



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

VOLUME 47, NUMBER 8

Mountain
Chickadee



Courtesy of Cornell Lab

It's Never Too Late Or Too Early To Become A Bird Watcher

By Linda Du Lac, Membership Chair

Throughout our 45+ years together my husband and I have always been active outdoors people. Whether skiing, hiking, biking, or traveling, we often carry binoculars and a bird identification book. Even though neither of us are serious life listers, we do love to identify the birds we see.

A few years ago we decided to move closer to our youngest son, here in the Flathead. That decision has been a very positive change in our lives. We now have the support of family and get to enjoy our young grandchildren in these, our "later" years. Just as important, we have become neighborhood birders and keep a daily journal of our findings. Oh those birds!

We get out two to three times per day walking in the neighborhood and to the Swan River, where there is an interesting variety of birds. Although we don't have river frontage, our nice neighbor to the north, who is older than me, has allowed us access to his riverfront property. As a thank you I gave him a bird identification book. It has been satisfying to see him become an avid bird watcher. Every once in a while I'll get a call from him to quickly get down to the river. It doesn't take me long to grab the camera and binoculars to see what excited him. Yup, that is indeed a Double-Crested Cormorant! Yup, that is an Eastern Kingbird. Nope, that isn't a Golden, it's an

immature Baldy, which he described as being like a B-52 bomber diving to catch a duck.



Right: Molly Jane Buckley, 6
Left: Zoey Du Lac, 9
Photo credit: Linda Du Lac

At the other end of the age spectrum, Zoey, our 9-year-old granddaughter has become a birder. Whenever I ask her to join me on a Flathead Audubon Society (FAS) field trip she enthusiastically jumps at the invitation. Oh those young eyes are something to be admired. She can spot birds at distances that to me are blurry blobs, until I raise my binoculars. One day last fall, my friend Susan and I took her birding to Condon in the Swan Valley. It was an enjoyable, although long day. On the trip home Zoey opened my iBird app and tested Susan and me on bird sounds. We were able to ID some correctly and on those we missed, the three of us often ended up laughing at our outrageous mistakes.

For me personally, joining the FAS has been a joy that has enriched my life like no other organization. The field trips are fun and educational. The general meeting programs are always outstanding, and special events such as the Birds of Prey Festival are something not to be missed. The people in our organization are not only nice and kind, but are accessible to help this recreational birder.

Whether you are young or old, a life lister or a recreational birder, the FAS is the best organization to join. Birds and Birders Rock!

APRIL FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, April 3, 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, April 10, 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 Dr. All are welcome. See page 3 for how to participate digitally.

Thursday, April 13. Spring Birding at Smith Lake. See page 6

Saturday, April 15. Herron Park Hike and Early Spring Migrants. See page 6

Friday, April 21. Earth Day Celebration at Creston Fish Hatchery. See page 6

Sunday, April 30, May 14 and May 21. Sonny Boon Memorial Trail, Somers. See page 6

Saturday, May 13. Family Forestry Expo, Trumbull Creek Educational Forest, north of Columbia Falls.

Friday through Sunday, June 2-4. Warbler Weekend. More details to come.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Osprey – the Finest Fishers

By Darcy Thomas

"There's an Osprey" I pointed out to my sister as our kayaks sliced through the serene waters of Smith Lake. We stopped paddling and watched as this beautiful raptor circled the shallow waters of the lake scanning for fish beneath the surface.

Ospreys have incredible vision. Visual adaptations that allow them to spot fish below the water include two fovea in each eye that give them a wide angle of sharp focus, a structure in the eye called a "pecten", composed of photoreceptor cells that enable greater visual resolution, and special muscles called Crampton's muscles, allowing their ocular lenses to see prey at great distances. The dark feathers in front of the eye also reduce glare from the water.

Spotting a fish, he swept back his wings and plummeted toward the lake, swinging his legs forward at the last minute to enter talons first. He came up empty having missed the fish and was soon circling and scanning again. Once more he dove and came up without the prize. On the third dive the osprey plunged and disappeared underwater.

Osprey often get soaked catching a fish and are still able to fly away with their prey because their oily, dense plumage provides waterproofing. Occasionally, a large fish will pull an Osprey underwater completely. Osprey



Don McCarter

weigh three-four lbs and are capable of carrying a fish equal to their own weight. They close their nares to prevent water from flowing in and are adapted with a nictitating membrane or semi-transparent eyelid that acts like goggles, allowing them to see underwater. They grasp the fish with reversible outer toes, two facing forward and two facing back, and tiny spines or "spicules" on the feet assist in gripping a slippery fish. On rare occasions the talons dig deeply into a fish that is too large for the Osprey to carry, and the spines and curved talons make it difficult to release. The bird can get pulled under the water by the heavy fish and drown.

As we waited for the Osprey to rise with his meal, the surface of the water calmed becoming glassy and smooth. It was taking too long.

"I think he's drowning," I said in alarm.

Osprey are designed for fishing and fish make up almost their entire diet. They are successful in their catch at least one in every four dives. Osprey have long, powerful, narrow wings that help them lift from the water with a heavy fish in their talons. Fish are carried facing forward to minimize wind resistance, and are taken to a perch where they can feast or to a nest where they drop it for their chicks to eat.

We kept our eyes on the spot where the bird had gone under. As the seconds dragged on we wondered

if we were about to witness the drowning of one of these amazing birds. Suddenly, in a great burst of water and wings, the Osprey emerged carrying a huge fish. His wings beat heavily as he struggled to rise above the lake's surface. He kept hitting the water, and with agonizing effort, the Osprey carried his fish from the lake but only a few feet above the water. It was too much for him to gain lift. Dropping the fish, he flew to a distant tree to perch for a well-deserved rest.

Osprey are a conservation success story after recovering from a decimated population caused by use of DDT, which poisoned the birds and thinned the shells of their laid eggs. But Osprey still face challenges. They pick up baling twine and other discarded plastic lines to incorporate into their nests. Sometimes, as they become entangled in the twine, they suffer slow, painful deaths from starvation, injuries, infection, or immobilization. Baling twine is thin, plastic rope used to tie up hay bales and can be orange, blue, pink, or green. Last year, an Osprey died dangling from his nest at the Creston Fish Hatchery. In 2021, a chick from a nest in Charlo died after being entangled in baling twine. These tragedies are all too common, but also easily preventable. You can help by picking up twine and disposing of it where Osprey can't get it. Help spread the word about baling twine and Osprey! Please visit <https://www.owlresearchinstitute.org/osprey-and-baling-twine>.

References available upon request.

APRIL PROGRAM

Informing Avian Conservation Through Local Research, Landscape-scale Conservation, and Embracing New Technologies

Presented By Victoria Dreitz

Dr. Victoria Dreitz, Director of the Avian Science Center and Professor in Wildlife Biology, will be the featured speaker at the Monday, April 10 meeting of the Flathead Audubon Society at 7 p.m. (See below on how to join the Zoom meeting). Her presentation will cover her research using adaptive management processes to meet avian management objectives in Montana. She will also discuss birds as bioindicators of landscapes and ecosystems showing which species are most in need of conservation and show how ornithologists use changing technology to do research in avian conservation.

Dr. Dreitz earned her BS from Colorado State University and earned her PhD from University of Miami. One of the objectives of her PhD was to develop a monitoring program that assisted in understanding the mechanisms driving the population status of the Snail Kite. This monitoring program has been used for over 20 years. After many years studying birds in Florida and in Colorado as a research scientist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Dr. Dreitz moved to Missoula in 2011 to work with the next generation of wildlife professionals (e.g., university students).



Provided by Victoria Dreitz

APRIL MEETING FAS

We will be continuing our hybrid meetings through the winter for the remainder of the year. For those coming to the meeting, on April 10, 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 Drive in Kalispell. Look for our banner hanging outside.

For those joining virtually, when you use the 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), and this is the preferred way to join. You can also get an audio connection to the meeting without the Zoom visual capability by using your phone.

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

Looking forward to seeing everyone!

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

Highlights from the March 6, 2023 Board of Directors Meeting By Pam Willison, Secretary

- ✚ The Board approved a motion to apply for a Whitefish Community Foundation Community Grant. Kay Mitchell will complete the application.
- ✚ Shannon and Bridger Donaldson reported on the plans for the new format for the spring Birdathon, and it was scheduled for Saturday, June 17. It will be held as a fundraiser for the proposed Conservation Easement for Owen Sowerwine.
- ✚ Pam Willison reported that she's working to schedule maintenance on the Greenridge Entrance to Owen Sowerwine, and also to complete a Conservation District grant, and to schedule work days in early April to tackle some more non-native buckthorn shrubs.
- ✚ Darcy Thomas will research a set of walkie-talkies for use when traveling in cars during field trips.
- ✚ Jake Bramante and Linda Du Lac are investigating how best to issue membership cards again.

A Place Worth Protecting

By Debbie Funk and Carol Bibler

More than 50 years ago, two adventurous little girls spent some of their happiest days playing in the woods that they called “Down Below.” Even then, as fourth and fifth graders, they knew it was a special place. It was their place, where they enjoyed solitude and freedom in nature.

Debbie was fortunate to live just a five-minute walk from this immense playground, and Carol was fortunate to be her friend. To this day, they both remember the excitement of waking up on Saturday mornings, anticipating spending the day in this magical place.



Photo provided by Flathead Audubon

“Are you girls going Down Below today?”, our moms would ask, already knowing the answer. “Here’s some lunch for you to take along”. Debbie’s trusty beagle, Gina Lollobrigida, usually accompanied us, and she probably enjoyed it as much as we did—and Debbie’s mom figured we were safer with Gina along. Oh, the freedom! We were in charge, and to this day, we do not recall seeing another human during our many visits. During this time in our childhoods, nothing came close to being as much fun, or as interesting, as the hours, summer days, early evenings and those wonderful Saturdays playing in the woods.

Although we certainly got a good education at our Kalispell elementary school, some of our best learning happened in the woods. And although we were pretty good students, Carol recalls daydreaming about Down Below while she was supposed to be paying attention in the classroom. What was happening down there while we were away? Were the birds still singing even though we weren’t there to hear them? Looking back on those days, we realize how much hands-on learning took place there in the absence of parents or teachers, and how it influenced our love and appreciation of nature and its beauty to this very day. We hiked, walked, and ran for hours through the woods, discovering and imagining. “Let’s pretend we are (explorers, treasure seekers, Indians, pioneers, in the ‘olden days’). We made maps and looked for treasure.

We had a world of make-believe in the woods, running as quickly as possible through the “Haunted Woods” (a part of the forest that was a little more overgrown than the rest) to reach the beautiful clearing.

Autumn colors in the fall, sun shining through the trees in that indescribable light; green leaves, the smell of sap, and birdsong in the spring; shapes in the clouds that drifted over blue skies; tall grasses that tickled bare legs. The clearing was truly breathtaking and awe-inspiring to two little girls. Joy and happiness, every time.

We were young and paid no attention to the names of the many birds that sang and kept us company; we recognized diversity in the vegetation surrounding us but didn’t know what to call it. As years went on, there was less time spent playing, and more time exploring in other ways. A jar full of water from the back water tributaries provided a whole world of creatures under Debbie’s first microscope. Her procrastinated middle school botany project was rescued when these woods provided a huge variety of plants collected in one day. High school photography class sent her back “Down Below” to discover amazing winter ice patterns on the river’s edge and the beauty of water flow patterns and rocks.

Both Carol and Debbie went on to earn science degrees, and we’re sure that this special time spent in what is now called Owen Sowerwine had a huge impact on those choices. Looking back, we’re so incredibly grateful we had this opportunity.

Right now, we all have a fleeting opportunity to ensure that this area will remain natural forever. If you want your children, grandchildren, and their children to experience the magical place that we did, and if you want this precious wildlife habitat to remain undisturbed, please join us in supporting the fundraising efforts to preserve the Owen Sowerwine.

Of Birds and Bears – Finding a Balance

By Kathy Ross

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

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

SPRING MATCH CHALLENGE AND UPCOMING OWEN SOWERWINE TOURS!

By Gael Bissell

Flathead Audubon's fundraising for the proposed conservation easement on the Owen Sowerwine property is going extraordinarily well! To date, you have helped us raise over \$45,000 for the proposed conservation easement, nearing our halfway mark to our organization's \$100,000 goal for this estimated \$775,000 project. More than half of all the funds likely needed for this extraordinary project have been raised or pledged.

Beginning on April 1, the Flathead Land Trust, Flathead Audubon and Flathead Lakers will be initiating our community wide Challenge Match Campaign to raise another \$100,000 in local funding for Owen Sowerwine to match \$100,000 in donations and pledges recently made to our three organizations to date. To help raise community awareness for this project, we are offering guided birding trips, walking, and boating tours to Owen Sowerwine in May and July 2023.

To sign up for any of the following tours, contact Jen at Flathead Land Trust (info@flatheadlandtrust.org) or call 406-752-8293. Check Flathead Land Trust, Flathead Lakers, or Flathead Audubon's websites for additional tours and information.



Photo by Sheryl Hester

Sunday May 7th

Early Birding 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

Walking Tour 10:00 a.m. to noon

Saturday May 13

Early Birding 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

Walking Tour 10:00 a.m. to noon

Wednesday May 17

Evening Walking Tour 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Sunday May 21

Early Birding 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.

Walking Tour 10:00 a.m. to noon

Thursday July 27

Kayak Tour 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Walking Tour 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Saturday July 29

Kayak Tour 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

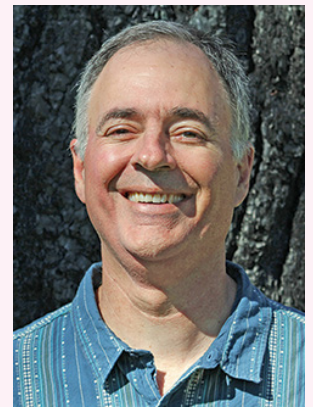
Thank you all for your help in making this conservation easement a reality!

SNEED COLLARD III TO PRESENT AT WINGS ACROSS THE BIG SKY 2023!

Wings Across the Big Sky, Montana's premier birding festival, organized by Montana Audubon and this year's local host chapter, Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon, will be June 9-11, 2023, at the Heritage Inn, Great Falls, MT. Registration opens in mid-April. Stay tuned for more information. www.mtaudubon.org

The keynote speaker for the festival is acclaimed author, Sneed B. Collard III, who has written more than 90 books for young people. Sneed is a popular award-winning speaker and has spoken at numerous birding festivals and events.

During the presentation, Sneed will recount the entertaining adventures behind his humorous, award-winning memoir *Warblers and Woodpeckers: A Father-Son Big Year of Birding* (Mountaineers, 2018) and other bird books and articles. Along the way, participants will travel to some of America's best birding hotspots as well as South America, the Galápagos, and the Middle East. Sneed will share highlights of his and his son's "accidental Big Years" of 2022 starring Pinky, America's most famous flamingo.



Sneed Collard III

To learn more about Sneed, visit his websites www.sneedbcollardiii.com and www.FatherSonBirding.com.

2023 FLATHEAD COUNTY SCIENCE FAIR AWARDS

By Denny Olson

Jenna Kimble wins Wildlife Conservation Award from Flathead Audubon for her project "Bird Brain" at the 2023 Flathead County Science Fair. Jenna used a maze and her own chickens to test their power to learn. Her hypothesis was that the chickens would take the trial-and-error approach to learning each time to find food at the end of the maze. After three tries, they took no wrong turns and went directly to the food. Some learned after just one try. This demonstrated quick temporal-spatial learning in birds. Jenna is a student with Classical Conversation Homeschool.

WINTER FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU

SPRING BIRDING at SMITH LAKE: THURSDAY, APRIL 13, 8 a.m. - 12 p.m. Join FAS field trip leader Darcy Thomas for a morning of birdwatching in Kila. We will walk a portion of the paved Great Northern Historical Trail along Smith Lake before driving around the lake stopping at the boat launch and other pull outs along the way to view birds. Smith Lake is a complex of large, shallow wetlands and marsh, surrounded by stands of willow and other shrubs as well as conifers. We will be looking for ducks, herons, hawks, and eagles. Vault toilet is available at the Fishing access site. Meet at the Kila Pub and bring your binoculars and a spotting scope if you have one. To register, contact Darcy at 406-407-8263 or darcy@flatheadaudubon.org.



HERRON PARK HIKE and EARLY SPRING MIGRANTS: SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 8 a.m. - about 1 p.m.

Join Jake Bramante as he takes us on a hike (approximately 4 miles) through Herron Park. We will keep our eyes (and ears) peeled for forest birds and look for some early spring migrants such as Spotted Towhees and Williamson's Sapsuckers. The hike will include an elevation gain of 750 feet. There will be sweeping views of the park looking out to the valley and down on Foys Lake, so be prepared to sweat a little, but we will take our time. Limited to 8 participants. Contact Jake at 406-250-8394 or jake@flatheadaudubon.org to reserve spots and for logistics (meeting time/location/ carpooling) Sign up is required.

EARTH DAY CELEBRATION at CRESTON FISH HATCHERY: FRIDAY, APRIL 21, 8 a.m. - 12 p.m. Please join FAS field trip leader Darcy Thomas to hike the trails and view Jessup Mill Pond from a birding blind while we look for waterfowl. Expect to walk up to two miles on easy trails. The Creston National Fish Hatchery grounds provide a variety of habitats that are attractive to several species. While ducks are more typical on the ponds, the grounds offer a bubbling creek, woodland edges and plenty of shrubs and trees. This is an excellent place to find early migrant songbirds, Great Blue Herons, Bald Eagles, Belted Kingfisher, and American Dipper. We will also look for early blooms of native plants. Dress warmly and bring binoculars. If you wish, bring a picnic lunch to eat at the picnic area at the end of the field trip. Bathrooms are available. The trip is limited to 10 participants. Contact Darcy at 406-407-8263 or darcy@flatheadaudubon.org.

SONNY BOON MEMORIAL TRAIL, SOMERS: SUNDAY, APRIL 30, MAY 14 and MAY 21, 8 a.m. - 10 a.m. Dan Casey will be leading three Sunday morning bird walks along the Sonny Boon Memorial Trail in Somers during this spring migration season. The paved trail follows a portion of the old railroad bed along Somers Slough and offers excellent views of waterfowl as well as a wide variety of land-birds reliant on the diverse riparian habitat. Indeed, 157 species have been reported at this eBird hotspot (<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1390990>). These round-trip walks will be one mile each way, and will last approximately two hours, starting at 8 a.m. Attendance is limited to 10 people. Please text Dan at 406-270-5941 to reserve spots on the attendance list. Walks will be held on the following dates:

- April 30: Waterfowl, early migrants (e.g. swallows, Nashville Warbler, Spotted Towhee)
- May 14: Increasing numbers of new arrivals (e.g. Western Tanager, Yellow Warbler)
- May 21: Most breeding species back on territories (e.g. Gray Catbird, Black-headed Grosbeak)

WARBLER WEEKEND AT TALLY LAKE: JUNE 2-4. Details to follow in the May newsletter.

Mission Raptors Field Trip Summary

By Darcy Thomas

On a blustery winter day in March with dark, turbulent clouds and crepuscular rays brightening the countryside eight delighted birders joined Margaret and me on a tour of the Mission valley in a quest to view birds of prey. We saw many wonderful birds including Merlin and American Kestrel, Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Harriers, Bald and Golden Eagles and much, much more. 34 taxa total. The Roughies and Harriers were enjoying the breeze immensely and it was a marvel to watch them hover in place



Photo credit Darcy Thomas

looking like statues in the air. We also saw a Great Horned Owl on a nest. About midday we enjoyed a tasty lunch at Ninepipes Lodge as we shared stories and talked about the day. Taryn, who is a NEPA coordinator for the CSKT, taught us about the Crow Dam spillway project. Michell practiced with her new photography lens. There were many requests to do this again soon!



Photo by JP Edge
Hungry Horse News

Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

Community Ed

From my experience, and I dare say the experience of tens of thousands of naturalists, artists, poets and explorers of the outer and inner landscapes, the big reason to include "nature" in our community of teachers, is that nature includes us in her usually benevolent and sometimes harsh rules. To survive, we need, and will always need, good food, clean water, adequate shelter, breathable air, and space. The ignorance that comes from twisting logic to think that nature belongs to us is beyond foolish. Nature depends on us not a whit. We are part of her community, and not the other way around. Countless indigenous sages, countless numbers of times, have tried to remind us that if we intend to learn from our "community", then we'd better darn well include the Big One.

The closer I've looked into the intricacies of nature, the more dumbfounded I have become at the sheer complexity of relationships between nature's component parts -- especially when looking through the lenses of time, space and mobility. Recently, part of my work responsibilities has been to produce an educational video on the connections between native plants, native insects, and native birds. Another part of my work is to advise and help manage Owen Sowerwine, our 403-acre river-bottom natural area, which is used for both education and recreation. It's a book, always waiting to be opened.

Common to both of those educational and stewardship responsibilities, my observations about the black cottonwood trees there, who support a natural population of the larvae of cottonwood borer beetles at a very specific time of the early summer, who in turn are preyed upon by Red-eyed Vireos, were revealing. The Vireos time the

hatching of their eggs to the hatch of the beetle larvae -- exactly -- because that is the time when they suddenly need four times their normal amount of high-protein food to feed their growing chicks. The birds themselves are essential to the cottonwoods to prevent fast-reproducing beetles from over-browsing them. In June, there rings a cacophony of Red-eyed Vireo song as each male of a pair sings up to 40,000 phrases per day.

This is but one bird species among 435 or so in Montana, among as many as 18,000 species world-wide according to recent genetically-based adjustments. There are about 450,000 species of plants in the world, and probably 6 million species of insects. Considering those raw materials in the warp and weft of probable relationships and interrelationships and inter-interrelationships -- it is difficult to conceive of anything in the fabric of nature being un-connected to everything else.

That unfathomably huge fabric includes us. We, and everything around us, are dependent on everything else around us. Some connections are close, and some may be a few degrees away. But they have always been, and will always be, there for us to discover. Nature's one over-arching lesson for humans is simple. We are part of the "community" of this planet, and our efforts separate ourselves through hubris, pretending to "improve" on nature, and pretending to "control" natural forces honed through millions of years, isn't just folly, it is flat-out dangerous. Sorry folks, facts and evidence trump opinion, and as life goes, biology trumps economics and politics. To ignore that is to be a too-hungry Ouroboros serpent eating itself. Instead of representing renewal and rebirth, our version, with our impatience to dominate, would eventually eat its own head. We belong to this Planet, our community. It does not belong to us. That lesson is "Community Education 101", day one.

2023 Long-billed Curlew Citizen Science Survey

Each year right around "Winter Wednesday", or the mid-point between the Winter Solstice and Spring Equinox, we notice the days getting a little longer, and the chickadees getting a little more vocal. It also means we get excited for the return of our spring and summer citizen science projects and our summer contingency of birds. Long-billed Curlews return early April each year, and their arrival triggers the start to our citizen science survey seasons.

Because curlews stay in the state for just about four



The Cornell Lab

By Amy Seaman,

MT Audubon Director of Policy & Science

months each year, we target their surveys for April and May when they are arriving from migration and setting up nesting territories.

The Long-Billed Curlew Citizen Science surveys will take place April 8 through May 7 and May 8 through May 31. If you are interested in more information, contact Cassidy Dinkel (Cassidy@mtaudubon.org) or Peter Dudley at (Peter@mtaudubon.org). With dozens of survey routes to choose from, we hope you will continue to join the project in 2023!

Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – JAN/FEB 2023

In many past years, Tree and Violet-green Swallows would already be circling Somers in small numbers as I write this (3/16). But not this year, as winter has been slow to lose its grip. Nevertheless, waterfowl numbers increased predictably during the period, with many thousands of Canada Geese, Mallards, and small numbers of Northern Pintails finding what waste grain and open water they could. The long-staying Brown-headed Cowbird in Creston stayed through at least the end of Feb, and the Purple Finch at Holt was still to be reported at the period's end. See also: <https://ebird.org/region/US-MT-029?yr=all>

02/18 – American Three-toed Woodpecker (1) Kalispell (Scott G.)

02/18 – Western Meadowlark (2) Kalispell (Scott G.)

02/19 – Northern Pintail (25) North Shore WMA (Dan C.); 78 at Creston 3/16 (Craig H.)

02/20 – Glaucous Gull (1) Flathead County landfill (Craig H.)

02/28 – Brown-headed Cowbird (1) Creston (Craig H.)

03/03 – Purple Finch (1, through 3/14) Bigfork (Leslie K.)

03/04 – Ruby-crowned Kinglet (1) Wayfarer's SP (Zachary S.)

03/04 – Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (3) Evergreen (Derrick R.)

03/07 – Cackling Goose (1) Creston (Craig H.); also 3 near Bigfork 3/14 (Dan C.)

03/09 – Ferruginous Hawk (1) Mill Cr, Creston (Jake B.)

03/12 – Northern Saw-whet Owl (1) Whitefish (bj W.)

03/13 – Snow Bunting (2) Kalispell (Darcy T.)

03/15 – Bohemian Waxwing (305) Owen Sowerwine (Jake B.)

What to Expect – March/April 2023

Ah, late March. The first insect-eaters arrive in earnest (Tree and Violet-green Swallows, Mountain Bluebirds, Western Meadowlarks), and waterfowl flocks increase in both numbers and diversity. Check Church Slough in particular for Eurasian Wigeon and Greater Scaup, Tundra and Trumpeter Swans, Northern Pintails. By mid-April, most dabbling duck species will have arrived. Red-necked Grebes will appear on the more vegetated wetlands (e.g. Smith Lake). Sandhill Cranes will return; listen also for the first Marsh Wrens and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Yellow-headed Blackbirds will start to arrive, staking out the best marsh territories.

SILENT AUCTION

By Cory Davis

It's back! The annual Silent Auction at the Flathead Audubon May Potluck. Now's the perfect time to gather all of the valuable "stuff" that you might be able to live without. We're looking for bird books, outdoor gear, art work, live bedding plants, bird houses and feeders of all kinds, homemade pies and cookies. Proceeds from the silent auction will benefit our Conservation Education program.

Toads in Winter at Owen Sowerwine

By Laura Katzman, Flathead Land Trust

Have you ever wondered what frogs and toads do during the winter? They go into a state of hibernation, and some frogs actually freeze nearly solid! High concentrations of glucose in the frog's blood act as a natural antifreeze that concentrates in its vital organs, protecting them from damage while the rest of the body freezes. A partially frozen frog will stop breathing, its heart will stop beating, and it will appear quite dead. Once the weather gets warm and things start to thaw out, the frog also will thaw and its heart and lungs will miraculously start working again.

Western toads which may be found at Owen Sowerwine cannot tolerate freezing temperatures so they burrow down below the frost line and hibernate sometimes in groups in burrows or cavities. Although the toads need wetlands for breeding, they need nearby terrestrial habitat for overwintering. Patches of forest with complex habitat structure that creates subterranean spaces and suitable microhabitats such as crevices in root systems have been found to be important for overwintering habitat. Owen Sowerwine has this combination of habitat for western toads, a species of concern in Montana.



Photo provided by Laura Katzman



April Program Montana Native Plant Society - Flathead Chapter

By Jen Hintz Guse

Wednesday, April 12, 7:00 p.m. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, 490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell. "Wildflowers of Glacier National Park: 20 years in the Shadow of a Plot Frame." Jen Hintz Guse will present on 20 years of native plant monitoring in Glacier: lessons learned, and lots of pretty pictures. Jen is a longtime MNPS member, past president of Flathead Chapter, and former Glacier National Park botanist, now working for the Flathead Land Trust.

Native Plants for Birds, A Growing Concern

By Kathy Ross

"Each patch of restored native habitat is just that—a patch in the frayed fabric of the ecosystem in which it lies. By landscaping with native plants, we can turn a patchwork of green spaces into a quilt of restored habitat. More native plants mean more choices of food and shelter for native birds and wildlife. To survive, native birds need native plants and insects that have co-evolved them." National Audubon

A few years ago I wrote a series of articles on how we can help our birds by using native plants in our gardens and landscapes to stop habitat loss (<https://flatheadaudubon.org/birds/helping-birds>). Loss of native plant communities is a major cause of decline in our bird populations, and in the insect populations that support over 90% of our birds. The last few years in the Flathead Valley demonstrate how quickly bird habitat can disappear! What is a bird to do????

Since that time, the movement to plant native plants has mushroomed. Planting native plants is no longer just a nice way to help our birds. It is now recognized as a necessary part of providing support for a much wider range of biodiversity, powered by pollinators and birds. More research is being done, new native plant databases are appearing, along with a variety of new publications on how to make our own gardens and landscapes more supportive of the wild we live with. To help you sort through all this helpful information, I've listed below some great online sites and YouTube discussions that give you new ideas and answer many of your questions, and will empower you to make a difference for the birds!



Photo by Kathy Ross

For starters, Google 'Doug Tallamy YouTube'. There are many and they are all informative.

Audubon Rockies, 'Habitat Hero' speaker series, 'What are bird friendly gardens and why plant one?'

https://youtube.com/watch?v=1BiF_TryCn8

National Audubon, 'Native plants for birds,' offers a native plant database for any zip code-- what native plants to plant and which birds they will attract to your yard,

<https://audubon.org/PLANTSFORBIRDS>

Cornell Lab of Ornithology webinar in collaboration with Audubon, a great introduction to planting native plants to support birds and pollinators, <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/live-event/gardening-for-birds/>

Montana Native Plant Society YouTube Channel, Landscaping for Birds, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=iH5P7a9UtvQ>

Conservation Gardening, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=xYDG8oHL8G8>

Center for Native Plants, Whitefish, MT, <https://centerfornativeplants.com>

American Bird Conservancy, 'Bird Friendly Life'-- Go Native with your landscaping, <https://abcbirds.org/blog/native-trees-shrubs-attract-birds/>

National Wildlife Federation, 'Planting for Wildlife', <https://nwf.org/home/garden-for-wildlife>

Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, "Let's Talk Gardens" series:

Native plants to replace invasives in your garden, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=GARIImd7OvM&t=14s>

A natural history approach to protecting pollinators and birds, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=CXZegHE-SsI>

Native plants to replace invasives in your garden, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=GARIImd7OvM&t=14s>

A natural history approach to protecting pollinators and birds, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=CXZegHE-SsI>

Latest on Avian Influenza A(H5) and A(H7)

By Carole Jorgensen

Local media sources have mentioned the continued spread of avian flu and implicated wild birds as major vectors in the state. Waterfowl, particularly dabbling ducks, are thought to be a reservoir of influenza A(H5) and A(H7). The March 2023 USDA update of avian influenza detections report three wild birds infected with bird flu in Flathead County: one Canada Goose, one Bald Eagle and one Red-tailed Hawk, and 114 detections in Montana composed mostly of raptors/scavengers and waterfowl, including skunks, foxes, grizzly bears, bobcats, and coyotes.

While it is highly likely that many mortalities in wild birds go undetected, the concern remains with domestic fowl. If raising backyard poultry you should take steps to prevent migratory waterfowl and other wild birds from contact with domestic birds in your poultry houses and coops.

While songbirds seldom get bird flu it is prudent to keep your feeders clean by regularly disinfecting them with a 10 percent bleach solution (left on for a few minutes) and cleaning up under the feeder. Wash your hands before and after handling feeders. Should you find dead birds, leave them alone or pick them up with gloves, consider wearing a mask, and make sure your pets don't pick them up. I'm trying to train the squirrels who rob seed from my feeder to wash their paws before and after they steal, but they don't listen, making me pay more attention to feeder hygiene. But for now, don't blame our eagles for the high price of eggs.

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-2022/2022-hpai-wild-birds>

CONSERVATION CORNER

Lights Out for Migratory Birds

By Darcy Thomas

Spring migration is not far off. You can help birds on their journey by turning out the lights. Audubon's Lights Out program is a nationwide effort to convince cities to turn their lights out for migrating birds, providing them safe passage between their wintering and nesting grounds.

Every year, as billions of birds migrate north in the spring and south in the fall, the majority of them use the night sky to navigate. They can become disoriented by bright city lights and skyglow. Many birds collide with buildings as a result. Others expend huge amounts of energy flying around and calling out in confusion, leading to exhaustion that renders them vulnerable to other urban threats.

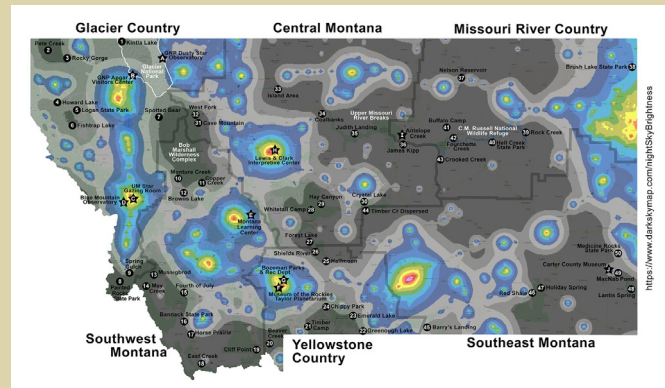
Although Montana is not as bright as many other places around the world, our city lights contribute to the disorientation of migrating birds. David Cronenwett, a Montana naturalist and nature writer, once witnessed thousands of snow geese heading south from their stopover at Freezout Lake become disoriented by a combination of low cloud cover and sky glow from Helena. They circled the city lights for hours as they called and squawked in confusion. Some of them likely perished on their long journey because of the incident.

The Flathead, being in the Pacific Flyway, saw about seven million birds fly over during spring migration last year. You may keep track of how many birds are going over us on any given night by visiting the BirdCast dashboard at <https://dashboard.birdcast.info/region/US-MT-029>. The Flathead Valley is one of the brightest areas in Montana as seen by the map (upper right) which can be found at <https://montana.darksky.ngo/dark-sky-destinations/>.

Audubon's Lights Out program encourages building owners, managers, and residents to turn off unnecessary lights during the months that birds migrate. Here is what you can do:

- Turn off exterior decorative lighting
- Extinguish pot and flood-lights
- Reduce atrium lighting wherever possible
- Turn off interior lighting especially on higher stories
- Substitute task and area lighting for workers staying late or pull window coverings
- Down-shield exterior lighting to eliminate horizontal glare and all light directed upward
- Install automatic motion sensors and controls wherever possible
- When converting to new lighting assess quality and quantity of light needed, avoiding over-lighting with newer, brighter technology

By doing this we can minimize unnecessary bird deaths while saving money by reducing energy usage. Please be a part of the solution. audubon.org/conservation/project/lights-out



Fatal Light Awareness

Margaret Atwood

*A thrush crashed into my window:
one lovely voice the less
killed by glass as mirror -*

*a rich magician's illusion of trees -
and by my laziness:
Why didn't I hang the lattice?*

*Up there in the night air
among the highrises, music dies
as you fire up your fake sunrises:
your light is the birds' last darkness.*

*All over everywhere
their feathers are falling -
warm, not like snow -
though melting away to nothing*

*We are a dying symphony.
No bird knows this,
but us - we know*

*what our night magic does.
Our dark light magic.*

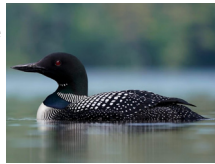


Sign up for Montana Audubon's Action Alert Network

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>.

Nongame Wildlife Tax Check-off

When filling out your Montana tax form this year, think "wildlife" by donating to the Nongame Wildlife Program, found on Form 2, page 11, under Contributions. If your taxes are prepared, tell your accountant that you want to donate to wildlife! Your contributions are tax deductible on next year's return. Montana has more than 500 species of "nongame" animals that benefit from public support each year at tax time. Since 1983, the check-off has contributed over \$27,000 annually to this important wildlife program.



Common Loon
The Cornell Lab

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Saturday, May 13, at the Trumbull Creek Educational Forest north of Columbia Falls

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