



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

Belted Kingfisher



Photo by Jack & Holly Bartholmai
Macaulay Library, Cornell Lab

Owen Sowerwine Spring Challenge Match Update

By Gael Bissell

The Spring Match Challenge was hugely successful! First, our members donated another \$13,656 during the Challenge Match (on top of the \$23,686 donated prior). Because of the value of Owen Sowerwine to the Flathead Valley and the outpouring of community support, Flathead Audubon received a generous and unexpected \$50,000 Community Grant from the Whitefish Community Foundation! As the Challenge Match news spread quickly throughout the Valley, hundreds of individuals donated gifts to the Flathead Land Trust (FLT) and Flathead Lakers as well. We held about a dozen public tours both on foot and by kayak to Owen Sowerwine in May and July. These were fully attended and greatly appreciated! Our goal was to raise \$100,000 from the community and by July 31, we raised \$103,401!



Photo credit Flathead Land Trust

In addition, we drew the attention of many local organizations who also donated to the project during the Challenge Match campaign via Flathead Land Trust, including Trout Unlimited, Flathead Wildlife Inc., Cinnabar Foundation, Montana Trout Unlimited, and the Whitefish Community Foundation for a total of \$21,000. Flathead Lakers have also collected significant donations.

Even with \$635,000 in large foundation and government grants awarded to the FLT, we still have a funding

shortfall. As previously mentioned in our earlier Fly-Bys, the July updated appraisal and other costs left us with about a \$200,000 funding gap. The good news is that needed grants and donations exceeded our expectations and are still coming in! And the FLT successfully raised another \$40,000 for Owen Sowerwine during the Great Fish Community Challenge. We now need only about \$125,000 to complete the project.

To plug the final gap, FLT recently submitted a request for \$125,000 from the ConocoPhillips SPIRIT of Conservation Program. This incredible Spirit of Conservation initiative focuses on projects that will help restore our 3 billion birds that have been lost over the last 50 years! A perfect grant opportunity. If successful, we will have all of the estimated \$1,055,000 that FLT needs to complete the project! We will hear from ConocoPhillips in November.

Thank you to all of you who have volunteered, donated, spread the word, wrote letters of support, and otherwise helped Flathead Audubon, FLT, and Flathead Lakers achieve so much in this last year. DNRC is going through the final review processes for the proposed conservation easement. The State Land Board approval is tentatively scheduled in December. Stay tuned!

OCTOBER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, October 2, 5:30pm, FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Public Meeting Room, Fish, Wildlife & Parks building, 490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell. You may bring your dinner.

Wednesday, Oct. 4 or Thursday, Oct. 12, Saw-Whet Owl Banding and Survey. See page 6.

Friday, Oct. 6. Sandhill Crane Viewing at West Valley. See page 6.

Saturday, Oct. 7. Owen Sowerwine Work Day. See page 6.

Monday, Oct. 9, 7pm, Flathead Audubon General Meeting. Gateway Community Center, US Hwy. 2 West, Kalispell. East side of Gateway Mall along Glenwood Dr. All are welcome. To join remotely, see instructions on page 3.

Saturday, Oct. 14, Glacier National Park Hawk Watch. See page 4.



BIRD OF THE MONTH

The Dynamic Downy Woodpecker

By Darcy Thomas

Downy Woodpeckers have always captured my attention with their striking black and white feathers and industrious energy, as they go about nimbly foraging for insects along tree branches. They often flock with other birds so I can usually count on enjoying a lovely array of birds when Downys are present.



Photo by Grace C.

Of the ten woodpeckers found in Montana, the Downy is the smallest – a physical trait that comes with certain advantages. Downys foray in a niche separate from other woodpeckers. Their small size helps them find insects, berries and grains in small spaces such as tiny branches, shrubs, and even the slender stems of weeds, grasses, and wildflowers that are unreachable by larger woodpeckers. They like to perch atop tall plants with galls that they can hammer at to get to the larva inside. I've even seen them drinking from my hummingbird feeders. I'm sure that's not something you would ever see a Pileated Woodpecker do. Downys are very active birds and work a branch with lithe acrobatic precision, often using their stiffened tail feathers for support and can even clamber around branches horizontally and upside down!

Downy Woodpeckers are not only nimble, they are also clever. They often travel along after the Pileated Woodpecker to glean any insects overlooked in these larger woodpeckers' excavations. They also follow White-breasted Nuthatches to their seed caches and steal the already gathered and easily taken food. In the cold months they join mixed flocks of chickadees, nuthatches, and other small birds to maximize foraging opportunities.

If you enjoy feeding birds during the winter when bears are hibernating, you will most likely entice Downy Woodpeckers with suet including peanut butter or peanuts, and black oil sunflower seeds as they are common feeder birds. They are also as likely to be in neighborhoods and city parks as they are in wooded areas. Listen for their high-pitched pik note and animated, descending whinny call. Learn to recognize them in flight as they have an undulating flight pattern, with their wings folding against their bodies between quick wingbeats. In spring and summer, Downy Woodpeckers make a lot of noise drumming on trees and making their whinnying call. They are cavity-nesters so be sure to look at the holes in

trees. You may be lucky enough to find a nesting pair with fledglings.

When watching small songbirds on a winter walk, take your time, as you are likely to be rewarded by a Downy Woodpecker showing up. Some researchers have speculated that the reason birds of different species flock together are for better detection of predators, thus increasing their chance of evading the predator. Some experiments have shown that chickadees are used as sentinels by Downy Woodpeckers. Other researchers surmise that mixed flocks simply increase feeding efficiency.

Learn to tell the difference between a Downy Woodpecker and a Hairy Woodpecker. They look alike and can be tricky to identify. Both species have similar black and white checkered feathers with

a white stripe going down the center of the back and a boldly striped head. Males have a red patch on the back of the head. There are some key differences however, and once you learn what to look for it's not so difficult.



Photo by Matthew Planet

First, let's look at size. Hairy Woodpeckers are larger than Downys. Nine inches compared to the Downys six-and-a-half inches. But size can be deceiving, so take a good look at the bill. The Downy Woodpecker has a tiny bill that is about half the width of its head. Hairy Woodpeckers have a bill that is nearly as long as the width of its head. The outer tail feathers on a Hairy Woodpecker are unmarked, while the outer tail feathers on a Downy

Woodpecker are spotted and Hairys drum much faster than Downys.

So, now you know a little about the Downy Woodpecker. This is such a rewarding bird to see anytime of the year. Downys stay in the Flathead Valley year-round, so you are

sure to see them if you keep an eye out. Put suet out this winter so they visit your backyard!



OCTOBER PROGRAM

Birding the Seven Continents

Presented By Gary Swant

Gary Swant will be the featured speaker at the Monday, Oct. 9 meeting of the Flathead Audubon Society at 7pm. (To join remotely, see instructions below). In 1993, Gary set a goal of birding all seven continents. In 2022, he achieved that goal while visiting 37 countries and territories. His presentation features his favorite birds on each continent, and his favorite countries to bird, along with other interesting tidbits and stories about his many birding endeavors.

Gary is a top-notch birder and a prolific author. He currently holds the record for seeing the most birds in Montana (382 species). He writes a monthly column for four Montana weekly newspapers and last year published a birding book, "My Montana Birds".

Gary is also founder of GoBird Montana, which does public bird walks, guided tours and field research for organizations such as Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Montana Department of Environmental Quality and others. He also currently serves as vice-chair for the Berkeley Pit Mitigation Council.



Photo by Rhonda Howell

Peeps from the President

By Darcy Thomas, President Elect

As I write, sunshine glints through my morning window touching the table with warmth and hinting of a beautiful day ahead. Gone are the dog days of summer. Fall is such a pleasant time for getting outside and enjoying all the fine activities Montana has to offer - kayaking, hiking, bicycling, and best of all, birding.

By the time you read this newsletter, autumn will be in full swing. I am planning to don my Muck boots and tromp through the woods every chance I get. Now is a good time to revisit some of your favorite hot spots or find a new place to look



Photo by Rob Thomas

for birds. Don't forget to spend a little time at Owen Sowerwine where you are likely to see woodpeckers, juncos, nuthatches, Bald Eagles and more. Flathead Audubon and Montana Audubon jointly manage this area that is rich with natural habitat. Because it is DNRC property you must have a Montana Conservation License. Buy it online here, <https://fwp.mt.gov/buyandapply/statelandsrecreation>. Owen Sowerwine is a wildlife and bird habitat area managed to minimize human disturbance, so please keep your dogs at home and enjoy the quiet beauty of nature.

OCTOBER MEETING FAS

We will restart our hybrid meetings this month, and continue through the fall/winter for the remainder of the year. For those coming to the meeting on October 9, we'll meet in Room 26 of the Gateway Mall (United Way building) at 7pm. This room is on the east side of the building along Glenwood Drive in Kalispell. Look for our banner hanging outside.

For those joining virtually, when you use the link, you will eventually be let into a "waiting room" where you will then be added to the meeting by the host. Please sign in with your name when you enter the room so we know to admit you. You will be muted when you first join the meeting. You can use your computer's microphone and speakers (most computers have both), and this is the preferred way to join. You can also get an audio connection to the meeting without the Zoom visual capability by using your phone.

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

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

It will be nice to see everyone again!

Glacier National Park Hosts Hawk Watch

By Lisa Bate

Glacier National Park will host its annual Mount Brown Hawk Watch Program on October 14 from 11am to 3pm near Lake McDonald Lodge. Meet at the Golden Eagle interpretive sign near Jammer Joe's Restaurant parking lot in the Lake McDonald Lodge area. Snacks and hot beverages will be provided. Park biologists and volunteers will teach participants how to identify and count migrating raptors and answer questions about the integral role of raptors in our ecosystems, risks they face and why GNP has started the Mount Brown Hawk Watch Program. Educators from the Montana Wild Wings Recovery Center will also be on-site with live raptors from 12 to



Photo by Lars Petersson
Macaulay Library

2pm to provide close-up looks at some of the raptor species that migrate past Mount Brown. Counting migrating raptors will resume from 2 to 3pm. Participants should bring their own binoculars and be prepared to count Golden Eagles on their annual migration south past Mount Brown.

GNP also hopes to have trained volunteers or staff at the Lake McDonald Golden Eagle interpretive site from September 25 through the end of October from 12-4pm. The individual staffing the site will be responsible for counting migrating raptors and educating the public about why raptors and Hawk Watches are important.

Thank You, Great Fish Donors

By Darcy Thomas



THANK YOU to all the wonderful people who donated to Flathead Audubon during the Great Fish Community Challenge!

Your generosity along with donations from others in our community raised \$27,075 by the September 15th deadline. The Whitefish Community Foundation will add a considerable match to these contributions. We will post the total Challenge results on our website and in the November Pileated Post.

Jewel Basin Hawk Watch 2023 Early Results

By Dan Casey

The 16th fall monitoring season at Jewel Basin Hawk Watch kicked off August 25th, and as of September 15th we had conducted 18 surveys. It has been an interesting and rewarding early season, with high species diversity and higher than average counts. We suspect that the extensive fires in British Columbia and Alberta may have helped provide impetus for early migration; it will be interesting to see if these trends continue.

We had tallied 944 raptors of 16 species as of September 15th. These included above average numbers of Ospreys, Broad-winged Hawks, Swainson's Hawks and Ferruginous Hawks (although the latter two make up a very small portion of our flight). Accipiters (especially Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks) comprised the bulk of the early flight, with 661 counted. This is typical, as Golden Eagle numbers generally do not pick up until early October, when they can dominate the counts. A Sharp-shinned Hawk tallied on September 5th was the 19,000th we have counted over the history of the count, which was initiated in 2007.

Our totals as of September 15th:

Turkey Vulture (2); Osprey (10); Bald Eagle (7); Northern Harrier (35); Sharp-shinned Hawk (439); Cooper's Hawk

(198); American Goshawk (12); Accipiter sp (12); Broad-winged Hawk (27); Swainson's Hawk (4); Red-tailed Hawk (83); Ferruginous Hawk (2); Buteo sp (7); Golden Eagle (20); American Kestrel (62); Merlin (12); Peregrine Falcon (3); Prairie Falcon (6); Falcon sp (2); Raptor sp (1). Total: 944

As we hit mid-September, the peak migration season is upon us! 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 a half-mile north of Mount Aeneas. The scenery is as spectacular as the birding! Already this season, volunteers have also had Black Bear, Moose and Bobcat sightings!

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 dunkadoo.org/explore and clicking on the Flathead Audubon Society icon. Or visit the Jewel Basin page on the Flathead Audubon website for more information and survey calendar: <https://flatheadaudubon.org/protect/jewel-basin-hawk-watch/>

Introducing Our New Operations Coordinator

By Darcy Thomas

Please welcome Dee Baginski to our Audubon family. Dee, a graduate of Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania in Parks and Resource Management, and veteran Glacier National Park, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Glacier Institute, and US Forest Service employee, has accepted a contract to work part-time as an Operations Coordinator for Flathead Audubon Society.

Dee has a great love for the outdoors, conservation, and birds. She is currently the Common Loon Citizen Science Project Coordinator for Glacier National Park. Dee has volunteered for Flathead Audubon Society



Photo by Katie Connors

leading field trips, as a Jewel Basin Hawk Watch observer, assisting with Birds of Prey Festival, and other activities in the three years she has lived in the valley.

Dee will be coordinating group use of the Owen Sowerwine area, handling publicity needs, helping with membership and newsletter needs, and conservation achievement recognitions. Dee is young and energetic, has a great sense of humor, and a tireless desire to work for the benefit of birds, wildlife, and the environments they live in. When you meet Dee please take a moment to welcome her.

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:



Christmas Bird Count – Coordinate the Kalispell count and compile the lists for the 2023 Christmas Bird Count.

Conservation – Write an article about a conservation issue or draft an alert regarding a conservation issue our members could respond to.

Education – Help with a classroom presentation or field trip.



Conservation Achievement Recognitions – Research individuals and organizations who can be nominated for an award; create an award certificate.

Merchandise – Choose and design merchandise for Flathead Audubon that can be purchased by members.

Contact Darcy Thomas at darcy@flatheadaudubon.org

Highlights from the September 1, 2023 Board of Directors Meeting

By Pam Willison, Secretary

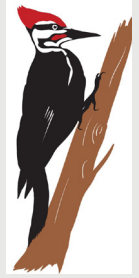
- ✚ Bob Lee, Elections Chair, reviewed the slate of candidates for the election to be held on 9/11/23. Additional nominations may also be made at that time.
- ✚ Darcy Thomas recommended to the Board that the contract as Operations Coordinator be offered to Dee Baginski. A motion to that effect was approved unanimously by the Board.
- ✚ There is an online course on Grant-writing offered through FVCC, and the Board approved reimbursing the enrollment fee (\$135) if the Operations Coordinator or a Board member is willing to take the training.
- ✚ Progress reports were given on: upcoming Conservation Education school field trips, the strong start of Hawk Watch, a possible new method for killing invasive buckthorn in Owen Sowerwine, the many opportunities to participate in field trips, the upcoming monthly programs, an anticipated uptick in membership renewals as programs begin, and the hot sauce created by Sacred Eats in memory of an employee and with profits designated to Flathead Audubon.

OCTOBER FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU

SANDHILL CRANE VIEWING at WEST VALLEY, Saturday, September 30, 6-8pm or Friday, October 6, 7-9am. 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, September 30 from 6-8pm. 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, October 6, 7-9am. We will be watching the morning lift off as it becomes daylight and the cranes fly to the surrounding agricultural fields to feed. For information and to sign up call Darcy at 406-407-8263 or darcy@flatheadaudubon.org.



SAW-WHET OWL BANDING and SURVEY, Owl Research Institute (ORI) and Flathead Lake Biological Station (FLBS), Wednesday, October 4 or Thursday, October 12, 7pm - approx. 9 or 10 pm. The ORI is running a Saw-whet owl banding station at FLBS this fall. 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. These outings offer the public an opportunity to learn, observe, and ask questions. Owl researchers from ORI will do a short presentation to explain the process, then check the mist nets. If an owl is captured, it will be banded. Nets will be checked every hour. The workers will discuss owl ecology and answer questions in between net checks. A typical evening results in the capture of 0-10 owls. This will be an outdoor program. Dress for the weather, as it can be quite chilly. Bring hot beverages, snacks and bear spray.

We will meet a staff member at the main gate to the FLBS at 7pm (gate will be locked) to be let in. Parking will be in the main lot and then a short walk to the banding station (about 1/3 mile). People with disabilities can be accommodated, please let us know in advance. You may stay for whatever time period you wish since the gate will open automatically when you leave. Generally people stay a couple of hours, but no later than midnight. There will be items for purchase if you desire (shirts etc.).

Sessions will be canceled/rescheduled if it is raining, snowing or excessively windy. Sign up is required. Please contact Darcy Thomas at (406) 407-8263 or darcy@flatheadaudubon.org or Margaret Parodi at (406) 837-1371 or mrparodi@charter.net. We require both a phone number and e-mail address in the event of rescheduling due to the weather.

Don't Put Up Those Bird Feeders Just Yet

By Jake Bramante

With the cooler weather coming on, there's a temptation to get out the bird feeders once again, but wait just a little longer! This time of year, nature still has a bounty of seeds and late insects to keep our feathered friends well fed. While they would appreciate a suet cake or black oil sunflower seeds, so would your neighborhood black bear or grizzly bear as they are seeking easy ways to round out those winter fat stores. Once bears find food sources, they'll keep visiting to check on them. A bear that finds your feeder this fall will probably swing by next fall to check again. For your safety, your neighbor's safety, and

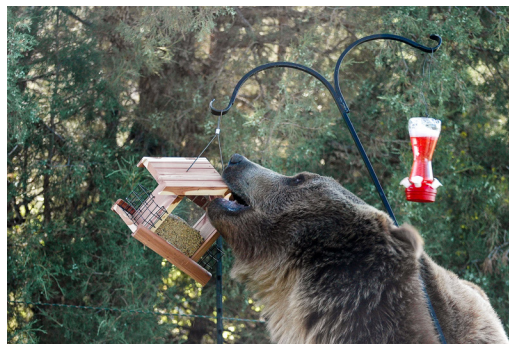


Photo by Gregg Losinski Courtesy of Audubon Magazine

especially the safety of the bears, let's try and remove temptations to avoid conflicts.

Wondering when is a good time to start feeding again? If you live in bear country, our very own Denny Olson recommends waiting until at least after the hunting season is over. This year, that date would fall after November 26. Bear Aware in Bigfork recommends the safe date

of December 15.

In the meantime, fall is a great time to head out and find locals and migrants finding food in the great outdoors.

Cornell Sets Date for October Big Day

By Dan Casey

Mark your calendars for October Big Day — October 14, 2023! Like the Global Big Day in May, October Big Day is an opportunity to unite around our shared love of birds. Last October, nearly 35,000 people from 185 countries submitted 80,000 checklists with eBird, demonstrating the power of birds to bring people together.

Wherever you are on October 14th, take a few minutes to join in this global celebration.

Participate from anywhere—even from home! By taking part in October Big Day you're also celebrating Global Bird Weekend and World Migratory Bird Day. Be a part of the global team and help set a new record for October birding.

How to participate: (see also: <https://ebird.org/news/october-big-day-2023>)

Get an eBird account: eBird is a worldwide bird checklist program used by millions of birders. It's what allows us to compile everyone's contributions into a single massive October Big Day list—while at the same time gathering data to help scientists better understand birds. Sign up at ebird.org: It's 100 percent free from start to finish.

Watch birds on October 14th: It's that simple. You don't need to be a bird expert or go out all day long, even 10 minutes of birding from home counts. October Big Day runs from midnight to midnight in your local time zone. You can report what you find from anywhere in the world.

Enter what you see and hear in eBird: You can enter your observations via our website or download the free

eBird Mobile app to make submitting lists even easier. Please enter your checklists no later than October 17th to be included in the results announcement.

Watch the results roll in: During the day, follow along with bird reports from more than 180 countries in real-time on our October Big Day page.

Simply create an eBird Trip Report for October 14, 2023:

As you submit lists and upload media throughout the big day, they'll be added to your report automatically. Send the trip report link to friends and family so they can follow along. The eBird site explains how to set these up.

October Big Day Tips:

- If you're new to eBird or want to make your checklists more valuable for science and conservation, take the free eBird Essentials course.
- Use eBird Mobile Explore to find nearby places to go birding and recently reported species.
- Use Cornell Lab's free Merlin Bird ID app to help you identify the birds you see and hear on October Big Day.
- Make your observations more valuable: submit complete checklists, keep counts of the birds that you see, and keep multiple checklists throughout the day.
- Have fun, enjoy the birds you find, and share your observations with eBird. Your checklists will help us better understand global bird populations!



Photo by David Kirsch, Macaulay Library

Conservation License Now Required for State Lands Use

By Margaret Parodi



Effective July 1, 2023, everyone ages 12 and older will need a Montana Conservation License to access most state lands (does not include state parks). Since there are numerous Audubon field trips that do use State lands, we encourage all Audubon members and field trip participants to get this license. Fishing access sites (FAS), wildlife management areas (WMA), wildlife habitat protection areas (WHPA), and Montana state trust lands are examples of where this license is needed.

The Conservation license "year" is March 1- February 28. This license is already included in fishing and hunting

licenses. You can also buy the conservation license separately. They are available at locations that offer fishing or hunting licenses, such as Fish, Wildlife and Parks office (FWP), sporting goods stores, some gas station/convenience stores, or online from FWP. (<https://fwp.mt.gov/buyandapply/conservation-license>) For Montana residents the cost is: Adult \$8, Seniors (62+) \$4, Youth (12-17) \$4, Non-residents \$10.



Photo by JP Edge
Hungry Horse News

Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

As with most good things in life, it starts with getting up. Early. Lunch for the day, raingear, extra layers of clothing to adjust to the autumn temperature swings at high elevation, extra drinking water, bear spray, binoculars, foam sit

pad, first aid kit, sunscreen and hat, hiking poles, multi-tool and headlamp (just in case) – check, check, check ...

Then there's the drive -- 45 minutes, half of it uphill through the deer and grouse slalom on what marginally passes for a road, to the parking area at aptly named Camp Misery. Another day begins at Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (JBHW). Steller's Jays, Lincoln's and White-crowned Sparrows escort me up the myriad twists and turns of a four-wheeler path that eventually flattens and opens on a brushy slope into the entirety of where I get to live. The whole Flathead Valley presents itself as an expanse of lakes, farmland and subdivisions. Solitaires dance from snag to snag adding foreground interest. I pause and take a breath or two, once again grateful for my good fortune.

The mini-road shrinks to single track trail, switches back seven times up the slope of Mount Aeneas – the third one never seems to end, but I notice that pauses to huff and puff are getting less frequent this time of the year. Despite my advanced state of decay, I'm in better shape now.

At the top, with the summit to the right, it's time to head north and traverse the steep exposure over Picnic Lakes far below. A quarter-mile of tight-rope ridge, and I'm there – on top of the hawk-watcher's world, hoping to share this space with hawks, eagles and falcons on a mission. After the morning hunt, they are ready to tack into the southwest wind, mostly motionless, and well over

the speed limit. There is nothing remotely like watching a Golden Eagle from above, focused on the south, at a hundred miles per hour.

Every day here is about anticipation. Will the clouds lift? Will the wind switch to favorable? Will this be one of "those" days? Recent years have had a day of nearly 600 raptors fly by, and a couple of others nearly 500. How many Sharpies and Coopers will take a run at the owl decoy? Will another Goshawk take out the decoy's other eye? Dan Casey, the founder of JBHW, and another watcher, were once standing on the ridge facing south about five feet apart and had a Peregrine Falcon fly, from behind, between them at waist height. Knowing how fast Peregrines can fly, it was probably ahead of its sound. This is a peek into the world of birds usually available only to them – in the endless world of air. For us landlubbers, hair regularly stands on end. This is the home of "wow".

Ostensibly, we are here to gather data, get some idea of population and migration trends, and to quantify. But after we have done it just once, we realize that the science is just our excuse to be here, to sit quietly in the middle of a world normally available only to birds for the last hundred million years. For them, that's a lot of practice. And it shows.

Etched on my addled brain is the neon rust color of a Swainson's Hawk juvenile directly overhead in the sunlight, a Peregrine hugging the terrain under the radar straight at my open mouth, Prairie Falcons flashing their dark armpits overhead, and all the tiny dots in my binoculars to the north morphing into apparitions, and then into a species of raptor. Author Loren Eiseley once said, "If there is magic in the world, it is found in water." It's true, but we "Jewelers" know that it is -- most assuredly -- also in the air.

Lead Bullets and Wildlife

By the late Lewis Young, and Kate Stone

With big game rifle hunting season approaching, you can help wildlife by switching to non-lead bullets if you are a hunter. Lead bullets, even copper jacketed lead bullets, fired from high velocity guns fragment on impact losing 20-40 percent of their mass when they hit an object. As many as 200 fragments disperse throughout the carcass and are often too small to see. The fragments may permeate the meat you bring home and often riddle the gut piles and carcasses left in the field.

Lead fragments are a problem because avian and mammalian scavengers feed on the gut piles/carcasses and ingest the lead fragments. Overwintering eagles

throughout Montana test positive for elevated lead levels and several die each year from acute lead poisoning.

Simply switching to a non-lead bullet makes a difference. A voluntary program in the Jackson Hole area of Wyoming to entice hunters to switch to non-lead bullets, resulted in a corresponding decrease in the blood-lead levels of eagles frequenting the area. Non-lead bullets are available in factory-loaded ammunition and for hand loaders. Non-lead ammunition costs about the same as premium lead bullets.

Give our eagles and other wildlife a break and consider switching to non-lead bullets.

Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – August - September 2023

It was a great month for uncommon shorebirds, with a few, such as the Red Knot at Pablo Reservoir and the Hudsonian Godwits at Creston wetland, lingering long enough for multiple local birders to enjoy them. Broad-winged, Swainson's and Ferruginous Hawks contributed to the diverse early-season counts at the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (JBHW). See JBHW Early Results on page 4. Lower than normal water levels at Flathead Lake provided access to some good finds on the North Shore, (Sanderlings, Ruddy Turnstone, and Lesser Black-backed Gull). Bohemian Waxwings arrived early and in some numbers. See also: <https://ebird.org/region/US-MT-029?yr=all>

08/19 – Herring Gull (5) Flathead Lake WPA (first of fall) (Joey A.)

08/21 – American Golden-Plover (1) Flathead Lake WPA (Craig H. and Dan C.)

08/22 – Red Knot (1) Pablo Reservoir (Shawn R.)

08/25 – American White Pelican (4) Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (Grant P.)

08/28 – Broad-winged Hawk (3) Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (Dan C.) (24 more through 9/15)

08/31 – Ruddy Turnstone (1) Flathead Lake WPA (Shawn R.)

09/02 – Ferruginous Hawk (1) Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (Nicki B., Pam W.)

09/03 – Franklin's Gull (1) Flathead Lake WPA (Joey A.)

09/04 – Lapland Longspur (4) West Valley Ponds (Joshua C.)

09/04 – Caspian Tern (2; one banded in 2016) Flathead Lake WPA (Shawn R.)

09/05 – Hudsonian Godwit (3) Creston wetland (Jake B.)

09/05 – White-throated Swift (1) Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (Joshua C.)

09/05 – Bohemian Waxwing (15) Creston (first of fall) (Jake B.) Also at JBHW, Glacier NP

09/06 – Swainson's Hawk (2) Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (Dan C.)

09/07 – Veery (1) River's Edge Park, Columbia Falls (Grant P.)

09/10 – Magnolia Warbler (1) South of Creston (Craig H.)

09/10 – White-throated Sparrow (2) South of Creston (Dan C.)

09/13 – Lesser Black-backed Gull (ad) Flathead Lake WPA (Craig H., Rod W., Shawn R.)

What to Expect – October 2023

As the raptor migration starts shifting from accipiters to eagles, the first Rough-legged Hawks of the season will also be arriving. Watch for flocks of mixed waterfowl, especially diving ducks (scoters, scaup, Redheads). Check lakes for migrating loons, with both Pacific and Red-throated Loons possible. Increasing Bohemian Waxwing numbers may be a precursor to other displaced or irruptive boreal breeders such as Common Redpolls and White-winged Crossbills. Sparrow flocks, now dominated by Savannah and Chipping Sparrows, will start to have more White-crowned, White-throated, Lincoln's and potentially (in wetland habitats) Swamp Sparrows.

Osprey and Hawk Migration

By Laura Katzman

This time of year many hawks are migrating south including osprey. Osprey nest at Owen Sowerwine but leave the area this time of year (mid-Sept.) and we won't see them again until April. Osprey migrate alone with females departing after the young leave the nest – a full month before the males migrate. Interestingly, males stay longer to continue to feed the young after they leave the nest. Amazingly, young osprey migrate unescorted to a winter home they have never seen before. Most osprey that nest in western North America winter in the southern U.S., Mexico and Central America. However, each family member winters separately - mated pairs will not see each other until next spring and first year birds spend about 18 months in wintering areas before navigating by themselves back to their natal area to breed.



Photo by John Pham

The secrets of birds' amazing navigational skills are unknown. They appear to navigate using a variety of techniques, including by the stars, sun, sensing changes in the earth's magnetic field, and following natural landforms such as mountain ranges, rivers, and lakes. Many hawks travel along the mountain ranges while migrating. We are lucky to have a hawk migration highway along the mountains on the eastern side of our valley and you can observe this migration this time of year with Flathead Audubon and the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (learn more at <https://flatheadaudubon.org/protect/jewel-basin-hawk-watch/>).

FAS Treasurer's Report, 7/01/2022 - 6/30/2023

By Rod Walette

Flathead Audubon Society (FAS) participated in the Great Fish Community Challenge for our third year, in what has now become our primary fundraising source. We had another successful campaign and raised enough funds to qualify for a percentage of the Challenge matching funds by raising \$27,094. The matching amount of \$9,708 brought our total amount for last year's Great Fish to \$36,802.

Our education program continues to be FAS's primary focus and our only paid position is a part time Operations Coordinator contractor. The education program comprises approximately 67 percent of our expenditures with the remainder supporting the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch, Owen Sowerwine and our overhead expenses.

This past year was another strong year for revenue, but with a large one-time expenditure for trail improvement at Owen Sowerwine, we ended the year with a small

negative balance. Our financial statements, tax returns and FAS policies are available for review on our website. The FAS board had voted to commit \$100,000 toward the Owen Sowerwine Conservation Easement fundraising efforts that are being led by the Flathead Land Trust (FLT). FLT, Flathead Lakers and FAS are working in partnership to accomplish this fundraising challenge.

Our fundraising efforts started at the end of 2022 and to date FAS has raised a total of \$101,104 toward the conservation easement. This fundraising effort was given a significant boost by the Whitefish Community Foundation and their award of a \$50,000 community grant to FAS. This grant was the result of efforts by Kay Mitchell, FAS Board member. Our permanent endowment fund is in place and now available for contributions. This is a great new opportunity to make a permanent difference in supporting Flathead Audubon Society's mission statement and goals.

Owen Sowerwine Fall Work Day

By Pam Willison

Join in the "Wade and Weed" work day with fellow volunteers on Saturday, October 7, from 9am until about noon – meet at the parking lot of Kalispell Montessori off Willow Glen Drive.

We plan to wade across the Stillwater River in the shallow riffles at the north end of Owen Sowerwine, to reach the Big Island portion. Once there, we will cut and bag the seed heads of houndstongue and cut or pull knapweed. Wading can best be accomplished wearing securely attached water sandals or shoes that can get wet, and, if desired, switching into a pair of dry shoes once across. Hiking or ski poles would be helpful to maneuver the slippery rocks, and some will be available to use. Leather gloves will offer the best protection and aren't as likely to gather sticky seeds – smooth fabrics are the best choice.

Bring hand nippers or a pair of loppers. Dress for the weather, bring a water bottle, and strap on some bear spray if you have it. Please note that if you aren't interested in wading, don't be deterred because there are weeds on the Mainland portion that you can cut and bag. If you need more information, contact Pam Willison at 406-270-0225 (email: pam@flatheadaudubon.org).

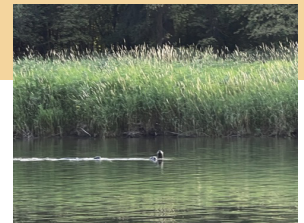


Photo by Lisa Flowers

Field Trip Report: Morning at Smith Lake

By Darcy Thomas

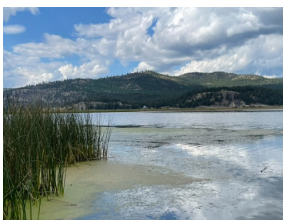


Photo by Darcy Thomas

Clear skies and cool air greeted a group of six in Kila the morning of September 16th. We got off to a shaky start with crows, starlings, house sparrows, coots, robins, magpies, and mallards on our list. It was worth a chuckle. We kept birding and were rewarded at the fishing access site with a family of six Trumpeter Swans including four cygnets, quite a few cormorants, Bald Eagle, Osprey, Red-necked and Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron and a smattering of ducks and a goose. Two highlights were very good looks at a couple of Common Yellowthroats as they flurried around the cattails and watching a Red-throated Grebe catch a very large fish and swallow it. We all thought we might be called upon to swim out there and perform the Heimlich maneuver, but he managed to get the fish down his gullet and swim along. We finished the morning with a drive over to West Valley Ponds Wildlife Viewing Area primarily to view the Sandhill Cranes. In all, we saw 32 taxa and had a lovely time.

Renew Your Membership Now

By Linda Du Lac

Many of our members have their Flathead Audubon Society (FAS) membership expiring this month. Not sure when your membership expires? Linda Du Lac, our Membership Chair would be happy to check your expiration date. Contact her at lindadulac@flatheadaudubon.org.

Your membership makes a huge impact on the many important education and conservation programs FAS offers. It also supports our monthly Pileated Post newsletter and enables FAS to offer free fall and spring birding field trips led by some of the best birders in the region.

A \$25 basic membership, or \$40 supporting membership can be renewed at www.flatheadaudubon.org or by using the membership form on the back of this newsletter. Please include your email address with your renewal so we can email our Pileated Post e-newsletter and Flathead Audubon Fly-by, which bring you occasional FAS updates, notifications and reminders.

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THE PILEATED POST is published monthly September through May in paper and digital forms. It is mailed or emailed to FAS members and supporters, and available at <https://flatheadaudubon.org>. Deadline for newsletter copy is the 16th of each month.

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

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