



the

# Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

American Kestrel



Photo by Michael JD Macaulay Library

## Michele Tohtz Honored as Flathead Audubon Volunteer of the Year

By Jill Carlberg

Sometimes seemingly small steps lead to big things. When Michele, already an active member at Hawk Watch and at Owen Somerwine work days, was asked if she would take on the simple task of picking up the Flathead Audubon Society's (FAS) mail once a week, she agreed. Luckily for Flathead Audubon, Michele continued to say "yes" to further involvement, as picking up the mail led to her playing an integral role in the success and use of a new member/donor system.



Photo by Joel Tohtz

FAS was converting from a 30-year-old, largely manual system of membership and donor tracking to a modern process supported by a software-driven database called Little Green Light. Michele not only learned the new system quickly, but she also assumed the responsibility for maintaining the data in the system. She has diligently reviewed and entered the following:

- Membership information, including new memberships, renewals, and the constantly changing details of current members;
- Donor details, including contact information and donation specifics.

Having accurate, complete, and up-to-date information on our membership and our donor community is essential to support FAS's communication with its various constituencies, and our ability to meet our goals each year. Michele has maintained the data on hundreds of members, and just this year alone, on hundreds of donations. She also performs third-party check verification on all checks received, ensuring the payments are authentic and appropriate. Her work is described as "meticulous" by Gael Bissell who notes that Michele always steps up to help, whether at meetings, work days, or raising awareness of fundraising activities, such as the Great Fish Community Challenge.

Flathead Audubon is grateful to have Michele as a member and is pleased to recognize her numerous contributions as a stellar volunteer. In speaking to Michele on her award, she was hesitant to attach too much importance to her activities and underscored how easy it was to want to get involved, praising Flathead Audubon as a "beautiful group of people who are fun to be with." Not a wonder that Michele fits right in!

## DECEMBER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Birch Birds by Grace Popp



**Monday, December 4, 5:30pm,** FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Public Meeting Room, Fish, Wildlife & Parks building, 490 North Meridian Road, Kalispell. You may bring your dinner.. See page 3.

**Tuesday, December 5, 6-8pm.** Bird Trivia at Bias Brewing. See page 7.

**Monday, December 11, 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.

**Thursday, December 14,** Libby Christmas Bird Count (CBC). See page 4.

**Saturday, December 16, 8am,** Bigfork CBC. See page 10.

**Saturday, December 16,** Eureka CBC. See page 4.

**Sunday, December 17,** Glacier National Park CBC. See page 4.

**Sunday, December 17,** Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area CBC. See page 4.

**Wednesday, December 20,** Upper Swan CBC. See page 4.

**Thursday, December 21, 10:30am to approximately 1:30pm.** Winter Solstice Birding. See page 3.

**Sunday, December 31,** Kalispell CBC. See page 4.

**Date TBD,** Troy CBC. See page 4.

# BIRD OF THE MONTH

## Northern Saw-whet Owl

By Karen Nichols • Photos provided by ORI

Although Northern Saw-whet owls are one of the most abundant forest raptors in North America, they are rarely seen due to their nocturnal and secretive nature.

Until recent decades, the diminutive owls were thought to be rare in many places and mostly non-migratory.



Banding efforts over the past 30+ years are shedding new light on how common and migratory these owls are. Many Saw-whet owls disperse from their nesting areas in the fall and migrate.

This gives researchers an opportunity to capture and band thousands of owls across their

range in autumn. Researchers, like Denver Holt and his colleagues at the Owl Research Institute (ORI) in Charlo, are capturing and banding these little owls to learn more about the owls' movements and migration.

Holt has been studying Saw-whet owls for more than 40 years. This fall, they moved the Institute's Saw-whet owl banding station to UM's Flathead Lake Biological Station (FLBS). Many Flathead Audubon members were treated to close-up views of this enchanting little owl and the research.

Saw-whet owls are about the size of an American Robin but stouter. Adult owls have a round head, striking forward-facing golden eyes, and a light facial disk. Feathers are mottled brown and white, with a distinctive white 'V' between its eyes. The females are about 25 percent bigger than the males, as is common among raptors.

Few people will forget their first glimpse of a Northern Saw-whet Owl. They are captivating and simply adorable (unless you are a mouse or vole).

Fierce and efficient nocturnal predators, they capture small rodents with their feet and swallow them in chunks, starting with the head. They are well-adapted for nocturnal hunting with near-silent flight, keen night vision and asymmetrical ears that help them pinpoint prey.

The Saw-whet is not our smallest owl in western Montana; the Northern Pygmy and

Flammulated Owls are a bit smaller.

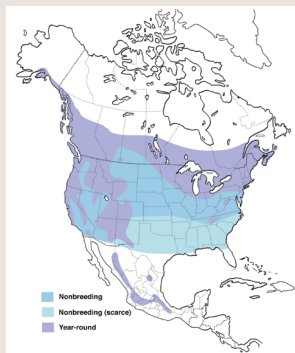
They nest primarily in old woodpecker cavities. Snags, large dead or dying trees, provide not only nesting habitat for Saw-whet owls in Montana, but also for Boreal, Northern Pygmy, Western and Eastern Screech, Northern Hawk, Flammulated, Great Gray, Barred and Great Horned owls.

Saw-whets roost by day in dense conifers and thickets to rest and avoid predators like larger owls and hawks. They often show up in places like Lawrence Park and Owen Sowerwine. My first glimpse of a Saw-whet owl was in a crabapple tree outside of the old Hardee's fast-food restaurant near Main and Idaho in Kalispell.

People are more likely to hear a Saw-whet than see one. The males sing their repetitive, too-too-too call, during the late winter and early spring breeding season, at a rate of about two to three toots per second.

To the modern ear, this sounds like the warning beep of a truck backing up. However, historically, the sound reminded people of a saw being sharpened with a file, hence the species' common name. The owls make up to 10 different vocalizations, from squeaks to high-pitched alarm shrieks to barks and guttural sounds.

Birders in search of these owls often find them near eye-level in dense thickets. To find such a roost, look for clues such as pellets and whitewash at the base of the trees. Also, keep an ear out for agitated small birds like chickadees and nuthatches. Even though Saw-whet owls rarely prey on small birds (unlike the similar Northern Pygmy Owls), the small birds tend to mob owls.



Birds of the World

The female does most of the nesting, with the male bringing food for her and the newly hatched young. The eggs are laid one to two days apart. When the youngest nestling is about 18 days old, the female often leaves the nest to roost elsewhere. The male takes over nesting and feeding the young. (It is not known if the female brings food for the male and young or simply leaves.)

(continued on page 10)

## DECEMBER PROGRAM

### A Decade of Rare Forest Carnivore Monitoring: Lessons Learned

Presented By Sara Lamar



Photo by Andrea DeNino

The Southwestern Crown of the Continent (SW Crown) is a 1.5 million acre, mostly forested landscape in the Rocky Mountains of western Montana. Swan Valley

Connections (SVC) has been collaborating annually with various partners to monitor rare carnivores. This monitoring project was designed to provide a baseline of the current distribution of the focal species (Canada lynx, wolverine, and fisher) in the SW Crown and to allow for tracking changes in that distribution over time.



Photo by Sara Lamar

through SVC's education programs. Sara has worked on the carnivore monitoring project for seven field seasons.

Sara Lamar (she/her) has worked with SVC for nearly a decade. As the Education Director, Sara spends much of her time connecting people of all ages to the natural world



Photo by Sara Lamar

## DECEMBER MEETING FAS

Our meetings are available both in person and virtually. For those attending the meeting in person on December 11, we'll meet in Room 26 of the Gateway Community Center at 7pm. This room is located on the east side of the building along Glenwood Drive. Look for our banner outside.

For those joining virtually, when you use the link, you will be let into a "waiting room" where you will then be added to the meeting by the host. Please sign in with your name when you enter the room so we know to admit you. You will be muted when you first join the meeting. You can use your computer's microphone and speakers (most computers have both). This is the preferred way to join. You can also get an audio connection to the meeting without the Zoom capability by using your phone. For more information on how to attend by Zoom, or how to get an audio connection by phone, contact [jake@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:jake@flatheadaudubon.org)

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

## DECEMBER FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU

### WINTER SOLSTICE BIRDING, Thursday, December 21, 10:30am - approx. 1:30pm

Celebrate the Solstice by joining Shannon and Bridger Donaldson for a morning of birding along Flathead Lake's North Shore. Encompassing over 1,800 acres, the Flathead WPA is a wonderful mix of habitats with many opportunities to see a variety of birds. The group will likely see eagles as well as both Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks. Song Sparrows and American Tree Sparrows are probable in the thickets. Closer to the lake, there is a great mix of Ponderosa pine, aspen stands, birch and larch trees where it is possible to find three types of nuthatches, a variety of woodpecker species and chickadees. The dense thickets along the sloughs provide great cover for birds such Long-eared Owls. Expect to walk 2.5 to 3 miles. It is mostly level, however, there are some slopes and boardwalks that may be slick. Bring ice cleats or hiking poles, tall waterproof boots, extra layers, water and a sack lunch or snacks. There are NO restrooms available. To sign up, contact Shannon at [shannon@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:shannon@flatheadaudubon.org) or 406-261-3466.



## Highlights from the November 6, 2023 Board of Directors Meeting

By Pam Willison, Secretary

- ✚ Dee Baginski, Operations Coordinator, reported that she has been working with Jake Bramante on outreach and website tasks, with Pam Willison and Denny Olson on Owen Sowerwine group use, and with Darcy Thomas and Linda Winnie on publicity and membership.
- ✚ The Board approved a \$100 donation to Whitefish Lake Institute; and Treasurer Rod Walette confirmed that the \$1,000 annual donation to Montana Audubon will be made in November.
- ✚ Denny reported that he developed a new contact at Somers Elementary and will work with the 5th grade doing a native plant installation at the school, and on a breeding bird survey in Owen Sowerwine.
- ✚ An ad hoc committee (Denny, Dee, Shannon Donaldson, and Linda Du Lac) was formed to investigate the idea of creating a Junior Birder Club, which would offer outings for school age kids, particularly during the summer months.
- ✚ Shannon and Bridger Donaldson will be the new coordinators of the Kalispell Christmas Bird Count.

## Kalispell CBC

By Shannon Donaldson

The 25th annual Kalispell CBC will take place on New Year's Eve, **Sunday, December 31**. The Kalispell count area is a large circle, 15 miles in diameter, centered at the junction of Highway 93 and West Reserve Drive by Home Depot. From Happy Valley to the north and Herron Park to the south, Fairview Marsh to the east and McMannamy Draw to the west, the Kalispell CBC covers a wide variety of habitats. It includes the Flathead River corridor between Pressentine and Foy's Bend, the Whitefish River downstream from Hodgson Road, and the Stillwater River downstream of Ray Kuhns Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Favorite birding spots like Lone Pine State Park, Foy's Lake, Owen Sowerwine, McWenneger Slough, Kuhns WMA, the "Flathead Gull Sanctuary" (Flathead County Landfill), and much of West Valley lie within the boundary as well.

Everyone is welcome to join the CBC effort, whether it's out in the field or counting backyard feeder birds. With many birds being concentrated at feeders this time of year, feeder data is valuable and easy to collect. If you reside in the count area and would enjoy collecting feeder

data, we're happy to get more feeder watchers signed up. If you would be able to lead, we are seeking at least one experienced birder to cover a section this year. If anyone observes an unusual or rare bird during count week, December 28-January 3, please let us know. Shannon and Bridger Donaldson will organize and compile this year and we'll be contacting everyone who covered sections last year to get your packet to you. We are happy to carry on the tradition of gathering for breakfast on count day. Meet at 7am at 4B's Restaurant, 660 E. Idaho St. in Kalispell (formerly Finnegan's).

Christmas Bird Count, first held on Christmas Day in 1900, is now the largest citizen science project in the world, running from December 14 through January 5 each year. Over the past 24 years, the Kalispell count has produced a total of 132 species. 72 species is the average while 83 was the maximum count in 2012. Let's see if we can break that record this year!

Sign up at the FAS general meeting on December 11, or contact Shannon at [shannon@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:shannon@flatheadaudubon.org) or 406-261-3466.

## 2023 Christmas Bird Counts

Kalispell	Dec. 31 Sun.	Shannon Donaldson	<a href="mailto:shannon@flatheadaudubon.org">shannon@flatheadaudubon.org</a>	406-261-3466
Bigfork	Dec. 16 Sat.	Craig Hohenberger	<a href="mailto:asoleado2003@yahoo.com">asoleado2003@yahoo.com</a>	406-890-1629
Glacier (GNP)	Dec. 17 Sun.	Lisa Bate	<a href="mailto:Lisa_Bate@nps.gov">Lisa_Bate@nps.gov</a>	406-888-7833
Ninepipes	Dec. 17 Sun.	Jim Oates	<a href="mailto:oates65@gmail.com">oates65@gmail.com</a>	406-270-7826
Upper Swan	Dec. 20 Wed.	Taylor Tewksbury	<a href="mailto:taylor@svconnections.org">taylor@svconnections.org</a>	406-754-3137
Eureka	Dec. 16 Sat.	Ellen Sullivan	<a href="mailto:kesullivan@interbel.net">kesullivan@interbel.net</a>	406-889-3983
Troy	TBD	Don Jones	<a href="mailto:don@donaldmjones.com">don@donaldmjones.com</a>	406-546-3832
Libby	Dec. 14 Thur.	Gene Reckin	<a href="mailto:gnreckin@gmail.com">gnreckin@gmail.com</a>	406-291-8482



## Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

### Rare and Notables – October/November 2023

This period presented several of the less common species we have come to expect in late fall, including all three scoter species, Short-billed Gulls, and a Swamp Sparrow. Pacific Loons were seen in several locations, including two at Rogers Lake. Common Redpoll, Snow Bunting and Bohemian Waxwing reports increased throughout the period. Most remarkable was a “one day wonder” BRAMBLING that was photographed at a Polson feeder; it was the tenth Montana record of the species, but the fourth in Lake County and the second one in the state this year! See also: <https://ebird.org/region/US-MT-029?yr=all>.

**10/16 – Pacific Loon (1) Ducharme Point, Polson (Shawn R.) (present 10/12-10/18)**

**10/16 – Black-bellied Plover (1) West Valley (Grant P.)**

**10/19 – Swamp Sparrow (1) Dixon Ln, Polson (Shawn R.) (present through 11/3)**

**10/20 – Short-billed Gull (1) Dixon Ln, Polson (Braydon L.)**

**10/21 – Pacific Loon (1) Woods Bay (Maggie and Clara K.)**

**10/27 – Ferruginous Hawk (1) Flathead Lake WPA (Grant P.)**

**10/28 – Common Redpoll (10) Owen Sowerwine (Evan C.) (first of season)**

**10/29 – White-winged Scoter (3) Foy’s Lake (Dan C.); Four there 11/9 (bj W.)**

**10/29 – American Golden-Plover (1) Dixon Ln, Polson (Braydon L.)**

**10/31 – Black Scoter (2) Lake Mary Ronan (Braydon L.) (present through 11/10)**

**11/08 – Pacific Loon (1) Wayfarer’s SP, Bigfork (Craig H.)**

**11/09 – Short-billed Gull (1) Flathead Lake WPA (Shawn R.)**

**11/09 – BRAMBLING (1) Polson (Braydon L.) (tenth state record!)**

**11/10 – Short-billed Gull (1) Salish Pt, Polson (Roy M. and Grant P.)**

**11/12 – Pacific Loon (2) Rogers Lake (Linda W.)**

**11/13 – Surf Scoter (1) Somers Bay, Flathead Lake (Dan C.)**

### What to Expect – December 2023

Late November and early December can continue to provide surprise, particularly if our lakes stay ice-free. It’s a good time to scan flocks of diving ducks for scoters or Long-tailed Ducks, and loons should be scrutinized closely to look for the rarer species. Gull diversity should increase as Glaucous, Iceland or even Glaucous-winged Gulls arrive. It’s also a great time to look through the wintering raptors for Harlan’s Red-tailed Hawks and the diverse plumages of Rough-legged Hawks.

## A Successful Raptor Quest

By Darcy Thomas

Red-tailed Hawk



Photo by Linda Du Lac

The first day of November brought overcast skies to the Flathead Valley making the 30 degree outside temperature feel even colder. But that was not daunting enough to stop 11 birders intent on looking for raptors around Creston. And we were well rewarded. The first bird seen was a Sharp-shinned Hawk flying around a wooded area near a field.

Before long, the group had added several Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks, a Cooper’s Hawk, a Merlin, and 14 Bald Eagles. The Merlin was sitting in a treetop at the fish hatchery, and everyone got a great view through the scope. That is except for one birder and his carpooling buddy who had dropped a phone at a previous stop and had backtrack to find it. Thanks to location services and great memory, the phone was

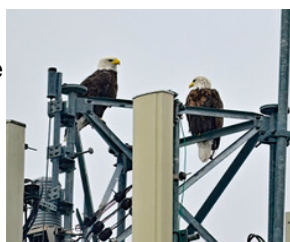


Photo by Mark Reasoner

retrieved but the Merlin flew just as they pulled up to rejoin the group. What we thought was our grand finale was watching five Bald Eagles on a carcass on Robocker Lane. We almost didn’t drive far enough down the road, but a passerby told Mark and Evan who led the rest of us to the spectacle. Our actual grand finale was watching two Rough-legged Hawks work a field near the hatchery. Their beautiful plumage and field markings were easily seen as they were so close to us. Some of the other birds that made the day great were a Belted Kingfisher, Bohemian Waxwings, and six Great Blue Herons. 23 taxa total.

Northern Harrier



Photo by Mark Reasoner



Photo by Linda Du Lac

## Sixteenth Jewel Basin Hawk Watch Season Wrap-Up

By Dan Casey, JBHW Coordinator

The 2023 migration season at the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch concluded on November 1, when Jake Bramante counted 26 birds during our 47th survey of the season. We finished the season with a total of 3,131 birds counted (10.5/hr) our fourth highest. It was also a season of diversity; we matched or exceeded our long-term mean counts for 14 of the 17 species reported, setting new record counts for Osprey, Broad-winged Hawk, Swainson's Hawk and American Kestrel. Only American (formerly Northern) Goshawk, Red-tailed Hawk and Golden Eagle were counted in below-average numbers. We have now counted 43,167 raptors over the 17 years of surveys (including our pilot year of 2007). Along the way, we recorded our 20,000th Sharp-shinned Hawk, our 6,000th Cooper's Hawk, our 6,000th Golden Eagle, and our 2,000th falcon.

As the person who conceived this count and has coordinated it all these years, I cannot overstate my appreciation for the funders, contactors and volunteers who continue to make it a success! This year 10 people served as primary observers, and many others contributed their time as the "extra pairs of eyes" so essential during busy migration days (or as company on the slow ones!) Thanks to Montana Audubon and Flathead National Forest for their contributions, which helped to provide financial support for our two stalwart contracted observers, Joshua Covill and BJ Worth. BJ has now served as the primary observer on an incredible 136 Jewel Basin surveys! A full report summarizing this year's data and 16-yr trends, will be produced this winter and will be available on the Flathead Audubon website. Our 2023 season totals were as follows:

Turkey Vulture - 5  
 Osprey - 19  
 Bald Eagle - 60  
 Northern Harrier - 81  
 Sharp-shinned Hawk - 1,710  
 Cooper's Hawk - 488  
 American Goshawk - 34  
 Unidentified Accipiter - 32  
 Broad-winged Hawk - 60  
 Swainson's Hawk - 7  
 Red-tailed Hawk - 157  
 Ferruginous Hawk - 2  
 Rough-legged Hawk - 26  
 Unidentified Buteo - 10  
 Golden Eagle - 257  
 American Kestrel - 104  
 Merlin - 36  
 Peregrine Falcon - 14  
 Prairie Falcon - 13  
 Unidentified Falcon - 8  
 Unidentified Eagle - 2  
 Unidentified Raptor - 6

**TOTAL – 2,851**



Courtesy of Hawk Mountain.org

## October Big Day: A Resounding Success

By Dan Casey via Team eBird



people contributed 83,735 checklists for the single biggest day in October birding history. The **7,525** species reported

was a 72-species increase over the 2022 October Big Day, a testament to the power of birding to bring people together in a common effort.

Global Big Days not only help to highlight the avian diversity of our planet, but they also help call attention to the role that citizen science can play toward improving our knowledge of bird abundance and distribution. Here in Montana, 253 checklists were submitted from 33 of our 56 counties, with 145 species reported. Twenty-two observers reported a total of 67 species on 28 checklists here in Flathead County. To further explore the results of this year's effort, see: <https://ebird.org/octoberbigday>.



## Birds and Glass: Reducing Avian Window Strikes

By Grant Pegram

On the nights of October 4th and 5th 2023, thousands of migrating warblers, thrushes, grosbeaks - and a host of other songbirds died due to window strikes in Chicago and all around the Midwest. Bird migration monitoring program BirdCast, run by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Colorado State University – observed the highest migration numbers ever recorded since the project's implementation, with over 1.1 billion birds migrating overnight on October 6th.

In times such as these, it is paramount to emphasize the effects of light pollution and reflective windows surfaces on migrating birds – and just how large of a threat they pose. In cities like Chicago, several movements have been implemented to help limit these light and reflective-surface related collisions during the height of bird migration season, such as the Bird-Safe Buildings Act introduced within the entire state of Illinois.

The issue of window strikes is not localized to the Midwest or to city high-rise buildings – injured birds have been spotted outside homes and car dealerships throughout the Flathead Valley. A Yale study comparing bird-safe building design notes that residences often account for 44 percent of fatal bird collisions but are often exempted from bird-safe building regulations imposed

upon commercial buildings. The importance of the homeowner to do their part to protect birds is just as important as the motions made by cities and commercial organizations to prevent bird collisions.



Photo by Grant Pegram

There are several easy and cost-effective solutions to help reduce your home's likelihood of claiming a bird strike victim. The National Audubon society recommends shutting off unnecessary light fixtures outside at night, as well as covering glass with reflection-irruptive patterning. Easy, DIY solutions such as leaving your blinds half closed to disrupt reflections, or using insect screens on the outside of windows nearly eliminates bird collisions.

For more info, follow these American Bird Conservancy or National Audubon links.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-21577-6>

<https://www.audubon.org/news/more-1000-birds-collided-single-chicago-building-one-night>

<https://birdcast.info/news/the-first-billion-bird-night-6-7-october-2023/>

<https://bird-friendly.yale.edu/policy-report>

## Lewis Young Memorial Fund

By Kay Mitchell

The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society, professional association of wildlife biologists, has established the Lewis Young Memorial Fund. Lewis was a longtime Flathead Audubon Society (FAS) member and conservation chair. Income from the fund will provide travel expenses to the annual convention for students who are currently enrolled in a wildlife biology curriculum at the college level. The convention is held in rotating locations around Montana and features presentations of reports on research projects as well as new methods and technologies in the wildlife biology profession.

Photo by Lisa Bate



Lewis setting up mist nets for a bat capture and survey

Donations to the Lewis Young Memorial Fund are tax deductible under current tax law and may be mailed to The Wildlife Society, Attn: Heather Bower, PO Box 605, Scobey, MT 59263, with "Lewis Young Fund" in the memo line when writing a check.

**BIRD TRIVIA NIGHT  
AT  
BIAS BREWING  
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5,  
6-8 PM**

Sponsored by  Flathead Audubon Society

*Come enjoy some brew and try your hand at Bird Trivia Tuesday with Audubon bird lovers!*

 412 South Main St., Kalispell

## Peeps from the President

By Darcy Thomas

It's almost a wrap! 2023 will soon be in our past and a new year will be ahead of us. It's a good time to reflect on what has been accomplished, as we look forward to where we would like to go. It's also a good time to show our immense appreciation for our Audubon family. Thanks to our Board of Directors, Committee Chairs, and many member volunteers. We can say we gave our best for the birds! That's what we are here for, and I think we make a difference.

While we said goodbye to our good friend, the late Lewis Young, and farewell to our past President Cory Davis who moved out of state, 2023 also brought new faces to Audubon. Linda du Lac's smiling cheerfulness has brought many new members into our chapter. Geri Meireis joined the fold doing a grand job of editing the Pileated Post, while Susie Waldron scooted in right behind her to enhance our reading experience with her beautiful newsletter layout. Ronda Howell jumped right in to find and schedule program speakers for our Monday general meetings. Ronda is elated to be part of the Audubon gang and says her job is great fun. Grant Pegram has brought new life into the Conservation Committee. He is an enthusiastic and knowledgeable birder and fast becoming good friends with many in our chapter.

Our accomplishments this year include fundraising and laying groundwork for a conservation easement at Owen Sowerwine, the habitat we manage and keep safe for birds, wildlife, and native plants. We have worked closely with Flathead Land Trust and Flathead Lakers but still have money to raise before we have the amount needed to purchase the conservation easement. We have been awarded a grant from Sliter's Hardware to purchase an EZ-Ject wand to deliver herbicide to the dreaded buckthorn. This will make the management of this invasive much easier in the future. We contracted with Montana Conservation Corps to complete maintenance at the Greenridge entrance to Owen Sowerwine, and spent a few days doing trail maintenance and clearing the area of buckthorn and other invasive plants.

We had a very successful year in the Great Fish Community Challenge for which we give a heartfelt thank you to our many donors.

With Denny at the helm, the Conservation Education program has expanded its quality classroom programs, revamped the educational trunks, and designed a new educational video called "Natives Rule!" which relates the intricate relationships between native plants, insects



Photo by Rob Thomas

and birds and instruction on how to recover dwindling bird populations through growing native plants.

Dee Baginski has joined the team as a part-time Operations Coordinator helping with publicity and outreach, among other things.

Flathead Audubon has joined the Winter Raptor Survey Project organized by East Cascades Audubon in Oregon to conduct several local routes.

Hawk Watch continued into November this year with 23 surveys producing above average totals and counts for most species. Denny is producing a video of Hawk Watch using a game camera that assisted in gathering information for the watch this season.

Sacred Eats is selling Schmidt Faced Hot Sauce and donating the profits to Flathead Audubon.

We enjoyed a lot of field trips this year from raptors to Sandhill Cranes, while traveling from local hotspots to more distant destinations such as Freezout Lake, the CSKT Bison Range and the Flathead Lake Biological Station. We now have walkie-talkies for caravan-style field trips which were donated by Devin Harshbarger.

Other fun events this year included Warbler Weekend at Tally Lake, a wonderful Bird-a-Thon and barbecue at the Creston National Fish Hatchery, and Beer, Bingo, and Birds at Bias Brewing. We will close out the year with Bird Trivia night at Bias Brewing and our annual Bigfork and Kalispell Christmas Bird Counts.

As we move into the new year we are looking forward to finalizing the conservation easement on Owen Sowerwine, and will begin controlling buckthorn in the area with the EZ-Ject tool, instead of using chainsaws and stacking thorny piles of buckthorn by hand. A Junior Bird Club is on the horizon. FAS merchandise will soon be available for purchase. We will help protect Osprey from entanglement in twine by partnering with the Owl Research Institute for a Baling Twine Clean-Up Day. The Birds of Prey Festival will be at Lone Pine again in 2024.

With all these wonderful projects in the works I still have a small wish list. We need a chairperson for the education committee, and I need a vice president who will help us move forward in the New Year.

Happy Birding everyone!





Photo by JP Edge  
Hungry Horse News

## Conservation Educator's Niche: The Value of "Our Place" in Education

By Denny Olson

In Montana, we are lucky in that education has always had a tradition of local control. Unfortunately, it has seldom had a tradition of local emphasis. In fact, the primary key to living well politically, economically, ecologically, spiritually and as a community member (on all levels) may well be "place education". Whether we recognize it or not, most of us need a sense of home which extends beyond the fenced yard (or worse, the immediate area of the television and the couch). We need a sense of family which extends beyond our own offspring. We gather subtle hints about these senses of connection when we take a refreshing walk in the woods, go hunting and fishing, attend summer camp or even simply join a club. Deep inside of most humans is a strong urge to belong somewhere. We often interpret that urge as a need to circle the wagons around home and property, but it goes broader and deeper than that obvious response. If we further examine our own motives and needs, perhaps there is an obvious gap that our culture actually widens. It could be that we need a sense of place, a level of comfort with our surroundings – including nature, our only life support system -- that is created through familiarity and interaction, instead of distance and isolation. Simply put, "place" adds an essential context to life, or rather, it is the context out of which life operates.

Teaching a sense of place, by its very scope, demands a teaching partnership between schools, families, other human communities (political, business, church, etc.) and nature. To make education a true community partnership, children must be seen (and function) as contributing members of the community, no matter what their age. In our present culture children are protected, but also insulated from active participation in the affairs of the community, and adult voices advocating children's interests are few and largely ignored. Children are seen as being in a constant state of preparation for adulthood, an unpaid and largely ignored apprenticeship for the real life of the marketplace later. To illustrate with two examples, adults must admit that (1) the users of a play area might be qualified to review and recommend changes in that area's design, or (2) that the future users of a natural area might have more stake in that area's welfare than those presently being asked to decide its fate. (Witness the success of the recent kid's lawsuit upholding the constitutional right to a clean and healthy environment. They have to think ahead.)

To create a healthy community through a sense of place,

this educational partnership must realize that the where and how of learning are as important as the what. If we examine our own educational experiences in terms of what we learned best, we will probably realize that respect for something has been a prerequisite for learning about it. From an examination of the stark beauty and seasonal happenings of our own place (natural, familial, political, spiritual, etc.) we can begin to understand the more abstract nature of all places. The way education is now practiced, we learn the abstract, global things first, get bored with it because it has so little relationship to our own lives, and therefore never get around to learning about here. By studying the tropical rainforest, we are asked to develop a sense of stewardship for our home, when we have never had the chance to know, love and respect the places just outside our doors.

The concept of global climate change is almost ridiculously abstract and complex. Conversely, wondering why I have so many fewer days of cross-country skiing (which I dearly love) in my home in Flathead Valley, and watching January rain soak layers of snow and then re-freeze – locking many animals from the safety of insulating snow, or breathing August and September smoke from wildfires across the West – these things happen to me. In 2023, with the world-wide January temperature the highest ever on record, I cross-country skied exactly five days, and had to travel 2000 feet higher in nearby mountains to do it. When odd weather becomes a multi-decade trend, I can begin to understand the differences between weather fluctuations and climate change. These conditions are immediate to me, and they are happening more and more often. Observations about my place bring the abstraction of climate change down to a reality I can understand, and prompt me to want to do something about it. It is accidental place education at work. Imagine how effective it could be if we did some planning around it.

As a small example, we have some of the most spectacular bird species and migrations in the world right here. Why does not every child and adult in the Flathead know about these things? Just sayin' ...



Kids at Owen Sowerwine

Photo credit Flathead Audubon

## The 49th Bigfork CBC

I am assuming all regional (local) leaders will be doing the Bigfork CBC once again. If you were a regional (local) leader last year, and are not participating in the Bigfork CBC this year, please let me know. I will be sending out the Bigfork CBC packets with bird checklists and maps of your respective sub-regions during the first week of December. If there are multiple people in your regions, you can organize your plan of coverage, or just caravan. All volunteers are welcome! I will meet any interested birders in the parking lot of Flathead Lake Brewery at 8am on **Saturday, December 16th** (day of Bigfork CBC).

After the count, we will meet at Dave Manuwal's house between 5-5:30pm for a potluck dinner and unofficial bird countdown. Please return your packets with the map and bird checklists ASAP after the count so I can tally the results. You can either return them by mail (asap), email them to me (but return the maps), or drop the bird lists in my mailbox on Riverside Rd. (95 Hash Mtn. View); it's

about one mile south of Creston on Riverside Rd., on the corner of Obryan Lane.

Directions to David Manuwal's house:

We are about five miles north of Bigfork and two-and-a-half miles south of Creston. Turn off Highway 35 at Lupine Ridge Rd. which is near a curve in the highway. Go down Lupine Ridge until you encounter Meadowlark Ridge Rd. on the right. Turn and go to the last house (yellow) on the left. That's us: 85 Meadowlark Ridge Rd., 406-257-1471.

Good birding!

Craig Hohenberger (Compiler)

406-890-1629

Email: [asoleado2003@yahoo.com](mailto:asoleado2003@yahoo.com)

My mailing address:

PO Box 5021, Bigfork, MT 59911



Photo by Ryan Schain  
Macaulay Library

(continued from page 2)

The nest is kept clean while female is brooding the young; all the pellets and feces are removed. Biologists have noticed that when the male takes over nesting, pellets, feces, and rotting excess prey build up in a layer several centimeters deep.



Haley Madden and Lynda Saul

The ORI site at the FLBS is one of more than 100 Saw-whet owl banding sites across the U.S. and Canada. ORI researchers set up mist nets for 40 nights this fall and caught and banded 180 birds. The researchers found that 73 percent of the owls captured were females, while 9 percent were males and 18 percent unknown, suggesting that females may be more migratory than males. Also, 78 percent were birds that had hatched that year.

While many banded owls are never caught again, some recaptured owls yield big surprises. One bird banded on Montana's Rocky Mountain Front in 2003 was recaptured two years later near Boston, Mass.

Studying Northern Saw-whet Owls is challenging because they are nocturnal, secretive, and have irregular seasonal migrations. While scientists like those at the ORI are answering many questions about these fascinating birds, many mysteries remain.

Sources: The Owl Research Institute; The Cornell Lab of Ornithology; *Birds of Montana* by Jeffrey Marks, Paul Hendricks and Daniel Casey; and *What an Owl Knows* by Jennifer Ackerman

## Great Fish Community Challenge Donor Thank You

By Kay Mitchell



It's cold outside, but inside, we're feeling warmth toward all of you who donated so generously to

Flathead Audubon through the Great Fish Community Challenge! These gifts allow us to provide the Flathead with field trips, programs, this newsletter and an outstanding Conservation Education program for school kids. Your donation is a mark of your faith in us to manage your dollars wisely and we operate with each of you in mind. Thank you so much for your Great Fish donations! Happy Holidays to all!



## Helping Hands

By Darcy Thomas



We would love to have you step forward and help with Flathead Audubon projects in whatever capacity you are comfortable with. The education committee is still without a chairperson and other committees could use either a co-chair or assistance with some of the ongoing work. I know my vice president is out there somewhere and I would be thrilled to meet you! To lend a hand, or for more information, contact Darcy at [darcy@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:darcy@flatheadaudubon.org).

- Write an article on nature journaling
- Help the education committee in the classroom and on field trips
- Write the Conservation Achievement Recognition article for Flathead Lakers
- Lead or co-lead a field trip
- Choose a committee to help with

**FLATHEAD AUDUBON MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Flathead Audubon Society is to conserve birds, wildlife habitat, and ecosystem diversity through education and conservation programs.

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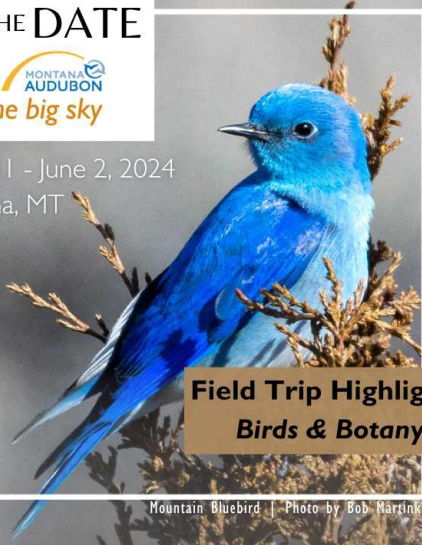
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**Field Trip Highlight:**  
**Birds & Botany**

Mountain Bluebird | Photo by Bob Martinka

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