



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

November 2021
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Tringa.com

Great Fish Community Challenge a Win for All!

This year's Great Fish Community Challenge, sponsored and organized by the Whitefish Community Foundation, set a new record in its 6th year of the Great Fish, raising a grand total of \$3.6 million donated to 61 Flathead Valley nonprofit organizations between Aug. 5 and Sept. 17, 2021. You, our members and many others throughout the valley, contributed a total of \$24,545 on behalf of our Chapter, about \$9,000 more than last year! Adding in match provided



from Whitefish Community Foundation's Circle of Giving plus donations made straight to the Match Fund during the campaign, Flathead Audubon will receive a total of \$35,708, nicely exceeding our goal of \$25,000. All of these funds will be used to support and improve our Conservation/Education Program. Thank you Whitefish Community Foundation, your amazing staff, and all the Great Fish donors! Page 8 lists all the wonderful donors this year. *by Gael Bissell*

FAS Membership Renewal Extended to November 15

If you haven't renewed your FAS local membership yet, please do so before November 15. This will allow us to send you the December Pileated Post. To renew, you may use the membership form on the back of this issue or do it online at: www.flatheadaudubon.org.



Thanks to those who have already renewed!

If you have donated \$25 or more to Flathead Audubon in the last year, your membership will be renewed automatically for the coming year, with your dues covered by your donation.

From the Board

by Dan Kotter

A Grand Connection to Earth's Processes

Growing up as a very curious young scientist in Southern Indiana, I always held the migration as a magical event. I knew nothing about it. However, there it was. Every year, coming and going. I had no education to guide my way in the "why," it just happened. Education programs were rare to explain these phenomena, so we are left with creative thought and local spiritual attitudes. Thousands of waterfowl overhead, Cardinals in abundance, loud Jays, the Robins are back, hundreds of Blackbirds eating mulberries leav-

ing the purple splattered remains on the go-to school vehicles. It just "was." For most people. I had questions...but I never really sought the answers.

Fast-forward to 2007. My first year in Glacier National Park. My third day of work (a VERY smoky Flathead summer...the names Chippy Creek and Tally Lake area fires ring a bell) in the Park up in Preston Park. I follow two female scientists up the trail, long term botanists in the park and quite excellent educators in all that is Ecology in Northwest Montana. *continued on page 8*

NOVEMBER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday November 1, 2021. 6 PM. FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Public Meeting Room, Fish, Wildlife & Parks building, 490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell.

Monday, November 8, 2021. 7 PM. Flathead Audubon General Meeting, will be held digitally with video attendance by Zoom, audio by phone. See page 3 for how to participate.

No scheduled field trips. See page 7 for suggestions for possibilities on your own.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

The Elegant Black Scoter

by Darcy Thomas

There are some birds we expect to see in certain locations and the Black Scoter (*Melanitta americana*) is one of those birds. It is, after all, a sea duck so one would expect to see them in open salt water. I viewed scoters many times along the Washington Coast and Puget Sound and had never thought about them venturing inland. On one occasion my husband and I watched as a small group of Black Scoters were diving to collect clams. They swallow them whole, crushing them in their gizzard, which is filled with sand. The crushed shell is then regurgitated. But not all the scoters were successful in swallowing the clams. Flying overhead vigilant Western Gulls circled, swooping down in a timely fashion when a scoter tilted its head up to swallow and forcing them to drop their clams. Quickly, the gulls snatched the clams before they had a chance to sink then flew to the beach dropping them on rocks to crack them open so they could feast.

When I became aware of the presence of Black Scoters in the Flathead during the fall I perked up. What factors come to play to bring seabirds inland during migration? Out came the books. I had to find out. As it turns out, Black Scoter breed in northern Quebec, Labrador, and Alaska on coastal tundra and lakes. Females build a nest on the ground near water. The nest is a shallow depression lined with soft plant material and down and hidden by grasses or shrubs. She lays 8-9 eggs which are incubated for one month. Males defend the area around the nest. The young fledge at 6-7 weeks. While females attend the brood at night the young forage along with adult scoters during the day. Food consists of marsh insects in summer along with small fish, fish eggs, and plant materials (on fresh water). In winter the birds dive for mussels and bivalve mollusks.

When the breeding season is over in late June, Black Scoter migrate to temperate zones on both coasts. Males are the first to leave the breeding grounds. Over the summer they are followed first by non-breeding females, then breeding females and subadults. Western Black Scoters interrupt their southward migration to gather in calmer inshore waters at annual molting sites throughout Alaska, and the western parts of the Yukon and British Columbia.

Once they are finished molting and their flight

capability returns, Black Scoter continue with their migration. Most of them continue migrating along the Pacific Ocean as far south as northern Washington and the Puget Sound where they stay all winter primarily on saltwater bays. But a few of them make their way inland and will stay for a few weeks as rare migrants during the fall and early winter. They drop down onto a big lake for a brief stay to rest and eat before continuing to the coast. This is how they end up in parts of Montana such as the Flathead Valley on bodies of calm water like Foy's Lake, Lake Rogers, Lake Mary Ronan, Lake McDonald, and Flathead Lake and the Creston wetlands. Look for them in deeper open water, not near the shore. A spotting scope can be useful to view the birds better.

The Black Scoter is the least common of three North American Scoters, the others being the Surf Scoter and the White-winged Scoter. Black Scoters are medium-sized diving sea ducks that are sometimes described as "simple elegance in evening dress", with males sporting a glossy jet-black plumage with a striking yellow knob, much like a lightbulb, on their small bill. Females are dark brown with a pale cheek patch and a dark crown. Black Scoters are buoyant swimmers who propel with their feet. They do wing flap displays while swimming by flapping their wings with their body held up above the water and then thrusting their heads downward.



Doug Hitchcox: Birds of the World

They often cock their short tails in the air and can appear much like the Ruddy Duck in poor light when all you see is the silhouette. But the Ruddy is much smaller. In contrast to their dark bodies the undersides of their wings flash silvery gray when they are in flight. Birds take off from the water abruptly. Black Scoters are the most vocal of the waterfowl during the breeding season when courting males make a mournful-sounding whistle and melancholy coo. During the winter you rarely hear them so listen carefully for the whistling of their wings in flight instead.

Black Scoter populations appear to be in decline and are listed as near threatened. Hunting takes a big toll. Other conservation concerns include climate change, contaminants such as pesticides, oil spills and other pollutants, as well as habitat degradation such as oil and gas drilling in nesting grounds.

continued on page 5

November Program

A Tribute to Military Veterans Who Became Ornithologists or Wildlife Biologists

presented by David Manuwal

David Manuwal will be the featured speaker at the Monday, November 8 virtual meeting of the Flathead Audubon Society at 7 PM. (See below for how to join the Zoom meeting.) He received his undergraduate degree from Purdue University and graduate degrees from the University of Montana and the University of California, Los Angeles. Dave taught and conducted bird research for 41 years at the University of Washington's School of Environmental and Forest Sciences. After retiring in 2013 as Emeri-



David and Maggie

tus Professor of Wildlife Science, he also served as an affiliate professor at UM. He and his wife now reside in the Kalispell area.

His presentation, during Veterans Day week, is a tribute to military veterans who became ornithologists or wildlife biologists. He was able to acquire information for the presentation by reviewing numerous professional journals and contacting many individual veterans. He includes veterans from World War 1, World War 2, Korean War, Vietnam War, the Gulf War and Afghanistan.

How to Attend the November 8 FAS General Meeting

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

You can attend this meeting by Zoom or telephone.

For information on how to do this contact cory@flatheadaudubon.org

Videos of earlier FAS meeting presentations are available at <https://flatheadaudubon.org/videos>.

A New Way to Identify Fly-over Raptors

Despite the disappointment of once again cancelling our Birds of Prey Festival this fall due to health concerns, Flathead Audubon once again made some lemonade from the situation, pivoting smoothly to a more limited number of remote and socially distanced activities called Birds of Prey Week.

One of those was a Friday evening outdoor workshop at the Lone Pine State Park outdoor pavilion called "Raptors from Below". Back in August of 2020, I spent the better part of two weeks painting and laminating 27 full-color, full-sized silhouettes of 27 plumages of our 17 most common migrating birds of prey. (Only the distinguishing characteristics were colored-

Aeneas Ridge at out Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (JBHW) site.

To go with the silhouettes, I also wrote a 3-page "key" to the distinguishing features separating one species from another, including juvenile birds. The workshop drew 26 enthusiastic participants, many of whom followed up the introduction with a trip or two to JBHW to see this spectacular flight for themselves!

We will do this again next August for those of you who may be interested. Meanwhile, I can send anyone an electronic copy of the Key to Raptors from Below. Just contact me at:

educator@flatheadaudubon.org.

by Denny Olson



Female Harrier, adult Prairie Falcon, Juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, Merlin and juvenile Coopers Hawk. Can you tell who's who?

in. Don't be confused by all the white parts!) They were created for training purposes -- to encourage more adventurous souls to become secondary and hopefully primary observers high on the Mount



Juvenile Bald Eagle plumages: left half first-year, right half second-year.

Leonard Howke Remembered

Leonard Howke, a 2010 recipient of the Flathead Audubon Conservation Achievement Award, recently passed away shortly after losing his home to a fire. The award certificate was destroyed in the fire so FAS reprinted the certificate and presented it to the family. Leonard received the award for his decades of contributions to a multitude of wildlife projects with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, mostly as a volunteer. Some projects he helped with included long-term white-tailed deer research, big game check station at Olney, bighorn sheep transplants, and sharp-tailed grouse transplants.



Leonard loved to help children learn about the outdoors. He taught hunter safety for over 50 years and was deeply involved in the Hooked On Fishing Program that introduced many, many children to fishing and being outdoors. For example, when ice fishing, Leonard would go out early and drill hundreds of holes for the children to use after they arrived and then help them bait hooks, unhook fish, and everything else necessary to teach them and help them enjoy being outside.

Leonard was a lifelong resident of Whitefish and was well known in the community. He will be missed.

by Lewis Young

Conservation Corner

What just hit my window?

A friend sent me this photo in late September after she heard this unfortunate juvenile sharpie, chasing finches, hit their window with a loud bang. We all have heard the crack at the window and then gone looking for a bird just hoping it flew away. Whether a bird is clearly injured or has flown away, birds crashing into windows often die. Studies show an average of 500 million (up to a billion) birds die each year after hitting windows in the United States and Canada ([source](#), Condor 2014) and research shows that 54-76% of window collisions are fatal. Spring and fall migrations are the most frequent times for window collisions and the most critical time to put up those



screens or other deterrents.

Cornell just released 7 simple actions that we can all do to help birds (<https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/seven-simple-actions-to-help-birds/>) and their first suggestion deals with birds and windows: Here is an excerpt:

The Cause: By day, birds perceive reflections in glass as habitat they can fly into. By night, migratory birds drawn in by city lights are at high risk of colliding with buildings.

What can you do? On the outside of the window, install screens or special tape to break up reflections—you can use film, paint, or **Acopian BirdSavers** or other string spaced no more than two inches high or four inches wide. This is a very simple and inexpensive solution ([source](#), American Bird Conservancy) or <https://abcbirds.org/article/new-window-tape-can-significantly-reduce-bird-collisions-at-homes/>.

Suggested Listening

Recent cool episode about student research on the historic list of the Birds of Bougainville Island in the South Pacific, go to NPR's science Short Wave podcast at: <https://pca.st/episode/79f108db-5a14-4c07-bc4d-d9f2f1a8c98e>

To support important bird conservation south of our border, Shika Shika developed this incredibly unique album "A Guide to the Birdsong of Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean". The music combines native bird songs with music created by local artists. <https://shikashika.bandcamp.com/album/a-guide-to-the-birdsong-of-mexico-central-america-the-caribbean>. When you purchase/download this soothing and captivating album, funds go to local bird conservation efforts.

Shika Shika just released their Kickstarter announcement to do a similar project for African birds: "A Guide to the Birdsongs of Africa" <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/shikashika/a-guide-to-the-birdsong-of-western-africa/>.

by Gael Bissell



Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

The Planetary Story: Part One.

Very, very long ago and not so far away, a giant blob of rock and iron cooled, water pooled over much of its surface, and somehow, green things that reproduce themselves populated the water and the land, oxygenating the thin skin of atmosphere. Plants didn't need anything else. They made their *own* food. But after crawling out of the primordial ooze, we animals, being resourceful, took advantage of that. Fruits, vegetables, berries, green leafy stuff -- most herbivore and omnivore animals spend a lot of time at the salad bar.

About 480 million years ago according to biologists and archeologists, first in line to eat plants were the insects. Insects, especially in their caterpillar stages, ate plants, and multiplied like, well, insects! Along came spiders and ate insects. Some insects decided to be predatory, and began to eat each other. Amphibians, then reptiles, began to eat insects and spiders and, yup ... plants.

Eventually, over MILLIONS of years, nature smiled on some reptiles, who began to walk on two legs -- and then grow their arms and fingers -- and then jump -- and then jump farther by growing feathers, for gliding. And finally, after 330 million years of nothing but plants and bugs and amphibians and reptiles -- we got our first birds!

An asteroid paid a visit (BIG boom!) and wiped out the giant reptiles (dinosaurs) -- and the birds flew to where it was safer, and the first mammals *somehow* managed to escape the fate of the dinosaurs. And then, *another* 150 million years goes by ... and here we are. Today.

This story took a few minutes to summarize, but it took a *ridiculous* amount of time to actually happen. And in that ridiculous amount of time here's what has transpired:

We now have 450,000 known *species* of plants in the world. We can't begin to estimate the *individual* number of plants in the world, but satellite estimates of just the number of *trees* is *3 trillion*. At this point in time, we humans have removed half of the 6 trillion trees there were a thousand years ago.

We probably have 6 million species of in-

sects. We have 10 *quintillion* (19 zeroes!) individual insects. Those are not understandable numbers for the human brain. They are uncountable living things that took uncountable years of the "e-word" to get as diverse as they are now.

Let's toss in *at least* 160,000 species of spiders, most of whom eat insects, and then, probably 400 billion birds, of perhaps 18,000 species, eating plants, and insects, and spiders.

That's the big, big picture. 8.7 MILLION species of plants and animals, humming along for millions of years, eventually getting to a (somewhat fluctuating) state of equilibrium -- a *balance*!

Birds, spiders, bats and other insect predators eat untold numbers of insects -- controlling their ridiculous reproductive capacity -- *but not too many of them*. Insects nibble on trillions of plants -- *but not too many of them*. It's about *balance*.

Occasionally, that balance gets ambushed by the unexpected. An asteroid might crash into Mexico and wipe out giants called dinosaurs. (Geologists say that was only the latest one.)

Or, our SUN might decide to take a catnap for a million years now and then, and we get an ice age. Luckily, it usually takes a few thousand years for it to fall asleep, and another few thousand years to wake back up -- and animals and plants can usually adapt without getting very unbalanced.

Sometimes the Sun has too much coffee when it wakes up, and makes things hotter than usual -- it was that way 5000 years ago. But again, it was a SLOW warming and a later SLOW cooling -- back to what I would guess would be called "normal".

Another unexpected ambush of the balance -- for example -- would be when a species of animal gets so smart, they learn to use most of the things on the planet just for themselves. That could REALLY throw things out of whack in a big hurry. An animal like that could pour so much energy into their own interests, they could change the whole climate! But it's hard to believe that an animal like that wouldn't also be smart enough to modify their own behavior -- and follow the rules of balance that nature has perfected over those millions of years. Isn't it?

(Next month, Part Two: The places on the planet -- restoring balance.)

Black Scoter continued from page 2.

Shipping traffic can discourage them from utilizing good feeding grounds as well.

Much still needs to be learned about Black Scoter such as its basic breeding biology. Ornithologists need to do a comparison of Western and East-

ern populations, learn more about their winter habitat, and how hunting affects breeding populations. In fact, there is a long list of questions regarding Black Scoter that could keep ornithologists busy for many years.

References available upon request from darcy@flatheadaudubon.org.

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY TREASURER'S REPORT

7/01/2020 – 6/30/2021

Last year, Flathead Audubon Society (FAS) was accepted to participate in the Great Fish Challenge hosted by the Whitefish Community Foundation for the first time and as a result we raised enough funds to qualify for a percentage of the Great Fish matching funds. We plan to make the Great Fish Challenge our sole fundraising campaign each year. This fundraiser raised a total of \$23,547.60. Other funding source for this past year included the Whitefish Community Foundation Day of Giving (\$4565), a grant from Montana DPHHS (\$13,817), our membership dues and donations. Our education program continues to be FAS's primary focus and our only paid position is a ½ time Education Coordinator contractor, Denny Olson. The education program comprises 67% of our expenditures with the remainder supporting the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch, Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, Birds of Prey Festival and our overhead expenses. We had a strong year financially, primarily due to the one-time grant we received. Our financial statements, tax returns and FAS policies are available for review on our website at:

<https://flatheadaudubon.org/about-us/reports-financials/>.

FAS now needs to file Form 990 EZ tax returns to qualify for the Great Fish Challenge program and the CPA firm of Bryan Gilbertson was hired to do this year's and future year's returns.

FAS determined that we needed to have a clearer financial policy or guidelines in place, so a draft Financial Policy was completed and presented to

the board. The policy was accepted at our May board meeting after some changes were made to address a few issues from the board. One change for our money handling process was to add a Financial Reviewer position to the board. Past FAS President Kay Mitchell, will now process all check/cash transactions and stamp checks for deposit before passing them on to the treasurer to deposit. QuickBooks was installed onto Kay's computer so she will be a second set of eyes for our books and will now do the monthly bank reconciliations. Another change was the decision to have all of our investments managed locally. Merrill Lynch and the Whitefish Community Foundation will now be managing our investments. A decision to have \$50,000 of these investments moved over to the Whitefish Community Foundation was approved by the board in May. This transfer is pending as a decision as to whether to allocate these funds into an investment account or start a permanent endowment fund needs to be made. Research into this decision is ongoing at this time.

FAS had committed to donating \$7,500 to the Bad Rock Conservation Easement fund with Flathead Lane Trust. The money was set aside but FLT managed to secure other funding for the easement so they recommended FAS use some of the money for the upcoming conservation easement appraisal at Owens Sowerwine Natural Area. \$5,000 will be donated to FLT when the appraisal is completed this fall.

Rodney Walleette treasurer

Flathead Audubon Out and About

Darcy Thomas represented Flathead Audubon at the Forestry Fair in Riverfront Park in Libby on September 24. The fair was sponsored by the Kootenai Forest Stakeholders Coalition. Darcy set up an educational table and provided information about forestry birds. Many people stopped to talk about birds and forest conservation, to pick up a bird list or other print materials, and the kids received coloring pages, crayons and stickers.

On September 24th, Darcy also helped Pam Willison prepare a display table at Gateway Center for the United Way kick-off event of their annual fundraising campaign. In addition to the usual printed materials, the display included the eye-catching vertical banners

designed by Susie Waldron and Denny Olson, a red-eyed vireo nest, some bird posters/artwork, a nesting box, and a bird identification book. We received several compliments on the display, which is shown in the accompanying photo.

*by Darcy Thomas and Pam Willison
Photo by Pam Willison*



Natural Events To See This Month:

Black Swifts are wintering in NW Brazilian rain forests. No one know where or whether they roost.

Owen Sowerwine Work Day 2021

Ten hearty volunteers arrived at Owen Sowerwine on October 9th and spent about 3 hours on various projects. It started as a crisp and chilly morning, but gave way to some sunshine and the slightly warmer temperatures as they got to work. Thank you so much to everyone!

Rod, Cory, Shannon and Bridger made quick work of some trail improvements at the Greenridge entrance, installing 4 water bars and leveling a few areas of the trail. After working at the entrance, Cory joined Cindy and Tom who had undertaken improvements on the viewing blinds of the Education Trail,



Bridger clearing nest box.
Photo by Shannon Donaldson

gathering and stacking fallen limbs and sticks to make the two blinds longer and taller. Shannon leveled the area under the sitting bench off of the Main Trail, and secured it in place with a locking cable because it had been wandering away – down the bank, into the adjacent bushes, etc. Shannon also joined Bridger who came prepared to locate and clear all the nesting boxes so they will be ready in the spring for new occupants. The two of them walked nearly the entire perimeter of the Mainland area to find each box. Bridger reported finding evidence of a couple boxes being used for nesting, a dried-up hornet nest, an accumulation of dried

grass, and a cache of dried mushrooms. The mushrooms were an interesting find because the nesting boxes have a predator guard, so there was some speculation about a flying squirrel caching the mushrooms.

Meanwhile, the kiosk was getting a much needed “sprucing up”. Kay, Alice, Susie, and Pam spent their time removing the plexiglass and of all faded printed material from the kiosk and masking and repainting the white side.



Alice, Susie, Kay working on kiosk
Photo by Pam Willison

Updated versions of the printed material were arranged on the two sides of the kiosk, including an up-to-date OSNA bird list, and the freshly cleaned plexiglass was replaced. Be sure you take a look at it, because it looks clean and renewed.

Thanks to the volunteers for giving up a Saturday morning to help keep Owen Sowerwine in good shape. Owen Sowerwine is an amazing area and we hope everyone gets a chance to visit at various times of the year. The management and on-the-ground work by volunteers, FAS members, and the Board of Flathead Audubon provide a valuable resource to the birds and critters who call it home and share it with the people who visit.

by Pam Willison, OSNA Chairperson

FALL 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 <https://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 <https://flatheadaudubon.org>. Check the FAS webpage at <https://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 are highly recommended, and we ask you to not share binoculars or spotting scopes. The number of participants allowed on trips will be limited as will carpooling.

While there are no formally scheduled trips in November there are still lots of possibilities for bird outings for those who have motivation to explore on their own.

You can find numerous ideas on the Flathead Audubon website (<https://flatheadaudubon.org>). Under the header “Birds”, there are Birding Hotspots, Bird ID Resources, and Birds of the Flathead Valley. Brochures can be downloaded and printed out. There are also maps that show places to go. Nearby areas

include Owen Sowerwine, Lawrence Park, Lone Pine State Park, Smith Lake, the Whitefish trail system, Wayfarer’s State Park in Bigfork and numerous wetland/riparian areas in the Lower Valley.

November is a particularly good month to watch for the return of Rough-legged Hawks, Harlan’s Red-tailed Hawks and Bohemian Waxwings. Scoters often turn up on the lakes. So, go out and have fun. Dress for the weather and get out and enjoy what the Flathead Valley has to offer!

THANK YOU GREAT FISH DONORS!

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From the Board continued from page 1
 only option I had at that moment when we arrived in Preston Park was to listen. I was breathless from the new altitude and mountains, however, it was mostly because of the story I was being told. This story of the interconnected Clark's Nutcracker, Whitebark Pine, and Grizzly Bear changed my life forever. It connected all of the dormant questions in my mind. The "why." Connected Bird, Tree, Grizzly Bear, Soil, Earth, Geology Formations. I challenge anyone to find a better ecological story to expand the perception of trophic levels. Perhaps this day I evolved from a Curious Scientist to an Educated Ecologist. These are the stories and field excursions that can change one's life, and perhaps



Clark's Nutcracker chick,
 Belly River area, spring 2013.
 Dan Kotter

evolve a Geologist into an Ecologist. Or, a local landowner into a hardy conservationist. There is power in story and connection to a place.

I returned from birding in Costa Rica for 2 months and met some amazing Aussies while in Corcovado National Park in 2012/2013. They visited me in Montana the following summer here and were lucky to share these birding endeavors seeing the Clark's Nutcrackers in the Belly River and Golden Eagles and songbirds elsewhere in the Flathead for one month. We keep in touch and they still are enamored with the beautiful avian ecological interactions of Northwest Montana. Cheers to the Flathead and cheers to the beautiful ecological interactions that educate and inspire.

"Cease being intimidated by the argument that a right action is impossible because it does not yield maximum profits, or that a wrong action is to be condoned because it pays." Aldo Leopold

Project Feeder Watch

Do you like to watch birds? Are you looking for a classroom or nature club project? How about participating in a project that contributes to scientific understanding of changes in wintering areas of birds? Project FeederWatch may be just for you. This year will be my fourth year for this important project. Since I feed birds and enjoy watching them come to my feeders, this was a no brainer. Also, it is fun to see how many different species I can bring into the yard by offering a variety of food. I found that my identification skills became more focused; that I observed more infrequent visitors, and that spending more time watching my feeders captured rare bird interactions. It was a very rewarding experience, and I highly recommend it.

Project FeederWatch is a citizen science project that began in Ontario, Canada in the mid-1970s and partnered with Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology ten years later. It is a winter-long project starting in November and ending mid-April, in which participants periodically count birds at backyard feeders, birdbaths or other local areas with plantings that attract birds. Designed to help scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance, this is the perfect project for anyone who likes birds or wants to learn more about birds.

No particular skill level or background is necessary to participate in the project. Participants will receive a research kit and resources to help attract and identify common winter species including an inter-

active tool that allows participants to learn about the food and feeder preference of nearly 100 species and how to predict which birds can be attracted to an area. All you have to do is watch your feeder, birdbath or designated area as much or as little as you like, record what you see, and send in your data. There is an \$18 fee for U.S. citizens (\$15 for Cornell Lab members) necessary to analyze the data. Along with the research kit, you will receive a year-end report each fall and have access to Cornell's digital version of Living Bird.



The data gathered by people like you will only become more important as predicted changes in climate continue to occur. Check out www.FeederWatch.org where you will find information on joining and access to a free on-line bird identification guide. You can also read about other people's experience since joining FeederWatch.

by Darcy Thomas

Smith Lake Field Trip Report



A morning of bird watching at Smith Lake in Kila was very successful September 8 with eleven birders joining Darcy Thomas around the lake. Two were visiting from out-of-state and the youngest was only 5 years old. It was a bit chilly at 41 degrees when we started but warmed up comfortably later in the morning. A haze of smoke surrounded us and gave views of a

red sun.

The group saw 31 species including Canada goose, Trumpeter Swan, Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler, Mallard, Ring-Necked Duck, Common Goldeneye, Ruddy Duck, American Coot, Killdeer, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, American Kestrel, Black-billed Magpie, American Crow, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, Barn Swallow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Marsh Wren, European Starling, American Robin, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Yellowthroat, and Western Tanager.

by Darcy Thomas

Amazon Smile

Sign up for AmazonSmile before Christmas shopping and benefit FAS. A portion of each purchase goes to FAS when you select them as your recipient.

Also, AmazonSmile is now available in a shopping app for Android users.

Birds of Prey Week Workshops

To kick off activities for Flathead Audubon Birds of Prey week, workshops were held at Montana Wild Wings Raptor Recovery Center on September 11 and 14. The enthusiastic participants enjoyed a wealth of information about the most abundant migrating raptors of Jewel Basin Hawkwatch site. A beautiful Sharp-shinned and a Coopers hawk, top migrators in the



ing raptors shared identifying field markings most helpful for the Jewel site and/or birding adventures in the Flathead. The Wild Wings Ambassador raptors were joined by Wild Wings volunteers and Hawkwatch veterans as presenters. After the workshop, participants enjoyed a tour of the facility, meeting all the Owls and Hawks that, because of injuries, are now cared for at Wild Wings.

by Kathy Ross

CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

Highlights from the October 4, 2021 Board of Directors Meeting

- ◆ Gael Bissell reported making progress on the proposed Conservation Easement (CE) being written for Owen Sowerwine, and is working with Montana Audubon regarding a capital campaign for our contribution to the cost. The Board authorized her to complete a partner contribution statement for the NAWCA grant application being completed by Flathead Land Trust, indicating a \$100,000 contribution by Flathead Audubon.
- ◆ Cory Davis is coordinating the authorized purchase of some secure cabinets that would be installed at Gateway Center, and would be used to store our sound/projection equipment, banners, etc. Other items authorized to be purchased to fill our current needs include: a laptop, a projection screen, and a few pair of good quality binoculars for use by field trip leaders.
- ◆ The list of our committees was reviewed and updated. There are some openings on various committees, so if you would like to help please contact an officer or director.
- ◆ Status reports were given about: Birds of Prey results, Education Committee work, Great Fish results, and Field Trips plans and ideas.

Field Update: The Search for Cuckoos by Big Sky Watershed Corps member Peter Dudley

Montana Audubon was back on the Missouri and Madison Rivers for Black-billed Cuckoo and avian surveys this summer, after a great pilot year in 2020. For nearly a decade, we have carried out land bird monitoring in partnership with the University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab (UMBEL) Montana, Fish & Wildlife and Parks (FWP), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Every year we try to both refine the project and increase it's scope in order to gain a better understanding of Black-billed Cuckoo, as well as other species, and their distribution in the state.

A new tool, Automated Recording Units (ARUs,) were used this summer. The ARUs, microphones that periodically record throughout the day, can record cuckoos from up to 150 meters away. That audio data is then run through a program trained to detect cuckoo calls within the audio recordings. With 43 of the 44 ARUs along the Missouri River retrieved (we think someone ran off with one of the units,) we expect to gain a much better understanding of cuckoo populations in Montana.

Along with the ARUs, Montana Audubon staff and research technicians set out to conduct our ripari-

an bird surveys and "call-back" surveys in late-May. At each survey point, we conduct a 10 minute bird survey followed by a vegetation assessment. Black-billed Cuckoos are very territorial birds, so if they are present anywhere within hearing distance of our playback, they typically respond and make themselves known very quickly.

Although results from our ARU's won't be available until later this fall, the season is already a success. We found two Black-billed Cuckoos at the end of our first multi-day survey float on the Missouri River and five on another multi-day survey. It will be even more interesting to see how many ARU's will actually capture the calls of this unique species in areas where we did not detect Cuckoos in person. Now we just have to be patient and hope our data was well-recorded.

For a full report go to: <https://mtaudubon.org/2021/07/bbcu-surveys-on-the-missouri-river/>.



Bo Creebs



Thank You!

...to all those that have made donations to Flathead Audubon.

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.

Field Trip Report: Sandhill Crane Viewing

A group of 12 bird lovers participated in the Sandhill Crane Viewing at the West Valley ponds just north of Kalispell. Darcy Thomas led the group which saw over 250 Sandhill Cranes. From the Bird and Wildlife Viewing Area a large group of cranes grazed in the agricultural fields very near the parking lot. Everyone was thrilled to get such a good view. What a great photo op as well. Just before dark we traveled along Clark Drive to view all the ponds and closed the evening watching the sunset as cranes returned to the protection of the pothole wetlands for the night. The sight of these graceful birds flying overhead along with the sound of their bugling call was quite an event to witness. Other great bird sightings included Cinnamon Teal, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Canvasback and Ruddy Duck, Horned Grebe, Northern Harrier and a Great Horned Owl as well as Mallards, Canada Geese Blackbirds and Coots. *by Darcy Thomas*



Photo by Darcy Thomas



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The Flathead Audubon Society is affiliated with the National Audubon Society and Montana Audubon <https://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.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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