



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

VOLUME 48, NUMBER 7

Black-billed Magpie



Photo by Kathryn Keith
Macaulay Library

Peeps from the President

By Darcy Thomas

On her birthday for every year of her childhood, my firstborn daughter, Ceinwen, desired a wish that could not be. She longed to have a spring birthday. But she was born on March 19 and technically that is still winter. Further, being nine days overdue, she should have been more of a winter baby. Nevertheless, each year as her birthday approached, Ceinwen asked for a beach party or an outdoor picnic, or another theme that required good weather. Inevitably there would be snow.



Photo by Rob Thomas

Spring, as you know, begins on the spring, or vernal, equinox which is variable. It most often falls on March 20th or 21st. Ceinwen just missed the cutoff. On this day, the sun is exactly above the Equator and night and day are of equal length. In the Northern Hemisphere the sun moves northward across the celestial equator and daylight becomes longer. Our earth begins to warm and ice thaws. Spring is in the air and so are migrating birds. By the time of the spring equinox, waterfowl migration is at its peak. With thawing bodies of water around the

valley, you can see thousands of ducks and swans. This is a great time to get out and watch nature unfold. The West Valley Ponds, Lower Valley wetlands and ponds, Church Slough, Creston Wetlands, Smith Lake, Foy's Lake, and Egan Slough are some great birding hot spots for ducks, grebes, swans, and geese. Watch for Red-winged Blackbirds staking out their territories in cattail marshes. Keep an eye out for the first bluebirds and meadowlarks of the season. They prefer open areas and a great place to spot them is along Smith Lake Road. Tree Swallows usually show

up on the vernal equinox, so look for them on the phone wires. Freezout Lake, though not in Flathead Valley, will host thousands upon thousands of Snow Geese by late March.

This year, the spring equinox will occur on Tuesday, March 19. This is the earliest arrival in the United States since 1896. My daughter will be so happy when I tell her! Though I should have told her sooner. She has already planned a ski trip for her birthday.

MARCH FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, March 4, 5:30pm. FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Public Meeting Room, Fish, Wildlife & Parks building, 490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell. You may bring your dinner.

Thursday, March 7, 8:30am-noon. Flathead County Science Fair. See page 5.

Monday, March 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.

Wednesday, March 20, 7pm. March Program of the Montana Native Plant Society, Flathead Chapter. Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell. See page 6.

Thursday, March 21, 8am-noon. Spring Waterfowl at Church Slough and Lower Valley Wetlands. See page 4.

Tuesday, April 2-Wednesday, April 3. Freezout Lake and Snow Geese Migration. See page 4.

SAVE THE DATE! Saturday, April 20, 9am-4pm. Earth Day Celebration, Flathead Valley Community College.



Credit:
School
Library
Journal

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

SAVE THE DATE! Friday, May 31- Sunday, June 2. 2024 Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival, Helena, Montana. See page 7.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta Carolinensis*)

By Margaret Parodi

The White-breasted Nuthatch is often observed walking and probing head-down on the trunks of large conifers in mature wooded areas. The first impression is a small bird with a very white head and breast. It is the largest of the three nuthatches that are year-round residents in our area. It is a compact, short-tailed bird with a long, sharply pointed bill and is 5½ to 6 inches long. The Red-breasted and Pygmy nuthatches are both less than five inches. It has a blue-grey back, white face and breast, and chestnut colored undertail coverts and lower belly. When it spreads its tail, there are white stripes on the outer edges. It has a narrow black cap or stripe on the head and nape; in females this is a dark grey.



Photo by Margaret Parodi

Mature forests of conifers or deciduous trees are the preferred habitat. The White-breasted Nuthatch feeds mainly on insects during the warmer months and switches to seeds and nuts during the winter. It enjoys suet and sunflower seeds at birdfeeders. I recently observed one hanging upside down on my suet feeder for a period of no less than five minutes. Was it taking a nap or just guarding its food source from other birds? It is a bark forager and uses its long bill to probe for insects on trees. It also uses trees as a food storage area, tucking seeds and insects into crevices in the bark or under loose pieces of bark for future use. The name "nuthatch" comes from its habit of jamming large nuts (such as acorn or hawthorn) or seeds into crevices in tree bark and then hacking and hammering them with the sharp bill to open or "hatch out" the seed or nut from its casing.

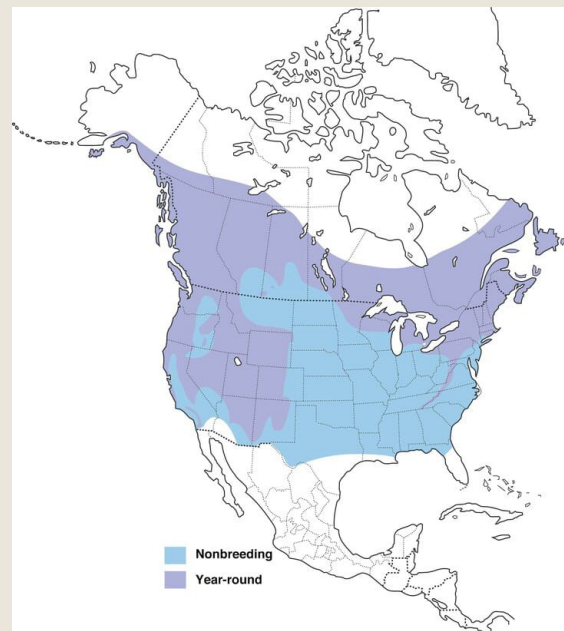
The voice is loud and nasal; although a bit less harsh than the more common, Red-breasted Nuthatch. It gives a rapid, low "wha-wha-wha" or "ank-ank-ank" call, like that of the Red-breasted Nuthatch, but a bit faster and not quite as loud. This insistent call matches its aggressiveness. These tough little birds will challenge birds larger than themselves for food and territory.

White-breasted Nuthatches are usually solitary or in pairs, although they do join other groups of mixed nuthatches, chickadees, and woodpeckers in the winter months, especially at birdfeeders. The pairs remain together throughout the year. Courtship begins by late winter. The male raises its head, spreads its tail, drops its wings, and

sways back and forth and bows. To show what a good provider he is, courtship can also include the male bringing food to the female. They use existing holes in trees or old woodpecker holes for nests. The nuthatch lines the cavities with fur and fine bark and then adds a softer, inner layer of grasses, weeds, and feathers. Five to nine spotted, pink to reddish-brown eggs (less than an inch long) are

laid. The incubation period is just under two weeks and the nestling period is about 26 days. Nuthatches actively protect their nests by using chemical odors to ward off predators. They may sweep around their nest holes with beetles or other insects that contain chemicals that act as repellants to squirrels. They also have been known to use cigarette filters or butts in their nest area to act as deterrents.

The White-breasted Nuthatch is common and has a year-round range of most of the continental United States and southern Canada. Populations appear to be stable and are of low conservation concern. However, since they are cavity nesters who depend on dead or partially dead trees for nesting, too much removal of these trees by overzealous felling or pruning could put them at risk in the future.



All About Birds - Cornell Labs

MARCH PROGRAM

Natives Rule! Converting Your Space Into a Bird Sanctuary

Presented by Mackenzie Dey, Kathy Ross and Jessie Walthers



Join three native landscaping experts and view a Flathead Audubon produced video about how plants and animals become “native”, and how intricately woven the millions of relationships

between natives form the balance of nature – especially those relationships among plants, insects, and birds. Popcorn optional!

Learn how to create a native plant garden and protect local waterways. The Flathead Rain Garden Initiative provides information, resources, and tools to help Flathead County residents create these beautiful and beneficial gardens. Rain gardens help filter and conserve water and attract native pollinators.

Jessie Walthers is the Conservation Program Manager at Flathead Conservation District. She loves working with people of all ages to explore and celebrate our amazing natural resources in Flathead County. Landscape and/or garden is an easy way to boost your land’s sustainability, improve pollinator and bird habitat and maintain soil health. Jessie will discuss how to plan for success when planting natives. This includes mapping out where to plant your natives, what care they need, and other tips and tricks.

Mackenzie Dey has her bachelor’s in botany and master’s in plant science. She is the MSU Agriculture Extension Agent and loves helping producers to home gardeners increase their sustainability in their practices and increase their knowledge to succeed. She has an affinity for the outdoors and the fantastic flora that beautifies it.



Mackenzie Dey
Photo by Mackenzie Dey



Kathy Ross
Photo by Patty Archibald

Kathy Ross is a volunteer naturalist, native habitat advocate, and consultant. She has 30+ years of landscape/gardening experience in the valley working in and around native habitats. She has worked extensively with native plants as well as non-native introductions and observed their impact on the environment. Kathy

will share valuable suggestions that will help you make good choices to support birds and all biodiversity in your landscapes, and also suggest a few of the best plants for this purpose. As native habitats disappear around us every day, never doubt that your landscape can make a difference!

MARCH MEETING FAS

Our meetings are available both in person and virtually. For those attending the meeting in person on March 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 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>.

Highlights from the February 5, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting

By Pam Willison, Secretary

- ✚ The Board passed and signed a resolution agreeing to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement with DNRC and Flathead Land Trust, and to serve as a Third Party Cooperator for the Owen Sowerwine property. The Board authorized Darcy Thomas to sign the agreement for Flathead Audubon.
- ✚ Dee Baginski and Jake Bramante reported on the progress of Flathead Audubon merchandise. Three styles of hats will be available by the March 11 general meeting, and the vests will soon be available for pre-order, and ready in April.
- ✚ Denny Olson reported that he has a busy month ahead being involved in school field trips, the spelling bee, science fairs, and planning for Earth Day activities.
- ✚ Shannon Donaldson said that in order to assess the level of interest for a Junior Bird Club, the committee will plan monthly events for April through September.
- ✚ Pam Willison is applying for a 310 permit for Owen Sowerwine and will schedule some work days to repair the two warped bridges. She also noted there won't be any large work days for cutting buckthorn this year, but plans for small crews to use the injection lance to rework cut areas and treat remaining buckthorn.
- ✚ Kay Mitchell is gathering the required information for the Great Fish Community Challenge application.

MARCH FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU

SPRING WATERFOWL at CHURCH SLOUGH and LOWER VALLEY WETLANDS, Thursday, March 21, 8am-noon.

Darcy Thomas will lead a field trip to view returning waterfowl in the Lower Valley and Somers area wetlands. Mid to late March is the prime time to see large flocks of incoming migrants, including such seasonal specialties as Greater Scaup and Eurasian Wigeon. If the conditions are right, we may see thousands of waterfowl of 15-20 species. Limited to 15 participants. Contact Darcy at 406-407-8263 to reserve spots and for logistics (meeting location, carpooling).



FREEZOUT LAKE AND THE 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. Snow Geese stop over at Freezout Lake 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.

Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – January/February 2024

Generally mild and relatively dry since the deep cold spell early in the period, this was a month with few rarities. People continued to enjoy the widespread **Pine Grosbeaks** and sporadic flocks of **Common Redpolls**. Thousands of **Canada Geese** and **Mallards** could be found throughout, particularly along the lower river and valley northwest of Bigfork. One or more **Prairie Falcons** could be found in the West Valley and along Farm Road. **Red-tailed Hawks** continued to outnumber **Rough-legged Hawks** locally, including a beautiful light morph “**Harlan’s**” Red-tailed photographed north of Somers. See also: <https://ebird.org/region/US-MT-029?yr=all>.

01/17 – **Spruce Grouse** (1) **Big Mountain** (Robert and Teresa B.)

01/20 – **Black-backed Woodpecker** (1) **South of Herron Park** (Elle E.)

01/27 – “**Harlan’s**” **Red-tailed Hawk** (light morph) **N. Somers Rd** (Dan C.)

01/31 – **Golden Eagle** (1) **Hog Heaven Rd, south Flathead County** (Raylene W.)

02/02 – **Common Loon** (1) **Wild Horse Island SP** (Derrick R.); (2) at **Yellow Bay**, 02/06 (Dan C.)

02/07 – **Red-breasted Merganser** (2) **Flathead River at Holt** (bj W.)

02/09 – **Short-billed Gull** (1) **Flathead Lake N. Shore, Somers** (Dan C.)

02/10 – **White-crowned Sparrow** (1) **Whitefish** (Ron B.)

What to Expect – March 2024

The first few male **Red-winged Blackbirds** were singing in frozen marshes as I wrote this summary, and soon they will be part of the daily early spring soundtrack! As local wetlands continue to thaw, watch for increasing numbers of waterfowl, particularly **Tundra Swans**, **Northern Pintails** and **American Wigeon**. By mid-March, **Mountain Bluebirds**, **Western Meadowlarks** and even **Tree Swallows** should be here. Swallows are primarily insectivorous, and therefore indicate that spring is arriving in earnest!

Helping Hands Make Light Work

By Darcy Thomas

We could really use a few new people on some of our Flathead Audubon committees. We are especially in need of help with the Conservation and Education committees. When you think about it, that is what we do at Flathead Audubon, and yet those are the two committees that have sparse support. Please step up and get involved, so we can continue the work we do to help the birds we love.

Another committee that can use some new volunteers is the Field Trip committee. When I was first asked to lead a field trip my response was, “I don’t know the birds well

enough!” But I decided to give it a try and found out it is fun to go birdwatching with other people. What I didn’t know, someone else knew. And, if no one knew, we figured it out together. If you are familiar with a good birding hotspot and think other people would enjoy it, then you will be good at leading a field trip.

Let me know which committee you would like to assist with, and I will put you in touch with the right person. It will be so nice to have you on board!

FLATHEAD COUNTY SCIENCE FAIR

We’re looking for a few good judges, for the Flathead County Science Fair on Thursday, March 7, from 8:30am to approximately 1pm, Flathead County Fairgrounds Expo Building (south side). Complimentary continental breakfast and lunch.

Register online at: <https://www.flatheadcountysciencefair.org/judges>, or visit the website, <https://www.flatheadcountysciencefair.org>, and click on “More,” “Judges” and “Sign Up”. The registration page allows you to choose grades and subjects that you do, or do not, want to judge, and will collect a bit more information that will only be used to assign judges. It’s pretty easy!

Flathead Audubon will present an award and prizes for the Best Wildlife Conservation Science Project.



2024 Montana Audubon Citizen Science Projects

By Lauren Smith, MT Audubon Communications Specialist

Help contribute valuable observations to science – and have a great time doing it! Montana Audubon is recruiting volunteers to help with four different surveys this year, including a new project surveying for Screech-owls.

2024 Montana Audubon Citizen Science Projects:

Western and Eastern Screech-owl surveys:
March - April

Long-billed Curlew surveys: April – May

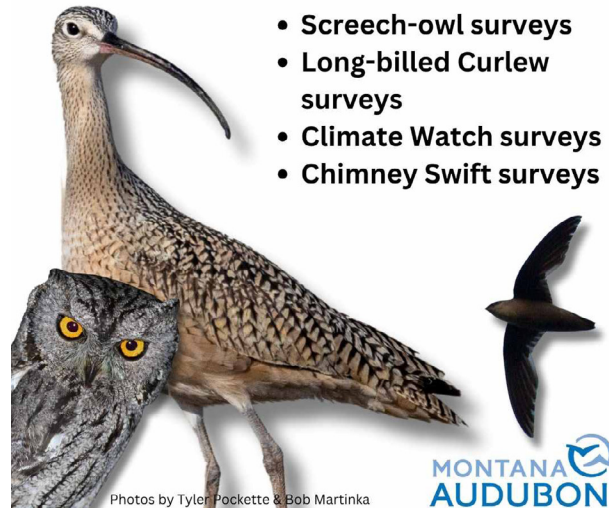
Climate Watch surveys: May 15-June 15

Chimney Swift surveys: June - July

Curlew training is scheduled for March 26, 6:30pm, via Zoom. To sign up, or for more information about any of the projects, email Gwynne at gwynne@mtaudubon.org.

Learn more about each of these projects on our Citizen Science website: <http://www.montanabirdsurveys.com/>

2024 Citizen Science projects



- Screech-owl surveys
- Long-billed Curlew surveys
- Climate Watch surveys
- Chimney Swift surveys

Photos by Tyler Pockette & Bob Martinka

MONTANA
AUDUBON

Pre-order your Flathead Audubon Merch/Swag/Drip!



Want to display your love for birds and bird conservation? Think that our Pileated Woodpecker logo would look great on a hat on your head? We've got great

news! Flathead Audubon swag is coming! Baseball caps, warm thermal beanies, and visors are all on order and will be available for purchase at the March 11 general meeting.

We are also excited to announce Flathead Audubon vests! While our hats/caps/visors will be in stock and available for immediate purchase, vests will only be available as a pre-order, which closes on April 9. At that time, we'll place a large order to be available for pick-up at the May 13 general meeting. We won't be ordering extras, so make sure that you place your order before then! View the items and place your online order at <https://flatheadaudubon.org/shop/> to show your support of the birds!

March Program of the Montana Native Plant Society, Flathead Chapter

By Hailey Moore

MONTANA NATIVE
PLANT SOCIETY

Native Plants, Invasive Weeds and Climate Change in Glacier National Park

**Wednesday, March 20, 7pm. Fish, Wildlife & Parks,
490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell**

Climate change accelerates the introduction and spread of non-native invasive plants, further reducing ecosystem resilience and negatively impacting biodiversity. Dawn LaFleur, Vegetation Biologist for Glacier National Park will discuss: What are the potential consequences of climate change for native plants in the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem? What can we do to mitigate this threat?

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.

Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival Keynote Speaker: Tiffany Kersten

wings
across the big sky

MONTANA
AUDUBON

Tiffany Kersten

2024

Keynote Speaker

May 31 - June 2
Helena, Montana



Montana Audubon, in partnership with Last Chance Audubon, is pleased to announce Tiffany Kersten as the keynote speaker for the 2024 Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival!

Birdie Big Year: Elevating Women Birders

Tiffany Kersten didn't set out to do a Big Year, but after a series of unanticipated and serendipitous events, she suddenly found herself amidst one. As a sexual assault survivor, she spent 2021 traveling to all corners of the Lower 48 States, tallying birds and gifting personal safety alarms to women she met along the way. Her goal was to see 700 species, and to raise awareness of women's safety in the outdoors. She ended up surpassing her goal and setting a new record, of 726 species. In her presentation, Tiffany will lead us through the fear, empowerment, struggles, and healing that all played vital roles in the personal growth she experienced on this wild adventure.

Learn more about Tiffany and Nature Ninja Birding Tours on her website: <https://tiffanykersten.blogspot.com>

CROSSWORD PUZZLE OWL FACTS:

Word Bank available
on page 9.



COLOR THE OWL

Scan or click the QR code to
download and print a larger
image.

Submit your final coloring to
info@flatheadaudubon.org.
We'll feature the submissions
on the Flathead Audubon
website.



KIDS'
CORNER

Down

- Owls are carnivores meaning they eat _____.
- Unlike humans, owls can rotate their heads 270 _____.
- Powerful claws called _____, help owls catch their prey.
- A _____ is a regurgitated ball of food material that an owl can't digest.

Across

- Owls have special _____ that allow them to be silent while flying.
- The Great Gray Owl is the _____ owl in North America.
- An owl's favorite snack is a _____.
- Owls are nocturnal animals, which means they are most active at _____.

Conservation Corner: Avian Influenza on the Rise

By Carole Jorgensen

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP) has noted an increase in the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), commonly known as bird flu and pigeon paramyxovirus, a naturally occurring virus that has also been documented in Montana recently. The National Audubon Society has previously discussed impacts of HPAI. The latest map of occurrence in the United States can be found on the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) website (<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-2022/2022-hpai-wild-birds>). Pigeon paramyxovirus (also referred to as Newcastle disease) affects primarily doves and pigeons. Introduced European collared doves have been competing with our native doves. Both species can be affected by the pigeon virus and the additional impacts on our native populations are unknown at this time.

Precautions for both diseases continue to be:

- Avoid feeding pigeons and doves at this time.
- Clean and disinfect any feeding/watering devices regularly.
- Do not pick up sick or dead birds. Be aware of sick, staggering or other flu symptoms. Symptoms of infected birds include weight loss, diarrhea, problems breathing, twisted head and difficulty flying. Diarrhea is green.
- Watch your pets to ensure they don't pick up sick or dead birds. Transfer of these diseases to mammals are rare, but if your pet displays weakness, vomiting/difficulty breathing or other flu-like symptoms, contact your vet as soon as possible.

Using gloves, any dead birds should be disposed of in sealed plastic bags into the trash. MTFWP would be interested if five or more dead birds are found in one location, especially if near domestic fowl. If you collect dead birds, use gloves (and masks) and a sealed plastic bag. Avoid contaminating your hands or other surfaces. In such cases, contact your local MTFWP.



Happening this Month: Mountain Bluebirds begin to arrive

Photo by Chris Wood - Macaulay Library

Red-tailed Hawks and Owen Sowerwine

By Laura Katzman, Flathead Land Trust Land Protection Specialist

Red-tailed Hawks are an amazing bird that use Owen Sowerwine year-round. Interestingly, the key identifying characteristic you think of due to its name is the hawk's red tail; however, Red-tailed Hawks do not get their red tails until their second year, and some dark-bodied Red-tailed Hawks known as "Harlan's" may not have a red tail

However, what I find most interesting about these hawks and hawks in general, is their exceptional eyesight, which they use to hunt their prey during the day. Like humans, hawks see color, but hawks can see greater distances than humans and their visual acuity (the ability to see clearly) is eight times better than ours. This remarkable vision is key to the success of Red-tailed Hawks who do most of their hunting from elevated perches. Just to give you an idea of the incredible visual abilities of a

hawk - the average vision of a human is 20/20 but a hawk's is 20:2 or 20:1. This means that from 20 feet away, a hawk can see the same level of detail we can see from one to two feet away from an object. They can spot a mouse from a hundred feet away and a rabbit from up to a mile away! They also can see UV light which helps them to find prey. Voles mark their trails through tall grass with urine, and vole urine reflects UV light. So when a hawk looks at a field, they see trails of urine leading to their prey. Nature is incredible!



Photo by Sanjib Bhattacharyya
Audubon Photography Awards



Photo by JP Edge
Hungry Horse News

Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

"The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant, 'What good is it?' ... Who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering."

Aldo Leopold

One of the things that my dad could always do, and I considered it almost magical through much of my childhood, was to take apart a broken complex mechanical thing, assess the problem inside, and fix it. This happened over and over, usually with objects that, at the beginning of the process, he knew nothing about.

My curiosity was such that I watched carefully as he worked this magic. Although I didn't know it at the time, I was applying the same principles of observation and organizing to analyzing his task, as he was to fixing the piece of equipment. I noticed that the parts were put on in a sequence – first to last, and his opening task was to undo the process – last to first.

Then I noticed something subtler. There was not a random scattering of parts as they were peeled back layer by layer. The placement of the parts on the table was organized by their relationships. In my dad's brain, he was placing things specifically so he could remember the first to last in the later reconstruction. It was never the same kind of arrangement – say left to right – for each job, but each time there was a pattern.

He would eventually recognize the offending part, or the improper relationship between parts. I never heard an "Aha" from him at that point. He was Scandinavian, after all, and that may have been a bit too demonstrative. I sometimes noticed a slight twitch of a smile at the corner of his mouth. Then he would fix it or toss it because the repair was not worth the replacement cost. Sometimes there was nothing broken, but the relationship between parts was out of place. An easy fix.

I was fortunate to inherit that confidence from my dad (and some other parts I chose to discard!).

The same principles are of course applicable to the rethinking of culture and education. To make it work, to float the evolution down the road, we need to realize what we must discard or repair, and what already works for us.

There is little intelligent debate about things we can do without. Most of us don't really want our culture and the attached-at-the-hip education system to be defined by hyper-materialism, selfishness as a positive attribute, lack of empathy and altruism, short-term non-critical thinking, isolation from our families and friends, worship of celebrity, sports as obsession instead of a fun diversion, violence as a viable alternative to problems that are mostly internal and personal, massive economic disparity between haves and have-nots, or drifting away from democratic political processes. Those parts can be given the "buh-bye" without much damage to our American culture and education.

But with nature, our life support system, that process is vastly different. The trillions of parts, and the quintillions of relationships between those parts has already been honed to perfection over literally billions of years. And we have barely scratched the surface of understanding those complexities. The intrinsic value of wild land is devalued and often lost. Nature is, first and foremost, our supply of air to breathe, water to drink and materials for shelter from its nastier elements. Even more obscure are the incalculable intricacies of an ecosystem that supplies all of that to us. That vast system is based on relationships, not just living things. Intelligent tinkering with nature demands the humility to understand what is beyond our understanding. Keeping all the parts is crucial. Those 26 bird species that will likely disappear from Northwest Montana if we continue the present path of climate change without changing our own consumptive habits – and the complex relationships that go with those species – are simply not replaceable for our natural life-support machinery to hum along in the future.

Acceptable losses? Not just "no" but "hell no"! We are part of that system, and truth-be-told, we might be the most expendable part.



KIDS' CORNER CROSSWORD WORD BANK

Rodent

Biggest

Meat

Night

Pellet

Talons

Feathers

Degrees

Dan Casey Awarded Certificate of Appreciation

By Darcy Thomas

Our very own Dan Casey has been awarded a certificate of appreciation for his outstanding contribution to South Dakota State University's (SDSU) Native Lands Inventory for 2023-2024.

During Dan's tenure as Coordinator of the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture, he helped advocate and provide funding for the SDSU effort to catalog the extent of unbroken native grasslands, particularly west of the Missouri River. This effort used a combination of remote sensing, historical data, and ground truthing, to identify intact landscapes. This data will be critical for developing



Photo by Darcy Thomas

conservation strategies for grassland birds, which have experienced the steepest declines of any North American bird population.

Grassland conservation in South Dakota is also facilitated through the South Dakota Grasslands Coalition, which includes ranchers, academics, The Nature Conservancy, and state and federal agencies that have a common interest in keeping grasslands "right side up". It is our great fortune to have a man like Dan in our Audubon chapter. He has spent a lifetime studying and protecting bird species both near and far and we are beyond thankful for his dedication.

Wintering Birds of Prey Tours: Soaring Over the Mission Valley

By Jen Guse, Flathead Land Trust Communications, Outreach and Special Projects Coordinator



Over 60 majestic raptors graced viewers with their presence on the two Wintering Birds of Prey Tours the first weekend in February. Under the expert guidance of Rob Domenech of Raptor View

One tour witnessed 33 Bald Eagles, 17 Red-tailed Hawks, eight Rough-legged Hawks, two American Kestrels, and two Northern Harriers. A second tour saw 28 eagles and a total of 45 birds of prey.



Research Institute, Jess Garby, roving avian technician, and Laura Katzman, Land Protection Specialist at

Flathead Land Trust, the 22 tour participants witnessed bald eagles that have begun gathering in the Mission Valley, awaiting the birth of a new herd of calves. After calves are born, the eagles often swoop in to snag the placenta as a nutritious snack. Also highlighting the tours: an American kestrel feasting on a vole and in-air battle between an eagle and a raven, forcing the raven to fumble its prey.



Photos provided by Flathead Land Trust

The prolific numbers of raptors using this agriculturally dominated landscape for winter habitat accentuates the importance of conserving farmlands in the Mission Valley. Flathead Land Trust is working with several more landowners in this area to safeguard some of these valuable lands - conserving both the rich agricultural heritage and year-round bird and wildlife habitat in this area.

Flathead Audubon Society Endowment Fund Donors:

Steve Thompson and
Nancy Woodruff



Image by Johnny Gunn

Nongame Wildlife Tax Check-off

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Common
Loon

Photo credit Cornell Lab

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