to keep up with an insatiable nest of young.

In summer and fall the berries, seeds and new generation of insects on native shrubs, keep the food supply coming, timed just perfectly to fuel fall migration of tanagers, towhees, warblers, and flycatchers and many other long-distance migrators.

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Cedar Waxwing with berry

Debra Reeves

### APRIL FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

**Monday, April 5, 2021. 6 PM. FAS Board of Directors Meeting.** Will be held digitally. If you're interested in attending contact [cory@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:cory@flatheadaudubon.org)

**Monday, April 12 2021. 7 PM. Flathead Audubon General Meeting** will be held digitally. See page 3 for how to participate.

**Wednesday April 7, 5 PM-dark, Evening Spring Waterfowl at the West Valley Ponds.** See page 6.

**Tuesday April 20, 9-11 AM, Lawrence Park Spring Birds.** See page 6.

**Wednesday April 21 6-8 PM, Identifying Raptors in Flight.** See page 6.

**Thursday April 22 and Wednesday April 28, 8-11 AM, Birding at the Creston Fish Hatchery.** See page 6.

**Saturday April 24 8-11:30 AM, Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, Spring River Bottomland.** See page 6.

# ANIMAL OF THE MONTH

## Townsend's Big-eared Bat

by Lewis Young

One look at an individual of this species and it's easy to see where part of the name comes from. The ears are nearly 1 ½ inches long. Townsend's comes from being named in honor of naturalist Charles H. Townsend even though it was first described in 1837 by William Cooper. Besides the large ears, other identifying characteristics include 2 large fleshy lumps on the nose and having the ears joined at the base. This is a medium sized bat with a nose-to-tail length about 4 inches, wingspan around 12 inches and weigh about 9 grams (0.3 oz). Overall coloration is brown with the belly being a lighter shade. The extremely large ears set it apart from all other bats in Montana except for Pallid and Eastern Red bats that have much different pelt colors.

Although they never appear to be common in any part of the state, Townsend's Big-eared Bats (*Corynorhinus townsendii*) are widely distributed in Montana with only the northcentral and northeastern short-grass prairie being unoccupied. They range from British Columbia to Mexico west of the Great Plains. Two isolated populations occur further east with one being in the Missouri, Arkansas and Oklahoma area, and another in the Virginia's and Kentucky. The subspecies in these eastern populations are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act but the western populations are not listed.

Townsend's Big-eared Bats are closely associated with caves, mines, and other similar features such as talus and erosion cavities found in badlands and river breaks that allow them to forage on various nocturnal flying insects near the foliage of trees and shrubs. They appear to specialize primarily on small moths but other insects such as lacewings, beetles, true flies and wasps have also been documented. Insects are captured in the air most often. However, their low wing loading allows them to fly slowly and even hover in the air and because of these flight capabilities they may be able to glean insects off vegetation. Nightly foraging bouts may be localized near the day roost or may cover more than 150 km (93 miles).

Echolocation is used to find and capture insects as well as to navigate around and through vege-

tation in the dark. Their large ears are thought to allow these bats to use quieter calls than other species.

Their echolocation calls are distinctive and can be detected with electronic equipment called bat detectors. However, since the calls are relatively quiet the bats must fly close to the detectors. Roosts during the May through September active season include caves, mines, erosion cavities and structures like buildings and bridges. Maternity roosts are typically found in caves and abandoned mines but have also been found in buildings in some areas. Only five maternity colonies are known in

Montana, with an estimated size in recent years of 25 to 100 adult females each. Males roost separately from the females. Mating begins in autumn and continues into winter. Ovulation and fertilization are delayed until late winter/early spring. Gestation lasts 2-3 ½ months and one pup is born in late spring/early summer. Young can fly at 2 ½-4 weeks and are weaned by 6-8 weeks. Females are sexually mature their first summer but males are not sexually active until their second year. Nearly all adult females breed

every year. Maximum longevity exceeds 21 years.

Hibernation sites in winter (called hibernacula) are also typically confined to caves and abandoned mines. These bats prefer relatively cold places for hibernation, often near entrances and in well-ventilated areas.

Individuals normally roost singly rather than in clusters and hang in an exposed position rather than wedging into crevices or cracks. Being exposed makes them more susceptible to disturbance and after disturbance they often abandon their roost which greatly increases the likelihood of death. They also tend not to mix closely with other species that may occupy the

same hibernacula. The large ears are snugly wrapped around the head and not so obvious. Hibernacula are cool and body temperature drops to just above the ambient temperature plus the heart rate drops to 10-20 beats/minute during hibernation unlike the 1300 when flying or 200 when resting. A few times each winter they will arouse from hibernation to excrete

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*Hibernating Townsend's Big-eared Bat*

# April Program

## Of Ravens, Wolves, and People

presented by John Marzluff

Ravens are known to scavenge from wolves and people, but the degree to which they exploit these and other sources of food has not been studied in detail. In 2019, Matthias Loretto and John began tagging ravens in Yellowstone National Park with long-lasting GSM transmitters. After tagging >60 ravens and relating their movements to those of people and wolves, they are gaining an appreciation of their reliance on both providers. They will describe the movements of territorial and non-breeding ravens and relate these to wolf- and human-provisioned foods. They will focus on the exploits of individual birds to emphasize variability. They observed ravens using wolf kills, but their discovery appears more incidental than a result of following or purposeful search. As we begin to quantify the relationship between wolves and ravens we may learn more about their synchrony, but at pre-



Provided by John Marzluff

John Marzluff, at left, netting ravens

sent it appears to be weak, with discovery of kills occurring during the day rather than after communal roosting. Ravens made extensive use of anthropogenic resources, including direct handouts, waste water treatment ponds, dumps, agriculture, road-kills, and hunter offal. Territorial ravens have extensive knowledge of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and exploit areas in excess of 6500 square miles to obtain their yearly needs.

John Marzluff received an undergraduate degree in wildlife biology at the University of Montana. He went on to receive an masters degree and a PhD from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. He has been on the Wildlife Science faculty in the School of Environmental and Forest Sciences, University of Washington since 1997. His specialty is on the ecology and behavior of jays, crows and ravens.

## How to Attend the April 12 FAS General Meeting

Time: April 12, 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

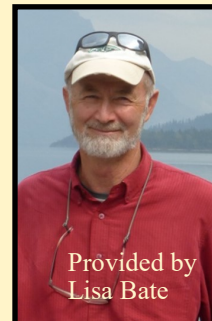
If you have been hesitant to try Zoom, it is actually quite easy. For a brief tutorial contact [cory@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:cory@flatheadaudubon.org)

We had a great program at the March meeting: *Trumpeter Swan Ecology and Reintroduction*, by Franz Ingelfinger. If you missed that presentation or want to see it again, you can view a replay of it at [flatheadaudubon.org/videos](http://flatheadaudubon.org/videos). Videos of earlier FAS meeting presentations are also available there.

## Lewis Young, a Lifetime of Conservation Work

At the FAS General meeting on March 8, we honored and presented a Lifetime Conservation Achievement Recognition to Lewis Young. Conservationists from all over the state of Montana who have worked with Lewis on projects sent photos and testimonials about Lewis's hard work, knowledge and dedication to the importance of science in conservation. Lewis has worked on projects from bats to Black Swifts to Sharp-tailed Grouse. Of course, we at Flathead Audubon also know and trust Lewis's abilities with the written word, to provide written comments

representing our FAS positions on important issues. Lewis also has brought The Pileated Post to life for us for 7 years, as co-editor/decision maker/digital assembler/occasional writer. In case you missed this important salute to Lewis Young, you can see the full presentation on the FAS website, [FlatheadAudubon.org](http://FlatheadAudubon.org).  
 by Kay Mitchell



Provided by Lisa Bate



## Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

Frustrated with Birding ID by Ear? Help is on the way!

There are 270 nesting species of birds in Montana, and 435 species that we know have at least passed through on their travels.

They all make some kinds of noises, and those noises are at least slightly different from each other, and some are radically different. For the birds, this is critical. Because they can literally go by air anywhere they like, they need a mechanism to find each other -- for breeding, for nesting, for safety, and for reassurance. And that mechanism is sound.

Many male migrants arrive early, to sing and threaten their way to a mating advantage. And then when females arrive later, the songs serve as "come hither" attraction. But recognizing 400-plus birds by sight quickly is the rarified air of master birders. Many folks just want the ability to identify and separate the robins from the pigeons. But recognizing 400-plus birds *by their songs* is on another scale of difficulty -- especially if music and pitch don't come easily.

But here's the key to the obsessively nerdy act of birdwatching and bird identification. We *never* get "good enough". There is always something new to learn, and a new elusive rare bird to chase. You can add a third bird to the robin and pigeon list, or your 433rd to your Montana list. Almost all of us are somewhere between, and in process.

Birding by eye is hard enough, so why add another dimension of complication to it by learning bird sounds as well? Well, there are actually four good reasons. (1) You love music, and birds invented it. (2) You are an auditory-dominant learner. (3) Advantageously, while birding by sight, you know *where* to look to see a bird, and *who* to look for. (4) And, if you choose, you can go birding without your binoculars, and never look for them at all!

And really, isn't making new friends partly about learning their language first?

A lot of people actually never hear bird song. They walk through the woods and bird song is just background "white noise" -- something they have never paid attention to (unfortunately for them, I think). Once you do begin to notice them, on a normal spring morning with 30 birds singing all at the same time, the

idea of learning the differences between all of them is completely overwhelming. Fret not. We have all been there. Isolate one bird song, learn it, and move on to a second one. I started there myself, and then the addiction began.

Encouragement: you can do this! Warning: it takes patience. Another warning: You will never be "done". As that wise Saturday Night Live sage, Rosanna Rosannadonna often said, "There's always something ..."

After diving in, I eventually realized (thinking about thinking) that I used a process of elimination that mechanical trouble-shooters, or cops after a suspect, have used for hundreds of years: Keep eliminating possibilities until there is only one conclusion, or suspect, or bird species, left on the list. Here's how I eventually organized that process: The "Binary Search" process of elimination: Starting with broad categories (e.g. Fur? It's a mammal. Feathers? It's a bird ...), keep splitting them into two or more types, until you are down to a specific species. The first categories eliminate the most birds from consideration; the last categories get to the fine points of identifying a specific bird. Birding by ear, here's how to start winnowing the list of 435:

Season. If it is winter, you have cut the list in half already.

Geographical area. In Montana, where you are chops the list in half again.

Habitat. Marsh, alpine, river-bottom -- we are getting closer to a manageable list.

General Sound Characteristics. (whistle, croak, quack, trill, oddball?)

Pitch. (low Great Gray Owl/Ruffed Grouse to ultra-high Brown Creeper, and everything between)

Cadence or Rhythm. (Black-capped Chickadee vs. Mountain Chickadee)

Speed. (slow Common Loon to 36 notes/second Pacific Wren)

Pacing / Spacing. (frequent Red-eyed Vireo vs. Cassin's ..... Vireo ..... long ..... pauses)

Did you notice how quickly the process zeroes on a specific bird? In a month or two, **I will have a video on the FAS website** -- complete with bird-song imitations by yours truly -- to get much more specific with learning bird song. **Watch for it!**

## Great Blue Heron Citizen Science Project

Please report any Great Blue Heron rookeries you know of to Darcy Thomas at 406-407-8263 or [darcy@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:darcy@flatheadaudubon.org). I am helping Montana Audubon with a citizen science project on the Great Blue Heron to help them confirm potential new rookeries as part of a project to get estimates of indi-

vidual nests and birds.

If anyone is interested in participating in the survey they can find information on the Montana Audubon website by looking under the tab for Citizen Science Opportunities.

## “Helping Birds” – new section on FAS website

Recent studies indicate that bird populations have declined drastically in recent years - one study found we've lost over 3 billion birds in the last 50 years. Bird support organizations such as National Audubon, the American Bird Conservancy, and Cornell Lab of Ornithology are developing action plans to address this problem. You can help birds by supporting these efforts. But all of these groups agree that **the most important thing YOU can do** to help stem the decline is to take appropriate action where you live - at home, in our yard, and in our community.

Flathead Audubon has added a section to our website called “Helping Birds” provides links to articles by Flathead Audubon authors about the actions you can take to help birds. They explain why these actions are important, provide concrete suggestions on what to do, and in some cases include lists of local re-

sources that can help you get started.

“BIRDS, BUGS, BERRIES AND BEDS FOR THE CHICKS,” by Kathy Ross, on page 1, has recently been added to this new section. And more articles on how you can help birds will be added as they become available. So check back frequently to see the new ones.

To access this new section, choose “Helping Birds” under the Birds tab at the top of main page or in the Birds menu, or go directly there using

<https://flatheadaudubon.org/birds/helping-birds>.

by Linda Winnie



## On the Road? Check out the Nature Guys podcast

by Charles B. van Rees

Have you got some long drives ahead for spring birding trips? Consider adding the Nature Guys podcast to your on-the-road listening. Pod-



casts, which can easily be streamed or downloaded on your mobile phone or via an internet browser are like radio shows you can listen to anytime, anywhere. Mobile Apps like Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, and Stitcher put dozens of great nature- and bird-themed podcasts at your

fingertips, and they are a great way to brush up on nature trivia or gain new insights into the outdoor world in your spare time. I recently had the privilege of joining the team of a popular nature podcast and am excited to share some great episodes with my fellow Flathead Audubon members.

Likened to NPR's *Car Talk* (with Tappert brothers Click and Clack) the *Nature Guys* podcast was started by Bob Staggenborg, a long time nature lover, and his friend Bill Creasey, a professional naturalist with decades of experience, in Cincinnati Ohio in 2016. The two frequently led wildflower hikes with the Cincinnati Nature Center, and their clever banter and hilarious rapport prompted attendees to urge them to do a radio show. Since then, *Nature Guys* has delivered in-depth nature knowledge on North American birds, plants, insects, and diverse other natural history topics through their growing list of over 200 episodes. *Nature Guys* is family-friendly but delves to scientific depths on topics of common interest for outdoor explorers and common questions from nature lovers of all levels and age groups. Shows on birds are among their most popular with listeners, and the podcast has covered Common

loon, Eastern & Western screech owl, Barred owl, Great horned owl, Hummingbirds, Black-capped chickadee, Acorn, Pileated, and Downy woodpeckers, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed hawks, Bald eagles, and many more. They also cover loads of other curiosities and questions about the great outdoors from how seeds get moved around to travel tips for nature-based tourism abroad.

Sadly, Bill passed away in August 2020 after a years-long battle with cancer, and urged Bob to continue and keep building the podcast after his passing. Since then, *Nature Guys* has grown to include a new team of co-hosts including a lead naturalist for Cincinnati Parks, a professional horticulturist and the executive director of a local nature education nonprofit. I was recruited as the team's bird expert and wetland nerd. I am currently a research associate at Flathead Lake Biological Station and scientist at the River Basin Center at the University of Georgia. Some of *Nature Guys'* latest episodes have focused on why water is important for ecosystems and biodiversity, keystone species like alligators and beavers, and exciting facts about the beloved Hooded Merganser.



Charles van Rees at the microphone

If you'd like to learn more about *Nature Guys*, you can check them out on the web at [natureguys.org](http://natureguys.org). I will also be giving the FAS General Meeting presentation for May on my own bird research and can answer questions about the podcast then as well. Until then, as we say on *Nature Guys*, remember to **step outside and stay awhile!**

## SPRING FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU!

All Flathead Audubon field trips are free and open to the public and are geared for all ages and levels of field experience. They are led by area biologists, retired professionals, and some of the best birders in the region. Please read our field trip guidelines at [www.FlatheadAudubon.org](http://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](http://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.

**EVENING SPRING WATERFOWL AT THE WEST VALLEY PONDS, Wednesday April 7, 5 PM-dark.** We'll visit several ponds in the West Valley area and see lots of migrating waterfowl, and look for shorebirds, raptors, and early passerines. Roads will be both paved and gravel/dirt and this trip will be primarily driving. To sign-up and learn the meeting location contact Cory Davis (406) 257-3166 or [piranga99@gmail.com](mailto:piranga99@gmail.com). We will stay distanced, wear masks, and drive our own cars. Trip is limited to 10 participants, reservation required.

**LAWRENCE PARK SPRING BIRDS, Tuesday April 20, 9-11 AM.** We will look for spring birds. Expect to see song birds, ducks, jays and woodpeckers. Bring binoculars and be prepared for an easy walk of up to 2.75 miles. Trails could be muddy so wear good shoes or boots. Restrooms and park benches are available. Trip leader: Darcy Thomas. Call Darcy 406-407-8263 or email her at [darcy@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:darcy@flatheadaudubon.org) to sign up and get instructions on where to meet. Limited to 10 birders.

**IDENTIFYING RAPTORS IN FLIGHT, Wednesday, April 21, 6-8:00 PM** with Flathead Audubon Conservation Educator Denny Olson, Lone Pine State Park Visitor Center. Lone Pine has 27 different juvenile vs. adult, male vs female full-sized color silhouettes of "Birds of Prey from Below" -- all hanging from the rafters or ceilings of their classroom. We will learn to use a "Key" guide (that you may take with you!) and take a self-assessment quiz anytime you visit there. We'll finish off the evening with a short bird hike near the Center. Call Lone Pine at 755-2706 to register.

**BIRDING AT THE CRESTON FISH HATCHERY, Thursday, April 22, 8-11 AM and Wednesday April 28, 8-11 AM.** Please join Darcy and Kathy for a morning of birding and identifying native plants. You are likely to see ducks, geese, eagles, herons, Belted Kingfisher and hopefully American Dipper. As we walk an easy trail of about two miles, we can also enjoy the early buds and blooms of native shrubs and wildflowers. Bring binoculars and spotting scope if you have one. Trip Leaders: Darcy Thomas and Kathy Ross. Call Darcy at 406-407-8263 or email her at [darcy@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:darcy@flatheadaudubon.org) to sign up and get instructions on where to meet. Each field trip is limited to six birders.

**OWEN SOWERWINE NATURAL AREA, SPRING RIVER BOTTOMLAND, Saturday, April 24th, 8-11:30 AM,** with Flathead Audubon Conservation Educator Denny Olson. With the early songbird migrants arriving, and the river and slough waterfowl well into mating season, this should be a birdsong-heavy field trip. As a bonus, Denny can usually repeat the songs for you if you want the practice. Registration is required and limited to 10 birders. Please call or text Denny at 406-249-3987 to register!

**SONNY BOONE MEMORIAL TRAIL, Sundays, 8-10 AM; April 25, May 9, and May 23.**

Dan Casey will be leading three Sunday morning bird walks along the Sonny Boone Memorial Trail in Somers during the spring migration season. This paved trail follows a portion of the old railroad bed along Somers Slough and offers excellent views of waterfowl as well as a wide variety of landbirds reliant on the diverse riparian habitat. Indeed, 151 species have been reported at this eBird hotspot. (<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1390990>). These round-trip walks will be one mile each way, and will last approximately 2 hours, starting at 8 AM. Attendance per walk is limited to 10 people and spacing expected. Please call Dan at 406-270-5941 to reserve spots.

**25 April:** Waterfowl, early migrants (e.g., swallows, Nashville Warbler, Spotted Towhee)

**9 May:** Increasing numbers of new arrivals (e.g., Western Tanager, Yellow Warbler)

**23 May:** Most breeding species back on territories (e.g., Gray Catbird, Black-headed Grosbeak)

*Natural Events To See This Month:*

*Ruby-crowned Kinglets arrive.*

## Flathead Valley Bird Report

by Dan Casey

### Rare and Notables – March 2021

- 2/19 - **Gyr Falcon** hunting large flocks of Mallards, N. Shore WMA (Dick W.)  
 2/24 - **Snowy Owl** in Lower Valley off Farm and Manning Roads through 2/24 (m. ob.)  
 3/03 - **Mountain Bluebird** (first of year) in Lower Valley (Craig H.)  
 3/06 - **Western Bluebirds** (first of year) at Columbia Mtn trailhead (Jake B.)  
 3/06 - **Snow Buntings** (60) near the West Valley ponds (Bridger D.)  
 3/06 - **Boreal Owls** (2) at Polebridge (George S.)  
 3/06 - **Sandhill Cranes** (first of the year), Batavia (Mani G.)  
 3/8 - 3/18 - **Mew Gull** on Somers Bay mudflats 3/8-3/18 (Dan C.)  
 3/10 - **Tree Swallows** (first of year), Owen Sowerwine Natural Area (Jennifer D.)  
 3/11 - **Turkey Vulture** (first of year), Coram (Leigh C.)  
 3/13 - **Spotted Towhee** at Wayfarer's State Park (Craig H.)

- 3/15 - **"Eurasian" Green-winged Teal** at Church Slough, third state record (Dan C.)  
 3/15 - 3/18 - **Eurasian Wigeons** (four or more) at Church Slough (m. ob.)  
 3/15 - **Brown-headed Cowbird** (rare in winter) in Creston through the period (Craig H.)  
 3/16 - **Williamson's Sapsucker** on state lands along Bowdish Rd (Scott P.)

### What to Expect – April 2021

As the mud of March gives way to the greening of April, migrants continue to arrive. Ice-out on local lakes is followed by the arrival of Northern Shovelers, Cinnamon Teal, Blue-winged Teal, Ruddy Ducks and more, joining the mixed flocks present throughout late March. Insectivorous birds become more prevalent, as large flocks of Tree and Violet-green Swallows, which have grown during late March, are joined by other swallow species. Ruby-crowned Kinglets will be singing in local woods, and by month's end the first warblers have arrived (Yellow-rumped, Nashville, Common Yellowthroat). Earth Day (4/22)

## Of Birds and Bears--Finding a Balance

We have had the enormous pleasure all winter of enjoying birds at our feeders and the birds have benefited. Now is the time to consider taking the feeders down. If you live in bear country, out of respect for our furry, hungry neighbors, it is essential. Besides helping to keep bears out of trouble, taking your feeders down also encourages birds to go for their natural food sources of insects, especially caterpillars. Over 90% of our birds (even hummingbirds!) eat insects, a source of protein and nutrients vital to their health and

more importantly essential for raising baby birds. It has been observed that it can take 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars to raise a brood of chickadees (average brood 5-10). Perhaps we would start seeing fewer insects in the landscape, creating less need for toxic insecticides and helping nature to find its own balance. Taking feeders down during the summer can be a win-win for bears, birds and the environment!

by Kathy Ross

## CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

### Highlights from the March 1, 2021 Board of Directors Meeting

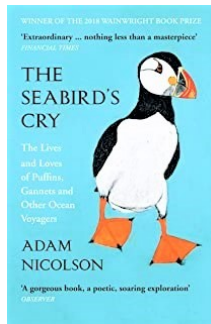
- ⇒ Treasurer Rod Walette reported: memberships are still coming in, our tax return will be completed by a CPA, and some procedural changes will be made to improve our checks-and-balances for financial matters.
- ⇒ Cory Davis said the membership committee has selected new data base management software, and that a trial run will be held before all data is transferred. Also, Mike Fanning is stepping down as the Membership Committee Chair, so will need to be replaced.
- ⇒ The Board decided to apply to participate in the Day of Giving event held in May by the Whitefish Community Foundation, and Kay Mitchell will complete the application.
- ⇒ Mike Fanning made reservations for June 8-10 at Tally Lake Campground for the warbler birding event.
- ⇒ The consensus was that the May meeting should not be held in-person, but that by fall we could look at options, including in-person meetings in the larger meeting room.
- ⇒ Denny Olson is coordinating an OSNA work crew to work on removal of Common Buckthorn.

# The Seabird's Cry by Adam Nicholson

a review by Rosemary McKinnon

In 2018 I visited an old school friend in Pembrokeshire, Wales. The weather was auspicious and we decided to take a boat to the offshore islands of Skomer and Skokholm. Puffins were returning to nest in their burrows after spending the winter feeding in the mid-Atlantic. Gannets and skuas circled overhead. Living here in landlocked Montana this was my first opportunity to watch seabirds. Inspired by this visit I read Adam Nicholson's book, the Seabird's Cry which describes the extraordinary adaptations made by seabirds to their environment of air, ocean and land as well as their precipitous decline due to warming seas, overfishing and oceans filled with plastic detritus from the age of man.

This book is not merely a description of scientific revelations regarding the lives of ten seabirds (aided by satellite loggers, miniature heart monitors, depth gauges, wetness detectors and accelerometers), although these are fascinating, but also it is a work of literature. It aims also to explore an older understanding of birds as symbols of the state of the ocean and the world.



My favorite chapter might be the one in which Nicholson discusses puffins. He likens their return to

the "Feeding of the Five thousand: so much from so little, so fertile a place of stone and salt sea, a flush of existence like a desert which rains have summoned the flowers. This arrival, when the birds glow against the evening is an ocean giving birth." Nicholson goes on to trace the arrival of puffins in the N. Atlantic 5 million years ago at the time of the birth of

the Gulf Stream. He describes their mating and parenting as that of "long-term investors banking on one big egg per year, 6 weeks for incubation and 6 weeks feeding the young chick." In hard times puffins travel as much as 300 miles to do so, both parents diving between 600 – 1,150 times a day and spending as much as 7 hours a day underwater. Much of the research done on Skomer demonstrates that each puffin follows a different route in search of food. Nicholson suggest that when we see puffins we should think of them "not (as) clowns but beauties, Ice Age survivors, scholar-gypsies of the Atlantic, their minds on an everlasting swing between island and sea, burrow and voyage, parent and child, the oscillating nomad-masters of an unpacific ocean."

It is horrifying to read Nicholson's account of the dwindling population of Atlantic puffins which are under frightening pressures from climate change and the disappearance of prey. He gives an account of visiting a puffin colony off the coast of Iceland where the locals were aware that mass deaths were occurring every year since the 1970s. There were simply not enough local fish to feed the chicks. Nicholson records "a straightforward cascade: warm seas, thin new species of plankton, thin or absent sandeels, voracious mackerel, hungry seabirds, dead chicks." By the end of the 21 century the population of puffins will be down by 80%.

Nicholson's tragic message is that we are coming to understand seabirds just as they are dying. During the past 60 years the population of seabirds has declined by two-thirds. They have lived for 100 million years superbly adapted to the ocean and the air, returning to land only to lay eggs, and now we are destroying them.

## Wings Across the Big Sky – Regional Field Trips 2021

Join Montana Audubon for a unique field trip in your area on Saturday June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021!

The health and safety of our supporters is of utmost importance. As such, the Lewistown 2021 Festival will be postponed to 2022. In lieu of this annual gathering, Montana Audubon is hosting Regional Field Trips at various locations throughout the state.

- Choose a field trip with a Montana birding expert in the region of your choice.
- Get an all-access pass to educational and instructional workshop videos led by Montana Audu-

bon scientists and experts.

•Receive a copy of the Montana Audubon Bird Guide to Familiar Species, and other goodies.

Mark your calendar! Registration opens April 12<sup>th</sup> with all trips occurring on Saturday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Rain or Shine. Visit [mtaudubon.org](http://mtaudubon.org) starting April 12<sup>th</sup> for detailed field trip information and to register for a unique birding experience. Register Early. Field trip participation is limited.

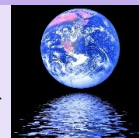
by Danielle Dowden, MT Audubon

## Virtual Earth Month Calendar

Climate Smart Glacier Country is creating a virtual "Earth Month" calendar of opportunities for celebrating "Earth Day" in the Flathead during the month of April. Events sponsored by organizations in Flat-

head County (including FAS) will fill the calendar. Check our FAS website for a link to the calendar as April approaches.

Climate Smart Glacier Country





**Native Shrubs continued from page 1**

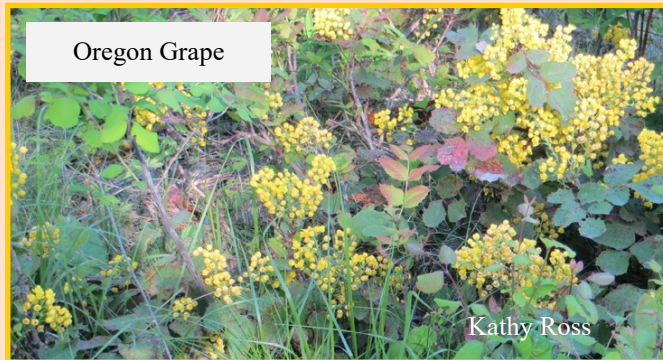
Globally and nationally, bird conservation organizations are advocating the use of native plants in our landscapes, keeping the native where possible and “rewilding the wild” where it has been lost. **National Audubon** is now one of the leading “native plant for birds” advocacy organizations: <https://audubon.org/news/why-native-plants-are-better-birds-and-people>. On their website at <https://audubon.org/native-plants/search> National Audubon has put together a database of native plants for all parts of the country. Enter your zip code for a wealth of information, including dozens of native shrubs for our area and some of the birds they will attract to your landscape. There are other perennials, trees and annuals listed also but **be careful**, not all are completely suitable to our local landscapes. **The Center for Native Plants**, in Whitefish, carries many of the native shrubs listed on the Audubon database. They also provide recycling for plastic nursery pots; drop the pots off and they will reuse them.

We all should encourage other local nurseries to carry native plants as well. The exotics, hybrids or cultivars of our native species often have morphological qualities (purple leaves rather than green, multi-petaled flowers instead of single petaled, different bloom times) that can make them poor food sources for our native insects and birds.

The **Montana Native Plant Society** website <https://mtnativeplants.org> is another good source of information on the how and why to plant natives and provides useful lists of native plants and sources.

**Benjamin Vogt**, a Midwest landscaper and native plant enthusiast, also has a wealth of information on his website: <https://monarchgard.com>. He says “rethink pretty.” Think first about how your landscape will benefit the entire community of living organisms of which we are just one small part. The aesthetic beauty will follow.

For an on-the-ground look at our local native shrubs and other native plants used by our birds, join me for my May field trip *Exploring the Native Plants and Birds of Wayfarers Park*. For details check the Field Trips section of this newsletter, or the FAS Field



Trips information at <https://flatheadaudubon.org>. Also see <https://flatheadaudubon.org/birds/helping-birds> for more articles on how you can help birds, including my “Creating Bird Song .... One Garden at a Time” about using native plants to landscape for birds.

## Nongame Wildlife Tax Check-off

When filling out your Montana tax form this year, think “wildlife” by donating to the Nongame Wildlife Program, found on Form 2, page 11, under Contributions. If your taxes are prepared, tell your accountant that you want to donate to wildlife! Your contributions are tax



deductible on next year’s return. Montana has more than 500 species of “nongame” animals that benefit from public support each year at tax time. Since 1983, the check-off has contributed over \$27,000 annually to this important wildlife program.



## Citizen Science Projects at Montana Audubon

### LBCU Citizen Science Survey 2021

Are you ready to hear the 'currleeee' of the Long-billed Curlew? Well, grab your binoculars and get ready, because it's almost curlew season! These charismatic shorebirds will be trickling back into the state in less than two months and we need your help finding as many as possible in and around the Mission, Blackfoot and Helena Valley! Since 2013, volunteers have recorded curlews sightings in these three Montana valleys and this data helps inform statewide habitat models as well as highlight important tracts of

intact grassland that are in need of conservation.

**The Long-Billed Curlew Citizen Science survey will take place from April 8 - May 7 and May 8 - May 31.** Please email Peter Dudley at [peter@mtaudubon.org](mailto:peter@mtaudubon.org) or Carmen Borchelt at [carmen@mtaudubon.org](mailto:carmen@mtaudubon.org) for more information and to sign up!

### GBHE Citizen Science Survey 2021

This project was created to bolster statewide efforts to survey Great Blue Heron nesting sites, which *continued on page 10*

## Golden Eagle 294 - A Rehabilitation and Wing-tag Success Story



In 2004 the Raptor View Research Institute in Missoula (RVRI) began applying wing-tag markers to Golden Eagles to aid in their eagle research. In January 2017, a motorist reported a Golden Eagle with wing-tags 294 injured and unable to fly after being hit by a truck along highway 200. It was after midnight, with temperatures around -15°F, when someone from the Wild

Skies Raptor Center (WSRC) was able to get to the bird and bring it back to the Center.

The rehab crew at the Center worked overnight to stabilize 294, then took him to the Missoula Veterinary Clinic in the morning. The vet found the bird had a ruptured crop - a life threatening injury, since the crop is an integral part of the bird's digestive system. The veterinary team performed emer-

gency surgery to repair the crop. Back at WSRC 294 began recovering, and after about a month he was released back into the wild.

Three years later a Golden Eagle with wing-tags 294 showed up on a "camera trap" west of Missoula. He was alive and well! The tagging program of RVRI, the rehab efforts of WSRC, and the emergency care by the Missoula Vet Clinic, had all come together to produce this happy ending. And also to provide important evidence that putting expert rehabilitation efforts into Golden Eagles pays off.



For a more detailed version of this story and more pictures, go to the RVRI Facebook page at [facebook.com/raptorviewresearchinstitute/posts](https://facebook.com/raptorviewresearchinstitute/posts)

### Citizen Science continued from page 9

are typically conducted through fly-overs, and cover the many miles of prime habitat along Montana's waterways. Despite this, it is commonly understood that the Great Blue Heron, like many of Montana's species of concern, require standardized surveys and rookery counts to ensure their conservation. If you're interested in volunteering, please join us on April 22nd to learn how to survey Great Blue Heron Rookeries. The training will be 1 hour, going over all the materials needed to be successful in the field.

**The Great Blue Heron Citizen Science survey will take place from May 1 - June 15.** For more information or to receive project outreach materials, please email Peter Dudley ([peter@mtaudubon.org](mailto:peter@mtaudubon.org)) or Carmen Borchelt ([carmen@mtaudubon.org](mailto:carmen@mtaudubon.org)).

### CHSW Citizen Science Survey 2021

We need your help locating more Chimney Swifts while they are active and nesting. Little is known about their nesting range throughout our state,

Montana Audubon is turning to citizen science for answers. Unlike searching for other swifts, or many birds for that matter, Chimney Swifts are best surveyed in towns and near buildings with large chimneys! Surveys are short, occurring 30 minutes before until 30 minutes after sunset, with observers being stationed for just a short time at selected chimneys.

If you're planning a trip to eastern Montana be sure to put this on your list of things to do! You can also join us in the field during our "Chimney Swift Night Out" events in eastern Montana. Participants will learn about chimney swifts and population monitoring techniques, and then put that training to the test that evening as we search local chimneys together.

Join us at Makoshika State Park on the evening of June 4th, with more dates to come.

For more information or to receive project outreach materials, please email Peter Dudley ([peter@mtaudubon.org](mailto:peter@mtaudubon.org))

## Legislative Update from Montana Audubon

### March at the 67<sup>th</sup> Legislature

As we move through March and into the last six weeks of the 67<sup>th</sup> session, the Montana Legislature continues to pass bills that negatively affect our wildlife and their habitats. While we are working hard to push back, the diverse issues we have faced have kept us bouncing between committees on everything from Fish and Game, to Agriculture, to Highways and Transportation, Taxation, and more. At this point we

have testified on 46 bills, opposing 30 and supporting 16, but our biggest challenges have just begun.

There is just so much happening, and so much deregulation its hard to keep track! But be sure that we are doing our best at Montana Audubon. You can see the whole list of bills we are working on at the MT Audubon website ([www.MTAudubon.org](http://www.MTAudubon.org)).

Contact Amy, [aseaman@mtaudubon.org](mailto:aseaman@mtaudubon.org) or Carmen, [carmen@mtaudubon.org](mailto:carmen@mtaudubon.org) for questions.



# Thank You!

...to those below who have made donations to Flathead Audubon.

This is where you would have found a list of last month's donations in past issues of The Pileated Post. Our new approach is to list all donors for the previous year in the January issue. So, look for the 2021 donors in January 2022.

### Bat continued from page 2

body wastes and may change location within the hibernacula or even change hibernacula. Fat reserves are only sufficient for a few arousals so any extra disturbances greatly increase the chance of death.

Although the viral disease White-nose Syndrome has killed millions of bats especially in the eastern U.S., Townsend's Big-eared Bats are not yet known to be afflicted by it.

Townsend's Big-eared Bats can be negatively impacted by a variety of human actions. Roosts are vulnerable to vandalism and disturbance by humans. Blockage of cave/mine entrances for human safety issues or to reduce human impacts to cave environments eliminates roosting sites unless bat friendly gates are installed. Similarly, exclusion of bats from buildings eliminates roosting sites. Application of chemical insecticides reduce food resources.



Although not easy to see because of their nocturnal habits, these bats contribute their share to the huge role bats play in insect control and are another interesting member of the diverse wildlife with which we share the planet.

diverse wildlife with which we share the planet.



## 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

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Kalispell, MT 59904

**Your gift is tax deductible.**

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# the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 9173, Kalispell, MT 59904-9173

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The Flathead Audubon Society is affiliated with the National Audubon Society and Montana Audubon ([MTAudubon.org](http://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 [linda@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:linda@flatheadaudubon.org).

Check our website [FlatheadAudubon.org](http://FlatheadAudubon.org) for  
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