



the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society



Killdeer

Photo courtesy of
All About Birds

Peeps from the President

By Darcy Thomas

What a year! What a year! I remember beginning the year as your new Flathead Audubon President with such trepidation, feeling I was not ready and not up to the task. I was so afraid of making a fool of myself – which I probably did from time to time. But, I have come to love this role and working hard for an organization that does such amazing things for birds and the world in which they live. Thank you for being patient with me as I learned the ropes.



Photo by Rob Thomas

And now we are celebrating one of our biggest achievements – a conservation easement on the Owen Sowerwine Area. It is the culmination of years of effort to provide permanent conservation protection for this Area, that began with “the passage of Montana’s Natural Areas Act in 1974 that opened the way for the creation of OSNA.” (Linda Winnie, January 2002 Pileated Post, page 4). The history here is extensive; I encourage you to check out Linda’s article - and other articles published in our newsletter over the years tracing the history of the Owen Sowerwine Area (<https://flatheadaudubon.org/about-us/pileated-post-archive>). It all started with the vision of one man, Owen Sowerwine, and was carried forward by the dedication of many who followed his lead.

It has been over 45 years from the official dedication ceremony of the Owen Sowerwine Area on September 9, 1978, to the signing of the documents on February 29, 2024, that placed it under a permanent conservation easement. During that time many people have been engaged in a labor of love to preserve the land, learn about its birds and other wild creatures, thwart invasive species, educate children and adults, and devise a management plan that protects the area for future generations. In the original management plan, long-time Flathead Valley conservationist

and philanthropist, Sam Bibler, called on managers of OS “...to keep the heavy hand of man as much out of the management as possible, and to proceed as carefully and thoughtfully as possible.” This sentiment has guided Flathead Audubon in its management of the area.

Please join us in a celebration of the Owen Sowerwine Conservation Easement at this month’s general meeting. We will hear several speakers who have worked diligently towards this achievement. I wish I had the space to mention the names of everyone who has been a part of this project, but please know that each one of you are appreciated, and your efforts have been part of something bigger than ourselves.

FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, May 6, 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, May 13, 7pm. Flathead Audubon General Meeting including Potluck, Silent Auction, Elections. Gateway Community Center, US Hwy. 2 West, Kalispell. East side of Gateway Mall along Glenwood Dr. All are welcome. See page 3.

Friday through Sunday, May 17-19. Warbler Days at Tally Lake. See page 7.

Friday through Sunday, May 31-June 2. Wings Across the Big Sky. See page 8.

Sunday, June 23. Birdathon. See page 10.

Wednesday, July 10. Celebration of OS Easement hosted by Flathead Land Trust. See page 10.

Saturday, September 14. Birds of Prey Festival, Lone Pine State Park. **SAVE THE DATE!**

For schedule of nine Field Trips see page 5.

For schedule of four Family Friendly Events see page 6.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Magnificence in Montana - American White Pelican

By Darcy Thomas

Early June last year in Dupuyer a man approached to ask about Glacier National Park as he was excited about driving over Going-to-the-Sun Road from the east. I informed him the road was not yet fully open. As he expressed his disappointment I sighted three gigantic, gorgeous white birds with black on their wings soaring overhead. "Oh, pelicans!", I exclaimed. "How beautiful!". The birds were so close you could see the details of their massive orange horned bills, orange legs, and white plumage. They are so large their wings measure over nine feet from tip to tip. I wanted this man to feel the same enthusiasm as I felt at the sight of these magnificent birds. But he merely glanced at them. Maybe I shouldn't expect others to feel the way I do.



Photo by Will Street,
Birds of the World

"Pelicans in Montana?", you ask. You saw pelicans on the coast. But those were brown, and these are white. How can pelicans be so far inland? But see them you do. There are eight pelican species - two of which live in North America. Brown Pelicans live along coastal waters and seas.

The American White Pelican is found in freshwater into the interior of North America. In Montana you can find them during migration and in summer. They rarely winter inland, preferring coastal bays, inlets, estuaries, and sloughs during the cold months. The exception is the Salton Sea where they regularly winter over.

American White Pelicans are often found together with Double-crested Cormorants as they forage together in shallow water, each taking different fish at different depths. Pelicans cooperate when feeding by surrounding fish and corralling them into shallow water while dipping their bills and flapping their wings. A common misconception is that pelicans carry food in their bill pouches, but this is not the case. They simply dip their bills to scoop up fish into the pouch, raise their bills to drain water, and swallow. Another use of the bill pouch comes into play when these big birds become overheated. To cool off they face away from the sun and flutter their bill pouches to let body heat escape.

Pelicans are also good at stealing food from one another as well as from cormorants. They have even been seen stealing food from other pelicans in their nesting colonies when the other parent has disgorged food for its young.

That's not such a bad idea for a bird that must provide about 150 pounds of food to raise a chick until it can forage on its own.



Photo by Gerrit Van, Birds of the World

Besides feeding together, American White Pelicans share the same nesting colonies with Double-crested Cormorants, Great Blue Herons, and California Gulls. In Montana these are found at Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge, Arod Lake, and Canyon Ferry Reservoir. Pelicans can also be seen at other locations in Montana during migration, including Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge, Freezout Lake, Red Rock Lakes, and along the Missouri River.

Look for American White Pelicans in Montana beginning in April when they arrive at their colonies to nest. They lay eggs — usually two — and incubate them from late April through May. Often only one chick survives as the other is harassed or killed by its nest mate. Before hatching, chicks inside the egg squawk to let their parents know they are too hot or cold! Both parents incubate the eggs by covering them with their webbed feet and will lift their feet off the eggs or cover them according to the clamor emanating from within the eggs. Young hatch in late May and June and stay in the colonies until mid-August.



Photo by Daniel Jauvin,
Birds of the World

These pelicans are large and gregarious. They appear graceful in the sky as they soar in V-formations. On the ground they appear ungainly when walking, quite fast, but in an awkward, rolling way on their webbed feet. On water they prove to be strong swimmers.

As big as they are they still have predators from the sky and from the land, including foxes, coyotes, gulls, ravens, Great Horned Owls, and Bald Eagles. When predators from the sky are a danger pelicans fly aggressively before going into a near stall. To discourage predators on land they stand upright, grunt, and make threat displays by opening and closing their bills as they lunge forward jabbing with their bill.

(continued on page 13)

MAY PROGRAM

Celebrating the Owen Sowerwine Conservation Easement

Join us on Monday, May 13, for our celebration of the Owen Sowerwine conservation easement. First nominated as a State Natural Area in 1974, and passing through a variety of lease and license holders through 2024, the natural values of this important 442-acre piece of river corridor and wildlife habitat have been protected for 50 years through conservation management. This 50-year journey has now culminated with the purchase of a conservation easement on Owen Sowerwine by the Flathead Land Trust this year, finally providing the Area with permanent conservation protection.



Photo by Brent Mitchell

The speakers for the evening will talk about the work and the partnerships that made this achievement possible. Laura Katzman from Flathead Land Trust, and Anne Moran from the Montana Department of Natural Resources will summarize their organizations' involvement. Kay Mitchell will speak about the early years of protecting Owen Sowerwine, and the Whitefish Community Foundation's role in securing the easement. Pam Willison will recount Flathead Audubon's land management efforts at Owen Sowerwine. Denny Olson, Flathead Conservation Educator, will talk about the educational services that have been provided at Owen Sowerwine for students and adults. Don't miss this chance to honor and celebrate a remarkable journey.

THIS IS YOUR LAST PILEATED POST UNTIL SEPTEMBER

May Meeting Celebrating Owen Sowerwine

Our May potluck and silent auction are one of our favorite events of the year. We enjoy seeing everyone, eating together, and having time to visit before the summer break. Doors open at 5pm, dinner at 6pm, meeting at 6:45pm.

This month's meeting will be a celebration of the Owen Sowerwine Area and the Conservation Easement that has just been placed on it. We'll have a souvenir Celebration Program, an OS area slide show during dinner, and short presentations on the OS area and the Conservation Easement. And the Flathead Lakers will be presented with our FAS Conservation Achievement Recognition for their 65 years of work protecting our region's water resources and natural landscapes – and their crucial role in making possible the Conservation Easement on Owen Sowerwine. The meeting will also include bird sighting reports and election of FAS Officers and Board Members.

We will meet in Room 26 of the Gateway Mall (United Way building). This room is on the east side of the building along Glenwood Drive in Kalispell. Look for our banner hanging outside. There will not be a virtual component to this meeting due to the number of planned activities.

Please bring your own plates, utensils and cups. There is no sink to wash dishes so prepare accordingly. Be sure to arrive early enough to look over and bid on silent auction items!

SILENT AUCTION

The annual silent auction is the perfect time to gather all of the valuable "stuff" that you might be able to live without. We're looking for bird books, outdoor gear, artwork, live bedding plants, birdhouses and feeders of all kinds, and homemade pies and cookies.

Please be prepared to take your items home if they do not receive a bid.



Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – March/April 2024

In typical fashion, late March and early April provided a variety of migrant waterfowl at Flathead Valley hotspots. Eurasian Wigeon were seen at multiple sites, and a hybrid wigeon was photographed at Church Slough. Greater White-fronted Goose and the Siberian form of Tundra Swan made appearances in West Valley. Early arrivals included Williamson's and Red-naped Sapsuckers, and Loggerhead Shrike; a Snow Bunting and Lesser Black-backed Gull lingered. See also: <https://ebird.org/region/US-MT-029?yr=all>.

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

03/19 – Lesser Black-backed Gull (1) Flathead Lake North Shore (Shawn R.)

03/20 – Williamson's Sapsucker (1) Bowdish Rd (Scott F.)

03/20 – Eurasian x American Wigeon (1) Church Slough (bj W.)

03/24 – Red-naped Sapsucker (FOY) Hungry Horse (Joseph C.)

03/25 – Greater White-fronted Goose (1) West Valley (Jake B.)

04/01 – Loggerhead Shrike (1) Creston (Craig H.)

04/09 – Snow Bunting (1) Columbia Mtn trailhead (Shannon D.)

04/11 – "Bewick's" Tundra Swan (2) West Valley (bj W.)

04/16 – Clark's Grebe (1) Ninepipes NWR (Shawn R.)

What to Expect – April/May 2024

It's time to put out the hummingbird feeders, as Earth Day (4/22) usually heralds the first arrivals. The number of arriving migrant species will start to increase exponentially by the beginning of May, with Blue-winged Teal, Vaux's Swift, Barn Swallow, Vesper and Savannah Sparrow, Cassin's Vireo, and the first warblers due any day. Most breeding species will have arrived by mid-May, only our latest arrivals (Willow Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, Common Nighthawk) wait until the end of May to show up in northwest Montana.

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.

Highlights from the April 1, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting

By Pam Willison

- ↓ Darcy Thomas reported that Dee Baginski has been very involved in merchandise sales, and that Denny Olson is entering the busy season for field trips and school presentations. Learning kits continue to be actively in use.
- ↓ The contracts for the Conservation Educator and Operations Coordinator are undergoing annual review and the Board voted to develop a strategy to transition these two positions together from contract to employment status.
- ↓ The Pileated Post newsletter will be printed in color in the future, and we will look into ways to reduce the number of pages to keep the cost down.
- ↓ Linda DuLac is working with Linda Winnie to document all Directors, Committee Chairs, and Officers since Flathead Audubon was formed.
- ↓ Margaret Parodi reminded field trip leaders to use the participation form so we can track numbers, and also for liability reasons.
- ↓ Pam Willison is redesigning the Owen Sowerwine brochure to update it and expand the contents. She will attend a meeting and site visit for the 310 Permit needed to repair the bridges this summer.
- ↓ Shannon Donaldson said the Junior Birder Club events will kick off at the Earth Day celebration in April and Warbler Weekend in May. She is working on some policies related to the Club.
- ↓ Kay Mitchell will complete the final report for the WFCF Community Grant, then complete the application to participate in the Great Fish Community Challenge again this year. At the suggestion of WFCF, we decided to include an endowment donation as the secondary purpose for the funds.

MAY AND SUMMER 2024 FIELD TRIPS

MAY



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.

SMITH LAKE BIRDING, Sunday, May 5, 8am-11am. Join FAS field trip leader Darcy Thomas for a morning of birdwatching. We will walk a portion of the paved Great Northern Historical Trail along Smith Lake before driving around the lake stopping at the boat launch and other pullouts along the way to view birds. Smith Lake is a complex of large, shallow wetlands and marsh, surrounded by stands of willow and other shrubs as well as conifers. We are likely to see Osprey, kestrel, warblers, vireos, blackbirds, waterfowl, herons, and cormorants. Vault toilet is available. Bring binoculars, water, and a spotting scope if you have one. To register contact Darcy at (406) 407-8263 or darcy@flatheadaudubon.org.

CELEBRATE SPRING MIGRATION at CRESTON FISH HATCHERY, Saturday, May 11, 8am-11am. Join Karen Nichols and Kathy Ross exploring the easily accessible Hatchery trails, for our returning avian migrants--warblers, vireos, thrush, Osprey and so many others, as they return to breed in our beautiful valley. Along with our favorite "locals" including dippers and chickadees. Also learn about the native flora — nature's own bird feeders, especially for parent birds feeding chicks! Field trip is limited to 12 participants. For meeting location, questions and to sign up, contact Kathy at mtkat67@gmail.com or leave a message at 406-837-3837.

SONNY BOON MEMORIAL TRAIL, SOMERS, Sunday, May 12, 8am-10am. Dan Casey will lead a Sunday morning bird walk 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>). We expect to find a variety of new arrivals (e.g. Western Tanager, Yellow Warbler). The round-trip walk 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.

BEAUTIES of the BISON RANGE, Tuesday, May 14, 6:30am-late afternoon. Join Darcy Thomas to savor the beauties of the Bison Range in Moiese. The Bison Range is home to many birds such as Bald and Golden Eagles, Lewis's Woodpeckers, Red-naped Sapsuckers, Willow Flycatchers, Lazuli Buntings, and Grasshopper Sparrows. There is also wonderful native vegetation and many animals including bison, white-tailed and mule deer, elk, pronghorn, bear, and coyote.

We plan to drive over Red Sleep Mountain, stopping to hike along the Bitterroot Trail, and then follow Prairie Drive back to the Visitor Center where we will learn about the Bison Range Restoration and the CSKT. We will likely take West Loop Drive as well, and finish the day either walking the nature trail at the Visitor Center or at the ponds, depending on what the group wants to do.

This field trip will be limited to four cars and a maximum of 15 participants; carpooling will be necessary. Passengers are asked to pay drivers for mileage and to offset the cost of purchasing a day pass. Each vehicle will need a Bison Range Pass, which is \$20 for a day pass (\$60 for a season pass). Plan to pay drivers \$15. Bring binoculars, bear spray, a spotting scope if you have one, lunch, snacks and drinks. There are a couple of restroom stops along the way. To register, contact Darcy at darcy@flatheadaudubon.org or 406-407-8263.

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. For details see page 7.

(continued page 6)

SUMMER FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU

(continued from page 5)

JUNE

BAD ROCK CANYON BIRD WALK, Thursday, June 6, 7am–10am. Come spend a morning walking the trails at Bad Rock Canyon WMA by Columbia Falls with Darcy Thomas and Michel De Leon Tyler. We will walk up to three miles on level ground while we look for warblers and other songbirds, flycatchers, and woodpeckers. You will need a DNRC Conservation License for this walk, which can be purchased through FWP at <https://fwp.mt.gov/buyandapply/conservation-license>. To register for the field trip, contact Darcy at darcy@flatheadaudubon.org or 406-407-8263.

BIRDING on the DANNY ON TRAIL in WHITEFISH, Monday, June 10 or Wednesday, June 26. Join Jim Rogers for a morning of hiking and birding in Whitefish. On June 10, we will hike up the mountain and then take the chair lift down or walk. On June 26, we will take the chair lift up to the top of the mountain and then walk down. Expect to see a variety of beautiful songbirds including Warbling and Cassin's Vireos, Lazuli Bunting, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Brown Creeper, MacGillivray's and Yellow-rumped Warblers, Western Tanager, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Fox Sparrow, Pacific Wren, Swainson's, Varied, and Hermit Thrushes, Cassin's Finch, and Pine Grosbeak.

Bring binoculars, water, and snacks. Dress for the weather, wear sturdy hiking shoes, and bring appropriate layers for the conditions. Specific start times will be discussed at time of sign up. Sign up is required and space is limited to 10 people for each walk. To sign up, contact Jim at jmrogers2007@gmail.com or call or text 406-871-1964.

June 10: Our field trip begins at the Danny On trailhead in the village area of the Whitefish Mountain Resort and, after hiking four miles up and gaining 2350 feet of elevation, ends on the summit of Big Mountain. Participants must find their own way down the mountain (i.e. walking or taking the lift down). Plan to start early, about 8am.

June 26: Our field trip begins on the summit of Big Mountain at the Danny On trailhead and, after walking four miles down and descending 2350 feet of elevation, ends in the village area of the Whitefish Mountain Resort. Participants must find their own way up to the summit (i.e. walking or taking the lift up).

Family Friendly Events from Flathead Audubon

By Shannon Donaldson

Flathead Audubon is hosting a series of four Family Friendly Events for kids this summer. All events will be held the third Saturday of the month, May through August, beginning at 9am and wrapping up between 11am and noon. Geared toward children who are interested in birds and nature, these outdoor events will all include a fun activity or craft and a short birding walk. Binoculars will be available for loan. Bring your kids, or grandkids, and spread the word! Space is limited. If you would like to attend, or for more information, please contact Shannon Donaldson at shannon@flatheadaudubon.org.

May 18 – Tally Lake. Join us for a special kids hike at the FAS Tally Lake Warbler Days. We will have a chance to discover different types of warblers and three of the four species of chickadees that inhabit Montana.

June 15 - Creston Fish Hatchery. Visit Jessup Mill Pond in Creston and enjoy a short bird walk in a terrific educational forest. It is a great spot to see Kingfishers.

July 20 - Pine Grove Pond. Take a trip to Pine Grove Pond where there is a nice walking path around the pond and there's a good chance we'll get to see Osprey fishing!

August 17 - River's Edge Park. Join us at River's Edge Park in Columbia Falls for a fun morning of birding and activities.

In addition, be sure to head up to **Lone Pine State Park** on the second **Saturday, September 14**. Flathead Audubon will host the 15th Annual Birds of Prey Festival. This Festival includes lots of kid friendly activities including bird hikes, educational booths, live raptors on display, and face painting. Save the date!

Warbler Days at Tally Lake: May 17 - 19



Yellow-Rumped Warbler
Photo by Jake Bramante

Flathead Audubon’s annual Warbler Days at Tally Lake will be held this year from Friday, May 17, through Sunday, May 19. Join us at the Tally Lake Campground for an extraordinary three days of birding and relaxing. 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 NW 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.

The Campground’s group pavilion will be our central gathering place. It provides cover for rainy weather, and a fire ring for warmth, with grates for cooking. We will have an optional potluck meal at the pavilion 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.

This year, our guest speaker will be Skip Via, a West Valley naturalist. His talk, “Water, Water Everywhere?” will be presented in the pavilion at 4pm on Saturday. Looking out from the pavilion you will be gazing at one of the deepest lakes in Montana, with Logan Creek flowing into the lake in front of you. Plentiful water has helped create an ideal habitat for the spring warbler activity we will be observing. Skip will talk about the geology of the Flathead Valley and how it has shaped our current watershed. We will learn about the aquifers of the area and the factors that influence their sustainability.

There is plenty of space for RVs and tents for those who want to spend the nights (checkout time is 11:00am). 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. Please contact Mike Fanning at 406-862-8070 or shrdu@centurytel.net if you have any questions.

KIDS’ CORNER

HUMMINGBIRD HIGHLIGHT

Compare these two male hummingbirds, both are common in Northwest Montana.

Calliope Hummingbird



Male Calliope Hummingbirds are mostly green and have a shimmering magenta gorget.

Do you see some differences?

You may notice their shiny, iridescent throat feathers first, also called their gorget. Gorget comes from the French word for throat.

Rufous Hummingbird



Male Rufous Hummingbirds are a rusty brown color with a flashy red-orange gorget.

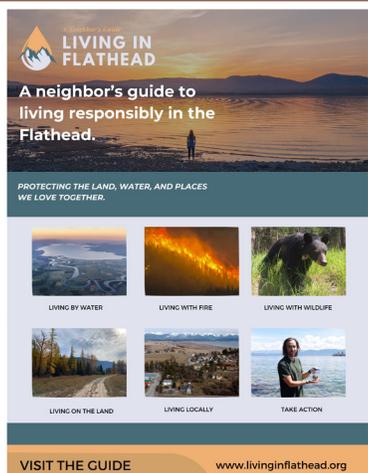
One good way to get a closer look at these guys is to have a hummingbird feeder at your house. See if you can find their favorite spots to perch and guard “their” feeder. Making your own nectar is easy and fun (*for recipe, see page 10*). The hummingbirds will thank you!

Check out this link for more ways to make your home more inviting to these little guys: <https://www.audubon.org/content/how-create-hummingbird-friendly-yard>.

Photos by Shannon Donaldson

CONSERVATION CORNER: LIVING IN FLATHEAD GUIDE

By Gael Bissell



Newly released!
LIVING IN FLATHEAD!
A most incredible compendium of ideas and shared knowledge on how to manage and protect our natural resource rich environment together, all at your fingertips!

relevant right now, as many of us are seeing the return of migrating birds, and enjoying the early morning sounds of robins, nuthatches, and chickadees. These returning birds not only captivate us with their songs and vibrant plumage, but they also play crucial roles in our ecosystem, such as insect control, plant seed dispersal, and environmental cleanup.

But these same birds need something from us. Researchers have recently calculated that a staggering three billion birds have been lost over the last 50 years. Leading causes of this decline include cats, collisions (including those with windows), and habitat loss. Birds need our help!

The Guide's **Birds and their Habitat** section will help you learn more about our native bird species, discover ways you can support them in your own backyard, and explore the numerous hot spots for bird watching in our valley. <https://www.livinginflathead.org/birds-habitat>.

Once you've investigated this section on birds, you'll enjoy exploring the rest of **Living in Flathead** – including **Living on the Land, Living by Water, Living with Wildlife**. This comprehensive guide to land and water stewardship, and to living and recreating in harmony with our natural heritage, is an important resource for us all. Please tell your neighbors about it, and recommend it to newcomers and visitors. Enjoy!

Coordinated by the Flathead Lakers, the new **LIVING IN FLATHEAD: A neighbor's guide to living responsibly in the Flathead** is a digital guide (<https://www.livinginflathead.org>) that gets to the heart of what we all need to consider to ensure we have clean water, open lands, diverse habitats and wildlife, resilient forests, and a strong local economy as our communities continue to grow. The focus is on what we as private landowners and visitors can do - landscape with native trees and shrubs, develop a rain garden, adopt a drain, recycle and reduce waste, pick up plastic, join a local non-profit, institute fire-wise management, etc. The Guide includes how-to advice and where to find resources and assistance. If we all do our part, we can reduce our impacts.

To get started, take a look at the section on **Birds and their Habitat** that FAS helped to write. It is especially

Wings Across the Big Sky Festival Field Trip Highlight



Lake Helena WMA Canoe/Kayak Field Trip will start with a relatively short walk to view shrub passerines – including Savannah Sparrow and associated species. We will then embark in canoes and/or kayaks and spend several hours enjoying marshland, cattail, and sandbar/mudflat habitats. There will be a wide variety of waterfowl, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, Sora, Virginia Rail, White-faced Ibis, gulls and terns, possibly including Black Terns and Bonaparte's Gull. Also likely are pelicans, swallows, Bald Eagle, Wilson's Snipe, and phalaropes. During the first week of June in both 2022 and 2023, White-rumped Sandpiper, commonly a late migrant, was documented here. Participants are encouraged to bring their own canoes/kayaks and PFDs, but local chapter members will endeavor to provide help with these if needed.

Find more festival info and to register online, go to <https://mtaudubon.org/events/wings>.

This trip is offered on both Saturday and Sunday — but space is limited, so register today!

April Herron Park Hike and Birding Field Trip

By Shannon Donaldson

On April 15, five participants joined Shannon and Bridger Donaldson at Herron Park for a morning of birding. The group tallied a total of 28 species of birds and several wildflowers.

The Serviceberry and Ninebark were just beginning to leaf out and vibrant larch buds were being consumed by several species. After hearing numerous Spotted Towhee, eventually one sang from a prominent branch so everyone could get a good look. Then, a small flock of Common Redpolls flew in and landed in the top of a nearby larch tree. Four Great Blue Herons and two Sandhill Cranes flew over and a Northern Harrier was spotted off the back side.



Photo by Shannon Donaldson

Half way through the trip, we saw a dove fly up and disappear into a thick, dead tangle of mistletoe. Bridger took a closer look and found two Mourning Doves on a nest. It was also a good Townsend's Solitaire day, two were near an overlook foraging with three Mountain Bluebirds and, further down the trail, three more were busy in the understory. It was fairly overcast and we didn't see many raptors, but did have a good time watching an adult Bald Eagle soar across the valley and lake below.

Thanks for joining us, everyone!

Happening this Month: Bullock's Orioles arrive



Photo by William Leaman/Alamy

April Snow Goose Migration Trip to Freezout

By Darcy Thomas



Photo by Clare Rodrigues

Our little group of eight birding buddies made a stop at Lake Frances near Valier on our way to Choteau and were delighted by the sight of at least 8,000 Snow Geese blanketing the far west end of the lake like a white carpet. An incessant cacophony of honking competed with the cries of gulls. An eagle disturbed their rest several times creating a massive uplift into the sky of these large white and black birds. They soon settled on the water once again to rest up before the long migration ahead of them. We also enjoyed watching Great Blue Herons as they returned from foraging to rest in their rookery. After a delicious dinner at John Henry's we made our way to Priest Butte Lake and Freezout Pond One. Meadowlarks and blackbirds, swans, Snow Goose, several species of ducks, pelicans, cormorants, and more, graced the evening as the setting sun painted the skies behind us in soft tones of orange, purple, and blue.

Before sunrise the next morning we grabbed coffee and bagels and headed to Freezout. We met the morning with a stunning sunrise watching Snow Geese flying in huge formations over our heads as they headed north. Many other birds including ducks, pelicans, herons, cormorants, killdeer, Bald Eagles, and gulls made the early morning a delight. After driving through the agricultural fields, a couple of folks in our party peeled off to venture out on their own. The rest of us decided to drive up Teton Canyon Road where we were rewarded with the sighting of two large herds of pronghorn, Horned Larks, a Northern Shrike, Bald Eagles, and a Peregrine Falcon.

Heading north on the drive home our final gifts of the trip were the sighting of Sandhill Cranes and a Golden Eagle who was dancing on the wind.



Photo by Darcy Thomas

Long-billed Curlew Surveys

By Lauren Smith, MT Audubon Communications Specialist

The warm and sunny days of Spring bring us the familiar “cur-leeeee” of the Long-billed Curlew, an icon of America’s prairies. The Long-billed Curlew depends on Montana’s grasslands for breeding, and continues to decline across its range due to loss of this habitat to development of agriculture and infrastructure. With this decline, more research is needed to assess the health and conservation needs of the population. Montana Audubon needs your help surveying curlews in three locations: Mission Valley, Helena Valley, and Blackfoot Valley. Two survey windows will be available for citizen scientists to participate in this unique effort:

April 8th - May 7th, and May 8th - May 31st.

Interested in participating? 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



Survey Periods:

April 8th - May 7th

May 8th - May 31st



Save the Date to Celebrate!

By Flathead Land Trust



Photo by Brent Mitchell

Owen Sowerwine’s 50-year vision has finally been realized. After over half a century of deliberation, cooperation, and legislation, the Owen Sowerwine Area is finally protected! We’re thrilled to announce a **celebratory event on Wednesday, July 10** to mark the purchase of a conservation easement on the Area. This momentous achievement would not have been possible without the tireless efforts and collaboration of all our dedicated partners, including Montana Audubon, Flathead Audubon Society, Flathead Lakers, DNRC, and countless grantors and individuals! Please join us as we celebrate this victory for Flathead Valley’s cherished landscape and the lasting impact it will have on our community. **Stay tuned for further details!**

Flathead Audubon will send you a Flyby with more information on this Celebratory event as soon as we get more details from Flathead Land Trust. Hope to see you all there!

KIDS’ CORNER

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Hummingbird nectar recipe:

- 1 cup water
- 1/4 cup refined white sugar

Boil the water, stir in sugar and simmer for a minute or two.

Allow to cool completely to room temperature.

Tips

Clean feeder weekly using 4:1 water to white vinegar and rinse well. Cleaning more often in warm weather prevents mold growth.

Never use red-dyed food.

Only use white sugar. Organic sugar contains molasses and its iron content can be harmful to the birds.

Birdathon 2024

By Shannon Donaldson

Flathead Audubon’s 2024 Birdathon will be Sunday, June 23. Birdathon is a fun and friendly competition to see who can find and identify the most bird species in a day. Everyone is welcome to participate, from beginner to expert birders.

Last year, nearly 30 participants got together and went “birding for a caws”. The cause was raising money to help secure the conservation easement on Owen Sowerwine. The easement has now been purchased, so this year we are not trying to raise money with Birdathon – just doing it for fun. So there is no entry fee this year.

After a day of birding, we will meet at the Creston Pavilion from 6:30pm until sunset to tally our sightings, share stories, and enjoy a potluck dinner. Feel free to bring a potluck item and beverage. To sign up or join a team, contact Shannon Donaldson at shannon@flatheadaudubon.org.



Photo by JP Edge
Hungry Horse News

Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

Koori men
Courtesy of Wikipedia

*"And this our life exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."*

- William Shakespeare

There is a very old story told by the Koori People of southern Australia which may be as much as 50,000 years old. The Koori were likely there for that long.

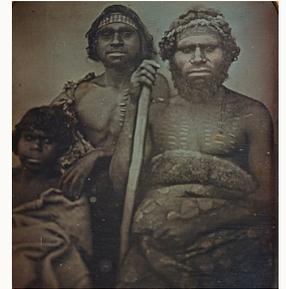
In the Dreamtime, the first of the Koori gathered around a great gum tree each day, to hear the voice of the Ancestor speak words of wisdom about how to live, how to care, and how to be. But as time went on, the people became more interested in the small things near to them -- their pleasures, and pains, and wrongs to each other -- and they one by one turned their backs on the great tree to pursue their busy obsessions with themselves, and their own importance. Gradually, a vast silence settled over all the land that they could see. The clouds didn't form. The rains didn't come. The tides were still. The birds did not sing. The land seemed to be dying. Groups of hunters and gatherers traveled far and wide, but it was the same everywhere.

The people became afraid and lonely. They remembered older times and went back to the great tree again and again, hoping to hear words that would ease their misery. Finally, when they became desperate in their pleadings. The Ancestor spoke.

"This is the last time you will hear my voice. But heed the sign that I will give to you, and you will be here, and happy, for the eons to come."

The great tree split open to the sky, and with a deafening roar, a giant river of light came down from the sky and into the yawning mouth of the tree. Then with a creaking moan, the tree closed again. All was silent.

The people then knew that they were to look for the voice of wisdom not among themselves, but in all the things of the natural world. They listened to the rocks, trees, grasses, insects, rivers, and sky, and learned, and lived until this very day.



This story, and hundreds like it from indigenous cultures everywhere on our planet, asks simple questions that beg for answers ... and will someday demand them. Do people need plants and animals to live? People are special, but do we think that people are more special than the animals and plants? Do we understand that life does not come from us, but to us, from nature, our life support system? What is the pathway to learning these things?

From my perspective, it's about paying attention. When I work with kids in the woods (and sometimes very large 'kids'), I place a premium on "being a woods detective". Through quiet observation, our attitude shifts from learning about nature to learning from nature.

"The hunter needs to prepare an attention which does not consist in riveting itself on the presumed, but consists precisely in not assuming anything, and in avoiding inattentiveness. It is a 'universal' attention, which does not inscribe itself on any point – and tries to be on all points."

- Jose' Ortega y Gasset

I'm convinced that our survival as a species – and the welfare of many other species – will depend on our ability to get over ourselves. We can start on that humility trajectory by listening to the voices from trees, and the sermons in stones.

Helping Hands Make Light Work By Darcy Thomas

The Osprey and Baling Twine Project got off to a good start this spring with the help of Michel De LeonTyler, Patty Archibald, Ann Halter, Dee Baginski, Ann Rhodes, Nancy Gresham, and myself. We printed brochures which we placed in various locations throughout the valley to remind people of the dangers of Osprey incorporating baling twine into their nests and the need to pick it up, published stories on the subject in the Daily Inter Lake and the Pileated Post, and made a poster to display at our local Earth Day celebration and other events. We hope to increase our efforts in the future and do all we can to get this information out. Please contact me if you want to help with this project.

2024 Flathead Audubon Society Elections

Each spring, FAS elects officers and directors for their dedication and leadership. Officers are elected for a two-year term, alternating between president and vice-president one year, and secretary and treasurer the next. This is the year for secretary and treasurer. Board directors are usually elected for a three-year term, and occasionally for shorter terms by choice of the candidate.

This year's election will be held at our May 13 general meeting. The slate of nominees below has been compiled by the FAS Elections Chair. You will see that three current directors whose terms are expiring have stepped up to run for re-election. Nominations will also be taken from the floor. There is no limit on the number of directors that can be on the Board, so please speak up if you are interested.

Secretary: Michele Tohtz. Michele was born in Pennsylvania and moved to Montana in 1983 with her husband, Joel. They lived in Missoula, Libby, and Deer Lodge before moving to Livingston, where they raised their two children. While in Livingston, Michele completed a Bachelor's degree in education at Montana State University and taught English at the local middle school.

Michele and Joel moved to the Flathead Valley 17 years ago, where she taught French, Spanish, and Reading at Kalispell Middle School. After retiring she was able to spend more time hiking, camping, and enjoying the outdoors. She reports that after just one trip to the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch, she became interested in birding, and began to attend Flathead Audubon meetings. Michele enjoys volunteering on the membership committee and lending a hand wherever needed. In addition to FAS, she is also an active member of Friends of Imaginelf Libraries where she coordinate the Homebound Program to deliver materials to patrons who are unable to travel to the library.

Treasurer: Rod Walette. Rod is running for re-election as Treasurer, having already served several terms in this office. He has also worked on several committees and was involved with projects including work activities at Owen Sowerwine. He is actively involved with the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch and Montana Audubon's curlew surveys at Camas Prairie. Rod completed a Bachelors' degree in accounting in 1990 and went on to complete a Masters' degree in Vocational Counseling in 1994. He worked as a Vocational Counselor in the Flathead Valley and Hawaii for 22 years.

Board Director 3-year term: Jake Bramante. Jake says that growing up in a log home in northwestern Montana, he frequently ran around with his brother in the Forest Service land adjacent to the family property. Armed with the blue, "Golden Guide to Birds of North America," he helped an area wildlife biologist with his section of the Libby area Christmas Bird Count. His fondest bird memory is of a Northern Pygmy Owl that flew right over and landed on a scrappy bush next to him. After a few years away at college in the desert, he came back to Montana with a renewed commitment to enjoy the woods. Shortly after, he spent one summer hiking all of Glacier's trails. Currently he makes his living by creating day hiking maps for national parks - but, he tells us, "I sneak out to bird as often as I can."

Board Director 3-year term: Kay Mitchell. Kay offers a good combination of historical knowledge and an understanding of current FAS activities and programs. She served for many years as newsletter editor, has been active from the beginning in Flathead Audubon's management of Owen Sowerwine, and currently serves as grant writer for the Great Fish Community Challenge and as financial reviewer. She has previously served as President of FAS and as a Board Director. Kay is a firm supporter of Flathead Audubon's programs and an advocate for land and habitat protection. She and her husband Brent operate a tree farm west of Kalispell.

Board Director 2-year term: Ronda Howell. Ronda has been on the FAS board for one year and is serving as the Programs Chair. She appreciates the many learning opportunities Flathead Audubon has made available to her and enjoys finding presenters for the meetings. Ronda has helped with the Birds of Prey Festival, Road Scholar Field Trips, and Owen Sowerwine work days. Some of the highlights of her birding year are kayaking Smith Lake, watching Church Slough waterfowl, Warbler Days at Tally Lake, and the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch. After graduating from Montana State University, Ronda taught elementary school in Montana and Texas for 35 years. She has four children and three grandchildren.

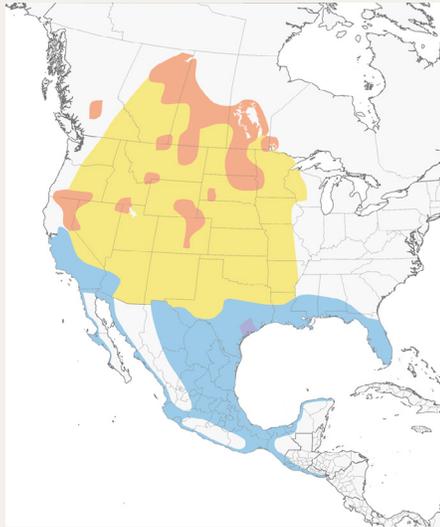
**COME AND
VOTE**



BIRD OF THE MONTH

(continued from page 2)

If you have yet to see an American White Pelican you may want to visit a likely hotspot this summer where you can add this bird to your life list. And, if you run across a tourist when you happen to see a pelican, point it out. Your tourist may just love seeing such a magnificent bird.



Birds of the World

References available upon request.

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