



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

January 2023
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Common
Redpoll



eBird

Owen Sowerwine, The Man

Who Was Owen Sowerwine?

Ever wonder about the person behind a named landmark, national forest, or natural area? How about our local Owen Sowerwine Natural Area? A look at the headstone mounted on an erratic boulder in the back row of the Columbia Falls Fairview Cemetery reveals Owen Evan Sowerwine. Aug 1, 1912 - Jan 24, 1975. "Educator, Humanitarian, Conservationist, Friend. His Goal and Achievement To Leave This a Finer Valley". Wow, what a beautiful epitaph!

The first of four children, Owen was born in Anaconda, Montana and raised in New Jersey. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. Owen spent summers near Anaconda (his father retired as vice president of the Anaconda Company) and on Swan Lake where he developed his love for Montana.

At age 23, he married Alice Gardiner of Anaconda and in 1946 they moved to Kalispell and raised three children, including David, Flathead Audubon Society member and amazing civic rights activist in his own right. David described his dad as modest, gentle and very, very smart!

Setting the Stage for Conservation

In 1972 the Montana constitution was written and ratified granting each of us the right to a clean and healthful environment. The 1974 Montana state legislature devoted much of its energy to environmental issues and created among other things, the Montana Natural Areas Act of 1974. In the early 1970's some Flathead area conservation-minded locals identified a special place, a riparian area located on 442-

acres of State school trust land and proposed it as the state's first Natural Area.

In the early 1970's, the Chair of the new Flathead County Park Board, and one of the most energetic proponents of the Natural Area project, was Owen Sowerwine. Sowerwine had previously been a member of the State Land Board and was well known in the Flathead as an avid outdoorsman, a dedicated conservationist, and a civic leader. The State Land Board recommended that the new area be named after Owen Sowerwine, who had died in January 1975. A public hearing on the proposed designation was enthusiastic and in 1978 the State Land Board designated the parcel for "natural area use".

Owen Sowerwine Natural Area was established. The official dedication ceremony took place on September 9, 1978. An article in The Daily Inter Lake the following day begins: "It became official Saturday. A wild thicket enfolded in the coils of the Flathead and Stillwater Rivers is now protected under the name of Owen Sowerwine, the longtime Flathead Valley resident and conservationist who initiated the fight to preserve the area." The original

Owen Sowerwine management plan was written in the late 1970s by the Flathead County Park Board. The forward to that plan, written by another community visionary and leader, Sam Bibler, calls on the managers "... to keep the heavy hand of man as much out of the management as possible, and to proceed as carefully and thoughtfully as possible."

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JANUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday January 2, 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, January 9, 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 January 7, 10:30 AM-noon. BEGINNER BIRD WALK: WOODLAND PARK, KALISPELL . See page 5.

Sunday January 8, 9 A M- noon. WINTER RIVER BOTTOMLAND: BIRDS, TRACKS, HYDOLOGY AND PLANT ADAPTATIONS. See page 5.

Sunday January 15, 10 AM-3 PM. FLATHEAD VALLEY RAPTOR PROWL. See page 5.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

American Crow

by Kat Petersen

Their iconic black glistening feathers, generalist beak, and recognizable “caw” makes them easily identifiable to even non-birders: The American Crow. Crows are one of the most common and widespread genus of birds in the world. On a recent trip to Thailand, I was awoken with the familiar call of a crow who was remarkably identical to our American Crow.

If these birds are so abundant and universal, what makes them so interesting? Why do researchers and birders alike find constant intrigue and perpetual fascination with these mundane avians? The answer is their intelligence. Similar to many quandaries in the animal kingdom, there is still much humans do not know about the behavior of the crow.

Crows are highly social and seldom seen alone. Where there is one, another is surely lingering near. They are monogamous and mate for life. Living in family groups, they share territory with both grown offspring and new broods. Where resources are abundant, they can be found in large flocks of both related and unrelated birds.

John Marzluff, the infamous corvid researcher who observed crows’ ability for facial recognition, writes in “Gift of the Crow”, that our fascination with corvids stems from their intellect. The novel describes the combination of their perception and intelligence to be a reflection of humanity’s own cognition. Another

cial interactions indicates another unique aspect of its unwavering intelligence.

In recent studies of wildlife behavior, scientists acknowledge the importance of social play in cognitive development. The brain activity used during social play allows cognitive abilities to grow in a portion of the brain not used by other animals.

Social play has been observed in an array of mammals, but the most elaborate playful interactions is exhibited in animals such as chimpanzees, wolves, and humans. As for birds, corvids are known to have some of the most complex and robust social interactions, that which is comparable to canids and primates.

For over a century play behavior has been noted in 10 orders of birds. However, most of these behaviors are solitary play. One example is locomotory play. If you have ever spied a raptor gliding along the wind in aerobic flight, going nowhere but appearing to enjoy its time in the sky, this is locomotory play. However, few avian species are known to find



Kris Tsujikawa

fun interacting with other birds. Among the incredibly rare birds who have fun with one another are crows!

Social play is extremely difficult to document in birds and still vastly unexplored in corvids by biologists. But the good news is you can view these interactions in your own backyard! They can be seen toying with one another strictly for the amusement.

So next time you see the crows outside your window, take a second to watch, and see their enjoyment with one another. May you be reminded of their incredible social intelligence and how we may share more in common with crows than it seems.



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telling discovery of corvid intelligence is their unique ability to build compound tools. Previously only described in primates and humans, this as a phenomenal indicator of the depth of cognition crows have. But beyond their outstanding memory and ability for complex problem solving, a crow’s playful nature and so-



Birds of the World

January Program

Bird Migration

presented by Meghan Fyelling

Meghan Fyelling is the Research Director and Avian Ecologist with the University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab. She will be talking about bird migration with particular emphasis on our own Swainson's Thrush and Gray Catbird.



University
of Montana

January Meeting FAS

We will be continuing our hybrid meetings through the winter for those that may not want to drive in wintry conditions. For those coming to the meeting, on December 12 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.

For those joining virtually, when you use the Zoom link, you will eventually 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.

For information on how to attend by Zoom, or how to get an audio connection to the meeting by phone, contact cory@flatheadaudubon.org

Looking forward to seeing everyone!

Citizen Scientists Needed for Rosy-Finch Feeder Surveys!

Do you feed birds during the cold winter months, or know of a friend or family member that does? If so, we at Montana Audubon encourage you to join us and contribute to a large Rosy-Finch study spanning at least eight western states!

This coming winter Montana Audubon is once again partnering with Utah's Sageland Collaborative on the multi-state Rosy-Finch Project in an effort to better understand Rosy-Finches' population status, distribution, survival rates, demography and migratory tendencies, all of which are poorly understood. Rosy-Finches breed around cliffs and snowfields in our highest elevations, and are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

That is why Montana Audubon and the Sageland Collaborative are members of the Rosy-Finch Working Group, which was created in order to foster collaboration among Rosy-Finch researchers, managers, and other interested parties, with the ultimate goal of developing conservation strategies for Rosy-Finches and their habitat. Before devising effective conservation strategies for these remarkable, hardy little birds, we first need to better understand their life-history, population status and distribution.

This is where you come in!

While population studies of Rosy-Finches in their remote, difficult-to-access summer breeding habitat are extremely challenging, these birds move to lower elevations when the snow flies, and regularly visit bird feeders in many parts of western and central Montana. We are looking for birdwatchers that are interested in helping with our Rosy-Finch conservation efforts by doing as little as watching their- or a friend's - feeder for 20 minutes, only once a month, from December to April, and reporting their observations. Even if you rarely or never see Rosy-Finches at your feeder, your contribution will be valued!

While time commitment for this important project is fairly minimal, we are asking interested individuals to review an hour-long training webinar that is recorded here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVHZJjwn6Kw>

Please contact our Avian Specialist Bo Crees (bcrees@mtaudubon.org) or Volunteer Coordinator Cassidy Dinkel (cassidy@mtaudubon.org) for more information and to get started.

We hope to hear from you soon!



Conservation Educator's Niche by Denny Olson

Studies about nature's effects on stress and health are a growth industry worldwide. In England, an 18-year study showed that those who lived closest to green space reported less mental distress (*after* adjusting for variables, like income, education and employment). In the Netherlands, scientists found lower incidence of 15 diseases – including diabetes, depression, anxiety, heart disease, asthma and migraines, in those people who lived within a half-mile of green space. In Scotland, epidemiologists found the same results for those who lived near green space – *even if the study subjects didn't use the natural areas* – and the lowest income people benefitted the most. In Toronto, those with more trees on their city block showed lower levels of stress hormones and mortality, and better heart and metabolic health. Studies in Sweden, Japan, San Francisco, Finland, South Korea, Switzerland and Rikers Island in New York City all show parallel results. Indeed it has been shown multiple times that being a hospital patient with trees and other plants outside the window decreases recuperation time.

Free play at schools is called recess (although, in fairness I know some great teachers who use sneakily-structured free play to set up lessons). Evidence-based studies have shown, since the 1800's, that people learn better with distributed effort, punctuated by breaks in the learning process. Outdoor recess has been shown to increase focus, improve the immune system, increase Vitamin D (which increases learning and productivity), reduces stress (especially in children mildly or overtly hyperactive), helps to mature socialization and perfect communication, reduce obesity and improve overall wellness, and "light up the entire brain" with aerobic activity. Physically active children improve their academic performance, have a better attitude about school, and – ahem -- improve their test scores.

And yet, schools are eliminating recess because it "wastes valuable time preparing for

standardized tests", and kids are spending increasing time in front of a screen, now at an average of seven hours per day – just a bit more time than they spend in their recess-less schools. And, in some classrooms, they watch a "smart board" (read: another screen, only bigger) for a considerable part of their school day.

Further erosion of outdoor time is accomplished by simple perception. Mass media sensationalizes the rare – and becoming more rare, crime on a child, producing even more overprotective parents with a bunker mentality regarding playing outside. With the exception of the unprecedented pandemic years, violent crime rates are dropping, but we are hearing about it more. Politicians whose goal it is to scare the public into voting for them use misplaced fear to their own ends. Lawyers are ready to sue for reckless endangerment at the drop of a hat, and the bureaucratic public educational system views the status quo as far more important than mountains of evidence to the contrary. We design our education system to prepare our children for rote nineteenth and twentieth century work (assembly line) and the twenty-first century will demand the kinds of work that will require the creativity honed from the arts, music, and unfettered creative *outdoor* play.

Perhaps there should be "research literacy" standards (and comparative tests, of course) for school administrators and school board members. Ignorance of the above kinds of *evidence-based facts* is, or at least should be considered, a form of malpractice. The sensory deprivation tank we call "the classroom" will never be where problems with education will be solved. Children need a classroom with walls at the outer edge of the universe. Nature *works* as a time-tested pathway to children's well-being. Bussing costs aside, we need to find a way to do it.

Reminder to taxpayers, school board members, administrators, teachers and over-protective parents: It's about the kids. Your degrees of over-caution and frugality can take a bite out of their future. The outdoors is one of the basic intellectual and emotional food groups. Let's feed them what they need.

"Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." Aldo Leopold

WINTER FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU!

All Flathead Audubon field trips are free and open to the public and are geared for all ages and levels of field experience. They are led by area biologists, retired professionals, and some of the best birders in the region. Please read our field trip guidelines at <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.



JANUARY 2023 FIELD TRIPS

BEGINNER BIRD WALK: WOODLAND PARK, KALISPELL SATURDAY JANUARY 7, 10:30 AM-noon

Please join Darcy Thomas for a morning walk at Woodland Park. This is a leisurely bird walk suited for families with children and beginner birders. We will meet in the parking lot on the east side of Woodland Park (along Woodland Park Dr and across from Woodland Qwik Stop). Please leave your dogs at home. The terrain is level and accessible for most but be prepared for icy walkways (think YakTracks). We will look for Wood Ducks, Flickers, Chickadees and Nuthatches.

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

SUNDAY JANUARY 8, 9 A M- noon. (weather permitting). Owen Sowerwine Natural Area.

Join FAS Conservation Educator and long-time teaching naturalist Denny Olson on a winter hike. Winter birds, bird songs, tracking, botanizing, and seat-of-the-pants interpretation will be the unstructured itinerary. This is one of the best spots in the area to see Pileated and other woodpeckers, many kinds of chickadees, Bohemian and Cedar waxwings in flocks of thousands, Pine Grosbeaks, Townsend's Solitaires--and there is always an unexpected bird! Not just ID, but lots of natural history lore, which is Denny's trademark. Dress warm, bring binoculars and snow boots, and check with us on the need for snowshoes if the snow is deep. Call Denny at (406) 249-3987 or e-mail denny@flatheadaudubon.org to sign up and get directions. Space is limited.

FLATHEAD VALLEY RAPTOR PROWL: SUNDAY JANUARY 15, 10 AM-3 PM.

Dan Casey will lead us on a tour of the open country favored by winter raptors in the West Valley, Creston and/or Lower Valley area near Somers. Our route will be finalized based on local raptor surveys, and we will focus on the roadside identification of the varied forms and plumages of Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks. Prairie Falcon and Snowy Owl are also possibilities. We will meet at 10:00 AM at the United Way parking lot at Gateway West Mall, and will return there by 3pm. Limited to 10 participants; we will car-pool to the degree of comfort of participants.

Sign up is required. Please call Dan at (406) 270-5941 or e-mail dan@flatheadaudubon.org to sign up.



FLATHEAD AUDUBON MISSION STATEMENT

THE FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY IS A LOCAL CHAPTER
OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY.



- ⇒ OUR MISSION IS TO CONSERVE BIRDS, WILDLIFE HABITAT, AND ECOSYSTEM DIVERSITY.
- ⇒ WE PROMOTE AWARENESS AND APPRECIATION OF THE NATURAL WORLD THROUGH EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND ADVOCACY PROGRAMS.
- ⇒ WE WORK WITH DIVERSE GROUPS AND AGENCIES TO ACHIEVE SOUND DECISIONS ON NATURAL RESOURCE ISSUES.
- ⇒ WHILE FOCUSING OUR EFFORTS IN NORTHWEST MONTANA, WE BELIEVE IN THE PROTECTION OF THE EARTH AND ALL OF ITS INHABITANTS.

Natural Events To See This Month:

Spruce Grouse are in trees now, except for nighttime roosts in powder snow.

Flathead Valley Bird Report

by Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – Nov/Dec 2022

As we shifted into winter weather, smaller lakes froze and the waterfowl flocks on Flathead Lake and River grew, particularly mixed flocks of Aythya species (Redhead, Canvasback, scaup). The first Snowy Owls of the season arrived, and there were a few notable lingering birds that more typically leave us during winter (e.g. Varied Thrushes, Spotted Towhee, Brown-headed Cowbird). Bohemian Waxwing flocks began to build. Rarities included Gyrfalcon, Pacific Loons and Short-billed Gull. See also: <https://ebird.org/region/US-MT-029?yr=all>

- 11/19 – Dunlin (1) Polson (Zach S.)**
- 11/21 – White-winged Scoter (1) Somers Bay (Dan C.)**
- 11/23 – Brown -headed Cowbird (1, throughout period) Creston (Craig H.)**
- 11/24 – Spotted Towhee (1, throughout period) Somers (Dan C.)**
- 11/25 – Pacific Loon (1) Elmo (Braydon L.); also one at Wayfarer's SP, 11/26 (Jake B.)**
- 11/26 – Cackling Goose (3), Bigfork (Dan C.); also six there on 12/03 (Dalton S.)**

11/29 – Varied Thrush (1) Somers, through 12/8 (Dan C.); also one at C. Falls, 12/04 (Bridger D.)

11/29 – Gyrfalcon (1) Creston (Craig H.)

12/03 – Purple Finch (1) Bigfork (Leslie K.)

12/04 – Short-billed Gull (1) Bigfork (Shawn R.)

12/04 – Snowy Owl (2) West Valley Ponds area (Jake B. and Dick W.)

12/08 – Rusty Blackbird (1) Creston (Craig H.)

12/12 – Snow Goose (1) Creston (Craig H.)

What to Expect – January 2022

While midwinter might be the time of lowest avian diversity, there are pleasures to be had. The Flathead and Mission Valleys offer a wide variety of raptors, from numerous Rough-legged and a variety of Red-tailed Hawks, to falcons, Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls. Our valley also hosts the greatest variety of wintering waterfowl in the state. We shall see if it is another good year for Snowy Owls near Somers, Polson, or in the West Valley. Will there be any influx of winter finches (e.g. Common Redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks)?

CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

Highlights from the December 5, 2022 Board of Directors Meeting

- Jake Bramante provided instructions on accessing and using calendars and files via Google, in an effort to improve the coordination and information-sharing for Board members.
- Dan Casey is helping coordinate some raptor count routes in the Flathead Valley, which were established by the Winter Raptor Survey Project out of Bend, Oregon.
- Progress continues on various aspects of the Conservation Easement for the Owen Sowerwine area. An End-of-the-Year appeal seeking support for the Conservation Easement will be mailed next week.
- Linda Du Lac expressed appreciation for all the support and training she has received in her new position as Membership Chairperson. She has been busy making contacts about lapsed memberships.
- Denny Olson completed a mid-year Conservation Education assessment, and it will be reviewed in the near future at an Education Committee meeting, and used as input for strategic planning.

Natural Events To See This Month:

Hairy Woodpeckers are now acting territorial.

Owen Sowerwine continued from page 1
Conservation Legacy

The Sowerwine family farm encompasses 157 acres along the shores of Fennon Slough, a meandering channel of the Flathead River near its final destination into Flathead Lake. In 1988 Alice Sowerwine, with encouragement from her son, David, donated a conservation easement to Flathead Land Trust on the family farm. This became Flathead Land Trust's first conservation easement. It took courage for the Sowerwine family to choose Flathead Land Trust in their infancy to hold their easement. The idea of a conservation easement 36 years ago was radical. People never thought we'd run out of open land.

Owen helped protect yet another treasure in the Flathead. He worked with landowners on the north shore to purchase easements from them and these easements later became the Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area.

Enduring Conservation Ethic

Owen's son, David, gave a little chuckle when I asked about his Dad's conservation ethic. He asked if I had heard about the "Great Smoke Case". Recall that Owen's Dad retired as Vice President of Anaconda Copper Mining Company. Through legal wrangling, the Company won in the courts again and again over public outcry about the damages caused by toxic emissions from the Company's smelters. David suggested, maybe his Dad was doing family penance. I'd say that's as fine a reason as any to live a life dedicated to conservation and community service, especially for a practicing Unitarian. And what a lasting legacy, if we can follow through with a permanent conservation easement for Owen Sowerwine Natural Area.

See the full article on our website at <https://FlatheadAudubon.org>



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+
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FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

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Owen Sowerwine Natural Area	Cory Davis	cory@flatheadaudubon.org
	Pam Willison	pam@flatheadaudubon.org
Outreach	Jake Bramante	jake@flatheadaudubon.org
	Jan Metzmaker	jan@flatheadaudubon.org
Programs and Hospitality		vacant

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the

Pileated Post

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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.**

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



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If you currently get a paper copy by mail please consider switching to email;

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



FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

Membership Individual or Family

- Basic Membership ————— \$25
Pays for newsletter and operating costs
- Supporting Membership ————— \$40
Extra \$15 funds local projects such as
Conservation Education and
Owen Sowerwine Natural Area
- Additional Donation of \$ _____
Total \$ _____

New member? Renewal?

If you wish to receive a paper copy by
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