



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

Red-breasted Nuthatch



Photo by Linda Du Lac

Thank You to Whitefish Community Foundation

By Kay Mitchell

This spring, Flathead Audubon applied for a Community Grant from Whitefish Community Foundation. We were barely at half of the \$100,000 we needed to raise for the conservation easement on the Owen Sowerwine natural area.

When I typed \$10,000 into the box asking how much we were requesting, a little voice in the back of my mind said, "Sure, and we all want to win the Powerball, too." I assumed we might be fortunate to receive \$2,000.

On awards night, President Darcy Thomas represented FAS at the ceremony. As the grants were announced,

there was no mention of Flathead Audubon. Then suddenly, the Foundation's staff rolled out a beautiful video showing Owen Sowerwine at its best and announced a Major Community Project Grant of \$50,000!

We can never express fully how delighted Flathead Audubon is to "share" Owen Sowerwine with Whitefish Community Foundation and its Circle of Giving members who supported the conservation easement in this way. Our thanks are heartfelt and sincere!

Nature surprises us often. Sometimes, human nature surprises us even more!

We Met the Match

By Gael Bissell

Great news! Thanks to 150 of you amazing FAS donors, plus hundreds of other supportive community members, we met the \$100,000 Spring Challenge Match for the proposed Owen Sowerwine Conservation Easement! Many, many thanks to all of you who gave so generously! And our sincere thanks to Molly Miller and Mark Jungerman, the Bibler Foundation, and Alan and Sallie Gratch who provided the incentive!

As great as this news is, the updated final appraisal increased the conservation easement value; leaving us with just under a \$200,000 funding gap to fill before Flathead Land Trust is able to purchase the conservation easement on the Owen Sowerwine parcel.

If you have not yet donated, there is still time and need! Donations made to the Flathead Land Trust during the Great Fish Community Challenge will go toward the purchase of the conservation easement. Head over to the Great Fish Community Challenge website and support Flathead Audubon's education initiatives, Flathead Land Trust's purchase of the conservation easement as well as the wide variety of other great causes from the valley's non-profits!



SEPTEMBER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Saturday, September 2. Raptor ID at Lone Pine State Park. See page 6.

Tuesday, Sept. 5, 5:30 p.m. FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Creston Fish Hatchery Pavilion, Kalispell. All are welcome. You may bring your dinner.

Monday, Sept. 11, 7 p.m. Flathead Audubon General Meeting. Gateway Community Center, US Hwy. 2 West, Kalispell. East side of Gateway Mall along Glenwood Dr. All are welcome. There will be no virtual component this month.

Thursday, Sept. 14. Birds of Prey Workshop. See page 6.

Saturday, Sept. 16. Birding at Smith Lake. See page 6.

Sunday, Sept. 24. Jewel Basin Hawk Watch. See page 6.

Saturday, Sept. 30. Sandhill Crane Viewing. See page 6.

Friday, October 6. Sandhill Crane Viewing. See page 6.

Saturday, Oct. 7. Save The Date!! Owen Sowerwine Fall Work Day. See page 10.

A BATTY TALE

THE HOARY BAT

By Lewis Young

*In honor of our late friend Lewis Young,
Wildlife Biologist and Bat Lover
First published in April 2016*

The Hoary Bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*) is one of the most striking and recognizable bats in North America. It is the largest in Montana and one of the largest in the U.S. with a wingspan of about 16 inches. The fur color on its back is a mixture of browns and grays with tinges of white giving it a frosted or hoary look that provides the common name and helps make it easy to identify. Ears are short and rounded with a distinct black edging and the tail membrane is heavily furred on the top. When roosting in cool weather the tail can be pulled up around the bat like a blanket. Relatively long, narrow wings give it a fast, direct flight pattern. Rarely, they can be seen at dusk where they are noticeably larger than most other bats and generally high flyers. Although a "large" bat, they only weigh about 0.7 ounce! *Lasiurus* is Greek for hairy or shaggy tail, and *cinereus* Latin for ash colored - referring to its color. The species was first described in 1796 from a specimen collected in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Hoary Bats roost on trees and tree foliage and are solitary except when females roost with their pups. Being solitary roosters and blending in well, they are seldom observed. They have been documented to return to the same roost tree for several years in some cases. Life span is typically six to seven years but up to 12 years has been documented.

The Hoary Bat's diet consists of a variety of insects but they favor large-sized prey such as moths and beetles, and like other bat species eat huge numbers of insects every night. Pregnant and lactating females may eat their own weight each night! They prefer to forage in uncluttered environments such as the edge between a meadow and forest, and usually come out to forage later than many species - often an hour after sunset. Like other bat species, they catch their prey in the web of the tail membrane, like a catcher's mitt, then transfer it to the mouth all in a split second.

Echolocation is used to navigate and find food - even in total darkness. Echolocation is like radar in that the bat sends out a rapid pulse of high frequency sound waves

that bounce off objects. Then the return signals are used to judge the location. Their echolocation calls at 20-30 kilohertz are at a frequency above human hearing but Hoary Bats also have a variety of social calls used to communicate with other individuals and these are within human hearing range. Electronic devices are now available that can detect echolocation calls, and some even identify the species.



Photo by Lewis Young

Hoary Bats usually have two pups but it can vary from one to four. They have four nipples allowing more than two pupa at a time to be fed. Breeding occurs in the fall but implantation is delayed so that fertilization occurs in the spring. Gestation is about 90 days with pups being born in June. Pups at birth are mostly hairless except for a few patches of fine gray fur. They are capable of flying in approximately 30 days and reach sexual maturity

the same year they are born. Although both sexes may inhabit the same general areas during summer males generally are scarce where females are raising their pups. Mothers fly up to 12 miles from the roost for foraging and when returning must find their well-concealed young. They recognize the pup's call and communicate with them when reuniting. If pups fall from the roost they give distress calls and the mother will retrieve them when possible.

With the widest range of any North American bat, Hoary Bats are found all across Montana and widespread in North America, Central America, and much of South America. It is the only bat found in Hawaii. Although widespread, they are usually in low densities except at times during migration when they may be concentrated in certain migratory pathways. They occur over a broad elevation range from the lowest valley bottoms to over 9,000 feet.

A migratory species, Hoary Bats are present in Montana primarily from May or June through September. There are no records of overwintering in Montana. It is not known where Hoary Bats from Montana go in winter. Possibly, they migrate to mild coastal areas, the southern tier of states, and Mexico where they are known to occur in winter months. Males and females typically don't overlap ranges during summer, but do migrate together and breeding occurs at that time.

(continued on page 12)

SEPTEMBER PROGRAM

A Father-Son Decade of Birding

Presented By Sneed Collard III

Missoula author Sneed B. Collard III, acclaimed author of more than 90 books for young people, will be the featured speaker at the Monday, Sept. 11 meeting of the Flathead Audubon Society at 7 p.m. (There won't be a virtual component to this meeting).

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 a smorgasbord of exotic birding destinations he and his family have been fortunate enough to visit, including his recent visit to Japan. Sneed will also discuss his upcoming book, *Birding for Boomers*, and share his special challenges as a birder with hearing loss.



Sneed Collard III

Peeps from the President

By Darcy Thomas, President Elect

As your President Elect, I am looking forward to the upcoming year and all of our plans to accomplish great conservation and education work for the benefit of birds and the world they live in.

This year we say good-bye to Cory Davis, who is moving away from the Flathead to pursue a job with the Forest Service in northern California and to be closer to family. We will miss his leadership, but he will continue to be a friend. I hope to fill his shoes here for Flathead Audubon.

The Great Fish Community Challenge is underway. The Challenge is a charitable giving campaign designed to maximize the generosity of our community and raise money for non-profits in our valley. We are very fortunate to have been chosen to participate in this wonderful annual event. The Challenge is the major fundraising event for Flathead Audubon, and it provides our annual budget used for our conservation and education programs. Please donate to Flathead Audubon and other non-profits of your choice through the Great Fish Community Challenge (<https://whitefishcommunityfoundation.org/great-fish/>).

We are getting closer to our goal of raising money, along with Flathead Land Trust and the Flathead Lakers, to preserve Owen Sowerwine area through a conservation easement. The generosity of our members and others in the valley has been truly amazing. It shows what a special place Owen Sowerwine is and how much people care for birds, wildlife, and habitat.

Fall migration is now underway, so go out and enjoy the birds. Find a new place to visit or go birding in a tried-and-true beloved spot. But go! We all work so hard, but we must remember to play and engage with nature to refresh our inner selves. Bring the stories of what you see and experience to a general meeting this year to share with other members. We have some exciting programs planned that you will not want to miss.

Happy Birding!
Darcy Thomas,
FAS President Elect



Photo by Rob Thomas

Sonny Boon Field Trip Report

By Dan Casey

April 30: Sonny Boon Memorial Trail, Somers. 15 people, 38 species recorded including Trumpeter Swans, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, Orange-crowned and Nashville Warblers.

May 14: Sonny Boon Memorial Trail, Somers. 11 people, 40 species recorded, including Trumpeter Swan, Sora, Warbling Vireo, Nashville and Yellow Warblers, Western Tanager.

May 21: Sonny Boon Memorial Trail, Somers. 62 species recorded, including 11 duck species, Sandhill Crane, Least Flycatcher, Pygmy Nuthatch, Northern Waterthrush, Townsend's Warbler.

Tally Lake Warbler Weekend 2023

By Pam Willison

One in a Thousand!

During Warbler Weekend at Tally Lake, Whitefish Lake Institute Executive Director Mike Koopal presented unique information on Tally Lake. Mike's working hypothesis is that the lake is meromictic, meaning the deep lake water doesn't mix with the surface water, leading to a depletion of dissolved oxygen at depth. Compared to holomictic lakes like Flathead and Whitefish Lakes that completely mix twice a year, scientists predict that there is only one meromictic lake to every 1,000 holomictic lakes.

Photo by Pam Willison



Mike Koopal

Mike has pieced together information to tell the story of why Tally Lake may be meromictic. The lake is ringed by mountains which shelter it from winds. It is also the second deepest lake in Montana at 445 feet, meaning wind energy would have to be strong to mix the water. It also has a trapezoidal cross section, meaning there is more water at depth than in most lakes. The lake has a brown color from the humic (organic) matter input from its watershed. That darker color rapidly absorbs sunlight and heats the lake up quickly forming a very strong shallow thermocline that is resistant to mixing.

But the story doesn't end there. Mike has documented an historic landslide at the far end of the lake that raised the lake elevation 40-50 feet. Now, the lake inlet and outlet are at the same end of the lake, decreasing any

flow-through energy. Mike is awaiting data analysis from a sediment core he helped collect from the lake last summer. He is curious whether the core will substantiate a sub-hypotheses that the lake is partially meromictic, meaning that it does mix every 50-75-100 years based on unique meteorological events. There's more to come from Mike's work on Tally Lake. He is assembling a team of scientists to further analyze lake conditions and publish a paper on this most fascinating and unique resource.

Camping and Birding Galore

In addition to the informative presentation recapped above, the Tally Lake Warbler Weekend, held June 2-4, provided glorious weather, great birding, good fun, and a notable increase in participation (possibly weather related?). There were over 50 attendees during the weekend, with nearly 25 people camping.

The Saturday potluck was well attended, and the desserts were well worth the trip – chocolate cake, rhubarb tarts, cookies, brownies!! Although there were no rare bird sightings, 53 species of birds were spotted, including a pair of Osprey demonstrating aerial mating behavior.

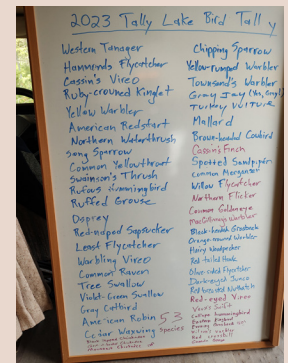


Photo by Pam Willison

Otters and Owen Sowerwine

By Laura Katzman

We met the \$100,000 Matching Challenge for Owen Sowerwine! We still have a funding gap, but thanks to all of you who helped us narrow this funding gap by helping us meet the matching challenge.

Some of you also came on tours of Owen Sowerwine at the end of July, and during one evening kayak tour we saw a group of five otters! Being on the river in the evening has its benefits as during summer otters are more nocturnal. The group of otters observed included a mom and four pups swimming in the Stillwater River. River otters are well adapted for swimming as their hind feet are webbed and they can close their ears and nostrils to keep water out. They also have nictitating membranes, which look like clear third eyelids. As an otter swims, these membranes stay closed, protecting its eyes from incoming particles and improving its underwater vision, just as humans see better underwater while wearing goggles. River otters can also dive up to 60 feet in depth and stay submerged for more than four minutes. They can do this because they have 2 ½ times the lung capacity of similar-sized land mammals. Otters also have the unique ability to slow their heartbeat while diving to save oxygen and stay underwater longer. The otters have these adaptations to hunt fish, their main food. However, they also spend time on land and can travel several miles overland between bodies of water. Nature is so amazing!



Photo by Laura Katzman

Wings Across the Big Sky 2023

By Lauren Smith, MT Audubon Communications Specialist

It may be late summer now, but we're still reminiscing about the 22nd annual Wings Across the Big Sky Festival! What an incredible June weekend in Great Falls, co-hosted by the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon chapter.



Photo provided by MT Audubon

Thank you to everyone who joined us in exploring the stunning variety of bird species that call Montana home. On Saturday alone we spotted about 147 different bird species!

Special thanks to keynote speaker Sneed Collard for an engaging presentation! His insights and knowledge about birding and nature were truly inspiring, and Montana Audubon was grateful for his participation.

This year, we were honored to present Senator Jon Tester with Montana Audubon's Conservationist of the Year award. His dedication to preserving Montana's natural beauty is truly commendable, and we are honored to have his support as we advocate for Montana's birds, wildlife, and natural ecosystems.

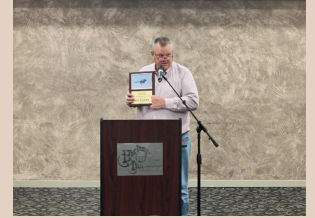


Photo provided by MT Audubon

Looking ahead, we're excited for next year's festival in Helena, and have already started planning field trips with our co-hosts the Last Chance Audubon chapter. Please save the date: May 31-June 2, 2024.

We hope to see you in Helena!

Highlights from the May 1, 2023 Board of Directors Meeting

By Pam Willison, Secretary

- ✦ Cory Davis reviewed the contract for the Conservation Education Specialist, and noted that it was revised to add more quantifiable requirements, and to emphasize our priority for doing in-class presentations and related field trips. The contract was approved.
- ✦ Darcy, Cory, Rod, and Linda will prepare a job description for a part-time contract for administrative support. They will use a spreadsheet prepared from input from each Committee Chair about tasks they need help completing. It is our goal to have this person in place by August.
- ✦ Progress reports: the Great Fish application is on schedule (Kay); tours and kayak trips for Owen Sowerwine are scheduled for July (Gael); Birdathon details are set and website registration is being set up (Shannon, Jake); Warbler Weekend is ready to go (Margaret), and there are now walkie-talkies for field trips (Darcy).
- ✦ Dan Casey reported that he is seeking a second paid primary spotter for Hawk Watch, and is following up on some leads.

Please Lend a Hand

By Darcy Thomas

Many hands make light work, and we need more hands to help with the work we do. This can be done in many small ways that don't take a lot of time or commitment. If you want to lend your hand, please choose a task from the following list:



Write an article for the newsletter

Lead a field trip



Volunteer a couple of hours at one of the Great Fish Community Challenge events

Volunteer to help at an Owen Sowerwine Work Day

Help a committee chair with a job

Contact Darcy Thomas at darcy@flatheadaudubon.org

Help Mitigate Human/Bear Conflict

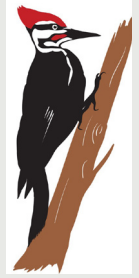
By Kathy Ross

Need help picking fruit on your property? Want to donate to local Food Banks or the Yellowstone Wolf and Bear Discovery Center? Check out the Flathead Food Gleaning Group Facebook page to connect with folks that can help pick and/or those who might be looking for fruit for winter. It will help keep your neighborhoods safer and help some to keep bears out of harms way. We can all do our part!



SEPTEMBER FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU

RAPTOR ID at Lone Pine State Park with Denny Olson. Saturday, September 2, 10 a.m.-12 noon. Raptors: Get Ready for the Migration! Lone Pine State Park Visitor Center. Join Flathead Audubon Conservation Educator Denny Olson for a workshop on the nuances of identifying raptors perching and in flight. Flathead Audubon has 30+ full-sized colored silhouettes of hawks, falcons, eagles and vultures, in various plumages, with a written key to identifying them (that you can take home). An extensive slide show (e.g. Redtails come in 14 color morphs!) will help you test yourself and practice. Then join us on the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch sometime this fall on Aeneas Ridge! For more information, contact Denny at (406) 249-3987 or educator@flatheadaudubon.org. No sign up is necessary.



BIRDS OF PREY WORKSHOP at Wild Wings Raptor Recovery Center, Thursday, Sept. 14, 10:30 a.m. Sponsored by Flathead Audubon, no charge for participants. Join veteran Wild Wing volunteers for exciting close views and discussions of raptors and their identifying characteristics. This will help with identifying migrating raptors at the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch or enhance any birding experience. The volunteers will be assisted by the Wild Wings educational birds of prey, of which 10 represent raptor species migrating through here in the fall and/or call this valley home. This includes a Cooper's Hawk, three Falcons of different species, three very different Red-tailed Hawks, a Ferruginous Hawk, and others. Sign up is required. Please call Margaret at (406) 837-1371 or mrparodi@charter.net or Karen Nichols at (406) 261-6230 or knichols.flathead@gmail.com to sign up. Limited to 25 participants.

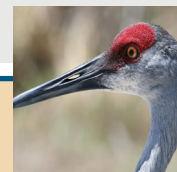
BIRDING AT SMITH LAKE, Saturday, Sept. 16, 8 a.m.-11 a.m. Join FAS field trip leader Darcy Thomas for a morning of bird watching. We will walk a portion of the paved Great Northern Historical Trail along Smith Lake before driving around the lake stopping at the boat launch and other pullouts along the 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. Vault toilet available at the Fishing access site. Bring binoculars, water and a spotting scope if you have one. To register contact Darcy at (406) 407-8263 or darcy@flatheadaudubon.org.

JEWEL BASIN HAWK WATCH, Sunday, Sept. 24, 9:00 a.m.- 5:00 p.m. (approximately). Dan Casey will lead a trip to the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch site on Sunday, Sept. 24. The second half of September offers peak numbers and diversity of passing raptors. We expect to see well over 100 hawks of 10 or more species if conditions are right; our peak daily counts usually fall between Sept. 21 and 28. This trip will involve a 2.4-mile hike of moderate difficulty (each way), gaining 1,400 vertical feet from the Jewel Basin parking lot. Attendees should wear sturdy footwear; hiking poles are recommended. You should also bring water, lunch and clothing layers for changing weather conditions (we will cancel or reschedule if weather conditions are unsuitable). The trip is limited to 10 participants, on a first-come, first-served basis. Please contact Dan at (406) 270-5941 if you are interested in participating. He will share logistics information with confirmed attendees. Approximate times will be 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. including driving and hiking time (from the Bigfork area); we will carpool to the extent possible.

SANDHILL CRANE VIEWING at WEST VALLEY, Saturday, Sept. 30 (6-8 p.m.) or Friday, October 6 (7-9 a.m.) View Sandhill Cranes as they stage in the West Valley on their fall migration. See these magnificent birds as they fly out at sunrise to nearby agricultural fields where they feed during the day or in from their daily feeding in the fields to roost overnight in pothole wetland ponds around sunset. Join Denny Olson for an early evening crane viewing on Saturday, Sept. 30 from 6-8 p.m. Please call Denny at 406-249-3987 or educator@flatheadaudubon.org to sign up. Join Darcy Thomas and Margaret Parodi for an early morning crane viewing on Friday, Oct. 6 from 7-9 a.m. For information and to sign up call Darcy at 406-407-8263 or darcy@flatheadaudubon.org.

COMING IN OCTOBER:

The Owl Research Institute will be running a Saw-whet owl banding station at the Flathead Lake Biological Station this fall (Sept. 10 to Nov. 6). The data collected from the migration station will contribute to global efforts to learn more about the migration routes, timing and habitat use of this charismatic little owl. ORI and FLBS are offering visitor nights for the public at Flathead Lake Biological Station at Yellow Bay. FAS will be sponsoring two outings early in October: Oct. 4 and Oct. 12. Details will follow in our October newsletter.



Sandhill Crane flocks begin arriving in the Flathead

Photo by Miriam Avello
Macaulay Library

One Woman's Dedication To Saving Swifts

By Rosemary McKinnon

A few summers ago, I had an unusual set of visitors to my bedroom. This bedroom has a fireplace, rarely used, with a chimney. Swifts arrived to nest there. Accustomed to silence, I was not aware of their presence until the chicks hatched. From then on, for weeks, I could barely sleep. I was awoken constantly by incessant screams for food. Eventually it was time for the fledglings to leave their nest. For reasons that were not clear, they could not fly up the chimney and, instead, dropped into my fireplace. Fortunately I was there to help. Of the six fledglings, three were dead on arrival but I was able to rescue the remaining three and toss them into the air where they took flight and had a chance to survive.

Swifts almost never land. They eat, sleep and court on the wing. And they fly thousands of miles across the sea from Africa where they spend the winter to raise their babies in our northern climates.

I was reminded of this experience when reading Hannah Bourne-Taylor's book, *The Fledgling* (2022) which tells the story of her move to Ghana with her newly married husband. She felt displaced and heartsick in this foreign land, until she connected with the natural world through several intense encounters. The first arrived in the form of a baby swift, which she rescued and nurtured round the clock till it could take to the skies.

A second encounter was with a very different bird - a Bronze Mannikin finch which she cared for, until 84 days

later, when it too, was ready to leave her and regain its family flock. This book is a love-story to a bird, which made its home on Hannah's body, nesting in her long hair, and . . . it is, of course, also an ode to all living things.

Hannah Bourne-Taylor has not only written a moving story about one woman's intimate encounter with the wild in West Africa, but she has gone on to become a champion for available nesting sites for wild birds in England. She dramatized her concern by decorating her nearly naked body with birds and feathers and walked through the streets of London to give voice to the "Feather Speech" campaign, which urges us all to remember that we share our home with other kind, and to make our newer houses more hospitable to cavity-nesting birds by using bricks with holes to accommodate these birds. I recommend that you watch her speech on YouTube, [hannahbournetaylor.com/news](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hannahbournetaylor). And also that you read this eloquent story about one woman giving voice to the time and energy investment needed to raise a wild bird. These efforts were rewarded by a renewed sense of identity and belonging, which led to the alleviation of her depression and feeling of displacement.



Photo by Joachim Bertrands
Macaulay Library, Cornell Lab

Revisiting Our Mission

By Darcy Thomas

As a local chapter of the National Audubon Society, we, as members of Flathead Audubon, should take a moment to revisit our Mission Statement and reflect on what we have been doing as an organization to live up to what the statement entails.

- **Our Mission is to conserve birds, wildlife habitat, and ecosystem diversity** - Flathead Audubon and Montana Audubon jointly hold the license for Owen Sowerwine from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and Flathead Audubon serves as the local manager of the area.

- **We promote awareness and appreciation of the natural world through educational activities and advocacy programs** - Flathead Audubon offers innovative K-12 and adult nature education programs, focusing on the beauty and value of birds to our ecosystem, community and culture, with school materials, videos, adult classes, presentations, field trips and family events.

- **We work with diverse groups and agencies to achieve sound decisions on natural resource issues** - Flathead Audubon works in partnership with other organizations to provide conservation protection for local at-risk bird and wildlife habitat in Flathead County.

- **While focusing our efforts in Northwest Montana, we believe in the protection of the Earth and all of its inhabitants** - Flathead Audubon engages in carefully selected conservation issues and promotes activities and lifestyles that are friendly to the environment.



Photo by JP Edge
Hungry Horse News

Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

In the last issue of the Post, I tried to point out the human tendency to frame our thinking about our relationship to the land that sustains us as “self-absorbed,” looking at nature in the framework of “what good is nature to me?”

The range of responses to that question is wide – from extracting minerals and petroleum, seeing land without a house on it as a waste of a money-making opportunity, or clearing land of trees, selling them and plowing it for an agricultural monoculture – to silent walking and observing birds on the other end of that scale. That entire range of attitude about land is still in the context of “how can I get my personal enjoyment from that land?”

The danger there is that the intrinsic value of wild land is devalued and often lost. Nature is, first and foremost, our life-support supply for air to breathe, water to drink and materials for shelter from its nastier elements. (It is a cultural tragedy that many people are actually afraid of our own life support system.) Even more obscure are the incalculable intricacies of an ecosystem that supplies all of that to us. That vast system is based on relationships, not just living things. It has been honed to perfection over literally billions of years. And we have barely scratched the surface of understanding those complexities.

Pretending that we control any of that has landed us in deep trouble. The herd of humans is likely already too big for the pasture. You needn't look any farther than our own Valley for evidence. And collectively, we are abusing the intricacies of nature on a global scale that may not be reversible. Changing the global weather patterns and warming the planetary climate is but one example.

Enter: Owen Sowerwine Area. Here we have a relatively natural system virtually on our doorstep. It offers a chance to experience the natural world in ways that are not consumptive, without the self-absorption of “it's for my enjoyment”. In Owen Sowerwine, wildlife/bird habitat comes first. It is the primary reason that Flathead Audubon, Flathead Land Trust and Flathead Lakers are working toward a conservation easement. It is not a recreation easement. It is not a playground or a park. It has been managed by Flathead Audubon for over 20 years as a place to observe how nature takes its course – and as much as is possible, without altering this place for our uses. (The exception to that unwritten rule is expelling invasive plants, another effect of human use, and promoting restoration toward native river bottom ecosystems.) Here, education activities have been, and should be, compatible with much lower impact on those systems than humans are accustomed to.

If we are to learn how natural systems work, then it is only logical that, as much as possible, we minimize our impact. Collecting, gathering, making crafts, playing active games, trail running, mountain biking, loose dogs, noisy activities that would be disruptive to wild animals – these activities can be done anywhere – and nearly everywhere – else. Group use multiplies those effects by the number of students in the group. There are many, many playgrounds and other un-wild areas where these activities work just fine.

“Uses” are on a broad scale, of course. Just being there and moving quietly can have effects on some wildlife, plants and soils, but our educational objective at FAS is to minimize those effects and learn from those natural processes around us, not to make use of them, and thereby alter them. I'm hoping that this will remain Owen Sowerwine Area's “prime directive”. This area IS different. It is a place of refuge for humans as well as wildlife. Psychological centering, quiet observation, peace based on solitude, learning about wildlife where they are relatively undisturbed by noise and rapid human movement – this is a place for that. Right next to us.

How does the river bottom world operate without us moderating it to fit our needs? This might be the only place where that kind of question can be answered. “We are part of nature too” is true in the context of nature forming our total life support system, but those systems don't belong to us – we belong to them. BIG difference. Owen Sowerwine may well be one of the only local places where we can be “part of” and not “dominant to”.

Our cultural paradigm is that the world is here for only us and our enjoyment. Playing in a place is a far cry from learning from a place. For that, students will be asked to (quietly) observe natural happenings instead of using the place for our own fun quotient. That is an attitude lesson that can be taught no other way than by modeling. Coming away from an experience where we learned without altering, is a rare lesson that we humans will have to learn if we intend to continue as a species.

Our education efforts in Owen Sowerwine will be intended to increase observation skills and be as invisible as is possible – cataloging observations, sitting and teaching kids how to do rudimentary breeding bird surveys (to find out whose “living room” we are sitting in), being motionless and silent and somewhat alone (safety considerations determining the degree), quiet, even silent walking – things that kids literally never experience in our crowded, noisy, virtual, screen-infested world.

(continued on page 12)

Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – May-August 2023

Spring migrants were generally late and in low overall abundance. An abnormally hot dry summer still provided a few surprises, with the first local record of a Red-headed Woodpecker near Kalispell, the seventh local record of a Yellow-breasted Chat (in Somers), an intriguing summer sighting of a Broad-winged Hawk in Glacier NP, and a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak potentially paired with a Black-headed Grosbeak west of Elmo. The first southbound shorebirds arrived in mid-June, with diverse species present at key wetlands by mid-August. See also: <https://ebird.org/region/US-MT-029?yr=all>

04/16 – Cackling Goose (1) West Valley (Leslie K.)

04/23 – Eurasian Wigeon (1) West Valley (Shannon D.) Late date

05/04 – Loggerhead Shrike (1) Lower Brown's Meadow Rd (Craig H.)

05/13 – Willet (6) Egan Slough Rd (Grant P.)

05/29 – Red-breasted Merganser (1) Dry Bridge Park, Kalispell (Darcy T.)

06/06 – White-faced Ibis (1) West Valley (Grant P.)

06/14 – Red-headed Woodpecker (1) Rose Crossing area (Markus and Erin B.)

06/19 – Rose-breasted Grosbeak (1) Cromwell Cr. Rd (bj W.)

06/27 – Yellow-breasted Chat (1) Somers Beach State Park (Dan C.)

07/18 – Broad-winged Hawk (1) Upper MacDonald Cr, Glacier NP (Jake B.)

07/19 – Grasshopper Sparrow (1) Lost Trail NWR area (Josh W.)

07/20 – American White Pelican (1) Creston wetland (Craig H.)

07/26 – Long-billed Curlew (1) Egan Slough Rd (Craig H.)

08/15 – Stilt Sandpiper (5) West Valley (Jake B.)

What to Expect – September 2023

Fall migration is in full gear during September. Watch for large mixed sparrow flocks (Savannah, Vesper, Chipping, Song, White-crowned) on the roadsides and windrows. Migrant hawks can be seen throughout the valley as well as on the mountain ridges; American Kestrels, Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers and Turkey Vultures are most common in the valley. Shorebird migration, which began in June (!), continues, with Pectoral Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers and American Golden-Plovers among the ones to watch for late in the season. Some of the first winter visitors (e.g. Rough-legged Hawk, Bohemian Waxwing) may arrive by the end of the month.

Jewel Basin Hawk Watch 2023

By Dan Casey

The Jewel Basin Hawk Watch has become known as one of the best places to count migrating accipiters in the Northern Rockies. Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks by the hundreds are joined by 16 other species of hawks, falcons and eagles as they fly the ridge on their way to wintering areas as far away as Central America. Our 16th full season of monitoring at this site will run from August 25 through November 7, weather and safe access permitting. Peak migration typically runs from mid-September through the first two weeks of October.

We tallied 2,851 raptors of 17 species during the 2022 season, and have now counted more than 40,000 raptors (including more than 18,000 Sharp-shinned Hawks) at the site since 2007. Peak counts over the years have included well over 100 birds per hour, 595 birds in a day, and more than 4,400 birds in a season. When conditions are right, many of the birds pass by at very close range at eye level!



Photo by David McQuade
Macaulay Library

The Jewel Basin Hawk Watch is supported through cooperation and funding from the Flathead National Forest, Montana Audubon and hundreds of hours donated by local and visiting volunteers. There will always be an experienced primary observer on site, but extra sets of eyes are needed on the busiest days! The Jewel Basin site sits on the ridge crest about ½ mile north of

Mt. Aeneas. Getting there involves a 2.4-mile moderately difficult hike from the Jewel Basin parking lot to the ridgetop, steadily gaining about 1,400 feet in elevation. The scenery is as spectacular as the birding!

We will be including monthly updates of this year's effort in the Pileated Post. But if you would like more information, contact Dan Casey at (406)270-5941. There is a Google group dedicated to the effort (jewelers@flatheadaudubon.org); you can also follow daily surveys in real time by visiting <https://dunkadoo.org/explore/flathead-audubon/jewel-basin-2023>.

Birdathon 2023 - Birding for a "Caws"

By Shannon Donaldson

On Saturday, June 17, Flathead Audubon Society hosted the Flathead Valley Birdathon. Twenty-six participants on nine teams spent the day birding for a "caws" - raising money for the conservation easement in the Owen Sowerwine area.

Although the morning began with plenty of rain showers and low visibility, by about 9 a.m. it began to let up and it turned out to be a great day of birding. Teams tallied 149 species in roughly 14 hours, covering hundreds of miles and a wide range of habitats between Red Meadow and Brown's Meadow, and from Ashley Lake to Bigfork. We all know the early bird gets the worm and it turns out that "Turtlehawks" are early birds. The "slow but dangerous" Turtlehawks team set out birding while most of us were still in bed and it paid off! They identified 131 species, the most of any team, finding several birds, such as Varied Thrush, others did not see.

Highlights from the day included a family of Trumpeter Swans, along with a Common Loon on the firehouse



Photo by Bridger Donaldson

pond along Foys Lake Road, nine Black Swifts spotted from Bojangle's Diner and a rare Grasshopper Sparrow singing his buzzy song in the tall grasses along the southern end of Brown's Meadow Road. Many of us wrapped up the day by looking for American Dippers near the Creston Fish Hatchery before gathering at the pavilion, sharing our stories and tallies, and enjoying a potluck dinner along with prizes and a raffle.

Due to all the individuals who participated and made thoughtful contributions, Birdathon raised nearly \$800 to help secure Owen Sowerwine! Flathead Audubon would like to thank each of our sponsors who donated so many exceptional items to our raffle this year: **Vortex, Snappy's Sport Senter, Plant Land, Montana Coffee Traders, Patagonia, Ceres Bakery, Glacier Restaurant Group, Center for Native Plants, Norm's News, Hike734, and both Kay Mitchell and Tom Roberts.** Thank you all for your generous support!

Owen Sowerwine Work Day

By Pam Willison, Secretary

Save the Date!! The Owen Sowerwine Fall Work Day is scheduled for Saturday, October 7, 2023. We will meet in the parking lot of Kalispell Montessori (on Willow Glen Drive) at 9:00 a.m., and spend about three hours doing some weed and trail maintenance. Dress for the weather, wear sturdy footwear, and bring a water bottle, loppers, and some work gloves. Questions: Pam Willison, 406-270-0225.



Bison Range Trip Report

By Darcy Thomas



Photo credit: Pixabay

Although a rather longish drive, a group of 14, including myself, drove to the CSKT Bison Range in Moise to enjoy a day of bird and wildlife watching. Morning rain prompted us to begin our day in the Visitor's Center where CSKT employee Emily provided a tour, teaching us about the Bison

Range Restoration and the natural history of the range.

During a walk around the interpretive trail we identified native plants. Driving over Red Sleep Mountain we sighted 45 bird species, about 200 head of bison, mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn – one with two fawns – and a black bear. We also saw a fox on the way into the range. Welcome sunshine warmed us up as we strolled around the pond at the end of a very fun, bountiful day.

Audubon and Road Scholar Team Again

By Denny Olson

Audubon volunteers once again taught Road Scholar grandparents and grandkids for five Fridays this summer in Glacier National Park. We focused on plants and birds, and teaching the "littles" how to become "woods detectives". There were some major adaptations to do since our normal classroom – the Johns Lake Loop – was closed for bridge construction. All in all, 190 participants spent three hours each Friday in the Oxbow Loop area near Apgar with our wonderful Audubon educators, becoming part of the natural world there.

Many thanks to Instructors: Mary Jo Gardner, Pat Jaquith, Rhonda McDowell, Darcy Thomas, Shannon Donaldson, Bridger Donaldson, Connie Johnson, Carole Jorgensen. Flathead Audubon's reach goes nationwide!

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 September 11 to vote! (Due to a technical glitch, we postponed our voting until this fall.)

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."

(continued on page 13)

Flathead Lake Biological Station Tour

By Darcy Thomas



Photo by Kent Meireis

On a drizzly day in May, a group of twelve from Flathead and Mission Mountain Audubon met at the University of Montana's field station in Yellow Bay to learn about ecology and research of the Flathead Watershed, hear the famous food web disaster of Mysis shrimp, and enjoy a quick picnic before tromping around the trails on the station property to bird watch.

Our day started with a fascinating classroom presentation by Associate Director Tom Bansak. We learned about the beginnings of the station in 1899, past and current research, changes in native vs. introduced fish species over the years, and about the station's monitoring and education programs. The Bio Station does work all over the globe!



Photo by Kent Meireis

Tom then led the group on a tour of the labs and other facilities at the station before setting us free to wander. After eating sandwiches at the picnic tables by the lake we hiked to the end of the peninsula, then around the loop trail where we encountered bear scat. We missed seeing the nesting Merlins but did see Bald Eagle, Osprey, Canada Goose, Vaux's Swift, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers, Chipping Sparrows, and Warbling Vireos.

This was a fun, educational field trip which gave us a great appreciation for the valuable research accomplished by the station. If you are sorry you missed the field trip, you may want to put a reminder on your calendar for next summer to participate in one of the events the station hosts for the public. They offer a research cruise as well as an open house, that you do not want to miss!



Mysis Shrimp
Photo by Kent Meireis

Spring Migration in Glacier National Park

By Kathy Ross

May 20: A good day for birds and butterflies in Glacier National Park with Steve Gniadek and Kathy Ross. Birders local and from around the country joined in this field trip, exploring favorite birding haunts in the park. Warblers abounded, as mating Rufous hummingbirds delighted, flitting among willows and dogwood of the Oxbow. Highlights were nest building of Belted Kingfisher and dozens of emerging Swallowtail butterflies on the mud flats of McGee Meadow.

(A Batty Tale continued from page 2)

Conservation concerns exist even though Hoary Bats are considered "Apparently Secure" on a global basis. In Montana they are listed as a Species of Concern. Hoary Bats are the species most commonly killed by turbines at wind energy facilities and make up about 40 percent of all bat fatalities at those sites in North America. Although the number killed is large (estimated in the hundreds of thousands annually), the overall size of the Hoary Bat population is unknown, so the population impact of wind energy associated mortality is uncertain. Fortunately, White-Nose Syndrome (a fungus killing millions of bats in eastern North America) is unlikely to affect Hoary Bats due to their solitary roosting habits outside of caves and mines.

Hoary Bats contribute to the wonderful wildlife diversity in Montana. Although they are not easily observed during their nightly activities, they are widespread, have many fascinating features, and provide an amazing amount of insect control.

(Conservation Corner continued from page 8)

I'm convinced that these kinds of lessons will prove to be key to our survival. Ironically, our survival is intricately and universally dependent on the health and survival of nature, which (so far) does include us. The unfortunate fact is that nature does not need us to be just fine. That is the critical humility lesson that starts with quiet observation of the way it really is, not the way we would like it to be.

Given our framework for thinking, students may never, ever, get this lesson anywhere else, and it might be the most important lesson our species may ever have the chance to learn. That's why our next educational step in Owen Sowerwine Area will hopefully be turning our Flathead fifth-graders into observant Woods Detectives – clandestine hunters for the really cool stories. Perhaps we can replace fear of the wild with awe, and the "me" with "we".

TRIBUTE GIFTS



In Memory of Lewis Young:

Jan Berelsen-James

Barbara Boorman

Guenter Heinz

Cathy Schloeder

Linda and John Winnie

(continued from page 11)

Director Candidates (continued)

Gael Bissell – Gael has been a member of Flathead Audubon for a long time. During that time, she has served as Vice President and President. She was on the Board of Directors by virtue of being the past president. Now she would like to continue to serve as a Director by being elected as an “At Large” Director. Currently she is representing Flathead Audubon to Montana Audubon and is extremely active with the Owen Sowerwine project.

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