



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

February 2023
VOLUME 47, NUMBER 6Long-eared
owl

Thanks for an Awesome SOS Campaign Kickoff!

See Gael Bissell's article on page 3.

River Design Group Awarded Flathead Audubon Business Conservation Achievement Recognition

By Darcy Thomas

River Design Group (RDG), one of the leading river restoration consulting firms in the Intermountain West and Pacific Northwest, was founded in the Flathead Valley in 2003 by four individuals with a passion for rivers. Since the beginning, the company has promoted a healthy work-life balance and maintained a culture deeply rooted in a restoration ethic and respect for aquatic ecosystems. Building upon a reputation as a leader in the restoration industry, in 20 years RDG has grown to be an employee-owned business of 30 professionals with offices in Montana, Oregon and Idaho.



Provided by River Design Group

Simply stated, River Design Group is committed to ecosystem and river restoration. However, their work is anything but simple. Their team of highly knowledgeable and skilled engineers, biologists, ecologists, surveyors, geologists, geomorphologists, and support staff tackle complex environmental problems to restore river ecosystems. Their services include restoration, dam removal, fish passage, wetland and river assessments, remote sensing such as wastewater risk mapping and dam monitoring and land surveys. While RDG is based in Whitefish, they complete projects in Montana, Idaho,

Wyoming, Oregon, Washington and California. RDG is involved with a project from the initial site survey through completion of construction and oversight of the finished project.

Over the last 20 years, RDG has completed over 600 river restoration design projects, assessed or

restored over 1,500 miles of river, designed and built 70 culverts and bridges for fish passage, removed or modified 47 dams, implemented 50 fish screen

projects, and restored 1,800 acres of wetland or estuary. Some of the projects River Design Group has worked on near their home base include the restoration of Krause Creek in Bigfork, the Milltown Dam Restoration near Missoula, the Trail Creek fish passage in Seeley Lake, and restorations on the Swan River National Wildlife Refuge in Swan Valley and Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge near Marion.

The work of the RDG team provides vast benefits for wildlife, fish, and birds. It is the pleasure of Flathead Audubon Society to acknowledge RDG with a Business Conservation Achievement Recognition. Matt Daniels, Principal Engineer, will accept the award on behalf of River Design Group at the Flathead Audubon meeting on February 13.

FEBRUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, February 6, 5:30 p.m. FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Public Meeting Room, Fish, Wildlife & Parks building, 490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell. You may bring your dinner.

Monday, February 13, 7 p.m. 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.

Sunday, February 5, noon-3 p.m. BIRDING at NORTH SHORE FLATHEAD LAKE WPA. See page 5.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Golden-crowned Kinglets Hardly a Life of Royalty

by Karen Nichols

Golden-crowned Kinglets are a mystery and a marvel of wintertime survival in the north woods. These grey and olive birds weigh only the mass of two pennies -- just bigger than a Rufous Hummingbird. This species is Montana's smallest permanent resident passerine and it eats insects all year.

Named for its brilliant gold and fiery orange crown-patch (just yellow on the female) bordered by black, *Regulus satrapa* is Greek for "a ruler who wears a gold crown." This royal name might accurately reflect its appearance, but the Golden-crowned Kinglet's lifestyle more closely resembles a peasant than a prince.

These tiny birds winter throughout the United States, breed in Canada and Alaska, and are year-round residents in western Montana and the coniferous forests of Northeast and western states.

While we Montanans cradled our hot cups of cocoa and stoked our fires during the recent December cold snap, the tiny Golden-crowned Kinglets fluffed their downy feathers and likely shivered through the nights that plummeted to minus 35. At daybreak, they began non-stop feeding, often hanging upside down from small twigs, using their tiny bills to pluck soft-bodied arthropods.

In Bernd Heinrich's *Winter World*, he describes watching four kinglets feed for over an hour during a cold day. "The birds foraged tirelessly, without pause. I timed them at an average of 45 hop-flights per minute, without any apparent change of pace." He once checked the gizzard of a dead kinglet in winter, finding 39 geometrid (inchworm) caterpillars.

The bird must eat constantly to brave the cold and maintain its high body temperature of 43 to 44 degrees Centigrade or 111 degrees Fahrenheit. Its body temperature is about 2 degrees Centigrade higher than that of most birds.

Scientists cannot fully explain how they survive brutally cold nights, when darkness stops their ceaseless feeding. They are not known to roost in cavities at night like chickadees and nuthatches do. When sunset comes, kinglets roost nearby, wherever night finds them.

Researchers speculate that kinglets may dip into torpor at night, but have found little direct evidence. Kinglets have been observed huddling together at night in small groups of 2 to 4 birds on a protected tree branch or beneath a snow-covered brush pile, shivering to maintain their body temperature.

Golden-crowned Kinglets are covered with highly-insulating downy



Len Jellico

feathers that they can fluff out to an inch thick. Heinrich determined kinglets had about four times greater feather mass committed to insulation than to flight. At night, they tuck their heads and feet into the down, which helps to maintain the difference between body and air temperature of up to 78 degrees Centigrade.

If a kinglet goes without food for only a few hours during the day, it will die. Golden-crowned Kinglets suffer an average winter mortality rate of 87 percent. There are reports of 100 percent mortality during severe winter storms.

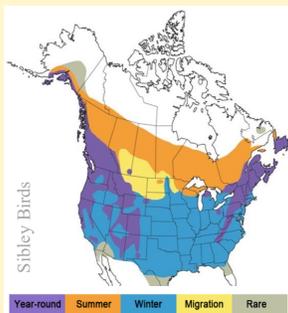
To offset the extreme winter mortality rates, kinglets produce unusually high numbers of eggs. The average clutch size is 8 to 9 eggs and most pairs produce two broods a year.

Pairs begin nesting in early spring, the female choosing a nest site in the upper canopy of a mature conifer, often beneath a heavy limb. They collect moss, lichen, spider silk, insect cocoons, downy plant matter, and birch bark strips to build a dense hammock-shaped nest. They line the nest with up to 1½ inches of insulation including hare fur and feathers from other birds. Spring snows accumulating on the conifer branch above the nest can provide additional insulation.

Few nests have been reported in Montana. One sighting near Libby in 1941 was of a pair of adults taking materials to a nest during the third week of March. Fledglings have been reported as late as mid-August in western Montana, likely reflecting multiple nestings (*Birds of Montana*, Marks, Henricks, Casey).

As the first nestlings fledge, the female starts building another nest for her next brood. The male takes over feeding the first brood. The female stacks her eggs in two layers, usually five on the bottom and four on top. How does the female kinglet adequately incubate eggs laid in two layers? Kinglets can heat up their legs to a temperature of 39 degrees Centigrade to circulate heat all throughout the nest, incubating and shuffling the tiny eggs. Nesting success is over 80 percent (Heinrich).

Continued on page 4.



February Program

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Bison Range

presented by Stephanie Gillin

Stephanie Gillin, Information and Education Program Manager for the Confederated Tribes, will talk about the Bison Range Restoration.

Stephanie has been a Wildlife Biologist for 21 years with the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribal Wildlife Management Program. She has worked with students, both on and off the Reservation, educating them about wildlife and the Tribe's cultural connection to them. For the past year she has been part of a group working at the Bison Range to remold the museum at the existing Visitor Center to present the story of the Tribe as told by the Tribe.



Provided by Stephanie Gillin

FAS FEBRUARY MEETING

We will be continuing our hybrid meetings through the winter for those who may not want to drive in wintry conditions. For those coming to the meeting, on February 13, we'll meet in Room 26 of the Gateway Mall (United Way building) at 7 p.m. 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 to join the meeting, you will 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!

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

Thanks for an Awesome SOS Campaign Kickoff!

By Gael Bissell

Thanks to all for your very generous donations to the Secure Owen Sowerwine (SOS) Campaign!

To date, we have received about 70 donations through our Year End Giving Campaign, including several wonderful donations directed to the Flathead Land Trust. Combining these, Flathead Audubon has raised just over \$16,000 or 16 percent of our goal. We hope to reach \$25,000 by March 1 before we begin our community-wide Spring Match campaign in partnership with the Flathead Land Trust and Flathead Lakers. Spread the word! Maybe your friends and relatives can help us get to \$25,000 by March 1.

To help us reach our goal, go to <https://flatheadaudubon.org/sos> to make an online donation. Or mail your donation check with SOS on the memo line to Flathead Audubon Society, PO Box 9173, Kalispell, 59904.

All SOS designated funds will go directly to purchase a conservation easement on the Owen Sowerwine property by Flathead Land Trust, once approved by the Montana State Land Board at the end of 2023. Questions? Contact gael@flatheadaudubon.org. **THANK YOU AWESOME MEMBERS!!**

Apologies

Lynda Saul should have been listed as the author of "Owen Sowerwine, The Man" on page 1 of the January Pileated Post. We apologize for the omission. In addition, the link provided for the full story was incorrect. You can read the full story at <https://flatheadaudubon.org/conservation/owen-sowerwine-the-man/>

The **FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY** is affiliated with the National Audubon Society and Montana Audubon. We provide free local field trips open to all, nature education in the Flathead Valley, manage Owen Sowerwine for wildlife habitat and quiet recreation, and organize and support the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch, as well as provide free birding field trips open to all. We meet the second Monday of each month September through May. The meeting includes a program on conservation or nature. The Flathead Audubon Board of Directors meets the first Monday of each month. Both meetings are open to the public. See page 1 for times and locations.



Photo by JP Edge
Hungry Horse News

Conservation Educator's Niche

by Denny Olson

From a recent, unfortunately unattributed, social media post ..

"When Florence Merriam Bailey was born in 1863, birds were more often seen ornamenting women's hats

than they were in the wild. In fact, on one walk through Manhattan in 1886, she counted 40 different species, stuffed and mounted for fashion. The pioneering ornithologist wanted to stop this trend, which killed an estimated 5 million birds a year. Her solution was to encourage people to go out and admire living birds through bird watching. 'We won't say too much about the hats,' she declared. 'We'll take the girls afield, and let them get acquainted with the birds. Then of inborn necessity, they will wear feathers never more.'

Bailey developed an early interest in birds, but when she went to Smith College in 1882, she learned that most ornithologists had little interest in bird behavior. Instead, they studied birds which had been killed, skinned, and mounted for private or museum collections. Bailey proposed that naturalists should learn to observe living birds in their habitats. She recommended an opera glass to allow bird watchers to see details: 'The student who goes afield armed with opera-glass,' she declared, 'will not only add more to our knowledge than he who goes armed with a gun, but will gain for (themselves) a fund of enthusiasm and a lasting store of pleasant memories.'

In 1889, at the age of 26, she published *Birds Through An Opera-Glass*. It was the first modern bird watching field guide: an illustrated guide to recognizing 70 common species in the wild, written for hobbyists and young people. Her approach of watching birds through magnification formed the basis of modern bird watching, which still uses binoculars today. Her book was also unusual because it was published under her own name, an uncommon

practice at the time. Bailey's independent and feminist streaks come out in her writing about her beloved birds too. 'Like other ladies, the little feathered brides have to bear their husbands' names, however inappropriate,' she lamented. 'What injustice! Here an innocent creature with an olive-green back and yellowish breast has to go about all her days known as the Black-throated Blue Warbler, just because that happens to describe the dress of her spouse!'

Bailey went on to write over 100 journal articles and ten books, including the *Handbook of Birds of the Western United States*, which remained a standard text for over 50 years. Bailey was named the first woman associate member of the American Ornithologists' Union in 1885; in 1929, she became its first woman fellow and received its Brewster Medal, which recognizes authors of exceptional work about birds, in 1931. In a fitting tribute to this trailblazing advocate for birds, eminent American biologist Joseph Grinnell named a subspecies of mountain chickadee after her in 1908: with the scientific name of *Parus gambeli baileyae* and the common name of Mrs. Bailey's Chickadee."

From the times when Florence probably risked a black eye and split lip for such audacity toward a few-thousand-year tradition of misogyny, we've come a short way toward gender full-partnership. Fifteen women are now elected heads of state in the world (out of almost 200 countries). My best male friends all agree that most of the world's political problems will not be solved until women are fully in charge. Florence is our kind of woman. And, I get to watch Mrs. Bailey's Chickadee go in and out of a nest box just outside my office window every day -- nesting in the spring, and warming in the winter. Every time I lift my "opera glasses" to get a better look, I think, "Oh yeah, she started that, too ..."

"*She Heard the Birds: The Story of Florence Merriam Bailey*" is a beautiful little picture book about her life.

Kinglets *continued from page 2.*

Golden-crowned Kinglets are more often heard than seen, so it is always a special treat to see the breeding males with their fiery orange crest. Listen for their high-pitched *tsee-tsee-tsee* call notes in the crowns of mature trees. I often cannot distinguish between the calls of a Brown Creeper and a Golden-crowned Kinglet, so I hope for a glimpse of the kinglet's erratic movements to help tell them apart.

In Montana, Golden-crowned Kinglets depend on mature and old-growth forests of spruce-fir and cedar-grand-fir with dense canopy cover for breeding. In winter, they feed in more diverse habitats, including deciduous forests, second growth or slash piles.

While the breeding range has expanded in the Midwest and eastern U.S. due to spruce and other conifer plantings, populations have declined in Montana, where data indicate declines of 8.2 percent per year between 2000-2010. (*Birds of Montana*, Marks, Hendricks and Casey).

Like Brown creepers, Golden-crowned Kinglets have a high affinity for old-growth forests. Populations on breeding grounds have been negatively affected by logging and clear-cutting (<https://birdsoftheworld.org>). We can assist these kinglets by maintaining extensive stands of mature and old-growth conifers. And by maintaining our own curiosity and enthusiasm for these survivors who may resemble little kings but hardly have a royal life of luxury.

This is a short version of the Bird of the Month feature to appear in February on <https://flatheadaudubon.com>.

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.



Check our website for newly scheduled field trips & events.

BIRDING at NORTH SHORE FLATHEAD LAKE WPA, Sunday, February 5, noon-3 p.m. Join Shannon and Bridger Donaldson for an afternoon of birding along Flathead Lake's north shore. We will meet at the Flathead Waterfowl Production Area. Encompassing over 1,800 acres, the WPA is a wonderful mix of habitats. February is one of the slower birding months but the north shore keeps a nice variety of birds all winter. We are likely to see eagles as well as both Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks. American Tree Sparrows are possible in the thickets and you never know who might pop up in or around the frozen marsh areas. Closer to the lake, there is a great mix of Ponderosa pine, aspen stands, birch, and larch trees where it is possible to find chickadees, all three of our native nuthatches, and a variety of woodpecker species. The dense thickets along the sloughs provide great cover for birds such as Long-eared Owls. We will be able to make it out to the frozen lake shore; a spotting scope would be handy if you feel like packing one along to get a closer look at the waterfowl on the lake. We will be walking a minimum of 2.5 to 3 miles through snow on mostly level, boot-packed trails, but keep in mind the lakeshore is quite icy and there are a couple of slopes we will encounter. Please wear good boots and bring ice cleats and/or snowshoes. There are no restrooms available. To sign up, please contact Shannon at shannon@flatheadaudubon.org or 406-261-3466.

MISSION VALLEY RAPTORS: FRIDAY, MARCH 3, 8 a.m. to approx. 5 p.m.

Join Darcy Thomas and Margaret Parodi for a day observing raptors in the Mission Valley. We will leave Kalispell at 8 a.m. and spend the day looking for birds of prey, including owls, around Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge and areas nearby. We will make frequent stops to observe birds, and will return to Kalispell about 5 p.m. Be prepared for cold temperatures, wind, and snow. Bring binoculars and a spotting scope if you have one. Also, bring snacks and drinks. We will be stopping at Ninepipes Lodge for lunch, for those who are interested. If you prefer not to eat in the restaurant you can bring your own lunch. Carpooling is encouraged. To register please contact Darcy Thomas at darcy@flatheadaudubon.org or 406-407-8263.

The Great Backyard Bird Count 2023 You Can Be Part of The Team - Every Bird Counts

By Darcy Thomas

It is time once again for the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), an inter-organizational effort by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Birds Canada to bring the joys of bird watching to the people who love them. Each February, for four days, people around the world spend time in their favorite places watching and counting as many birds as they can find and reporting them to The Cornell Lab.

The 26th annual GBBC will take place February 17-20. This is a free and fun event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real time snapshot of bird populations. These observations help scientists better understand global bird populations before one of their annual migrations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes or as long as you wish on one or more days of this four-day event. You may report your sightings in one of three ways:

- Identify birds with **Merlin Bird ID** app and add sightings to your list;
- Use the **eBird Mobile** app;
- Enter your bird list on <https://eBird.org/home> (on a desktop or laptop).

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



Courtesy of Macaulay Library

Natural Events To See This Month:
Great Horned Owls are on eggs.

Flathead Valley Bird Report By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – DEC 2022/JAN 2023

Mid-December through mid-January was a period with mostly gray skies, periodic snows, and one period of deep cold. As the snow and lakes iced over, raptor numbers declined, but several species of owls were among the notables. "Winter finches" were scarce, with few reports of redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks and crossbills, though a Purple Finch in Bigfork first seen in early December re-appeared. Bohemian Waxwings also seemed to have mostly overflown our area and were present in well below-average numbers. Gull numbers and diversity were also well down from typical seasonal patterns. There were a few notable lingering blackbird species. See also: <https://ebird.org/region/US-MT-029?yr=all>

12/18 **Brown-headed Cowbird** (1, through 1/9) Creston (Craig H.)

12/18 **Long-eared Owl** (1) North Shore WMA (Elliot R.); through 1/11 (Andrew K.)

12/18 **Rusty Blackbird** (1) Creston (Craig H.)

12/19 **Varied Thrush** (1) Foothills Rd (Rod W.); also one on Kalispell CBC, 1/1 (Karen N.)

12/21 **Snowy Owl** (1) West Valley (bj W.); again 1/1 (Cory D.); Farm Rd, 12/30 (Andrew K.)

12/21 **Glaucous Gull** (2) Flathead County landfill (Mark H.)

12/23 **Short-eared Owl** (1) Lower Valley (Andrew K.)

12/30 **Common Redpoll** (10) Evergreen (Derrick R.); one along Farm Rd 1/1 (Thomas K.)

01/01 **Yellow-headed Blackbird** (1) Evergreen (Craig H.); another in Creston 1/3 (Craig H.)

01/01 **Northern Saw-Whet Owl** (1) Kalispell CBC (Dick W.)

01/09 **Purple Finch** (1) Bigfork (Leslie K.)

01/06 **Short-billed Gull** (1) Dayton (Dan C.)

What to Expect – February 2023

Our winter finches may yet arrive, and perhaps the waxwing flocks will grow as the birds start to gradually move back north. If there is enough thaw to reveal some bare ground, raptor numbers may rebound. The first signs of Spring should occur mid-month, with the notable returns of Red-winged Blackbirds and the first migrant waterfowl. Great Horned Owls, our earliest breeders, should be incubating their eggs.

Conservation Corner

Bird and Biodiversity Declines By Carole Jorgensen

Audubon shared the recent dire study showing that 3 billion birds have declined since 1970, almost 30 percent of the North American bird population (<https://science.org/content/article/three-billion-north-american-birds-have-vanished-1970-surveys-show>). Some of the reasons given were habitat loss due to development, changing climate and weather patterns, pesticides and even cats, although the reasons are complex and each species and group of species vary in their population changes.

A further dire study has been released addressing a similar decline in biodiversity of vertebrates worldwide. Monitoring wild critters is a messy, difficult, expensive and very incomplete challenge. The Living Planet index (<https://livingplanetindex.org/>) is an evaluation of vertebrate species conducted every two years, using the best scientific data available (including that collected by citizen scientists like Audubon members). The study is a collaboration by 89 authors around the world in partnership with WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) and the Zoological Society of London.

The Living Planet Index found a 69 percent decline in analyzed 5,320 monitored mammals, birds, reptiles and mammals since 1970. No invertebrates (which are the largest biological group on earth) were evaluated. The North American portion exhibited a 20 percent decline, although Latin America and the Caribbean declined 94 percent. Scientists fear the lack of similar monitoring of amphibians and invertebrates would make the declines even more troubling if data were available.

What to do? Educate yourself and others on this news and how you can help. Continue to support population monitoring for all species and participate in citizen science programs where possible. Support sustainable energy and reduced carbon. Choose local foods and sustainable agriculture, avoiding monocultures like palm oil. Provide as much native habitat as you can in your own neighborhood and beyond: shrubs, trees, native prairie, wetlands and dead and down wood. Avoid pesticides. Seek support from local and national legislators for land conservation; habitat protection and restoration; support for research and monitoring. We all can make a difference!

Highlights from the January 2, 2023 Board of Directors Meeting

- Treasurer Rod Walette explained that donations for Owen Sowerwine all go toward the Conservation Easement. He also moved to update the officers listed on the checking and savings accounts. The Board approved .
- Bob Lee stepped down as our Representative to the Montana Audubon Board. Gael Bissell will replace him.
- Linda DuLac is coordinating documentation by committee chairs on the what, how, and when of their positions. There are several committee chair positions open; an active search is underway to fill them.
- A list of fundraising activities related to the Conservation Easement for Owen Sowerwine has been compiled, the ideas were discussed, and volunteers are starting work on some of them.
- Cindy Roberts reported that the Education Committee is meeting to start reviewing the strategic plan, and to discuss improving access to the education kits.

By Pam Willison

Thank You To All Flathead Audubon Donors in 2022

Flathead Audubon could not accomplish all the work we do without the generosity of so many wonderful donors. Your donations allow us to continue such activities as the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch, our very effective Conservation Education Program, and many more.

This list includes those who have given financially to Flathead Audubon throughout the past year through memberships and donations.

Jane Adams	William Cox	John and Sarah Graves
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DONORS in 2022

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Susan Muellner	Daniel Shura	
Teresa Narduzzi	Beverly and Robert Skinner	

Cleaning Bird Houses and Feeders

By now, you've probably cleaned and sterilized your bird houses and feeders. The best time to clean bird houses is after the birds have fledged. If, like me, you've had a busy season, you may not have completed this task. Using gloves, take down the houses and feeders, and remove any nesting material or debris with a stiff brush. Put the houses/feeders in a container containing a solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water. A plastic bucket works well. Keep them in the solution for a few minutes. Then remove them, rinse well with clean water, let dry.

Bird flu can be deadly. Although it primarily affects commercial birds in confined situations, wild birds can also be affected, and it's important not to expose yourself to any possible pathogen.

If you have some extra time, consider building a few bee houses (<https://thespruce.com/build-a-diy-bee-house-5112611>) or bat houses next season. The added benefit is that well-designed bat houses don't need to be cleaned (although bee houses do, annually) (<https://batcon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/RocketBoxPlans.pdf>).

By Carole Jorgensen

Summary Reports of the 2022 Northwest Montana Christmas Bird Counts (CBC)

Upper Swan CBC December 15

Upper Swan held its annual Christmas Bird Count on Thursday, December 15, with nine field observers. We had decent weather with temperatures ranging from 19 to 27, cloudy skies, and wind at 7 mph. Most still water was frozen and moving water was partly open. Snow depths ranged from six to 32 inches.

Total number of species observed on count day was 21, total number of individuals 182; an additional six species were observed during count week. Common Raven was the most numerous species (67); only 1 individual was found for Belted Kingfisher, Snow Bunting, White-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Flicker, and Canada Jay. Overall, it was a pretty drab day with the usual suspects! *By Eli Estey*

Bigfork CBC December 17

The 49th annual Bigfork Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 17, under cloudy skies and mild SE winds. Temperatures varied from 19 to 28. Snow depths were about 4 to 6 inches in the valley, and at the eastern edges of the count circle there was up to a foot of snow. Lakes and ponds were mostly frozen, Flathead Lake and River were ice free. Thirty-three volunteer participants counted 22,968 individual birds of 84 species. The number of birds was up measurably from last year's total of 15,322, and the number of species was down from 90 to 84.

There was one new bird species for the count week, a Varied Thrush! Highlights this year were a Cackling Goose, Snow Goose, Long-eared Owl, Brown-headed Cowbird, and a Rusty Blackbird. Trumpeter Swans and Bald Eagles were recorded at all-time highs this year.

Thank you to all the amazing participants who helped make the Bigfork CBC count a very enjoyable experience. *By Craig Hohenberger*

Eureka CBC December 17

The 30th annual Eureka Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 17, on a mild day with temperature ranging from 21 to 30. Koochanusa Reservoir was open as were parts of the streams, but smaller lakes and ponds were completely frozen. Nineteen people went to the field and 16 feeders were counted as well. Fifty-four species were recorded which is well below our record high of 72 species in 2014, but similar to the last few years. The total number of individual birds was 1851, which is in the low end of numbers we have recorded over the years.

Black-capped Chickadee (257) was the most numerous species observed and other most common birds included Wild Turkey (188), Mallard (163), Red-breasted Nuthatch (152), and Common Raven (150). Record high counts were recorded for 6 species: Ruffed Grouse (11), Great Horned Owl (6), Belted Kingfisher (8), Red-breasted Nuthatch (148), American Tree Sparrow (12), and Song Sparrow (12). Five or fewer individuals were seen for 21 species including Barrow's Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Golden Eagle, American Coot, Killdeer, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Northern Shrike, American Robin, Cassin's Finch, and Common Redpoll.

Several species often found on the count were not reported this year including any accipiter or falcon, Pileated Woodpecker (first ever miss), Canada Goose, and Pine Grosbeak. Raptors were limited. The usual Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, and Bald Eagle were sighted. Finch numbers were very low with only small numbers of Red Crossbills and House Finches and very low to none for other finches. *By Ellen Sullivan*

CBC Summaries continued on page 10.

Natural Events To See This Month:

Maple buds get brighter pigments.

Summary Reports of 2022 CBCs *continued from page 9.*

Libby CBC December 17

The 53rd Libby Christmas Bird Count took place Saturday, December 17 with 10 field observers and four feeder watchers. The day was calm and partly clear with a low in the morning of 15, and an afternoon high of 28, with 4 to 6 inches of snow on the ground. Forty-one species and 1,242 total birds were recorded.

The most important feature in our circle is about 20 miles of Kootenai River corridor. Seasonal lead-up and count day weather along with Libby Dam discharge water flows, which can fluctuate from 4,000 to 27,000 CFS, have an enormous effect on our river count. Floating the river is by far the most effective way to survey bird life. Our floaters were unable to float this year, which had a huge impact on our numbers. Bald Eagles were abundant with 72 counted, 59 adults and 13 juveniles, but that number was undoubtedly low without our river floaters. No unusual or noteworthy species were observed. *By Gene Reckin*

Ninepipe CBC December 18

We had good weather for the 30th Annual Ninepipe Count on December 18, with temperatures 27 to 33, calm winds, mostly cloudy skies, and morning flurries. Most still water was frozen.

Twenty-five participants counted about 80 species (up a little) and about 12,000 birds (down a little). About 3,000 of those were mostly starlings, feral pigeons and House Sparrows at a silage feedlot...

Although no new species were reported, several rare winter birds (less than 6 times in 30 years) were seen including White-crowned Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Pacific Wren, Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon) and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

Other notable sightings: Snow Bunting (first time in six years), Rough-legged Hawk (down 50 percent), Northern Harrier (down 80 percent), Great Horned and Short-eared Owls (down 50 percent). *By James Oates*

Glacier National Park CBC December 18

Glacier National Park held its annual Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 18. Sixteen participants covered 10 different routes in Glacier. The weather was dramatic with strong, gusty winds, heavy snow, and temperatures ranging from minus 2 to 5. Snow depths were 14 to 32 inches, so most observers skied on their routes. Still water was open but small streams were mainly frozen.

We only counted 185 birds, comprising 22 different species, in 2022. This was more than a magnitude lower than our counts in 2021 when we tallied 2,319 birds. This was not surprising, considering the weather.

The most common common species were Common Goldeneye, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Bufflehead. We only counted three Black-capped Chickadees, which tied with our lowest count of this species since we began counts in 1962. Fresh mountain lion tracks were found on the Rocky Point Trail. In count week we only added one species, Brown Creeper, spotted foraging outside an office window the day after the count.

Thanks to all participants for contributing their expertise, time, and energy. Your count results are invaluable for tracking long-term changes in species abundance, diversity, and range changes, in Glacier and throughout North America. Thanks to Glacier National Park Conservancy and its donors for providing hot drinks and snacks. It was so good to see folks again! *By Lisa Bate, Wildlife Biologist, Glacier National Park*

Troy CBC December 31

Troy's count was held on Saturday, December 31. We had 14 people in the field and five feeder counters. Total species were 40, with total individuals at 1,065. Species numbers were low as were individuals. We had seven species for count week. Conditions were tough, with deep hard snow and plenty of ice on our roads, temps were moderate which made things a litter easier.

Highlights were a first year Harris's Sparrow (showing itself off and on since late November), a lone American Tree Sparrow (unusual for our timbered Troy area) and eight Trumpeter Swans (2nd time in 30 years, I believe). Noticeably absent this year (like everyone else) were our finch species and just higher bird numbers in general.

We were not able to get someone by boat to cover our 14 miles of the Kootenai River, as the river was low making many areas snow-free and attractive to birds, but unattainable to the bird watcher. *By Don Jones*

Kalispell CBC January 1

The 24th Kalispell Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, January 1, 2023.

A total of 75 species was recorded, a number which is about average for this count.

Highlights included the 2nd ever Yellow-headed Blackbird (Craig Hohenberger et. al.), the 2nd ever Pied-billed Grebe (Elaine Snyder et al.), the 3rd ever Northern Saw-whet Owl (Dick Walker), and the 3rd ever Varied Thrush (Karen Nichols/Jane Adams). No new species were added this year, so the overall species list holds steady at 132.

Species that were found in record numbers included Great Blue Heron (15), Prairie Falcon (3), Northern Shrike (11), Blue Jay (91), Red-breasted Nuthatch (211), White-breasted Nuthatch (32), Golden-crowned Kinglet (24), Townsend's Solitaire (25) and Red-winged Blackbird (350).

Thirty-six field observers and 8 feeder watchers participated. Thanks all for a fun day! *By Pete Fisher*

Sign up for Montana Audubon's Action Alert Network

The 68th Montana Legislature is in session, and the Montana Audubon team of legislative lobbyists are busy working for all of us to defend Montana's wildlife, wildlife habitat, and bedrock environmental laws. But they need your help. During this legislative session Montana Audubon will again maintain an active "Action Alert Network" that will provide you with the information you need to make your voice heard when important issues come up! To sign up for Network alerts go to <https://mtaudubon.org/join-our-online-network>. You can also access the most recent alert on the MT Audubon facebook page or check <https://mtaudubon.org/conservation-policy/take-action/>

SAVE THE DATE!

Wings Across the Big Sky, the annual Montana birding festival, will be June 9-11, 2023, at the Heritage Inn, Great Falls, MT. The festival is being organized by Montana Audubon and this year's local host chapter, Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon. Stay tuned for more information in the coming months.

February Program of the Montana Native Plant Society, Flathead Chapter

The Dance of Landscape Design

Tuesday, February 14, 7 p.m.

North Valley Senior Center

205 Nucleus Avenue, Columbia Falls

Leslie Lowe of Beargrass Landscape Architecture (<https://beargrassla.com/>) says the biggest question when she designs is how to balance the needs of pollinators, animals, and humans in our landscapes. It is a dance of exquisite proportions, resulting in sustainable beautiful outdoor spaces. Join her to learn about the dance of landscape design.

By Rachel Potter

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