



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

VOLUME 47, NUMBER 9

Cassin's Finch



Photo by Ron Knight

OSNA Spring Work Days / Buckthorn Removal

By Pam Willison, Grateful Head Wrangler

Many hands, many hours, MANY THANKS!!

In early April volunteers participated in four work days at the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, to help cut, treat and stack Common Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), which is invasive and is very good at outcompeting native vegetation and toxifying the soil.



Photo by Pam Willison

Crews consisted of saw operators, lopper operators, swamper/stackers, and glyphosate daubers operators. In some areas, the Common Buckthorn is so dense that there isn't anywhere to stack brush. Then, bit-by-bit a clearing forms, there is space to work, and you can see the results of your efforts.

This is challenging work, and the volunteers labored with gusto and determination while wearing eye/ear protection and good gloves! Over four days, 34 individuals joined in and worked a total of 159 volunteer hours. That's an amazing and generous effort!

Kudos to our saw operators who tackled the hardest job, and to Great Old Broads for Wilderness volunteers Connie, Teresa and Katy. Heartfelt thanks to all the hard-working volunteers: Carol, Denny, Rod, Pat, Darcy, Terry, Tom, Cindy, Ronda, Jane, Chris H., Lynda, Dee, Matt, Jacob, Sally, Brian, Shannon, Bridger, Will, Dan, Fawn, Chris G., Connie, Teresa, Katy, Kristen, Jake, Mary Jo, Alice, Jer, Ben, and Karen. May your scratches, thorn-pokes, and sore backs recover quickly!

THIS IS YOUR LAST PILEATED POST UNTIL SEPTEMBER

MAY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, May 1, 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.

Saturday, May 6. Lawrence Park Bird Walk. See page 6.

Sunday, May 7. Owen Sowerine Early Birding and Walking Tours. See page 5.

Monday, May 8, 7 p.m. Flathead Audubon General Meeting, Potluck and Silent Auction. 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.

Thursday, May 11. Spring Migration, Budding Springtime at the Creston Fish Hatchery. See page 6.

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

Saturday, May 13. Owen Sowerine Early Birding and Walking Tours. See page 5.

Sunday, May 14. Sonny Boon Memorial Trail, Somers. See page 6.

Wednesday, May 17. Owen Sowerine Evening Walking Tour. See page 5.

Wednesday, May 17. Flathead Lake Biological Station Tour and Birding. See page 6.

Saturday, May 20. Celebrate Spring Migration in Glacier National Park. See page 6.

Sunday, May 21. Owen Sowerine Early Birding and Walking Tours. See page 5.

Sunday, May 21. Sonny Boon Memorial Trail, Somers. See page 6.

Wednesday, May 31. Beauties of the Bison Range. See page 7.

(continued on page 5)

BIRD OF THE MONTH

The Stellar Steller's Jay

By Bridger Donaldson

Anyone who spends time birdwatching in high or low elevations of coniferous forests in the Western United States and Canada are likely to see the bold and inquisitive Steller's Jay. They do well in forests disturbed by humans, such as thinned areas and campgrounds. Maybe you have heard the Steller's Jay as it raucously announces its presence to the forest, "KWEK KWEK KWEK KWEK KWEK", maybe meaning, "I'M THE PRETTIEST BIRD IN THE WOODS!" Indeed, these Jays are very handsome and they seem to know it too! Flaunting their beautiful plumage and brash habits as shamelessly as their close relative, the Blue Jay. These two species are the only crested jays in Canada and the US and are of the genus *Cyanocitta*.

Steller's Jays are distinguished from Blue Jays, their easterly cousin, by their dark brown to deep black head, crest and back, as well as their dark blue wings, tail and underbody. They also lack the white plumage and markings of the Blue Jay. In autumn, the two often appear in my yard. When together, they seem to either despise each other wholeheartedly, tussling often, or get along like family members. Maybe they are! As they are closely related, *Cyanocitta* forms a "superspecies" with Blue Jays and Steller's Jays which are east-west counterparts. They occasionally hybridize where their range meets. They have also hybridized on rare occasions with Woodhouse's and California Scrub-Jays (two species formerly lumped as the Western Scrub-Jay).



Photo by Bridger Donaldson

The range of the Steller's Jay spans north-south from Alaska to Nicaragua and west-east (US) from coastal California to New Mexico. Steller's Jay has a lot of regional variation, with 16 recognized subspecies. Subspecies may be differentiated by the length and color of forehead streaking, typically blue in "coastal" birds and bold white in "interior" Steller's Jays, and by the extent of black on their head and the color of their throat. The length of the crest also varies from population to population.



Photo by Bridger Donaldson

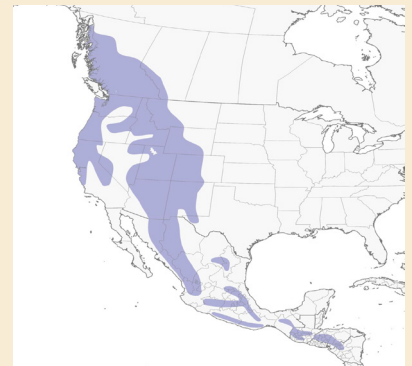
Steller's Jays are proficient mimics, commonly crying out like hawks. I have witnessed one local Steller's Jay uttering a surprisingly good impression of a House Finch, complete with the typical "BJEEER" end note, soon after a real finch finished singing nearby. Other animals noted to have been mimicked by this jay include the Fox squirrel, White-Breasted Nuthatch, Northern Flicker, Northern Goshawk, and chickens, as well as a myriad of mechanical and other human-made noises.

A diverse and opportunistic forager and an omnivore, Steller's Jays have a varied diet, eating nuts and seeds, insects, berries, and small animals. They readily attend bird feeders in winter, and their favorite offerings are peanuts and walnuts. They are also avid nest robbers, consuming nestlings and eggs, resulting in songbirds mobbing them to protect their nests. They readily habituate to campgrounds and parks

throughout the western states, taking from picnickers and campers and earning the nickname Camp Robber – a label more commonly applied to another corvid, the Canada Jay.

When breeding, a pair usually chooses a conifer for its nest, a large cup made of sticks, moss and leaves held together by mud and then lined with some soft material such as animal hair. A clutch is typically two to six eggs, raising one brood a year. Incubation is 16 days and the nestling period is about the same. Like Blue Jays, Steller's Jays get very secretive around their nests and become more elusive during the breeding season. Parents feed the fledged young for about a month after they leave the nest, and they often stay in a family flock for autumn and winter.

One good place to see them in the Flathead is Whitefish Mountain Resort and any similar forested areas around the Valley. So, maybe quit "Cyanositting" around and go look for some Steller's Jays!



Birds of the World

MAY PROGRAM

Tracking Montana's Osprey

Presented By Rob Domenech

Rob Domenech, executive director of Raptor View Research Institute (RVRI), will be the featured speaker at the Monday, May 8 meeting of the Flathead Audubon Society at 7 p.m. (There won't be a virtual component to this meeting). His presentation will include a brief history of the Montana Osprey Project (when it started and why), blood heavy metals analysis (i.e. mercury levels) in Osprey sampled along the Upper Clark Fork River Superfund site, a summary of color band encounters, and an overview of our satellite telemetry tracks of Osprey tagged along the Bitterroot River – with a few standout stories of satellite-tracked individuals.

Rob graduated from the University of Montana in 2002 with a Wildlife Biology degree. He worked throughout western Montana for much of the 1990s, scouting for suitable sites to establish the first fall raptor migration ridgeline banding study in Montana. He founded RVRI in 2004 to continue and better facilitate his raptor research and migration studies. Domenech is one of the country's leading authorities on Golden Eagle and Osprey ecology. His work includes standardized migration counts, satellite telemetry, wing-tagging and color-banding, eco-toxicology studies and more. RVRI's data have contributed to over a dozen publications in top-tier scientific journals. When not in the field, you can find Rob promoting awareness of raptor ecology and related conservation challenges to youth, and community groups.



Provided by Rob Domenech

MAY MEETING FAS

Monday, May 8, 2023

Doors open at 5 p.m.

Potluck Dinner starts at 6 p.m.

Meeting begins at 7 p.m.

Our May Potluck and Silent Auction are one of our favorite events of the year. We enjoy seeing everyone, eating together, and having time to visit before the summer break. This year, silent auction proceeds will go toward the Owen Sowerwine Conservation Easement.

We'll meet in Room 26 of the Gateway Mall (United Way building). This room is on the east side of the building along Glenwood Drive in Kalispell. Look for our banner hanging outside.

We will not have a virtual component to this meeting due to the number of planned activities.

Please bring your own plates, utensils and cups. There is no sink to wash dishes so prepare accordingly. Be sure to arrive early enough to look over and bid on silent auction items! Officers and Board Members will also be elected.

SILENT AUCTION

By Cory Davis

The annual Silent Auction at the Flathead Audubon May Potluck is 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, artwork, live bedding plants, bird houses and feeders of all kinds, and homemade pies and cookies. We'll also have a few special items that have been donated. Proceeds from the silent auction will go towards the Owen Sowerwine Conservation Easement. Please be prepared to take your items home if they do not receive a bid.

Gail Cleveland Honored as Flathead Audubon Volunteer of the Year

By Darcy Thomas

Perhaps it is not as appropriate to call Gail Cleveland Volunteer of the Year, as it would be to call her "Volunteer of Many, Many Years." Gail taught at Whitefish High School and has contributed many volunteer hours to the Whitefish Theatre Company as artist, booking agent, supporter, actor and director. Gail and her husband Bruce Tannehill, live in Whitefish.

Both before and after her retirement from teaching, Gail has found time to volunteer countless hours for Flathead Audubon Society (FAS). "Gail has been our behind the scenes advisor/coach/cheerleader for many years," says board member Kay Mitchell. Over those many years Gail and Bruce have led birding field trips to their favorite spots around Whitefish. In addition, they have been enthusiastic participants in many FAS Birdathons, securing large numbers of pledges each year, then turning those pledges into significant donations to FAS by observing high numbers of species on Birdathon day. Gail and Bruce were part of the FAS birding team that for several years did point counts for the Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge, when the refuge was first established and was trying to document what species could be found there. Gail wrote her first Bird of the Month article for the Pileated Post in 2003 and contributed a total of 17 articles over the next 17 years. She volunteered for the first Owen Sowerwine work day in 2002, and has helped on work days ever since - pulling weeds, controlling buckthorn, maintaining trails and assisting with the five-year plots. She and Bruce built the first stairway to Owen Sowerwine at the Greenridge Drive entrance.

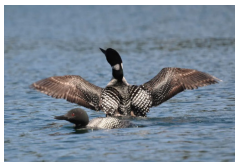


Gail has provided crucial guidance and assistance to FAS efforts to secure funding for chapter projects. For a number of years, Gail contributed her time and considerable grant writing skills to the FAS Grants Committee, reviewing and editing grant applications. She introduced Flathead Audubon to the Whitefish Community Foundation's Great Fish Community Challenge and has been FAS Fund Advisor during the Great Fish campaign. In this capacity, she represents FAS at Great Fish meetings, kickoffs and celebrations. She also tracks our Great Fish Community Challenge donations on a daily basis and writes thank you notes to our donors (within 48 hours of donation!). Gail's work on behalf of FAS with Whitefish Community Foundation and the Great Fish Community Challenge has helped put FAS on a firm financial foundation.

Gail's volunteer skills have benefitted Montana Audubon as well as Flathead Audubon. She was co-chair of the FAS Dessert Auction Committee for two of the Montana Audubon State Bird Festivals that FAS co-sponsored and organized in Kalispell. The Dessert Auction is a big festival fundraiser with proceeds shared by Montana Audubon and the sponsoring chapter. Both years, Gail's work as co-chair raised significant funds for both Montana Audubon and FAS.

Gail and Bruce have travelled around the world birdwatching and recording bird songs. Each winter they reside in Arizona for a few months, where they continue to lead field trips and tours at Patagonia Lake State Park.

Loons and Lead – You can help!



Loons on Van Lake,
Swan Valley
Photo by Jessica Curry

Here in northwest Montana we are fortunate to have both a population of common loons and good fishing in many lakes that support loons. Unfortunately, the lead sinkers and jigs often used for fishing pose a significant threat to loons. Loons often swallow fishing tackle and lead is toxic to loons. One lead sinker can kill a loon. Lead sinkers and jigs 1 1/2 inches or smaller along the longest axis are known to cause loon mortality. In our neighboring state of Washington, one third of loon mortalities from 1999-2010 were attributed to lead poisoning. Numerous other studies around the country have documented the same adverse effects. Many other species such as waterfowl and fish also suffer from lead toxicity.

The good news is that non-toxic alternatives for fishing tackle are available at local fishing supply stores and online from many sources. An extensive list of companies that sell lead-free tackle is available on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency website: go to www.pca.state.mn.us then search for nontoxic tackle. Tell all your fishing friends and fellow anglers about the problem with loons and lead tackle and be sure to add that non-toxic alternatives are easily available. The sooner more people become aware of the problem and switch to non-toxic fishing tackle the quicker the lead poisoning rate in loons will decline.

More information about loons and lead poisoning is available from the Montana Loon Society (www.montanaloons.org) and the Montana Common Loon Working Group (montanaloonworkinggroup@gmail.com).

SPRING MATCH CHALLENGE AND UPCOMING OWEN SOWERWINE TOURS

By Gael Bissell

Starting April 1, the Flathead Land Trust, Flathead Audubon and Flathead Lakers initiated a community-wide Challenge Match Campaign to raise another \$100,000 in local funding for Owen Sowerwine.

Several donors have pledged a match of \$100,000 to all new donations or pledges received by Flathead Audubon or its partners now through July 31 through any of our organizations websites. Help us raise another \$100,000 or more!

We are also offering several guided walking, birding and kayak tours of the property from May 7 to July 29. Contact Jen at Flathead Land Trust for more information and to sign up for tours (info@flatheadlandtrust.org) or call 406-752-8293. New tours may be added so check the Flathead Audubon, Flathead Land Trust or Flathead Lakers websites for additional tours and information.



Photo provided by Flathead Land Trust

Sunday, May 7

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

Highlights from the April 3, 2023 Board of Directors Meeting

By Pam Willison, Secretary

- ✦ Jake Bramante explained that our newsletter is now being printed, prepared and mailed by Insty-Prints, which is an efficient process because all steps are completed at one location.
- ✦ Kay Mitchell said the WFCF Community Grant application has been submitted, and they will be reviewing and making selections soon. Applications for The Great Fish open April 17 and Kay will complete our application.
- ✦ Updates: The field trip committee is looking for a fireside presenter for Warbler Weekend in early June (see page 7), the learning kits have been moved from the cellar at Lone Pine to Gateway Center, prices and options for purchasing walkie-talkies were discussed, and details for the June 17 Birdathon are coming together (kids participate for free).
- ✦ Pam Willison gave an Owen Sowerwine report: Spring work days cutting buckthorn are happening now, MCC will be working on the Greenridge entrance the week of April 10, and a grant application will be submitted to Flathead Conservation District.

SPRING/SUMMER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

(continued from page 1)

Friday through Sunday, June 2-4. Warbler Days at Tally Lake. See page 7.

Friday through Sunday, June 9-11. Wings Across the Big Sky. See page 6.

Saturday, June 17. Birdathon is back! See page 9.

Sunday, June 18. Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge. See page 7.

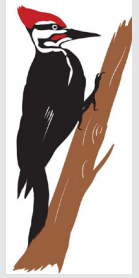
Wednesday, July 26. Sprunger-Whitney Nature Trail. See page 7.

Thursday, July 27. Owen Sowerwine Kayak and Walking Tours. See page 5.

Saturday, July 29. Owen Sowerwine Kayak and Walking Tours. See page 5.

SPRING & SUMMER FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU

LAWRENCE PARK BIRD WALK: SATURDAY, MAY 6, 8 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. Join Karen Nichols on this birding walk through the riparian habitat and open areas of Kalispell's Lawrence Park. We will walk approximately two to three leisurely miles through forest and paved trails near the Stillwater River and sloughs. We hope to see and hear a variety of resident birds and recent spring migrants. Highlights might include: Sora Rail, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Common Yellowthroat, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-tailed Hawk, Osprey, Northern Waterthrush, Black-headed Grosbeak, Gray Catbird, Great Blue Heron, Wood Duck, Vaux's swift, Tree Swallow and Rufous Hummingbird. Please come prepared with rain gear and footwear for possible muddy conditions along the trails. Bathrooms available at the park. Please bring binoculars and bird ID books or apps, if you have them. Meet at the Lawrence Park Picnic Shelter. To sign up or get more information, contact Karen Nichols at knichols.flathead@gmail.com or 406-261-6230.



SPRING MIGRATION, BUDDING SPRINGTIME AT THE CRESTON FISH HATCHERY: THURSDAY, MAY 11, 8 a.m. - 11 a.m. Join Steve Gniadek and Kathy Ross (Flathead Audubon and Montana Native Plant Society) for birding along the Fish Hatchery trails where native spring ephemerals will brighten the walk on an easy trail. An abundance of migratory (as well as local) birds will be returning. Dippers, swans, osprey nesting, eagles and warblers are a few of the birds we will see. We will share ideas on how we can encourage our birds by protecting and promoting our native plant communities. Field trip is limited to 12 participants. For more information and to sign up contact Kathy at mtkat67@gmail.com or 406-837-3837.

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)

FLATHEAD LAKE BIOLOGICAL STATION TOUR AND BIRDS: WEDNESDAY, MAY 17, 10 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. Join Darcy Thomas at Yellow Bay on Flathead Lake to learn about the Flathead Lake Biological Station (FLBS). The station, part of the University of Montana, does research on the limnology and ecology of lakes and rivers, environmental monitoring of Flathead Lake and its watershed, and education. We will meet in Bigfork before driving the east shore to Yellow Bay. Once there, we will join a classroom presentation about the work done by FLBS followed by a Q&A and tour of the facility. Bring your lunch to enjoy a picnic with views of Flathead Lake. After lunch we will walk the trails on the Bio Station campus to bird watch. Contact Darcy to register at darcy@flatheadaudubon.org or 406-407-8263.

CELEBRATE SPRING MIGRATION in GLACIER NATIONAL PARK: SATURDAY, MAY 20, 7 a.m. - 11 a.m. Join Steve Gniadek and Kathy Ross (Flathead Audubon and Montana Native Plant Society) for a birding field trip in the West Glacier-Apgar area. We will explore the shore of Lake McDonald near Apgar, a short walk to the famed "Warbler Heaven" wetlands of Lower McDonald Creek and the forests around Fish Creek, McGee Meadows and Quarter Circle Bridge for songbirds, waterfowl, and raptors. Learn the songs and field markings of our returning breeding birds as well as those of our many hardy year-round avian residents. Along the way, we will point out spring-budding native flora that make up a healthy habitat for bird survival and for raising young. Trip is limited to 12 participants. Contact Kathy at mtkat67@gmail.com or 406-837-3837 to sign up and for more information about the trip and meeting place.

(FIELD TRIPS continued on page 7)

WINGS ACROSS THE BIG SKY

Montana Audubon is excited to announce online registration for Wings Across the Big Sky Festival is open! Join us at Montana's premier birding festival, organized by Montana Audubon and this year's local host chapter, Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon. Friday-Sunday, June 9-11, Heritage Inn, Great Falls, Montana. Click on the link to register. Sign up early to reserve your preferred field trips. <https://mtaudubon.org/outreach/wings/>



(FIELD TRIPS continued from page 6)

BEAUTIES of the BISON RANGE: WEDNESDAY, MAY 31, 6:30 a.m. - late afternoon. Join Darcy Thomas to savor the beauties of the Bison Range in Moiese. The Bison Range is home to many birds such as Bald and Golden Eagles, Lewis's Woodpeckers, Red-naped Sapsuckers, Willow Flycatchers, Lazuli Buntings, and Grasshopper Sparrows. There is also wonderful native vegetation and many animals including Bison, White-tail and Mule deer, Elk, pronghorn, bear and coyote. We will enjoy a short walk along the nature trail and Grassland Trail before touring the Visitor Center to learn about the Bison Range Restoration and the CSKT. After that, we will drive around West Loop, Red Sleep Mountain, and along Prairie Drive as we look for birds, wildlife and flora. Near High Point we will take a short hike on the Bitterroot Trail which leads to a beautiful rocky outcropping. This field trip will be limited to four cars and carpooling will be necessary. Passengers are asked to pay drivers for mileage and to offset the cost of purchasing a day pass. Plan to pay drivers \$15. Bring binoculars, a spotting scope if possible, and lunch, snacks and drinks. There are a couple of restroom stops along the way. To register, contact Darcy at darcy@flatheadaudubon.org or 406-407-8263.

WARBLER DAYS AT TALLY LAKE: FRIDAY, JUNE 2 - SUNDAY, JUNE 4. Join FAS at the Tally Lake Campground for an extraordinary three days of birding and relaxing. There is space for RVs and tents for those who want to spend the nights (checkout time is 11 a.m.). This is an ideal time of year to find a wide variety of migrant and resident birds; most notable is that virtually all the warbler species in NW Montana are found here. Several of our expert birders will be available to lead us around the campground. Plenty of other activities can be enjoyed as well. There is a covered pavilion for rainy weather and a fire ring for warmth and grates for cooking. We will have an optional potluck meal Saturday evening around 6 p.m. Please bring something to share if you want to join in. All other meals are up to you. Someone will show up Friday afternoon to get a fire going, scout the area, and start creating a bird list. Please bring firewood if you have it and camp chairs to sit around the fire. Please call Jill or Mike Fanning at 406-862-8070 or shrdlu@centurytel.net if you plan to come, or if you have any questions. Camping and day use are FREE, courtesy of FAS. Just tell the campground host at the gate that you are with Flathead Audubon at the group pavilion.

**Saturday, June 3, 3 p.m. in the Pavilion
at Tally Lake Campground
Guest Speaker, Mike Koopal**

Mike Koopal, Director and Founder of The Whitefish Lake Institute, will present some of the ongoing research on Tally Lake. Tally Lake has some very unusual features. It is the deepest natural lake in Montana, and does not "turn over annually" unlike most lakes. We have often wondered if there are sea monsters hidden at the bottom!

LOST TRAIL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE: SUNDAY, JUNE 18, 7:45 a.m. - noon. Join refuge wildlife biologist Beverly Skinner and tour the incredible wetlands and grasslands of this hidden jewel west of Kalispell. See nesting Trumpeter Swans and an abundance of shorebirds and waterfowl species associated with Palouse prairie, riparian/wetland, and larch/pine forest habitats of the 9000+ acre refuge, northwest of Marion, MT. We will drive and walk along some of the refuge's closed roads with short hikes on uneven ground for better viewing. Meet at the Lost Trail Refuge Headquarters (about 45 miles NW of Kalispell) between 7:45 and 8:00 a.m. For location and more information about the refuge go to http://www.fws.gov/refuge/lost_trail. Sign up is required and the number of participants is limited to 12. For more information about the trip, contact Beverly at 406-858-2266 or beverly_skinner@fws.gov.

SPRUNGER-WHITNEY NATURE TRAIL: WEDNESDAY, JULY 26, 10 a.m. Lace up your boots and join Friends of the Wild Swan for a guided naturalist hike on the Sprunger-Whitney Nature Trail. The forest will be carpeted with wildflowers and the air filled with the warbles of songbirds. Anne Morley, naturalist and botanist, will be your guide. She is well-versed in the ecology of the Swan Valley and will identify plants, birds, trees and wildlife habitat along the trail. She also offers interesting historical perspectives. The two-mile loop trail meanders through a low elevation old-growth forest with interpretive and plant identification signs along the route. Over 50 different birds and plants are found in the trail area. For more information go to: www.wildswan.org Meet at the trailhead. Bring water, lunch and appropriate clothing for the weather and binoculars. Please contact Anne at 406-886-2242 to let her know you are coming, so she can contact you in case of inclement weather. Directions: Take Hwy. 83 approximately seven miles south of Swan Lake. Turn right 1/2 mile south of mile marker 64 and follow the sign to the trailhead.



Photo by JP Edge
Hungry Horse News

Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

In my column last month, I defined our earthly "community" as far larger than just the Flathead Valley community – or any community that includes just one species – us. To be sure, we have spent untold quadrillions of dollars and work hours to shape that larger community to fit our own needs and wants. In the Lower 48 states, 97.3 percent of our surface area is developable, leaving 2.7 percent as "untrammelled" and wild. Even there, we trammel those spots with trails for hiking and XC skiing. Agriculture, cities, suburbs – all land uses to serve our human purposes – literally cover the map. Agricultural land (food and forestry) is 52 percent. Wetlands comprise 5 percent of land cover (formerly 10 percent). Three percent is urban and suburban. We have 65,000 square miles of mowed lawn! In the entire world, humans have removed three trillion trees (half of what was here originally) to open the land for our uses. The point is often made – correctly – that we are "part of nature, too". Yes, but we have proven to be an absurdly and dangerously dominant "part" of nature.

Put into scientific perspective, nature's checks and balances on life have been honed through an often painful evolutionary process spanning an estimated 3.5 billion years. Along the way dinosaurs came and went, along with millions of other extinctions. Comets and asteroids pummeled us, the sun hiccupped its output a few times, but life, resilient life, persisted. We now have 6 billion species of insects and perhaps 18,000 species of birds, for example, and one species of homo sapiens, which has been around now for 0.00057 percent of that long, long "life-time". And in that time, we have had nearly the same impact as the asteroid that killed all the giant reptiles. One would think that those scientific estimates might lead to some level of humility on our part.

Therein lies the problem. Somewhere along our short timeline, someone decided that the rules of life do not apply to us. Instead of "we are part of a vast system honed over billions of years – and subject to those processes which created us", we in western civilization decided that the entire planet belongs to us – instead of the other way around. And in our haste to make that so, we began shaping the world for our convenience.

Large-scale infractions of the "rules" are becoming obvious. Deforestation, global climate change, and exponential extinctions can all be traced back to our own self-absorption. Our newfound powers vastly outweigh our ability to think ahead to long-term consequences.

And, we can trace that lack of ability back to our own desires and conveniences. "It's about me, isn't it?"

This tendency is on a sequential scale, of course. At one end of the scale, individuals who, through a sociopathic lust for power, combined with greed, start wars and commit genocide on our fellow humans. Others, unaware that the rest of nature is our unquestionable life support system, take from nature anything that will make them richer and more powerful, and eliminate anything that gets in the way.

But biology cannot be politicized, even though some people try. Neither is ecology subject to our human invention called economics. It is just there, as it always has been. Most of us understand that, and make rules and alliances that will temper those primitive and dangerous individuals. Humans are mostly good and kind people, but we often confuse symptoms with problems. At the other end of the self-absorption spectrum, we still appreciate those natural processes that created us, and the wild places that are represented by parks, wilderness areas, and other protected spots. But we often "appreciate" them in the same old context of "what's in it for me?" As an example, 3.5 million of us appreciating Glacier National Park in a given summer have high potential to take the "wild" out of wild. Most of us love wild places because they provide us opportunities to do our chosen types of recreation. Some folks like to snowmobile and motocross in the woods. Some others like to mountain bike the trails, appreciating the wild at a somewhat slower mph. Some of us would rather hike, snowshoe and XC ski – or maybe slow down even more and, say, go bird watching. The impacts on the nature of things in wild places are on a scale, but all these activities have some impact on nature.

Those impacts are the symptoms, to the tune of only 2.7 percent of our lands left to be considered "wild". The problem is that we still approach nature as a place to exercise our self-absorption – what is its value to us. If nature were able to ask the same question – on authority of its vast seniority, "What are those two-leggeds good for to the rest of us?" How would we stack up?

Stay tuned. Next Niche column in September I'm going to make a case for places like Owen Sowerwine, a close and convenient wild place, as an answer waiting for that question, a place to turn off our self-awareness and tune in to a world we will impact some, but very little. It will, in a roundabout way, be a chance for us to learn a little something about ... us.

Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – MAR/APR 2023

Mid-March offered its usual diversity and abundance of waterfowl, with great numbers of geese and ducks throughout the valley (despite the late ice-out). Eurasian Wigeon were seen among the flocks at many sites around the valley, from March 17 through April 11. A Eurasian Green-winged Teal at Creston April 11 (Craig H.) was just the fifth local (and state) record of this subspecies. Ospreys, Turkey Vultures, bluebirds, Western Meadowlarks and particularly swallows arrived later than usual as winter weather lingered. A few winter visitors were slow to leave (e.g. Snow Bunting, Northern Shrike, Rough-legged Hawk). See also: <https://ebird.org/region/US-MT-029?yr=all>

03/18 – Glaucous Gull (1) Flathead Lake North Shore (Shawn R.); Lower Valley 4/02 (Leslie K.)

03/19 – Western Screech-Owl (1) Fish Creek Campground, Glacier NP (Collin M.)

03/20 – Purple Finch (1) Bigfork (Leslie K.) Last report of this overwintering bird

03/20 – Black-necked Stilt (1) N. of Bigfork (Denny O.) Record early arrival date for MT

03/28 – Short-billed (Mew) Gull (1) Somers Bay (Dan C.) Present through 4/07

03/30 – Lesser Black-backed Gull (1) Egan Slough Rd (Craig H.)

04/04 – Snow Bunting (1) Egan Slough Rd (Craig H.)

04/05 – Trumpeter Swan (collar “9@5”) Church Slough

(Dan C.) Marked in OR in 2021

04/05 – Eurasian x American Wigeon (hybrid) (1) Church Slough (Dan C.)

04/06 – Lapland Longspur (1) West Valley (Josh C.)

04/11 – (Eurasian) Green-winged Teal (1) Creston area (Craig H.)

04/12 – Greater White-fronted Goose (3) Egan Slough Rd. (Craig H.)

04/14 – Horned Grebe (389) Dayton to Elmo, Flathead Lake (Dan C.) Extraordinary numbers

04/15 – Williamson’s Sapsucker (1) Herron Park (Shannon D.)

04/15 – Northern Shrike (1) West Valley (Markus and Erin B.) Late date

What to Expect – APR/MAY 2023

It’s time to put out the hummingbird feeders, as Earth Day (April 22) usually heralds the first arrivals. The number of arriving migrant species will start to increase exponentially by the beginning of May, with Blue-winged Teal, Vaux’s Swift, Barn Swallow, Vesper and Savannah Sparrow, Cassin’s Vireo, and the first warblers due any day. Most breeding species will have arrived by the time I prepare the next installment of this summary, May 16; only our latest arrivals (Willow Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, Common Nighthawk) wait until the end of May to show up in northwest Montana.

Birdathon 2023!

By Shannon Donaldson

Flathead Audubon Society (FAS) Birdathon is back and is scheduled on Saturday, June 17. Birdathon is a fun and friendly competition to see who can find and identify the most bird species in a day. Everyone is welcome to participate, from beginner to expert birders.

This year, we will again be birding not just for fun, but for a great cause! The money raised through Birdathon all goes toward the purchase of the Owen Sowerwine conservation easement. Owen Sowerwine encompasses 442 acres just outside of Kalispell and includes extensive riparian habitat along the Stillwater and Flathead Rivers. 168 species of birds have been found in the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area. Participating in Birdathon will help ensure that this area is secured not just for the wildlife, but that it will also continue to serve as an exceptional outdoor classroom for K-12 conservation education. You can learn more about the Owen Sowerwine effort here, <https://flatheadaudubon.org/protect/owen-sowerwine-natural-area/>

Birdathon registration is \$20 per person. In general, we will stay within the Flathead Valley. Unlike past years, there will not be teams of two. Teams of up to four people (one car) can be formed and a team name can be decided upon. For more information, or if you would like to be connected with a team captain, please email shannon@flatheadaudubon.org

After a day of birding, we will gather in Creston at 6:30 p.m. to share bird lists, stories and highlights. FAS will be hosting a barbecue and raffle at the Creston picnic pavilion, located adjacent to Jessup Mill Pond, just east of the Creston Fish Hatchery, along Kauffman Lane. Prizes will be awarded for the most species, rarest bird(s) and the “best worst” photo. We will also give away some exciting raffle items! When you register, you will automatically receive one entry into the raffle held during the BBQ. Raffle tickets will also be available for purchase at the BBQ. FAS will provide burgers and hot dogs. Feel free to bring a potluck item and beverages.

Farewell to a Flathead Audubon Society Hero

By Kay Mitchell

Some people are gentle and kind. Some are highly intelligent. Some are dedicated to good causes. Some are highly principled. Some give the limelight to others. And a few wrap these all up together and quietly become a hero.

Lewis Young passed away April 9, from complications of a stroke suffered while skiing in Fernie, BC. He leaves behind his beloved wife, Lynda, and one son and his family. A wildlife biologist by education, Lewis was (in his words), "a conservationist by choice and by birth." He lived his beliefs.

Flathead Audubon has been fortunate to have Lewis with us from 2003 until 2023. In those 20 years, he helped us form the Owen Sowerwine Committee, dealing with initial land, wildlife, water, and weed issues. He was instrumental in putting together a protocol for monitoring vegetation changes in Owen Sowerwine, the monitoring to be done every five years; he developed the monitoring form and has participated in every monitoring session carried out so far. During the same time, he was chair of the FAS Conservation Committee for 17 years, from 2004-2021.

For nine years, 2014 to present, Lewis has been the layout editor for our monthly newsletter, the Pileated Post. In true Lewis style, the articles were always scientifically correct and diverse, and the copy always submitted by the deadline.

In his professional life, Lewis worked all over the US, including Alaska. He was a member of The Wildlife Society (TWS), a nationwide professional society of wildlife biologists. For TWS, he worked on committees and on many research projects for and with other biologists. Bats and Sharp-tailed Grouse have been among his strongest interests. He led yearly Going Batty field trips for FAS and wrote annual educational articles.

Photo by Lisa Bate, GNP



Lewis setting up mist nets for a bat capture and survey.

"Bat of the Month," served to teach folks throughout the valley about bats and were published each year in the Daily Inter Lake. He worked for many seasons with Lisa Bate's bat surveys in Glacier National Park and has been instrumental in the reintroduction of the Sharp-tailed Grouse in Western Montana.

Lewis has been a recipient of the MT Audubon and TWS Conservationist of the Year and Lifetime Achievement awards.

Throughout his career and retirement, he received many awards for his work. In 2021, he was awarded Flathead Audubon's Conservation Achievement Recognition "for applying the best available science and his considerable experience-based knowledge to a wide range of wildlife projects throughout Montana, both as a US Forest Service biologist and as a volunteer. The projects include multi-year surveys of Montana's bats and Black Swifts, monitoring owls and eagles, and preservation and restoration of Sharp-tailed Grouse." You can view the presentation honoring him at <https://flatheadaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Lewis-Young.pdf>.

Lewis and Lynda always had at least one well-trained black Lab to help them on their frequent pheasant hunts. Lewis's other hobby was restoring classic cars. With Lewis doing the mechanical work and Lynda the upholstery, their most recent trophy was a stunning black 1967 Ford Mustang with not a speck of dust on its shiny paint, as it travelled enclosed in a Lewis-adapted trailer.

A hero to many of us who knew him, Lewis left us in a natural world immensely better for his being here, and with his examples as a man who has inspired many, to continue to carry the banner of conservation.

For an obituary and online memorial for Lewis see <https://belltower.funeraltechweb.com/tribute/details/1820/Daniel-Young/obituary.html#tribute-start>.

Smith Lake Field Trip Report

By Darcy Thomas

A small group of seven birders joined me on April 13 at Smith Lake in Kila. Although there was still a lot of ice on the lake, there was an adequate amount of open water and we saw a combined total of 39 taxa.

We were greeted by two busy Ruby-crowned Kinglets at the Kila Pub. We watched several Tree Swallows and Mountain Bluebirds checking out nesting boxes. There were eight Sandhill Cranes in various locations foraging in the wet areas. A variety of ducks,



Photo by Darcy Thomas

both dabbling and diving, as well as grebes and scaup were viewed through the spotting scope. Four Trumpeter Swans graced the far shore and four Bald Eagles were perched in trees around the lake. The group saw Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Northern Goshawk, and a single Peregrine Falcon. There were more birds than I can mention here. We all felt we could have stayed all day had we had a camp chair, a sandwich, and a thermos of coffee.

Presidents Column

By Cory Davis

"My Audubon Family" is a phrase I often hear from our board members. We truly are a family and care and support each other whenever needed. I experienced this firsthand, recently, when I needed to leave town for a family emergency and my FAS family had my back (especially VP Darcy, thank you!). The dedication, not only to each other but to the FAS mission and local conservation, is truly impressive. Another phrase I often hear to describe our board, is that we are a "working board." Except for our Conservation Educator, Denny Olson, we are all volunteers. Many non-profit boards meet and make decisions, but then decisions are implemented by staff. We are the staff of FAS. The board and committee members work regularly to plan, research, attend, teach, organize, write, mail, pull weeds, bake cookies, and anything else that's needed. Why am I telling you all this? Because we need more family members! Don't worry, you don't need to jump right in as a board member. We could use help with several specific tasks and need some new voices on our committees. Whatever you have time for. I have been very lucky to help lead this organization for the past two years and I know FAS will be in even better hands with the incoming President. But I'll continue to enjoy working with this fun group of folks and I hope you'll consider joining our family!

Here are just some of the things we could use help with:

Outreach/Publicity Committee: help get the word out about our events!

Conservation Committee: help write comment letters for local projects that may affect birds.

Education Committee: help us create and implement our education program.

Field Trip Committee: help us organize and lead field trips.

Newsletter: write a Bird of the Month or conservation article for the Pileated Post.

Merchandise: help us design and order FAS merchandise.

Manage the FAS booth at an event.

Contact Darcy if you're interested in helping in any way: darcy@flatheadaudubon.org.

Good birding!

Take Time to Thank a Bird of the Month Author

By Darcy Thomas

Please give a big shout-out to our fabulous Bird of the Month (BOM) authors who wrote great articles for your reading enjoyment this year. Sneed Collard gave us the Black-backed Woodpecker, Theresa Ciraolo imparted her newfound love of the Common Merganser, Kat Peterson imparted her knowledge of the American Crow, Karen Nichols spoke of the amazing Golden-crowned Kinglet, Nora Roberts shared her experience with the Harlequin Duck, and Bridger Donaldson penned a piece on the beautiful Steller's Jay.

I rounded out the year with a little of my own writing on the American Redstart, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Osprey. If you haven't had a chance to read all of these articles, please take the time to do so. You will not be disappointed. BOM authors help make our newsletter special and I hope they will return next year with more stories about the birds they love. If any new author has an inclination to write a piece for next year, I'd love to hear from you!

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 in 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 months each year, we target their surveys for April and



The Cornell Lab

By Amy Seaman,

MT Audubon Director of Policy & Science

May when they are arriving from migration and setting up nesting territories.

The current Long-Billed Curlew Citizen Science survey concludes on May 7, but you can get involved in the next survey which begins 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!

2023 Flathead Audubon Society Nominations Slate

By Cory Davis

Each spring, FAS elects officers and directors for their dedication and leadership. This year is no exception, and we have an impressive list of candidates for consideration. FAS elects officers for a two-year term, alternating with president and vice president one year, and secretary and treasurer the next. This is the year for president and vice president. We do not currently have a candidate for vice president, but this is not the first time we've gone without a VP. Our board members and officers constantly step up to help each other out. In addition, all five directors whose terms are expiring have stepped up to run for re-election. There is no limit on the number of directors that can be on the board, so if you are interested in joining our family, please talk with one of our officers or directors.

Please give these nominees due consideration. Then attend the FAS general meeting this month on May 8 to vote, as well as enjoy a great potluck.

Officers

President – Darcy Thomas: Born in Seattle, our family moved to Kalispell in 1970 where I graduated from Flathead High School. After community college at FVCC, I moved to Missoula to finish my degree in Psychology. Although I planned to return to the Flathead, I got sidetracked by a tall, handsome rock climber whom I married and raised four children with. We lived in Florence in the Bitterroot Valley. Early in my marriage I earned my BSN in nursing from Montana State University and enjoyed a career as a nurse evolving from oncology, to public health and school nursing and ending in infection control. During all this time I loved birds, teaching my children about them and enjoying them wherever I happened to be. One of my great birding joys early on was participating in a two-week field study with Dick Hutto while collecting data on the Long-billed Curlew. It took 40 years, with an interlude in Seattle, before I finally returned to the Flathead Valley to retire with my second husband. We are happily ensconced in our dream home in Kalispell. My retirement goal is to be active in Audubon, make myself useful to my community, and advocate for birds.

Director Candidates

Bob Lee: I have been a member of Flathead Audubon for many years and served in a variety of positions during that time. I have been the representative for FAS to Montana Audubon for several years and the chair of the Nominations Committee. I would like to continue to be involved as an elected board member and carry on the good work of FAS. I feel that my background as a wildlife biologist will serve me and Flathead Audubon well, as we progress in uncertain times for many bird species.

Carole Jorgensen: I am a retired wildlife biologist with over 40 years' experience in five states (and Botswana) working on rare and conservation-listed species, habitat protection and improvement projects, land management, regulation, timber/oil and gas/mining/recreation, oil spills and way too much litigation. Throughout my career, I often said if we knew then what we know now, the loss of species and habitats could have been prevented with some proactive actions. Now, in Montana, The Last Best Place, I fear we take our resources and open spaces for granted too often. I am the world's worst birder, but I am a bulldog on law and policy and hope to apply to be Flathead Audubon's mascot, so I can continue to work towards the wise balance of ecosystems and people.

Cindy Roberts: I earned a Master's Degree in Science Education and taught elementary and middle school students for 38 years in Iowa, Virginia, Montana, Japan and Austria. I have also worked as an interpretive park ranger in Yellowstone National Park for nine summers. With my husband, Tom, I raised two daughters, and love taking six grandchildren into the Montana wilds. I have been the co-chair of the Education Committee for the past several years.

Tom Roberts: I recently retired from teaching at Linderman Education Center in Kalispell, adding to a career total of 42 years. I have also coached many sports teams in Iowa, Virginia, Japan and Austria. I worked as an interpretive ranger in Yellowstone National Park for 20 summers. My daughter, Lisa, lives in Iowa, and daughter Lori, in Kalispell. In my spare time, I paint wildlife in oils and watercolor.

Linda Du Lac: Linda was elected to the board last year on a one-year temporary opening to chair our Membership Committee. She has taken charge and uplifted our membership more than anyone could have imagined. Linda has over 35 years of experience working in the national resources field. To learn more about Linda and her dedication, see our cover story in the April 2023 Pileated Post, "It's Never Too Late Or Too Early To Become A Bird Watcher."

Cash Rewards for Loon Sightings

By Linda Winnie

The Montana Loon Society and the Montana Common Loon Working Group (CLWG) are once again offering cash prizes for observations of banded loons or confirmed unbanded breeding loons. Two, \$100 awards will be decided by a random drawing from all individuals who have submitted at least one observation. For details about the contest go to <https://montanaloons.org/report-loon-sightings/> and click "PRINT PDF" about halfway down the page. The pdf will also give you information on how to observe and report loon bands.

The most useful band reports are the ones received as soon as possible, so send them in as you see them, even if you are not 100 percent sure of your observation.

Send band observations by email to the CLWG at montaloonworkinggroup@gmail.com or report your sighting using the free mobile app Survey123. For help using the app, email CLWG.



Common Loon/The Cornell Lab

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Content Editor Geri Meireis geri@flatheadaudubon.org

Layout Editor Susie Waldron susie@flatheadaudubon.org

Bird of the Month Editor Darcy Thomas darcy@flatheadaudubon.org

Mail Distribution Jake Bramante jake@flatheadaudubon.org

Email Distribution Linda Winnie linda@flatheadaudubon.org

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

OFFICERS

President Cory Davis cory@flatheadaudubon.org
 Vice-President Darcy Thomas darcy@flatheadaudubon.org
 Past-President Gael Bissell gael@flatheadaudubon.org
 Secretary Pam Willison pam@flatheadaudubon.org
 Treasurer Rod Walette rod@flatheadaudubon.org

DIRECTORS

2022-2025 Will Beyer beyer59901@yahoo.com
 2022-2025 Margaret Parodi margaret@flatheadaudubon.org
 2020-2023 Bob Lee bob@flatheadaudubon.org
 2020-2023 Carole Jorgensen carole@flatheadaudubon.org
 2020-2023 Cindy Roberts cindy@flatheadaudubon.org
 2020-2023 Tom Roberts yellranger@yahoo.com
 2021-2024 Dan Casey dan@flatheadaudubon.org
 2021-2024 Kay Mitchell kay@flatheadaudubon.org
 2021-2024 Jake Bramante jake@flatheadaudubon.org
 2022-2025 Bridger Donaldson bridger@flatheadaudubon.org
 2022-2025 Shannon Donaldson shannon@flatheadaudubon.org
 2022-2025 Jason Garver jason@flatheadaudubon.org
 2022-2023 Linda Du Lac lindadulac@flatheadaudubon.org

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Conservation Vacant
 Education Vacant
 Field Trips Margaret Parodi margaret@flatheadaudubon.org
 Darcy Thomas darcy@flatheadaudubon.org
 Finance Rod Walette rod@flatheadaudubon.org
 Great Fish Cory Davis cory@flatheadaudubon.org
 Membership Linda Du Lac lindadulac@flatheadaudubon.org
 Newsletter Geri Meireis geri@flatheadaudubon.org
 Nominations Bob Lee bob@flatheadaudubon.org
 Owen Sowerwine Cory Davis cory@flatheadaudubon.org
 Pam Willison pam@flatheadaudubon.org
 Outreach Jake Bramante jake@flatheadaudubon.org
 Jan Metzmaker jan@flatheadaudubon.org
 Programs Ronda Howell pitamakinlynne75@gmail.com

CONSERVATION EDUCATOR

Denny Olson educator@flatheadaudubon.org

FAS REP ON MT AUDUBON BOARD

Gael Bissell gael@flatheadaudubon.org

Cory Davis (alternate) cory@flatheadaudubon.org



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