



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

Blue Jay



Photo by Dick Walker

Peeps from the President

By Darcy Thomas

After hearing that the Montana Land Board had approved the conservation easement for Owen Sowerwine, I told my husband to put his boots on, as we needed to go walk among the trees, enjoy the music of bird song, and revel in the accomplishment. A couple of days later, Ronda Howell and I returned to bird watch. Owen Sowerwine is not only a birding hotspot but is also designated as an Audubon Important Bird Area (IBA). IBA's protect sites of critical importance for the conservation of birds. They are "managed and preserved for the benefit of the important bird populations they serve" (<https://flatheadaudubon.org/protect/important-bird-areas/>). Because of this and because Flathead Audubon manages Owen Sowerwine, Ronda and I were especially happy that the Montana Land Board viewed the conservation easement, which soon will be in place, as an important preservation area. Both of us felt a great desire to bask in the beauty of this rich birding habitat knowing that it would remain undeveloped for perpetuity.



Photo by Rob Thomas

We enjoyed watching a Pileated Woodpecker fly into a nearby tree and begin whacking at it in search of something yummy to eat. We watched him for a long while and were quite enjoying ourselves. It is always wonderful to get a good look at a Pileated Woodpecker

as it is our Flathead Audubon mascot. Just as I was saying, "I wonder if we will see a Belted Kingfisher", we spotted one zooming along the river like a fighter pilot and breaking the silence with his rattling call. We caught sight of a Cooper's Hawk and in quick succession a Merlin. Seconds later, the Cooper's Hawk flew toward the river while the Merlin chased after him mobbing and harassing him in the air. It was a wonderful outing, and we went home with smiles on our faces.

A few days later, I decided I just couldn't get enough of the place and headed into Owen Sowerwine again. I walked along a backwater channel and then took the main trail to the river before taking the Greenridge Trail. My phone dinged. Taking it out of my pocket, I checked my text messages and read the following, "I laughed when I pulled into the Treasure Lane parking lot and saw your car. Might see you on the trail. Happy birding!" It was Ronda. It seemed she couldn't stay away either! Many people gravitate to this special spot for its trails, birds, wildlife, native flora, and rivers. Maybe you are one of them. Now is a great time to visit and ponder what the conservation easement will mean to all the living organisms that call Owen Sowerwine home. It is certainly a victory to celebrate.

FEBRUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Thursday, February 1, 6:30pm, "Science on Tap: Montana's Hidden Owls: Three Decades of Research and Discovery", Flathead Lake Brewing Company, Bigfork. See page 13.

Saturday, February 3, 9am - 3pm. Mission Valley Wintering Birds of Prey. See page 5.

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

Monday, February 12, 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.

Tuesday, April 2-Wednesday, April 3. Freezout Lake and Snow Geese Migration. See page 5.

SAVE THE DATE! Friday, May 17-Sunday, May 19. Warbler Weekend at Tally Lake.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Short-eared Owl

By Bridger Donaldson

Short-eared Owls are a medium-sized owl and are commonly chanced upon in daylight. Their wings are quite long and when perched, usually extend past their tail. The plumage of Short-eared Owls varies among their populations worldwide, but retains a combination of mottled white, tan, beige and brown. They are palest on their belly, and on their chest, they are boldly streaked. This all provides effective camouflage in the open grassy habitats where they are most commonly found. On their underwings, they show dark markings on their wrists and wingtips. They have piercing yellow eyes. Their “ears”, which as in all owls with “horns”, are tufts of feathers on the head and are generally only visible and lifted when agitated. Quite unique to Short-eared Owls is their flight, which is often described as moth or bat-like, with their unhurried, deliberate wingbeats and erratic flight pattern.

To find Short-eared Owls close to our home in the Flathead Valley, you might visit open, relatively treeless areas in the Mission Valley, south of Flathead Lake and Polson, in the late afternoon and early evening. There can be dozens moving about, looking for the ideal field to hunt in for the night. You're most likely to come across these beautiful, primarily nocturnal, and crepuscular (meaning active at dawn and dusk) owls in grasslands with scattered thickets, shrubs, and fence posts. As the Northern Harriers start to wind down for the day, Short-eared Owls come out en force to work the night shift. These two routines overlap as the sun goes down, and the harriers and owls are often seen harassing each other and tussling over their shared food sources.

The Short-eared Owl is a species found worldwide and has a range that spans North America, and South America outside of the Amazon, Europe, much of Asia and sporadic sightings in Africa. In the breeding season in North America, they range up into the far northern reaches of Alaska and Canada. In the non-breeding



Photo by Braydon Luikart

season, they winter in much of the southern United States and Mexico, and in Montana. In much of the Midwest and Pacific states, they occur year-round.

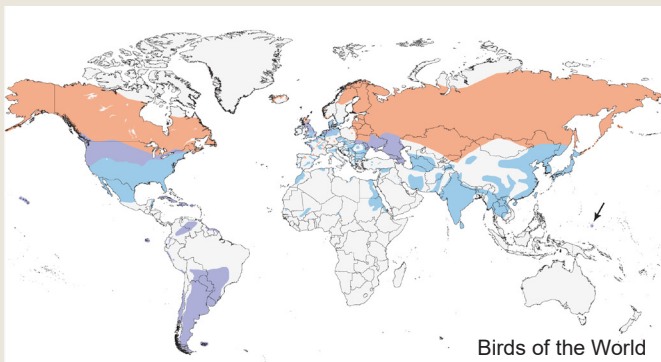
Short-eared Owls are known to science under the name *Asio flammeus*. “Flammeus” means flaming, or fiery, in Latin. The Genus “Asio” includes eight other species of owls, including the relative of the Short-eared Owl - the Long-eared Owl, *Asio otus* - which is also found worldwide, and has been especially researched in Montana.

In their breeding season, Short-eared Owls are usually found nesting on the ground in open expanses, hiding their nest among areas of tall grass. Typically, a clutch of four to seven eggs, up to 11 in years when food is very abundant, are laid in a scrape made by the female. This is usually lined with her own plucked down, and grass. Chicks often leave the nest about two weeks after hatching, and become independent from their parents within a month after fledging.

In early spring, one might encounter the remarkable display flight of the male, in which he will ascend hundreds of feet above the ground with exaggerated wing flaps. During this display he rapidly snaps his wings together below his body, creating a clapping sound. This flight ends with the male's descent to the ground, “sashaying” down, often to where a female is perched.

There is a subspecies of the Short-eared Owl endemic to Hawaii known as the Pueo, it is the only native species of owl on the islands. They are believed to have arrived in Hawaii after Polynesians colonized them, helped along by the introduction of the Polynesian Rat, which likely became its food source. The Pueo figures

(continued on next page)



(Bird of the Month continued from page 2)

prominently in Hawaiian mythology, in which they are one of the more well-known forms of 'aumakua, which are Hawaiian household gods. Hawaiians held the belief that ancestors would transform into 'aumakua and watch their descendants with love and concern for them as their protectors, while also being the judge of their actions. The only other owl species with a population in Hawaii is the Barn Owl. Introduced in the late 50's by Hawaiian officials, it is considered somewhat problematic to native species, but is protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Like many other birds, Short-eared Owls are threatened by habitat loss, and protecting the grasslands in which they live is important. Another threat is widespread use of rodenticides, which can easily kill raptors that take poisoned animals as prey.

Whether you're in some of the far northern reaches of Russia, around the farmland areas outside of Edmonton, Alberta, come across the Pueo in Kauai, Hawaii... or if you're just here in the Flathead Valley, keep an eye open and your binoculars out, for this wonderful world-widespread owl.

FEBRUARY PROGRAM

A Naturalist's Journey to Antarctica

Presented by Lou Bruno

Join Lou Bruno on an incredible, epic journey aboard the National Geographic Explorer to the Antarctic, South Georgia and the Falkland Islands. This is the world of snow-capped peaks, icebergs, pristine endless seas, and an unbelievable diversity of marine mammals and pelagic birds.

Lou will offer a naturalist's perspective on the life histories of these creatures and the fascinating adaptations that make them able to thrive and deal with the changing conditions affecting their existence.

Lou will also trace the heroic 1915 journey of Ernest Shackleton and his crew of 27 men from Antarctica across hundreds of miles of open ocean to the Stromness Whaling Station at South Georgia.

Lou Bruno is a retired educator and professional naturalist who resides in East Glacier Park, Montana. He grew up in Brooklyn and Queens, New York. His passion for all things natural led him to pursue a biology degree at the University of Montana, which he received in 1971. He taught in Browning, Montana, for 20 years until he retired in 1995. In addition to teaching in Browning, Lou spent many years guiding in Glacier, Yellowstone, Alaska and Mexico. He is currently the Vice President of Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance and was one of the founders of that group.



Lou Bruno among the penguins
Photo by Bill Cardin

FEBRUARY MEETING FAS

Our meetings are available both in person and virtually. For those attending the meeting in person on February 12th, 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 info@flatheadaudubon.org

Videos of previous FAS meeting programs
are available at

<https://flatheadaudubon.org/videos>.

Highlights from the January 2, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting

By Pam Willison, Secretary

- ↓ Dee Baginski will contact the Owl Research Institute about FAS participation in activities or education related to baling twine cleanup, to help protect Osprey against entanglement.
- ↓ Jake Bramante will prepare a proposal about how to use the Little Green Light data management program to help us keep track of our volunteers.
- ↓ Pam Willison reported that meetings with DNRC and Flathead Land Trust related to the Owen Sowerwine Conservation Easement will continue through the end of February, in order to wrap up all the details and final documents.
- ↓ The Board passed a motion authorizing an application for participation in the Great Fish Community Challenge. The Board also decided not to apply for the Whitefish Community Foundation Community Grant this year. The new application process and information for Group Use in Owen Sowerwine were reviewed. These will be posted to the FAS website once they are finalized.
- ↓ The Board passed a motion to contribute \$5,000 to the Lewis Young Memorial Fund. Income from the fund will provide travel expenses to the annual convention for college students who are currently enrolled in a wildlife biology curriculum. Lewis made numerous and varied contributions to Flathead Audubon over many years.
- ↓ Plans are in the works to document the history of FAS through interviews with long-term officers, directors, and members. The goal is to have a history compiled for the 50th anniversary in three years.

Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – December 2023/January 2024

As mild as it seemed going into the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season, it certainly changed in early January! **Pine Grosbeaks** continued to show up throughout the area, but **Bohemian Waxwings** were present in much smaller numbers than usual. **Rough-legged Hawk** numbers were also surprisingly low. **Common Loons** were still present on Flathead Lake before the deep freeze, and impressive numbers of **Canada Geese** were in the area, joined by small numbers of **Cackling Geese**. A group of four **Dunlins** near Polson were present most of the period but may also have left when the deep cold arrived. See also: <https://ebird.org/region/US-MT-029?yr=all>

12/16 – Black-backed Woodpecker (1) La Brandt Rd (Lisa B.)

12/18 – Black-backed Woodpecker (1) Farm to Market Rd (Pat J.)

12/20 – Cackling Goose (30) Lake Blaine (Jake B.)

12/21 – Marsh Wren (1) Flathead Lake WPA (Shannon D.)

12/28 – Dunlin (4) Polson (Shawn R.) Still present 01/01 (Raylene W.)

01/02 – Common Loon (4) Somers Bay (Dan C.) One still present 01/07 (Leslie K.)

01/04 – Lapland Longspur (4) Creston (Craig H.)

01/04 – Double-crested Cormorant (1) Osprey View Conservation Area, Bigfork (Dan C.)

01/07 – Western Grebe (1) Somers Bay (Leslie K.)

01/09 – Cackling Goose (7) Lower Valley Rd (Dan C.)

01/12 – White-crowned Sparrow (1) Whitefish (Ron B.)

01/12 – Prairie Falcon (1) Farm Rd, Somers (Dan C.)

What to Expect - February 2024

It will be interesting to see if the deep cold and snow that arrived in January will boost (or lower) the numbers of raptors in the valley. A few surprises may show up at well-visited feeders, including **Sharp-shinned Hawks**, **Northern Shrikes** and/or **Northern Pygmy-Owls**, all of which may be looking for easy "pickings". Keep watching for **Hoary Redpolls** in the redpoll flocks. By mid-February, the faintest glimmer of spring may appear in growing flocks of **European Starlings** and **Red-winged Blackbirds**. It's also a great time to look over the gull flocks at the lake and dump for rarities (notably **Glaucous** or **Glaucous-winged Gulls**).

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU

BIRDS OF PREY TOUR in MISSION VALLEY: Saturday, February 3, 9am-3pm

Laura Katzman of Flathead Land Trust and Jess Garby will lead a tour in the Mission Valley to look for wintering Birds of Prey. Jess Garby has worked extensively studying migrating raptors in the West, and Laura Katzman has been working to protect farmland in the Mission Valley that is important to wintering birds of prey. The tour route will be based on local raptor surveys and will also include lands important to these raptors that are in the process of being conserved west of Pablo and Ronan. Participants should see Rough-legged Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagles, falcons, and possibly Golden Eagles. Space is limited and sign up is required. Carpooling will be necessary as no more than four cars will be taken on the tour.

Please e-mail Laura at: lkatzman@flatheadlandtrust.org to sign up and get information on where to meet.



FREEZOUT LAKE AND SNOW GEESE MIGRATION, Tuesday-Wednesday, April 2-3

Join Darcy Thomas to see the annual Snow Geese migration on their journey from their wintering grounds to their arctic nesting areas. They stop over at Freezout Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA) near Choteau to rest and feed for a few days before continuing their northward journey. We will meet Tuesday morning, April 2, at 10am at Tractor Supply parking lot (2024 US Hwy. 2 East) in Evergreen. Darcy will provide a suggested schedule and route. We will proceed to Choteau, birding along the way. We should arrive in time for some afternoon goose watching. After a night around Choteau, we will head back out to Freezout Lake just before daybreak on Wednesday, April 3, to watch the "mass ascension" of geese from the ponds and try to locate birds in the local agricultural fields. After the morning's birding, you can return to Kalispell in the afternoon at your own pace.

In recent years, there have been an extraordinary number of people congregating to watch the goose phenomenon. There is no indication of how many might be there this year, although it may not be as crowded mid-week. Please make your own arrangements for lodging. Primitive camping is available at the Freezout WMA; if there are lots of people, these sites may fill up quickly. Motel options include the Stage Stop (406-466-5900), Gunther Motel (406-466-5444), and Big Sky Motel (406-466-5318). There are also possible Airbnb's in the area. Please make your reservations early as these places will likely fill up quickly. For more information and to sign up, contact Darcy at darcy@flatheadaudubon.org or 406-407-8263.

Lewis Young Memorial Fund

By Kay Mitchell

The Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society, the 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.

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.



Photo by Lisa Bate

Lewis Young setting mist nets for bat capture

FLATHEAD AUDUBON MISSION STATEMENT

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

Summary Reports of the 2023 Northwest Montana Christmas Bird Counts (CBC)

Bigfork CBC - December 16th

The 50th annual Bigfork Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 16th, under cloudy skies (fog & stratus) with calm conditions. Snow depths were variable, with most areas in the valley essentially snow free. At the eastern edge of the count circle, snow depths ranged from zero to six inches. Temperatures ranged from 28 to 34 degrees. Shallow lakes and ponds were mostly frozen, but Flathead Lake and River were ice-free.

Thirty-five volunteer participants counted 13,474 individual birds of 74 species. The number of birds was significantly down from last year's total of 22,968, and the number of species declined by 10 birds. There was one new bird species, a Black-backed Woodpecker, found on this year's bird count. Highlights were a Snow Goose, Peregrine Falcon, Gyrfalcon, Iceland Gull (Thayer's), and Lesser Black-backed Gull. There were a few count week birds including a Red-tailed Hawk (Harlan's), Canvasback and Prairie Falcon. Notable misses on the Bigfork CBC were Ruffed Grouse, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Canada Jay, American Robin, Brewer's Blackbird, Red Crossbill and Common Redpoll. Species with a high, all-time tally this year were Snow Goose and Ring-billed Gull.

Thanks to all the devoted participants who helped make the Bigfork CBC a very enjoyable and rewarding experience.
By Craig Hohenberger

Eureka CBC - December 16th

The 31st annual Eureka Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 16, on a mild day that ranged from 27 degrees to 33 degrees. Kootenai Reservoir was open as were parts of the streams, but smaller lakes and ponds were mostly frozen. Eighteen people went to the field and 16 feeders were counted as well. Sixty species were recorded which is in the upper half of our species counts over 31 years. Our record high of 72 species was in 2014. The total number of individual birds was 3,067 which is in the upper end of numbers we have recorded over the years (9 of 31 years had over 3,000 individuals).

Canada Geese (1,050) were the most numerous species observed. Other most common birds included Wild Turkey (352), Black-capped Chickadee (233), Mallard (145), Common Raven (139), and House Sparrows (95). Record high counts were recorded for five species which were Canada Goose (1,050), Black-billed Magpies (71), Golden Eagle (4), Sharp-shinned Hawks (8), and Song Sparrow (14). *By Ellen Sullivan and Lauren Michelsen*

Glacier National Park CBC - December 17th

Glacier National Park (GNP) held its annual Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 17, 2023. Thirty participants contributed to this event by covering 10 different routes in Glacier and one bird feeder just outside the park, but within the circle. Participants spent the day counting all bird species and individuals detected. The weather was very mild with calm winds, no rain or snow, and temperatures ranging between 25 and 30 degrees. There was little (one inch), if any, snow, so most observers walked their routes. Both still, and moving, water was open (not frozen).

We counted 463 birds, comprising 32 different species. Most observers commented on how quiet it was when not walking. The most common birds we encountered were the Black-capped Chickadee, Bohemian Waxwing, and the Common Goldeneye. Unusual birds included two Pied-billed Grebes and one Red-necked Grebe. We added a new species this year from our feeder count (just outside GNP) when a Ring-necked Pheasant was observed.

Observers took some fantastic photos for Christmas Bird Count. Check out the circle versus the crescent moon pattern on the male Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes side-by-side. J. Belt successfully took pictures through a spotting scope to confirm both Pied-billed and Red-necked Grebes at the head of Lake McDonald. On the McGee Meadows Loop—the only route with enough snow to be skiable—observers took perfect pictures of otter tracks and coyote tracks.



Barrow's (left) and Common (right) Goldeneyes - Photo by Karen Nichols

Glacier's CBC started in 1962, and contributed to the 124th year of the National Audubon Society's CBC. Thanks to all participants for contributing their expertise, time, and energy for this annual event. Your efforts are invaluable in tracking long-term changes in species abundance, diversity, and range changes, in Glacier and throughout North

America. Thanks to Glacier National Park Conservancy, and its donors, for providing hot drinks and snacks both before, and after, the count. It was so good to see folks again! *By Lisa Bate, Wildlife Biologist, Glacier National Park*

Ninepipes CBC - December 17th

The 31st Annual Ninepipe Christmas Bird Count was held December 17. With foggy conditions limiting visibility to 100 yards most of the day, it was no surprise to anybody that the number of birds at 6,912 were down about 39 percent and the number of species at 71 were down 20 percent from 2022. Thanks to the 29 participants especially the two teenagers! *By James Oates*

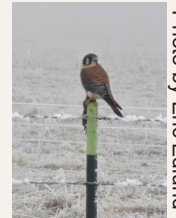


Photo by Eric Edlund
American Kestrel

Upper Swan CBC - December 20th

Swan Valley Connections (SVC) hosted the Upper Swan Valley Christmas Bird Count on Wednesday, December 20. Weather conditions were constant throughout the day with cloudy skies, calm wind conditions, and the occasional light rain shower. Temperatures remained in the mid-to high thirties. Most waterways in the valley were partially frozen and a thin layer of snow lingered on the ground. Fifteen volunteers recorded 26 species (226 individual birds) during SVC's count day and six additional species during count week. To accomplish this, SVC birding parties walked 20.9 miles (16.8 hours) and drove 28.9 miles (2.13 hours).

This was the first CBC on record that a Merlin was noted in the Upper Swan Valley count. Additional count day highlights included a Northern Shrike (1), Pacific Wren (1), Northern Pygmy-Owl (1), and Golden Eagle (1). Count week also contributed a Northern Goshawk.

Thank you to the amazing participants who supported the success of this event! *By Taylor Tewksbury*



Upper Swan CBC - Photo by Taylor Tewksbury

Troy CBC - December 30th

Like so many others, our count weather was so mild that we were able to access more of our count circle than usual. We had 27 field counters (good for little old Troy) and a handful of feeder counters. We tallied 54 species on count day with another six species for count week. Highlights were Canyon Wren, Trumpeter Swans (12), Killdeer, Snipe, and Pygmy Nuthatches. This may not seem like a lot, but for those of us participating in the count, it was pretty good! *By Don Jones*

Kalispell CBC - December 31st

The 25th Annual Kalispell Christmas Bird Count took place on Sunday, December 31, 2023. It was New Year's Eve and most everything on the valley floor was cloaked in an amazing amount of hoar frost. Very low visibility was the theme for the day, as it was incredibly foggy, especially so near the center of the count circle. Conditions were fairly calm with temperatures ranging from 27 to 34 degrees. Some areas received light snow showers later in the afternoon. There was a noticeable lack of snow cover throughout the valley, three inches of snow was the maximum reported, while most everyone reported a mere trace to none.

A total of 69 species were tallied this year, down from 75 last year, and slightly below the average of 72 over the years. 9,503 individuals were counted in all. There was near record participation with 51 enthusiastic folks turning out to count. Forty-two field observers and nine feeder watchers collected data.

Five species were found in record numbers: Northern Pintail (6), Wild Turkey (455), Ring-billed Gull (265), Hairy Woodpecker (20), and White-crowned Sparrow (6).

This is the first year that Gray Partridge and Common Mergansers were not recorded and one of only two years that Cedar Waxwings and American Tree Sparrows were not found. We had four count week birds: Great Gray Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, American Three-toed Woodpecker, and Canada Jay. It was just the second year for California Gull and the third year Greater Scaup was recorded. The Casey, Nichols and Hohenberger crews found one Redhead in each of their sections. Redhead is a new species for the Kalispell count, bringing the overall number of species to 133.

Thank you to all the participants this year for contributing your time, it was a great day! *By Shannon and Bridger Donaldson*



Redhead and Greater Scaup - Photo by Elliot Ress

Great Backyard Bird Count

By Dan Casey

The 27th annual "Great Backyard Bird Count" (GBBC) will be held February 16-19, 2024. This effort, sponsored by the Cornell Laboratory, National Audubon, and Bird Studies Canada, encourages

all interested people to spend at least one, 15-minute period over those four days to enter a list of birds seen in their yard or a favorite local patch. Much like the "Global Big Days" in May and October, this event is designed to engage people in birding, while providing insight into the seasonal distribution of birds.

Observations submitted help us to better understand

The Cornell Lab

Audubon

BIRDS CANADA
OISEAUX CANADA

The Great Backyard
Bird Count



global bird populations at a time that precedes the onset of spring migration. These data are entered into the massive eBird database, which has become the largest citizen science database ever developed to describe the distribution and abundance

of birds across the globe. And if you are already an eBird contributor, any checklists you submit during that four-day period will be included.

It's easy! Just pick a place, count all the birds you see or hear, and enter them into eBird! Detailed instructions on how to participate are on the GBBC website, <https://www.birdcount.org/>

Helping Hands Make Light Work

By Darcy Thomas

I have to say, we have the most incredible people at Flathead Audubon. Not only do you love birds and want to protect them and the places they live in, but you also want to help Flathead Audubon with its many activities and projects that make our chapter better. But we can always use more help!

Earth Day is just around the corner and Denny could probably use some helping hands in setting up and/or staffing a table at the Saturday, April 20 Earth Day event at FVCC. Hours are 9a-4p. Dee and I talked about making a **tri-fold display** with information about membership and birding hot spots. If you are interested in a project like this, please reach out to one of us. If you're interested in guiding a **snowshoe or Nordic ski** outing, Margaret would be thrilled.

Karen Nichols, Ben Long and Linda Winnie deserve a round of applause for creating a team to compile and

curate Flathead Audubon historical content. Shirley Folkwein has joined a group to select Flathead Audubon promotional merchandise for purchase. Anthony Dal Nogare is working with the Flathead National Forest to add benches to the trail at the Tally Lake Campground, so we can rest while we bird watch there.

Thank you everyone for stepping up to make Flathead Audubon the best it can be for the birds!



Photo by Flathead Audubon

**Great Horned Owls
are on their eggs**



Photo by JP Edge
Hungry Horse News

Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

It's been a busy winter of Christmas Bird Counts, Flathead and Mission Valley raptor surveys and Short-eared Owl roosting research. Birds are everywhere, all-the-time on this Planet. The winter, and the surveys, are not done with me yet. That's why it seems counterintuitive to be sitting here thinking about breeding birds just hours past an overnight minus 32 degrees, still unable to see out my completely frosted windows. But it is the symbolic beginning of resident bird watching for me. Canada Jays, Great Horned Owls and Great Gray Owls are already winking, hooting, singing, and displaying toward the opposite gender. In February and March, they'll be courting in earnest, mating, nest-building, and laying eggs.

But the earliest of all is our national symbol of past destruction, endangerment and redemption, the Bald Eagle. This bird will be cartwheeling with its mate in spectacular displays just about when this issue of the Post is published. To me, that's the official beginning of that glorious time we call the spring breeding season.

Eagles are a great rescue story, largely due to Rachel Carson and her minions, going from the metaphorical depths to the "They're all over the place" heights. We think we know how they became so rare and endangered (DDT and other persistent insecticides), but causality rarely digs beyond symptoms to the multi-layered depth of problems. A Caucasian American might point to the obvious, the unrestricted killing and the use of poisons for insect control. But Native people know better, on the deeper symbolic level. To many First American Nations with a much longer time frame, Eagle represents vision and a connection with the spirit world. Eagle is a reminder that connections are far more important than differences, and a people that forgets this will have little need for messengers between worlds. Their version? The Bald Eagle was almost gone because it did not feel needed or wanted. It was waiting for our enlightenment.

Once long ago, according to Ojibwe tradition, leaders and medicine societies began to use their power for selfish reasons. They made people fear them, distorted

truth, and took the lives of others for personal gain. The Creator was angry at the twisted sickness on Earth and decided to destroy everything after four days had passed. Just before dawn on the fourth day, Eagle flew from the space between dark and light, up toward the Creator. They screamed their song four times to get Creator's attention. Creator agreed to hold the dawn until Eagle had held council. They smoked the pipe.

Eagle admitted to Creator that the world was full of evil, but he also said he had seen a few humans who had remained true to the teachings of kindness and harmony. Here and there the sacred tobacco smoke still rose from a lodge. Eagle saw humility in the ways of some people and pleaded with the Creator to call off the coming destruction in their name and offered a deal. If Eagle could fly over the Earth and report every day to Creator that there were still some who followed the good road, Creator would not destroy the world. If there was someone doing a good deed, sounding the Drum, observing the Sacred Circle through the Pipe, or thinking of the unborn, Eagle would report to Creator that there was still hope in the world. Creator agreed, saying that the deeds of the born should not overrule the promise of the unborn.

Eagle still flies to the Sun every day, and I like to think that we are still under observation by the messenger. I wonder if things today look better than they did back when the deal was struck ... Climate change, overpopulation, persistent wars, famine, degradation of biodiversity, worship of selfishness, viciousness in politics – all of these must give the Eagle pause ...

That's why, when I see an Eagle soaring high to deliver the daily news, I try to send thoughts of humility, connection to everything still wonderful on our earth-bound world, and a passion to keep it that way. And I try to remind Eagle that I'm not alone in those thoughts. Witness ... all of you. That's why gratefulness is also part of my telepathic message.

Happy power-birding this year.

My thanks for this story and much other wisdom to an Ojibwe Midew and Mentor, the late Waasa Inaabidaa (Dee Bainbridge) of the Bad River Band of Ojibwe.

Natural Events To See This Month: Maple buds get brighter pigments.

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