



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

American Robin



Photo by Ceredig Roberts
Macaulay Library

Peeps from the President

By Darcy Thomas

Our Executive Committee, Board of Directors, and many volunteers have been busy putting our shoulders to the wheel on important chapter work and conservation issues that affect birds. I'd like to give a personal thank you to everyone for making Flathead Audubon a great chapter. Recently we signed on as an organization to two very important conservation issues. One was signing the Coalition for a Clean CFAC petition which asks the EPA and DEQ to pause their decision-making process and evaluate more carefully the option to remove toxic waste from the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company site. (See page 5). Another was to draft a letter opposing the proposed subdivision adjacent to Somers Middle School and across the road from Somers Beach State Park. The subdivision would result in the development of 252 residential units impacting nesting and migrating waterfowl and prime habitat including a pond and wetland.



Photo by Rob Thomas

This letter was delivered to the Flathead Planning Board on March 13.

I know we get some great work done as an organization, but I have to say I am concerned that after many months, we still do not have an active Conservation or Education committee. These two areas are the crux of our mission as an organization, and we need dedicated individuals to step forward to do this important work. Many hands make light work, and we have a lot of fun doing it, as well as the satisfaction of knowing we are accomplishing

something vitally important. Please come join us. I promise you will not be sorry.

So, Happy Spring all you wonderful bird lovers! Migration is full-on and you should be outside taking it all in. We all need to take time from our busy lives to get outside and just bask in the beauty of nature, and the melodious symphony of bird song.

APRIL FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, April 1, 5:30pm. FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Public Meeting Room, Fish, Wildlife & Parks building, 490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell.

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

Monday, April 8, 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, April 11, 3-5pm and Saturday, April 13, 8am-approx. 11am. Bird and Wildlife Photography. See page 4.

Monday, April 15, 8am-approx. 1pm. Herron Park Hike and Early Spring Migrants. See page 4.

Saturday, April 20, 9am-4pm. Earth Day Expo and Celebration, Flathead Valley Community College, Arts and Technology Building. See page 4.

Friday, April 26, 9am-3:30pm. Arbor Day for all local 3rd graders, Lawrence Park. "Which tree, Chickadee?"

Saturday, April 27, 8am-12pm. Spring Bird Migrants in Owen Sowerine Area. See page 4.

Sunday, April 28 and Sunday, May 12, 8am-10am. Sonny Boon Memorial Trail, Somers. See page 4.

Thursday, May 2, 8am-11am. Whitefish River: Waterfowl, Songbirds and Warblers. See page 5.

SAVE THE DATE! Saturday, May 11, 9am-4pm. Family Forestry Expo, Trumbull Creek Educational Forest, "Bird Anatomy Dress-up."

SAVE THE DATE! Friday, May 17-Sunday, May 19. Warbler Days at Tally Lake. See page 5.

SAVE THE DATE! Friday, May 31- Sunday, June 2. 2024 Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival, Helena, Montana. See page 10.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Cinnamon Teal

By Connie Marmet

Did you know that the Cinnamon Teal is not only a small, rust colored dabbling duck, but also a protagonist in the Disney movie series, "DuckTales"? Disney's Cinnamon Teal has white feathers, a black pixie haircut, and a mole on her cheek, looking more like Daisy Duck than a Teal.

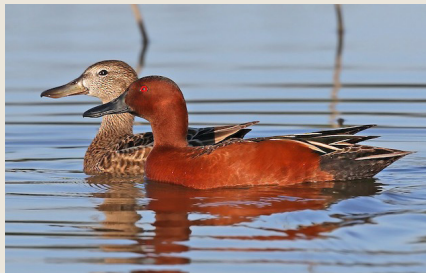
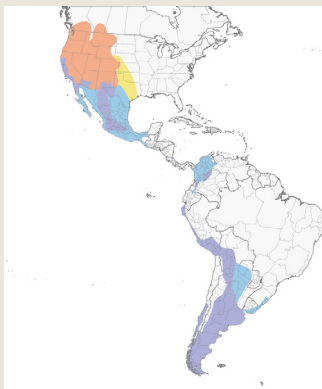


Photo by Matt Davis - Macauley Library

The real Cinnamon Teal, *Anas cyanoptera*, is distinguished by dark reddish-brown feathers with a pale blue shoulder patch. Females are mottled brown, also with a pale blue shoulder patch although faint. Females and males in fall plumage are difficult to distinguish from Blue-winged Teal. Not only are they often confused in the field or even in hand, but many bandings are thought to be incorrect, especially among birds wintering in South America. Female Cinnamon Teal even quack like male Blue-winged. The two species have been known to inter-breed. Internet searches provide side by side comparisons.

Yes, Cinnamon Teal winter as far south as South America, even with some nesting populations there. They are also unique in that they are only located in the western parts of the United States, including Montana. They are only present from spring to fall. For distribution in Montana, please see maps to the right.



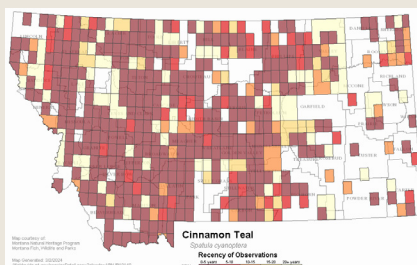
Birds of the World

Cinnamon Teal are found in freshwater wetlands and permanent marshes but may feed on other bodies of water. Like other dabbling ducks, they strain food near the surface, heads submerged. They often feed in close formation with other birds, benefiting from food stirred up by them. They feed largely on seeds and shoots of marsh grasses but may also eat snails and insects. Note that in some ways, the Cinnamon Teal seems to be intermediate in between Northern Shovelers and Blue-winged Teal.

Nests are built at the base of tall grasses. The female hollows out a depression not far from water. She adds down from her breast and lays from 4 to 16 creamy white eggs. If water levels rise, she adds more material to the nest to keep it from flooding.

Yellow downed ducklings with gray-brown eye stripes hatch in 21 to 25 days. They are led to water and immediately start to feed themselves. Within seven weeks, they are capable of flight. The parents may hatch another brood that same season. When threatened, females may do a broken wing display to protect the brood.

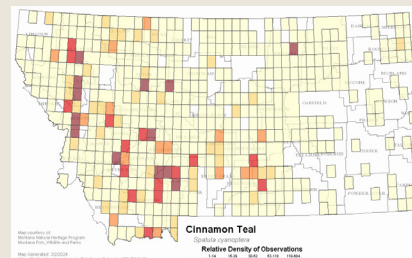
Cinnamon Teal are not monogamous. The male does stay with the female as she prepares the nest and has been seen with the brood. The males also defend a small, fixed territory during incubation. Cinnamon Teal are very territorial, although not as territorial as Blue-winged. They will however chase Blue-winged from their area.



Males may also mate with more than one female in a season. Male courtship displays include ritual preening, head movements, and synchronous "jump flights". The female indicates consent by swimming in front of the male and rejection by head pumping or opening her bill.

After breeding, Cinnamon Teal gather in flocks to molt and migrate. Flocks are largely peaceful at this time, but the males may dominate females. Flocks tend to migrate by day.

While numerous, Cinnamon Teal have a declining population. The Bird Conservancy estimated a breeding population of 380,000. They rank 13 out of 20 on the Continental Concern Score, placing them on the Yellow Watch List. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recorded 800,000 Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal taken by hunters each year. They are susceptible to contaminants from agriculture and industry as well as loss of wetlands.



Relative Density and Recency maps courtesy of Montana Natural Heritage Program

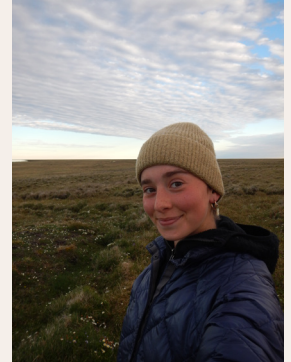
APRIL PROGRAM

The Life and Science Behind Arctic Shorebird Nest Monitoring

Presented by Anna Von Duyke

The Arctic takes up a massive part of our globe yet remains an area that seems foreign and mysterious, with a landscape that is hard to comprehend. Unless from a place in the Arctic, most people will not get a chance to visit it, especially in a way that allows us to interact intimately with the environment through seasonal change and migratory periods. Anna's presentation will shed light on the experience of a remote biological field technician both in the science and day-to-day life; she will share details of the job, the systems used to monitor Arctic shorebird nests, and photos of the beautiful small things in this amazing habitat.

Anna Von Duyke has been working exclusively with Arctic nesting shorebirds and Eider ducks for the last five years. As a biological field technician in the remote coastal plains of Alaska since her freshman year of undergrad in 2019, she has experienced much of the spectrum of the field work lifestyle. Anna is excited to share photos and stories of an area so worthy of conservation yet unrecognized by many, due to its remoteness and vastly different landscape.



Anna Von Duyke
Photo by Anna Von Duyke

APRIL 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>.

Get ready for the Annual May Silent Auction and Potluck Dinner

By Darcy Thomas

CELEBRATION OF OWEN SOWERWINE • Monday, May 13. Doors open at 5pm, Potluck Dinner and Silent Auction start at 6pm. Program (TBA) begins at 6:45pm.

Clean out your closets and bring a potluck dish to share. Please bring your own plates, eating utensils and cups. Cake will be provided.

The annual Silent Auction is the perfect time to gather all the valuable "stuff" that you've squirreled away: Bird books, outdoor gear, artwork, live bedding plants, homemade pies and cookies, bird houses and feeders and other bird-related items for auction. Please be prepared to take your items home if they do not receive a bid.

Officers and Board Members will also be elected. Please consider joining the Board of Directors!



Graphic by Mary June

SPRING FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU

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 Airbnbs 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.

BIRD and WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY, Thursday, April 11, 3-5pm and Saturday, April 13, 8am- approx. 11am.

Join Erin Braaten (Dancing Aspens Photography) and Jake Bramante to learn how to take better photos of birds. We will have an initial, indoor instructional meeting on Thursday, April 11 at the Kalispell Library meeting room (in basement) from 3 to about 5pm. An outdoor session will follow on Saturday, April 13 at 8am, to put your new skills to work. Space is limited to 10 participants and sign-up is required. For more information and to sign up, please contact Erin at (406)270-0351 or erinbraaten@dancingaspensfarm.com.

HERRON PARK HIKE and EARLY SPRING MIGRANTS, Monday, April 15, 8am-approx. 1pm.

Join Jake Bramante as he takes us on a hike (approximately four miles) through Herron Park. We will keep our eyes (and ears) peeled for forest birds and look for some early spring migrants such as Spotted Towhees and Williamson’s Sapsuckers. The hike will include an elevation gain of 750 feet. There will be sweeping views of the park looking out to the valley and down on Foy’s Lake, so be prepared to sweat a little, but we will take our time. Limited to eight participants. Contact Jake at jake@flatheadaudubon.org or 406-250-8394 to reserve spots and for logistics (meeting time/location/carpooling). Sign up is required.

SPRING BIRD MIGRATORS IN OUR NEWEST PERMANENT CONSERVATION AREA, Saturday, April 27,

8am-12pm. Meet at Kalispell Montessori Schools, 349 Willow Glen Drive.

Join Denny Olson, Flathead Audubon Conservation Educator (and “Bird Whistler”) for a birding tour in Owen Sowerwine Area, part of the migration superhighway of the great Rocky Mountain Trench. Over 160 species have been seen there, and the “regulars” include Pileated Woodpeckers, Bald Eagles in all age classes, Ospreys, Pygmy, White and Red-breasted Nuthatches, Merlins, Sharp-shinned and Red-tailed Hawks, Great Horned Owls, two kinds of Chickadees, and the constantly singing Red-eyed Vireos. The Stillwater River is a migration channel for many kinds of waterfowl. Limit is 10 participants (narrow trails). We will keep a waiting list. To enroll, contact Denny at educator@flatheadaudubon.org

SONNY BOON MEMORIAL TRAIL, SOMERS, Sunday, April 28 and Sunday, May 12, 8am-10am.

Dan Casey will be leading two Sunday morning bird walks along the Sonny Boon Memorial Trail in Somers during this spring migration season. The paved trail follows a portion of the old railroad bed along Somers Slough and offers excellent views of waterfowl as well as a wide variety of land birds reliant on the diverse riparian habitat. Indeed, 157 species have been reported at this eBird hotspot (<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1390990>). These round-trip walks will be one mile each way, and will last approximately two hours, starting at 8am. Attendance is limited to 10 people. Please text Dan at 406-270-5941 to reserve spots on the attendance list. Walks will be held on the following dates:

Sunday, April 28: Waterfowl, early migrants (e.g. swallows, Nashville Warbler, Spotted Towhee)

Sunday, May 12: Increasing numbers of new arrivals (e.g. Western Tanager, Yellow Warbler)

(continued page 5)

SPRING FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU

(continued from page 4)

WHITEFISH RIVER: WATERFOWL, SONGBIRDS and WARBLERS, Thursday, May 2, 8am-11am.

Join Margaret Parodi and Darcy Thomas for a relatively easy walk (two-three miles) on a path along the Whitefish River. We can expect to see ducks, (including Mallards, Wood Ducks, mergansers, goldeneye, Bufflehead), warblers (including Yellow, Orange-crowned, Common Yellowthroat), flycatchers, songbirds, eagles, and other year-round residents. Other wildlife such as foxes or turtles may be seen. Space is limited and sign-up required. For more information and to sign up contact Margaret at mrparodi@charter.net or 406-837-1371.

WARBLER DAYS at TALLY LAKE, Friday, May 17-Sunday, May 19.

Join FAS at the Tally Lake Campground for an extraordinary three days of birding and relaxing. There is space for RVs and tents for those who want to spend the nights (checkout time is 11am). This is an ideal time of year to find a wide variety of migrant and resident birds; most notable is that virtually all the warbler species in Northwest Montana are found here. Several of our expert birders will be available to lead us around the campground. Plenty of other activities can be enjoyed as well. There is a covered pavilion for rainy weather and a fire ring for warmth and grates for cooking. We will have an optional potluck meal Saturday evening around 6pm. Please bring something to share if you want to join in. All other meals are up to you. Someone will show up Friday afternoon to get a fire going, scout the area, and start creating a bird list. Please bring firewood if you have it and camp chairs to sit around the fire. Please call Mike Fanning at 406-862-8070 or shrdlu@centurytel.net if you have any questions. Camping and day use are FREE, courtesy of FAS. Just tell them at the gate that you are with Flathead Audubon at the group pavilion.

2024 Flathead Science Fair Awards

By Denny Olson



Denny Olson, FAS Conservation Educator, presents the award, \$50 check, and a "Sibley Birds of the West" field guide to Brecken

Brecken Thorn wins Best Wildlife Conservation Science Project award from Flathead Audubon for his project at the 2024 Flathead County Science Fair. Brecken did an amazing study about fire resistance in the barks of local trees. Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers, Nuthatches and Lewis'

Woodpeckers will appreciate Brecken educating us about these important ecological relationships. Brecken is an eighth-grade student at Trinity Lutheran School. Congratulations!

Conservation License Renewal

By Margaret Parodi

Effective July 1, 2023, everyone ages 12 and older will need a Montana Conservation License to access most State Lands (does not include State Parks). Since there are numerous Audubon field trips that do use State lands, we encourage all Audubon members and field trip participants to get this license. Fishing access sites (FAS), wildlife management areas (WMA), wildlife habitat protection areas (WHPA), and Montana state trust lands are examples of where this license is needed. The Conservation license "year" is March 1 to February 28. This license is already included in fishing and hunting licenses. You can also buy the conservation license on its own. They are available at all places where fishing or hunting licenses are sold, such as Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), sporting goods stores, some gas station/convenience stores, or online from FWP. (<https://fwp.mt.gov/buyandapply/conservation-license>). For Montana residents the cost is: Adults \$8, Seniors (62+) \$4, Youth (12-17) \$4. Non-residents are \$10.

Flathead Audubon Supports Full Cleanup of CFAC Superfund Site

By Shirley Folkwein, Coalition for a Clean CFAC

Thank you, Flathead Audubon, for your support by joining the efforts of the Coalition for a Clean CFAC requesting the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) pause in their decision-making process to evaluate the cost benefits of removing (not leaving) the toxic waste fully and fairly at the CFAC (Columbia Falls Aluminum Co.) Superfund site northeast of Columbia Falls, on the banks of the Flathead River. Flathead Audubon joins 11 other organizations supporting the effort as well as 1,400 individuals signing the petition.

For more information on how to help and to sign the petition requesting the pause in decision-making, go to <https://cleancfac.org/>

Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – February/March 2024

In typical fashion, early March was a time for waterfowl migration to begin in earnest, with good numbers of **Northern Pintails** present by the end of the period, and multiple sightings of **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Greater White-fronted** and **Snow Geese**. First-of-year (FOY) arrivals included **Varied Thrushes**, **Western Meadowlark**, **Western Bluebird** and **Sandhill Crane**, although no swallows had arrived by the end of the period. See also: <https://ebird.org/region/US-MT-029?yr=all>.

02/18 – Dunlin (2, continuing through 03/13) Dixon Lane, Polson (Braydon L.)

02/20 – White-crowned Sparrow (1, continuing) Whitefish (Ron B.)

02/27 – White-throated Sparrow (1) Whitefish (bj W.)

02/22 – Short-billed Gull (1) Flathead WPA, Bigfork (Shawn R.)

02/29 – Short-billed Gull (1) Somers Beach SP (Dan C.)

03/02 – Snow Goose (1, FOY) Montford Rd (Emily E.)

03/04 – Varied Thrush (1, FOY) Somers (Dan C.)

03/05 – Greater White-fronted Goose (20) Montford Rd (Emily E.)

03/09 – Short-billed Gull (1) Wayfarer's SP (Craig H.)

03/13 – Western Meadowlark (1, FOY) South of Columbia Falls (Jake B.)

03/13 – Iceland (Thayer's) Gull (1) North Shore at Somers (Shawn R.)

03/15 – Snow Goose (29) Egan Slough Rd, Creston (Craig H.)

03/13 – Eurasian Wigeon (1) Egan Slough Rd (Allison and Steven F.)

03/15 – Western Bluebird (1) West Valley (Angela T.)

03/16 – Eurasian Wigeon (1) Church Slough (Erin B.)

03/16 – Sandhill Crane (1) South of Creston (Craig H.)

What to Expect – April 2024

The first insect-eaters arrive in earnest in late March (Tree and Violet-green Swallows, Mountain Bluebirds, Western Meadowlarks), and waterfowl flocks increase in both numbers and diversity. Check Church Slough in particular for Eurasian Wigeon and Greater Scaup, Tundra and Trumpeter Swans, Northern Pintails. By mid-April, most dabbling duck species will have arrived. Red-necked Grebes will appear on the more vegetated wetlands (e.g. Smith Lake). Sandhill Cranes will return; listen also for the first Marsh Wrens and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Yellow-headed Blackbirds will start to arrive, staking out the best marsh territories

Highlights from the March 4, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting

By Michele Tohtz

- ↓ Rod Walette and Jake Bramante explained that Stripe has been dropped and Woo Commerce will now be used for online transactions.
- ↓ Rod Walette discussed the benefits of closing the Glacier Bank and Whitefish Credit Union accounts and moving the Flathead Audubon accounts to Three Rivers Bank. Motions to open a non-profit checking account and Pinnacle Savings account were both approved unanimously.
- ↓ Dee Baginski has been busy with the website, newsletter, and the baling twine/osprey project. Murdoch's in Columbia Falls has brochures about baling twine and osprey nests.
- ↓ Cindy Roberts reported that the education kits are quite popular, and they are in good shape when returned.
- ↓ Denny Olson is leading a lot of field trips and can often use volunteers to help. Contact Denny if you can lend a hand.
- ↓ It was noted that the Owen Sowerwine Conservation Easement was finalized.
- ↓ Linda Du Lac explained that she and Linda Winnie will use details from the History Project to update member information in LGL.
- ↓ Shannon Donaldson discussed her ongoing work with the Junior Bird Club. This includes obtaining volunteers, finding suitable locations, and drafting a safety policy for the program.
- ↓ Kay Mitchell updated all the paperwork for the Great Fish Community Challenge and will submit the application.

Flathead Lakers to be Recognized for Conservation Achievements

By Gael Bissell and Linda Winnie



The Flathead Lakers will be presented with the Flathead Audubon Society's 2024 partnership Conservation Achievement Recognition at the May 13 general meeting. Based in Polson, Montana, the Flathead Lakers have been hard at work for the last 65 years helping protect water quality, floodplains, and critical habitats in the Flathead Lake watershed.

The Laker's have initiated many innovative and highly effective programs to encourage stewardship of the land and protection of water quality in the Flathead Valley through education, advocacy, and partnerships. They offer watershed education programs in schools that include both classroom materials and field trips. They have developed citizen science projects in which community members help evaluate water quality and monitor aquatic vegetation. The Lakers have been early, and persistent, advocates for a program to protect Flathead Lake and Montana from aquatic invasive species; they organized the first volunteer boat inspections for zebra mussels on Flathead Lake. They actively monitor growth policies, legislation, and development proposals, advocating for science-based water quality protection measures. The Lakers participate in a number of watersheds working groups, and partner with the Flathead Lake Biological Station to carry out a variety of educational and citizen projects, and to provide monthly science talks for the community.

In 1999 and 2001, Constanza Von der Palen with the Flathead Lakers set up two important workshops for The Critical Lands Project. She brought together resource staff and volunteers from land trusts, landowners, federal and state agencies, several non-profits and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes to identify those lands in the Flathead Basin that are critical to maintaining the water quality of Flathead Lake and its major tributaries, and to develop criteria for evaluating these critical lands according to the importance and feasibility of



Constanza Von der Palen

providing them conservation protection and restoration. The goal was to then find a way to protect and restore these critical resources in the face of already increasing development pressures.

It was Constanza who saw in these early workshops a fantastic collaborative opportunity, realizing that if we did not all work together, we would probably not be very successful. This group evolved into the Flathead River to Lake Initiative (RTL), officially formed in 2006, whose goal was to identify, conserve, and restore lands critical in the upper Flathead basin, not only to protect water quality in Flathead Lake, but to also protect

wetlands, forests, floodplains, agricultural lands, and the shallow aquifer that underlies much of the Flathead Valley and north shore. This group worked closely with willing private landowners who knew that they were stewarding some of the most productive and important lands along the river system. Over the past two decades, R2L partners successfully protected nearly 7,000 acres, contributing to a conservation network of almost 13,000 acres along the Flathead River. Constanza was and still is the key to this Collaborative keeping the RTL on task and highly productive.

Over the last decade, the Lakers created the River to Lake Conservation Fund to directly support land conservation efforts. They were instrumental in raising significant funding for the state's purchase of the Bad Rock Canyon Wildlife Management Area, Somers Beach State Park, and more recently, for Flathead Land Trust's purchase of the Owen Sowerwine conservation easement.

The conservation work of the Flathead Lakers has provided significant benefits to all of the Flathead Basin – to the lives of the people who live and recreate here, the quality of its waters, and the preservation of its critical lands and wildlife. Flathead Audubon is honored to recognize the Flathead Lakers for their far-reaching conservation vision and their diverse and successful campaigns on behalf of this region's water resources, its natural landscapes, and our quality of life. Thank you, Flathead Lakers!

Conservation Corner: Wildlife Crossings to Reduce Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions

By Dee Baginski

While highways make traveling easier for humans, they have the opposite effect on animals. Highways can create barriers that separate animals from the resources that they need for survival. Oftentimes they cross our roads and highways to get where they need to go, but sometimes they don't make it to the other side. It is a safety risk for both humans and animals alike.

U.S. Highway 93 is notorious for its wildlife-vehicle collisions. In 2018 alone, eight grizzly bears were hit by cars. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes are receiving an \$8.6 million grant through the Federal Highway Administration to create a wildlife overpass. A wildlife overpass or crossing are bridges or tunnels that are specifically designed for animals to use to reduce the environmental impact of highway use. There are currently 41 wildlife crossings along Highway 93 between Evaro and Polson. The overpass will hopefully mitigate vehicle-wildlife conflict near the Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area. It is important to be vigilant and drive carefully, especially at night, to avoid wildlife-vehicle collisions.

For more information, visit these websites:

Resources — Montanans for Safe Wildlife Passage (mtsafewildlifepassage.org)

US 93 - Wildlife Crossing Structures in Use | Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) (mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/us93info/wildlife-crossings)

CSKT Receive Grant to Construct Wildlife Overpass Spanning U.S. Highway 93 - Flathead Beacon (flatheadbeacon.com/2023/12/23/)



Photo courtesy of CSKT game camera

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 here!

Baseball caps, warm thermal beanies, and visors are all available for purchase at the April 8 general meeting.

We are also excited to announce Flathead Audubon vests! While our hats/caps/visors are in stock, 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!

Flathead Valley CITIZENS' CLIMATE LOBBY Presents:

Earth Day EXPO 2024

Uniting Nature & Technology **Saturday April 20th**
9am to 4pm
 Flathead Community College, Kalispell

PANELS | WORKSHOPS | BOOTHS | KIDS' ACTIVITIES

Featuring Kids' Activities (including birding!), panel discussions, workshops and 25 booths representing local organizations.

Don't miss Flathead Audubon's workshop, "Canaries in the Coal Mine: Birds & Climate," presented by Denny Olson, Flathead Audubon Conservation Educator, 1pm-1:45pm, Room 201, Arts and Technology Building. Watch a 28-minute FAS- produced film, "Bird Trouble", detailing the past troubles of Northwest Montana's nesting bird populations and their prospects under different climate change scenarios. Discuss the birds on course to disappear from the Flathead Valley by 2100 and the "why care?" question, with stories about the value of birds to our enjoyment and our survival.

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.

Spring Waterfowl at Church Slough and Lower Valley Wetlands

By Darcy Thomas

15 enthusiastic birders met at Church Slough on March 21 for a wonderful morning of watching waterfowl of all sorts. After an hour at the slough we

followed the river, hopped over to Forest Hill Road, and finished up by walking a portion of Sonny Boon Trail. The rain blessedly kept at bay and afforded us a lovely cloudy morning with peek-a-boo looks at blue sky. We



Photo by Linda Du Lac

saw Trumpeter Swans, Canada Goose, American Wigeon with one Eurasian in the flock, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser and Greater Scaup, Bufflehead, both Goldeneyes, Green-winged Teal, Mallard, Common Merganser and more. Two highlights that delighted everyone, were a group of Wood Ducks swimming quickly along the shore of Flathead River and two Red-tailed Hawks mating and checking out a nest above the river. What a fun day for all!



Photo by Linda Du Lac



Photo by Paul Jacyk - Macaulay Library

Happening this Month:

Ruby-crowned Kinglets begin to arrive

KIDS' CORNER

WHO AM I?

I am spunky, small and grayish brown.

I weigh .39 oz., about as much as two quarters.

I am a cavity nester who eats insects and spiders.

I am common and found coast to coast.

If you put up a nest box and I move in, I will lay 3-10 eggs.

I sing a bubbly song from my perch.

In Chippewa, my name means "making big noise for its size." (O-du-na'-mis-sug-ud-da-we'-shi)

You won't often find me more than 3 to 4 feet above the ground.

I can be found skulking amongst thickets and brush piles in backyards.



BIRD SEARCH

Y	H	H	O	R	N	E	D	L	A	R	K	C	T
E	N	O	D	B	E	J	U	N	C	O	G	O	R
L	P	N	U	R	L	E	A	T	E	R	O	M	E
L	C	O	M	S	I	U	N	I	R	O	L	M	D
O	K	S	A	I	E	B	E	E	N	B	D	O	T
W	E	P	G	O	G	F	E	J	A	I	F	N	A
W	S	R	P	R	U	D	I	U	A	N	I	L	I
A	T	E	I	I	L	N	M	N	L	Y	N	O	L
R	R	Y	E	L	L	O	S	N	C	B	C	O	E
B	E	F	I	M	E	R	L	I	N	H	H	N	D
L	L	K	L	E	L	G	A	E	D	L	A	B	H
E	R	E	H	S	I	F	G	N	I	K	G	O	A
R	A	K	B	L	N	U	T	H	A	T	C	H	W
C	I	N	N	A	M	O	N	T	E	A	L	U	K

Killdeer	Osprey	Merlin	Magpie
Blue Jay	Nuthatch	CinnamonTeal	Gull
Kestrel	YellowWarbler	CommonLoon	Gold Finch
HornedLark	RedTailedHawk	Kingfisher	Bluebird
Bald Eagle	Robin	House Finch	Junco

(Answers on page 10)

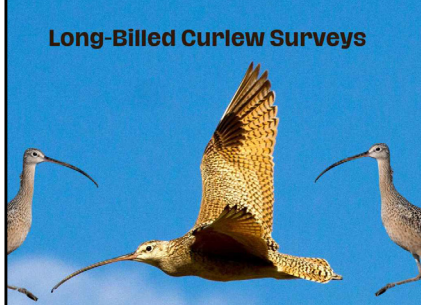
Long-billed Curlew Surveys

By Lauren Smith, MT Audubon Communications Specialist

Spring is fast approaching, and with that comes the familiar “cur-lee-ee” call of the Long-billed Curlew, an icon of America’s prairies. These birds depend on Montana’s grasslands for breeding and continue to decline across their range due to loss of habitat owing to development. With this decline, more research is needed to assess the health and conservation needs of the population - so we need your help!

Join Montana Audubon’s Long-billed Curlew surveys this spring! There are two survey windows: April 8 through May 7, and May 8 through May 31. The training session is on March 26 at 6:30pm on Zoom, and the recording will be available online afterward.

Interested in participating, or want more info? Email Gwynne at gwynne@mtaudubon.org and visit the Long-billed Curlew Survey page on our website: <https://www.montanabirdsurveys.com/long-billed-curlew.html>.



Long-Billed Curlew Surveys

Training:
March 26th 6:30-7:30 pm

Surveys:
April 8th - May 7th, May 8th - May 31st

Photo by Bob Martins

NOMINATIONS

Each spring, Flathead Audubon Society elects officers and directors for their dedication and leadership. FAS elects officers for a two-year term, alternating with president and vice president one year, and secretary and treasurer the next. This is the year for secretary and treasurer candidacies. Michele Tohtz has announced that she is interested in running for the secretarial position. Rod Walette has agreed to run for another term as Treasurer. Both Michele and Rod will be the Nominating Committee’s candidates.

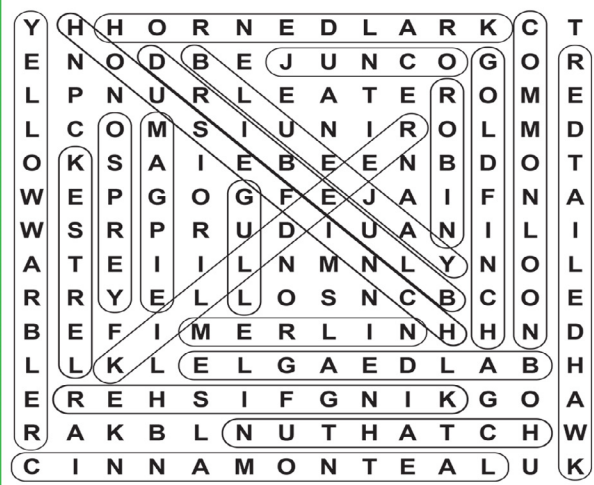
There are three directors up for re-election: Dan Casey, Kay Mitchell, and Jake Bramante. Dan is not running this year, but Kay and Jake are, and will be nominated by the committee. There is no limit on the number of directors that can be on the Board, so if you are interested in joining our family, please talk with one of our officers or directors. We currently do not have a vice president. Please consider running for this position.

We will publish a list of the candidates in the May Pileated Post. Please give these nominees due consideration, then attend the FAS general meeting on May 13 to vote, as well as enjoy a great potluck.

KIDS' CORNER

WHO AM I? I am a House Wren

BIRD SEARCH ANSWERS



Wings Across the Big Sky Registration Now Open!

By Lauren Smith, MT Audubon
Communications Specialist

If you're on our mailing list, check your mail for the registration brochure, or visit our website (<https://mtaudubon.org/events/wings/>) to view and download the brochure. Register online - and early - for the best field trip availability. You can also register via mail. If you have any questions or issues, please email the Montana Audubon office (info@mtaudubon.org) or call us at 406-443-3949. See you in Helena this summer!



Registration now open!

May 31 - June 2 / Helena, Montana



Photo by JP Edge
Hungry Horse News

Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

"The Nature of Cities"



In 1900, 14 percent of the U.S. population lived in cities. Now, more than 70 percent (240 million) of the U.S. population live in urban and urbanizing areas (U.S. Census Bureau 2021). Improving the sustainability and livability of cities is a long-term challenge that many cities are beginning to consider, but only beginning. This is probably a familiar case of "you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone". I grew up in a town of perhaps 550 people, surrounded by woods, lakes, rivers, and other tiny towns. I'm a rural kid. I lived in cities during college, grad school and a few subsequent years, but urbanity is far from my strong suit. Since those times, I have always tried to live in a place where I have quick access to relatively wild natural places. I live in Kalispell, a town of under 40,000 citizens or so, in a valley inhabited by about 110,000 humans, surrounded by five National Forests, eight State Forests, at least half a dozen National Wilderness Areas, a Tribal National Bison Range and a million acres of Glacier National Park. My choice of domicile wasn't an accident. When it comes to imagining life as a committed big city dweller, I'm clearly over my head.

But I do worry about the insular effects of living in any city, which can create the illusion of human self-sufficiency regarding food, water, shelter, and space. The support system, the life support system, of cities comes from outside the city, from that natural world of deep dark scary woods, quadrillions of insects, birds that poop on your car, frightening predators – the out-of-control, out-of-the-comfort-zone world. Cities are completely at the mercy of photosynthesis, the water cycle, climate, weather, and rural agriculture, and subject to the same life support system of rural areas.

The human tendency to wait until the last minute to save wild places that many people traditionally think are "going to waste", is often exacerbated by a simple lack of awareness about the importance of nature to humans. Urban forests and marshes reduce ambient temperatures up to six degrees Celsius in the summer. Trees are filters reducing the amount of air pollution and enhancing water quality. They offer wildlife habitat and corridors for larger and more mobile animals. They are buffers for damaging storms. They offer pathways, staging areas and refuge for migrating birds. Urban wetlands reduce rainwater

runoff with vegetation, act as sponges for natural water treatment, reduce the effects of flooding and erosion, and reconnect floodplains with rivers. They also get people outside, establishing and reinforcing their connections to nature and each other, and generally making them healthier, happier, and smarter. They are preventative mental and physical healthcare. The return on investment for urban wilds is a no-brainer.

It is never too late to save a wild area, because, without a lot of effort, the holy economic grail of growth will continue to shrink it into oblivion. As of late, we also have the dubious distinction of being the fastest growing "micropolitan area" in the United States. But, concurrent to that distinction, we now have a permanently protected (by conservation easement) 405-acre river bottom natural area, Owen Sowerwine, managed with a very light hand by Flathead Audubon Society. It regularly hosts deer, grizzly bears (!), black bears, cougars, and eagles. This area is adjacent to the city limits and is walking distance from my house in the middle of town. The diversity found there is less due to the size of the area, and more due to the connecting corridors of forest and other river-bottom land, much of which is protected by a geographic daisy-chain of other conservation easements.

These areas are important for humans because they are important for many other species as well. With care to minimize disturbances, urban natural areas can serve as educational instruments, teaching visitors how they can help be stewards of these important public assets.

Estrangement from our natural roots in cities is unacceptable, on so many levels. The proximity to "green space" and its relationship to health is only a good start. Our community-based education system needs to find a way to include our whole "community" (read: including our natural life-support system). Our children need to know who they are in the bigger picture of our food, potable water, habitat, and space, biological essentials for life. There will undoubtedly be many creative ways to finance and facilitate these experiences once we decide it is important. From my own groundings in a life of abundant nature, I've come to believe that the truth and realities about our relationship with our natural world is the most important thing that I can teach.

Nesting Ospreys Near Creston

By Michell De Leon Tyler



Oh, how I love Spring! Not only because warmer weather and sunshine are coming, but also because Spring brings migratory birds back to the Flathead Valley.

Every year, I wait in anticipation for the Ospreys to return. Ospreys migrate from South America to North America to breed. On April 7, 2023, our migrating Ospreys returned to the Valley. I live in the Creston area not far from the Creston Fish Hatchery. It seemed a bit soon, I thought to myself, because in previous years they would arrive more toward mid- to the third week in April. Nonetheless, I was happy that they were back.

The second day after their arrival, I decided to take a drive back to where I noticed them. I was curious to see if the two had selected a nest building site. Indeed, they had. The couple chose a platform on top of a power pole. This concerned me. The first thing that came to mind was, is a perch on top of a power pole a good choice? I



continued to watch as the nest was being built. The male would fly into a wooded area and collect branches. One by one, he flew to the power pole delivering them. The female carefully stacked them, layering and weaving each branch together. As I watched, the male Osprey continued to collect sizeable branches and fly with them tight in his talons back to the nesting site. It was incredible to watch. Ospreys are magnificent nest builders.

On day three, I checked on the couple again and could not believe how large the nest had become. It was three times larger than the previous day. To my disappointment, I saw orange twine woven throughout the branches of their nest. It had been collected from a nearby rancher's field. It was somewhat heartbreaking as I knew how detrimental twine can be for Ospreys when it becomes a component of their nest. Many have lost their lives from strangulation in twine. Power poles can also be dangerous. With each day of nest building the twine was getting closer to the ground. I made the decision to call Flathead Electric to see if the nest could be examined and the twine removed.

On the fifth day, a lineman from Flathead Electric visited the nest site and decided that for the Ospreys' safety it had



to come down. I was sad for the couple but understood why it was necessary. The lineman replaced the nest on top of the platform with a fake Canada Goose to discourage the Ospreys from rebuilding.

The following day I returned to the old nesting site. The Ospreys were nowhere to be found. I never saw the pair again. It was truly disheartening. My hope is that we can offer awareness and educate our community and our ranchers on how dangerous twine is for Ospreys and other birds and animals. I am grateful to Flathead Electric. I have been noticing more fake geese on power poles lately. There is still time for these two Ospreys to find success in fulfilling the reason they come so far to breed in our area. It would be helpful if our Ospreys were given more nesting sites. If you live close to a good water source for fishing, offer a nesting site by designating a tree and putting a platform on it.

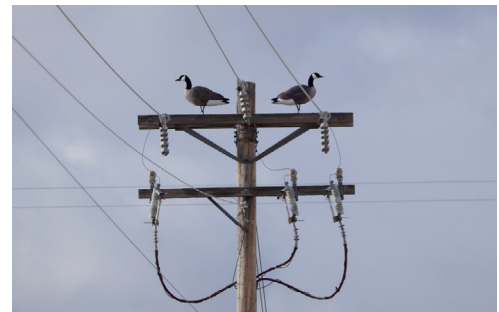




Image by Vanover Studios

TRIBUTE GIFTS

Robin Krogstad
in memory of
Glenn Graham

Nongame Wildlife Tax Check-off

When filling out your Montana tax form this year, think "wildlife" by donating to the Nongame Wildlife Program, found on Form 2, page 11, under Contributions. If your taxes are prepared, tell your accountant that you want to donate to wildlife! Your contributions are tax deductible on next year's return. Montana has more than 500 species of "nongame" animals that benefit from public support each year at tax time. Since 1983, the check-off has contributed over \$27,000 annually to this important wildlife program.



Common Loon

Photo credit Cornell Lab

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Content Editor Geri Meireis geri@flatheadaudubon.org

Layout Editor Susie Waldron susie@flatheadaudubon.org

Bird of the Month Editor Darcy Thomas darcy@flatheadaudubon.org

Mail Distribution Jake Bramante jake@flatheadaudubon.org

Email Distribution Dee Baginski dee@flatheadaudubon.org

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

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2022-2025 Will Beyer beyer59901@yahoo.com
2022-2025 Margaret Parodi margaret@flatheadaudubon.org
2021-2024 Dan Casey dan@flatheadaudubon.org
2021-2024 Kay Mitchell kay@flatheadaudubon.org
2021-2024 Jake Bramante jake@flatheadaudubon.org
2022-2025 Bridger Donaldson bridger@flatheadaudubon.org
2022-2025 Shannon Donaldson shannon@flatheadaudubon.org
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2023-2026 Gael Bissell gael@flatheadaudubon.org
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COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Conservation Gael Bissell gael@flatheadaudubon.org
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Field Trips Margaret Parodi margaret@flatheadaudubon.org
Darcy Thomas darcy@flatheadaudubon.org
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Pam Willison pam@flatheadaudubon.org
Outreach Jake Bramante jake@flatheadaudubon.org
Programs Ronda Howell ronda@flatheadaudubon.org

CONSERVATION EDUCATOR

Denny Olson educator@flatheadaudubon.org

OPERATIONS COORDINATOR

Dee Baginski dee@flatheadaudubon.org

FAS REP ON MT AUDUBON BOARD

Gael Bissell gael@flatheadaudubon.org



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Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society
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