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# Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

October 2022  
VOLUME 47, NUMBER 2

Yellow-rumped warbler



THANK YOU to all who donated to Flathead Audubon in the Great Fish Community Challenge! You and the Flathead community donated an amazing \$27,308 by the Sept. 18th deadline; soon the Whitefish Community Foundation will add a considerable

match to these contributions. We will post the total Great Fish Challenge results on our website and in the next newsletter.

Thank you!  
Cory Davis, President

## 2022 Birds of Prey Festival -- Biggest Ever!

Finally, after two years of pandemic cancellations, we had our 14th Annual Festival at Lone Pine State Park. The ever-energetic and humorous Kate Davis headlined our presenters with her falcons, Kurt Lindsay showed his gorgeous owl photos, Dan Casey expanded our abilities to ID raptors in flight, and showings of our bird education trilogy videos started off the morning. Three bird walks were offered during the morning. Kids were making snowy owls from pine cones, getting their faces raptorized by Fancy-face Design, and making flying birds on a stick. Everyone enjoyed the 16 birds of prey shown by Wild Wings Rescue, and displays by the Owl Institute, Center for Native Plants, Citizen's Climate Lobby And Hockaday Art Museum. Our own Flathead Audubon booth featured Chickadee and owl dress-ups by the Donaldson crew, and hundreds of our Flathead resi-

dents enjoyed and learned about everything "raptor". What a day! Our biggest crowds ever!

*by Denny Olson*



Photo by Denny Olson



Photo by Denny Olson



Photo by Denny Olson



Photo by Denny Olson

### OCTOBER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

- Monday October 3, 2022. 6:00 PM. FAS Board of Directors Meeting.** Public Meeting Room, Fish, Wildlife & Parks building, 490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell. You may bring your own dinner at 5:30.
- Monday, October 10, 2022. 7:00 PM. Flathead Audubon General Meeting.** United Way Gathering Place Room 26, Gateway Community Center, US Hwy 2 West, Kalispell. East side of Gateway Mall along Glenwood Rd. All are welcome. See page 3 for how to participate digitally.
- Saturday October 1, 6-8 PM. Sandhill Crane viewing at West Valley.** See page 6.
- Wednesday October 5, 6:00 AM-4:00 PM. Bison and Birds at Moiese, MT,** See page 6.
- Sunday October 9, 9 AM- NOON. Fall Migration at Pothole Wetlands, West Valley.** See page 6.
- Sunday October 16, 9 AM-NOON. Fall Transitions at Owen Sowerwine Natural Area.** See page 6.

# BIRD OF THE MONTH

## Red-breasted Nuthatch

a little upside-down bird

by Darcy Thomas

Once called the Canada Nuthatch, the Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis* is a common bird throughout North America. The name nuthatch is likely from the word "nuthack", referring to the nuthatches habit of hacking away at a seed with its bill to open it. For such a tiny bird it gets your attention with its "tinhorn" *yank yank* call that can be heard year-round in coniferous forests. Red-breasted Nuthatches prefer fir and spruce forests but can be found in a forest mix including pine, hemlock, larch, western cedar, aspen and poplar. If you have watched them, you know these little birds are an intense bundle of energy in constant motion probing for insects and seeds on trunks and tree branches. They like to travel through tree canopies with a mixed flock of chickadees, kinglets, and woodpeckers. They are called "a little upside-down bird" due to their ability to move up and down headfirst along tree trunks. They are also talented at moving sideways. The foot of the nuthatch has one big toe called a hallux that faces backward. This enables it to walk headfirst down tree trunks by moving one foot at a time while the hallux toe on the other foot holds firmly to the bark.

The Red-breasted Nuthatch is the only nuthatch in North America to have large irruptive flights when there is a shortage of winter food on their breeding grounds. This sometimes drives them hundreds of miles to the south to the Gulf Coast or the deserts of northern Mexico. They also have the distinction of being the only North American nuthatch to have crossed the Atlantic to Europe as a vagrant.

A small, compact bird with practically no neck and a short tail shaped somewhat like a chubby cigar with a long bill, the Red-breasted Nuthatch is only 4.3" long and weighs only 0.4 oz. Males are a beautiful blue-gray with a rich reddish-cinnamon on the underparts. The head sports a strong pattern with a black cap and a black stripe through the eye with a white stripe over the eye. The adult female is similar but with blue-gray on the top of the head rather than black and the black parts are paler with the eye stripe not quite as wide.

Red-breasted Nuthatches are cavity nesters. The female selects the tree and both parents excavate the hole. While the female does most of the work the male makes up for this by feeding her while she excavates. It is quite remarkable when you think about it.

Nuthatches don't have strong stiff tails to support them while they work like woodpeckers do. They also do not have chisel-like bills. They lack the large muscular body that helps woodpeckers hammer. Instead, they have persistence. They remove minuscule wood chips one piece at a time until the work is done. The nest is built with grasses, strips of bark and pine needles. Sometimes they steal nest-lining material from the nests of Chicky Nuthatches and Mountain Chickadees. They aggressively defend the nesting cavity, especially while building it and can chase away birds much larger than themselves, like Downy Woodpeckers and pesky House Wrens.

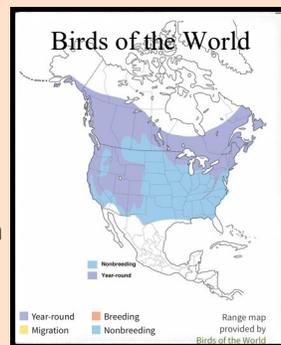
Resin is collected from conifers and plastered around the entrance to the cavity. They carry the resin in the bill or, in a remarkable example of tool use, on pieces of bark used as applicators to spread the resin. The resin may prevent predators or competitors from getting into the cavity. One would think the nuthatch would stick to the resin, but it avoids this by diving headfirst into the hole. It's a terrific feat of agility.

During the summer, Red-breasted Nuthatches primarily eat insects, beetles, caterpillars, spiders, ants, and earwigs. The nestlings thrive on these foods. During spruce budworm outbreaks Red-breasted Nuthatches enjoy a feast. Nuthatches cache conifer seeds and insects in the bark of trees to help them get through a cold winter. They shove this food into bark crevices and often cover them with pieces of bark, lichen, or pebbles to hide them.

While numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches are probably stable, and their breeding range has expanded southward in some eastern states, it is important to leave some dead trees standing in forests to provides places for nests. They readily visit bird feeders eating peanuts, sunflower seeds, and suet. They take the bigger pieces to a tree, jam them into the bark, then hammer them open so they can eat. Once bears are hibernating put your bird feeders up and get ready to enjoy these pretty little upside-down birds from your cozy house on a cold winter day.



Birds of the World



# October Program

## Costa Rica: A Birder's Paradise

presented by Joshua Covill



Provided by Josh Covill

From lush lowland rainforests to high misty mountains, Costa Rica is home to over 800 bird species, making it a birder's paradise! Josh Covill's presentation will take us through what birding in Costa Rica is like, touching on the amazing biodiversity,

where to go, what to look for, and how to plan your own visit.



Red-legged Honeycreeper  
Josh Covill

## October Meeting FAS

The hybrid meetings seem to be working well, so we're going to stick with the mixed method for our October 10 Meeting. For those coming to the meeting, we'll meet in Room 26 of the Gateway Mall (United Way building) at 7 PM. This room is on the east side of the building along Glenwood Rd in Kalispell. Look for our banner hanging outside.

If you attend by Zoom, you will initially be let into a "waiting room" where you will then be added to the meeting by the host. Please sign in with your name when you enter the room so we know to admit

you. You will be muted when you first join the meeting. You can use your computer's microphone and speakers (most computers have both, whether you see them or not), and this is the preferred way to join.

You can also get an audio connection to the meeting without the Zoom visual capability.

To attend by Zoom, or to get an audio connection to the meeting without the Zoom visual capability, contact [cory@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:cory@flatheadaudubon.org). Looking forward to seeing everyone!

## FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY TREASURER'S REPORT (7/01/2021 – 6/30/2022)

Flathead Audubon Society (FAS) participated in the Great Fish Challenge for our second year and this has now become our primary fundraising source. Once again we raised enough funds to qualify for a percentage of the Great Fish matching funds by raising \$24,430. The matching amount of \$11,200 brought our total amount for last year's Great Fish to \$35,633. The Whitefish Community Foundation's Day of Giving has been discontinued so our only other sources of revenue were membership dues, other donations and our year-end silent auction.

Our education program continues to be FAS's primary focus and our only paid position is a 1/2 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. This past year was one of our strongest years ever for revenue

but with some large one-time expenditures for audio/visual equipment, education equipment and a \$5,000 donation to Flathead Land Trust, we realized only a small net gain in revenue. Our financial statements, tax returns and FAS policies are available for review on our website.

The FAS board had voted previously to set aside \$50,000 for investing with the Whitefish Community Foundation and the decision was made this past year to use those funds to open a permanent endowment fund rather than an investment account. The permanent endowment fund was officially started last April and is now available for contributions. Watch the newsletter in the next few months for more information on this great new opportunity to make a permanent difference in supporting Flathead Audubon Society's mission statement and goals.

by Rod Walette

Below is the sixth installment in the Post series called  
**GETTING TO KNOW OWEN SOWERWINE NATURAL AREA**

## Finding Treasures in the Mud of Owen Sowerwine Natural Area by Pat Jaquith

Making a list of plant species in Owen Sowerwine seemed like an easy enough task in September when the trails were dry, vegetation was senescing, and the deciduous trees still had leaves and fruit, so I accepted the challenge and started out. Seasons progressed, and I realized that I hadn't seen what was growing there in June. I drove down Treasure Lane and set off — but not too far! I got as far as the slough, where the ferryman wasn't waiting to transport the uninitiated across a full channel, and turned back. This newcomer has a daunting amount of homework to do on the assignment in this wetland!

On August 11, 2022, after a rainy spring when the slough flooded to a depth of 8 or more feet (as estimated from the silt that still coated the vegetation) and lasted well into July, I stocked up on mosquito repellent and ventured into the slough again. WOW! I had not gone far when a "lifer" plant popped out at me among the dense grassy vegetation! On hands and knees in the mud, I investigated the slender plant with tubular lavender blossoms from every angle, took photographs galore and measured as many features as seemed useful. With my hand lens I examined the square stems, counted the stamens in the tubular flowers, and observed the pattern of seeds developing from the senescent blooms. I counted the number of plants in that area. Did I miss anything? All this information went home with me to begin my homework! I returned to the site and double-checked. Eventually, I had a tentative identification: *Physostegia parviflora*, Purple Dragon-head, as it is cataloged in the Montana Natural Heritage Program. It is a member of the Lamiaceae/Mint family. Its Wetland plant indicator status is FACW (67-99% of occurrences are in wetlands).

The same day, before I recovered from the excitement of finding a "lifer", I discovered a patch of *Lysimachia ciliata* (Fringed Loosestrife) plants.

Though new to me in Montana, I had some familiarity from New Eng-

land. Its five bright yellow pointed petals on the 6 to 8 inch plants are a lovely sight - but what about the "fringe"? Down on hands and knees in the mud again!

Get out the hand lens. Look at the silt still adhering to those little stems! They had been flooded up to their necks! There it is: the fringe is a collection of little erect hairs in the intersection of the leaf and stem!

Fueled by the elation of finding two great



Purple dragonhead  
*Physostegia parviflora*

plants, I continued on. My final discovery for the day was a mixed blessing. I'd located a second lifer, but it bore such a strong resemblance to a well-known aggressively invasive wetland plant, I had my worries. Pictures, measurements, pawing through the vegetation, more mud... I took my data and went home to do the research. Indeed, *Lysimachia vulgaris* (Common Loosestrife) is a non-native that has a reputation of becoming invasive.

Below are partial lists of wetland plants that I have cataloged in OS-NA. Some of the plants in Owen Sowerwine are in the "Obligate Wetland" category (99% of occurrences are in wetlands). Bladderwort (*Utricularia*); Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*); Northern arrow-head (*Sagittaria cuneata*); Hooded skullcap (*Scutellaria galericulata*); Mare's tail (*Hippurus vulgaris*); Sandbar willow (*Salix exigua*); Beaked sedge (*Carex rostrata*); Least spikerush (*Eleocharis acicularis*) and Northern water-plantain (*Alisma triviale*). Many of these grow in pools or frequently-flooded areas.



Common loosestrife  
*Lysimachia vulgaris*

Among the native plants in the category "Facultative Wetland" (67-99% occurrences in wetlands) are *Hippurus* (Common mare's tail; Marsh hedge-nettle (*Stachys palustris*); Twisted stalk (*Streptopus amplexifolius*); Field mint (*Mentha arvensis*); Sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*); Stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*); and Small yellow water-buttercup (*Ranunculus gmelini*); Alder (*Alnus incana*); and Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron Rydbergii*).

Non-native plants in the "Facultative Wetland" category include Creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*); Reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*); Common loosestrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*); Black medic (*Medicago lupulina*); and Redtop (*Agrostis alba*).

Owen Sowerwine Natural Area is a vulnerable location. The rich, moist bottomland of the Flathead valley provides a perfect spot for plants to get established. Birds help distribute the seeds. The floodwaters scour upland areas and provide transportation. Its proximity to human activity can be a source of those seeds, as gardens and farms have long been a part of this valley. Awareness and vigilance are going to be required to keep the Natural Area "Natural."



Creeping buttercup



Photo by JP Edge  
Hungry Horse News

## Conservation Educator's Niche by Denny Olson

We are now in the middle of the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch season, and things have begun to heat up -- but the numbers of migrant raptors are slightly lower than recent years. Like true geeks, a

number of us have been pulling up multiple weather forecasting websites every day, looking for those sunny, southwest breeze days following a cold front. We are closing in on those fairly consistent triple-digit days, with dreams sugarplums and winning the "lottery", being there on one of those 400 - 500-bird days.

Last year, we had a 400-plus day, and in 2020 our record day of 595 birds flying by! At least six observers were there, barking out species and age class, some taking written notes because they were flying by a half-dozen at a time. Poor Lisa Bate, who actually "lost" the lottery by being the primary data recorder (and never being able to look up and enjoy the birds at eye level)! Some days are beyond the normal "magical" days on the ridge. If you are *at all* physically able to be there -- even at a turtle pace -- you have to see it to believe it! We always love company up there.

Last month I talked about the nuances of identifying accipiters and buteos in flight and at a distance. Here's the second installment:

The speedy falcons, who are more closely related to parrots than they are to hawks, come in four sizes. What they all have in common is narrowing, pointed wings, and speed. From when they are first spotted to zooming overhead, they get there quickly and directly.

Kestrels have shallow, rapid wingbeats and seem light and buoyant (which they are) wandering vertically and horizontally. Females flash more orange than males on the whole underside, and males have a much brighter orange tail than body. From the side, with a decent (but quick!) view, they show a double dark sideburn/moustache.

Merlins have a stronger, direct and speedier flight -- hardly ever wandering -- and have a flat to slightly drooped profile from directly ahead. They look buffy and streaked from below, and have a weaker "moustache" than the other falcons. Many have a pug-nacious "Napoleon complex" and have a hard time resisting a swipe at our owl decoy.

Peregrine Falcons are, of course, the epitome' of speed. They are almost always never-messing-around direct in flight, and their rowing, whipping, powerful wingbeats can help them accelerate in seconds to the highest speeds of any bird. As they pass

by, the large dark cheek "sideburn" is a giveaway. Adults have a dark head as well and the body feathers have a light-colored "checkered" look from overhead.

Prairie

Falcons are slightly larger than Peregrines, which is impossible to see while they fly at falcon speeds. They are lighter brown (tannish) than the darker, grayish Peregrines, and have a buffy moustache. The big key is that overhead, they are darkest in the "armpits" close to their body, and the juveniles are quite a bit darker there than the adults.

Harriers are slender-bodied, with long narrow wings and tail. They usually have a dihedral "V" shape on their open-country hunting grounds, but on migration that changes to a bowed-wing flatter profile. The long tail is still distinctive, and when they do a turn, the white rump is a dead giveaway. Males are much lighter (gray-white) than females (mottled brown).

Bald Eagles are year-round residents, so identifying a migrant demands watching them for as long as we can, to make sure they have that "on a mission" look flying directly south. Identifying adults with their white head and tail is a no-brainer, but it gets trickier with first-through-fourth year immature birds. The most common mistake is calling a first year Bald eagle a "Golden" because it is so dark. First year juveniles have a dark body from below, with varying degrees of seemingly random white mottling on the underside. Juvenile Golden Eagles have a distinct white spot in the center of their underwing, and the inner tailfeathers are also white. No white elsewhere! Bald Eagles have increasing amounts of white (including their body feathers) as they age (2 - 4), and have an *almost* white head and tail by age four.

Bald Eagles fly with a totally flat frontal profile, and Golden Eagles have a slight dihedral, with the outer primary "fingers" slightly upturned. A Golden Eagle on migration is a hair-raising sight to see, wings folded slightly back and not moving even a twitch at 100-plus miles an hour, tacking like a sailboat on southwest headwinds.

Lastly, Ospreys fly with their distinctive arched and crooked-at-the-wrist long wings. Their wingbeats have been described as slow and "mechanical". They have a dark wrist and outer primaries, but otherwise are whitish with their distinctive dark eye-stripe from the side.

Happy hawking this fall!



## 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. 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.



### OCTOBER 2022 FIELD TRIPS

#### **SANDHILL CRANE VIEWING at WEST VALLEY, Saturday October 1, 6:00-8:00 PM.**

View Sandhill Cranes as they stage in the West Valley on their fall migration. See these magnificent birds as they fly in at sunset from their daily feeding in nearby agricultural fields to roost overnight in pothole wetland ponds. Join Denny Olson for an early evening crane viewing. Please call Denny at 406-249-3987 or [educator@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:educator@flatheadaudubon.org) to sign up.

#### **BISON and BIRDS at MOIESE, MT, Wednesday October 5, 6:00 AM-4:00 PM**

See bison, birds, and other wildlife on a day trip to the Bison Range. The range is home to up to 500 bison which can be viewed safely from your car. Other wildlife includes black bear, elk, deer, bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope, mountain cottontail, and more. More than two hundred bird species have been catalogued on the range. We are likely to see woodpeckers, raptors, and many passerines. The range protects one of the most endangered ecosystems in North America, the intermountain bunchgrass prairie. We will start the morning with a tour of the Visitor Center before driving over Red Sleep Mountain. Be prepared for short walks at designated trails with good walking shoes. Bring your binoculars, a scope if you have one, a lunch, snacks, and water. Due to limited pullouts for vehicles, we will be carpooling for this trip. Limited to 4 cars. Riders should plan to pay drivers \$7 for gas. There is also a cost of \$10 per vehicle for a day pass and we will share the cost of these passes. We will leave Kalispell at 6 AM and plan to return by 4 PM. Contact Darcy Thomas to register at 406-407-8263 or [darcy@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:darcy@flatheadaudubon.org).

**FALL MIGRATION at POTHOLE WETLANDS, WEST VALLEY, Sunday October 9, 9 AM-NOON.** See shorebirds, ducks, grebes, cranes, pipits and raptors. We will be viewing the West Valley Ponds from the roadside. Bring binoculars and scopes if you can. Carpooling is best for this field trip as pullouts are limited. Contact Darcy Thomas to register at 406-407-8263 or [darcy@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:darcy@flatheadaudubon.org).

#### **FALL TRANSITIONS at OWEN SOWERWINE NATURAL AREA, Sunday October 16, 9 AM-NOON.**

Join FAS Conservation Educator and long-time teaching naturalist Denny Olson on a fall walk at OSNA. Learn about birds and wildlife as they prepare for the upcoming winter. Expect to see our year-long resident birds including woodpeckers, nuthatches, chickadees, waxwings, juncos, and jays. This unstructured outing will include Denny's usual natural history lore, discussion, and stories. An unexpected bird or wildlife sighting may occur. Dress for the weather and bring binoculars. Contact Denny at (406) 249-3987 or [educator@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:educator@flatheadaudubon.org) to sign up.

## FIELD TRIP LEADER APPRECIATION & RECRUITMENT

Flathead Audubon would like to thank all the dedicated and enthusiastic FAS volunteers who have recently led field trips. These include: Denny Olson, Darcy Thomas, Dan Casey, Bob Lee, Cory Davis, Maria Mantas, Laura Katzman, Beth Watne and the Wild Wings staff, Kathy Ross, Derrick Rathe, Shannon and Bridger Donaldson, Steve Gniadek and Lewis Young.

This provides a connection to our outside world and valuable learning experiences. Well done!

We also would like to encourage new people to step forward and think about offering a field trip in the future. It doesn't have to be lengthy or complicated. You don't need to be an expert. If you know an area well and it has birds you would like to share with others please consider offering a field trip. If you prefer co-leading a field trip that can also be arranged. Any outing is welcome. Thanks.

*Natural Events To See This Month:*

*White-tailed Ptarmigan molt to pure white.*

### Flathead Valley Bird Report

by Dan Casey

#### Rare and Notables – Summer

Hot conditions early in the period, and smoky conditions later may have contributed to a relatively lackluster migration period; many shorebird locations had dried up, and birders were perhaps staying at home a bit more! Nevertheless, some good finds included the season’s first Herring Gulls, Anna’s Hummingbirds, and Lapland Longspur, along with some less common Buteos at the local hawk watch.

- 8/19 – **Boreal Owl** (1) Jewel Basin Road (Adrian A.)
- 8/26 – **Common Grackle** (up to 3) Creston, continuing through period (Craig H.)
- 8/27 – **Upland Sandpiper** (1) Creston (quite rare locally) (Craig H.)
- 9/03 – **Herring Gull** (1) Wayfarer’s State Park (first of fall) (David K.)
- 9/05 – **Swainson’s Hawk** (1) Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (bj W.) (another 9/14, Josh C.)
- 9/07 – **Anna’s Hummingbird** (1) Creston (Craig H.) (Another in Somers, 9/15, Al J.)
- 9/09 – **Broad-winged Hawk** (1) Jewel Basin Hawk

- Watch (Josh C.)
- 9/14 – **Greater White-fronted Goose** (1) West Glacier (Kyler S.)
- 9/14 – **Ferruginous Hawk** (1) Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (Josh C.)
- 9/15 – **Dusky Grouse** (2) Somers townsite, present several days (odd location) (Al J.)
- 9/16 – **Lapland Longspur** (1) Jewel Basin (Dan C.)

#### What to Expect – October 2022

Late September into October is typically the best time to see such rarities as jaegers and Sabine’s Gulls at area wetlands. As shorebird migration wanes, hawk migration is in full swing, with peak numbers expected at Mt. Brown and the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch. Mixed flocks of sparrows will fill the fields, fencelines and brushpiles. Look for White-throated, Harris’s, and Swamp Sparrows in particular among the more common Savannah, Lincoln’s and White-crowned Sparrow flocks. Waterfowl migration will also pick up, and the first cold fronts may bring scoters.

### Jewel Basin Hawk Watch Update

We have counted 660 raptors of 16 species during our first 21 surveys (through Sept 17<sup>th</sup>). Migration has been relatively slow to pick up, perhaps due to stable high pressure and smoke. This has been only the second time we have gone this deep into the migration season without recording a daily total of 100 or more birds counted. Our totals for our four most

common species (Sharp-shinned, Cooper’s and Red-tailed Hawks, Golden Eagles) were all below our 14-yr average for this point in the season, although just a few good days with passing cold fronts should remedy that! We recorded our 1000<sup>th</sup> American Kestrel over the history of the count on September 6<sup>th</sup>. Please consider joining us on the ridge! *by Dan Casey*

Turkey Vulture 4	Unidentified Accipiter 16	American Kestrel 35
Osprey 4	Broad-winged Hawk 1	Merlin 6
Bald Eagle 11	Swainson’s Hawk 2	Peregrine Falcon 2
Northern Harrier 23	Red-tailed Hawk 86	Prairie Falcon 2
Sharp-shinned Hawk 274	Ferruginous Hawk 1	Unidentified Eagle 1
Cooper’s Hawk 150	Unidentified Buteo 7	Unidentified Raptor 2
Northern Goshawk 10	Golden Eagle 23	<b>Total 660</b>

### West Valley Naturalists

West Valley Naturalists are back with presentations at West Valley School (2290 Farm to Market Road, Kalispell). Laura Katzman, Land Protection Specialist with Flathead Land Trust, will talk about the Sandhill Cranes which grace our valley each fall when hundreds of them refuel at a staging area in the West Valley on their migration. Flathead Land Trust, with help from FAS, helped conserve a portion of this staging area in 2018. These impressive birds depend on

wetlands and agricultural lands as they travel from their breeding to their wintering grounds. We will meet at **7 PM on Wed. Sept. 28 in the West Valley Middle School Commons area**. Guides will help you find your way. Please check out the wonderful West Valley Naturalist website created and maintained by Skip Via: <https://westvalleynaturalists.org/>

by Linda deKort

## Great Fish Community Challenge Benefits Us All

The 2022 Great Fish Community Challenge came to a close on September 16. Flathead Audubon was an active player this year. For the first year since we have been involved, it was finally possible to hold all of the Great Fish events live and in person. Seventy nonprofit organizations participated in the Challenge this year. The Great Fish Community Challenge has been a game changer for Flathead Valley nonprofits, many of whom rely on funds raised in the Challenge to cover a significant portion of their annual operating budget. These funds help nonprofits deliver important services to citizens of the Flathead Valley.

Some of our members represented us at the pop-up stations in Kalispell, Whitefish, Bigfork, Lakeside and Columbia Falls. Our members also at-

tended the two mandatory (rules!) meetings and the Launch Party. We had a crew of 6 operating our FAS booth at the Community Celebration and Fun Run and helping out with additional jobs during the Celebration. Behind the scenes, two of our members performed as our Fund Advisors and wrote thank you notes to everyone who donated, several prepared and emailed the fly-bys that you saw in your Inbox, prepared and arranged publicity for our chapter and crunched the numbers as we tallied donations. Our efforts paid off, as people from all over the Flathead Valley showed us with their donations that they believe in FAS and what we do. To everyone involved, THANK YOU, GOOD JOB, and we hope to include you next year!

*by Kay Mitchell*

## CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

### Highlights from the September 6, 2022 Board of Directors Meeting

- ◆ The Birds of Prey Festival is on track to be held on 9/17, Jewel Basin Hawk Watch is currently being conducted, and our participation in the Great Fish Community Challenge is in full swing. It's a busy time of year!!
- ◆ Darcy Thomas is interested in doing research, a newsletter article, and some community outreach/ education about the risks to Osprey from finding orange baling twine for their nests and then becoming entangled, resulting in injury or death.
- ◆ Gael Bissell is gathering information about who, when and how Flathead Audubon members and officers were involved in the early development of the recently approved Conservation Easement at Lost Trail Wildlife Refuge. Several Board members attended the celebratory ceremony held in August.
- ◆ Cindy Roberts reported the Education Committee is ready for the new school year and will be promoting the Education Kits and Videos to local educators. Denny Olson has several schools participating in the Comprehensive Bird Education Program, and he will begin classroom presentation and field trips this fall.
- ◆ Margaret Parodi reported on field trips being planned, and is still seeking additional trip leaders so more trips can be offered.

## Lead Bullets and Wildlife

By Lewis Young and Kate Stone



Found near Hamilton MT, 2014, this Bald Eagle died from lead poisoning. Photo courtesy Brooke Tanner.

With big game rifle hunting season approaching you can help wildlife by switching to non-lead bullets if you are hunter using lead bullets. Lead bullets, even copper jacketed lead bullets, fired from high velocity guns fragment on impact losing 20-40% of their mass when they hit an object. As many as 200 fragments disperse throughout the carcass and are often too small to see. The fragments may permeate the meat you bring home and often riddle the gut piles and carcasses left in the field.

Lead fragments are a problem because avian and mammalian scavengers

feed on the gut piles and carcasses and ingest the lead fragments. Overwintering eagles in many parts of Montana test positive for elevated lead levels and several die each year from acute lead poisoning.

Simply switching to a non-lead bullet makes a difference. A voluntary program in the Jackson Hole area of Wyoming to get hunters to switch to non-lead bullets resulted in a corresponding decrease in the blood-lead levels of eagles using the area so it does work. Non-lead bullets are available in factory loaded ammunition and for handloaders. Non-lead ammunition costs about the same as premium lead bullets.

Give our eagles and other wildlife a break and consider switching to non-lead bullets.



# Thank You!

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

Donations to Flathead Audubon that are accompanied by dedications are listed each month in this space. The full list of 2022 donors will appear in February 2023.

### Tribute Gifts

Linda King in memory of Alice Bebout  
Linda Miller in memory of Brian Peck.

### OSNA WORK DAY

- ◇ Saturday, October 1, from 9-Noon.
- ◇ Meet at Kalispell Montessori parking lot (Willow Glen Drive)
- ◇ Bring gloves and water. Questions? Pam: 406-270-0225

### Visitor to Owen Sowerwine Natural Area

*"I had the pleasure of exploring Owen Sowerwine Nature Preserve today. What a fantastic place! I live in Spokane and I visit Columbia Falls at least once a year and have for the last 10-15 years but this was the first I had heard about Sowerwine. Even in August in midday I could see that May and June would be crawling with birds. I had 26 species and I'd bet in June you could easily see and hear 60. You have done great work here and I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate what you have created. I look forward to visiting Sowerwine every year. Alan McCoy Board president Spokane Audubon" (used with permission from Alan McCoy).*



### 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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## FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

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Bob Lee [bob@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:bob@flatheadaudubon.org)



# the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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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.

**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 [darcy@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:darcy@flatheadaudubon.org).**

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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?

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