VOLUME 49, NUMBER 8

the Pileated Post

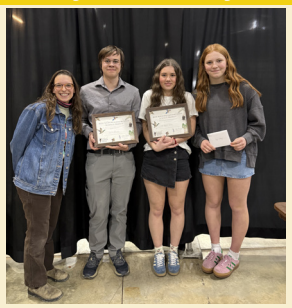
Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

Tundra Swan
Courtesy of Ducks Unlimited

Flathead County Science Fair Awards

By Jess Garby

On Thursday, March 6, I attended the Flathead County Science Fair. Per tradition, Flathead Audubon Society not only helped judge the entries, but also sponsored a special award open to students whose projects focused on some aspect of wildlife conservation.



Science Fair Awardees
Photo by Savannah Malosky

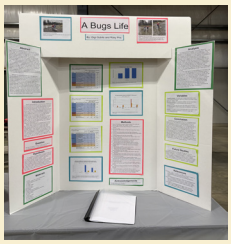


Photo by Jess Garby

It wasn't easy for me to decide who was most deserving, so I decided to present two awards! The first award went to high school students Gigi Gubits and Riley Pris for their project, titled "A Bug's Life." They examined how dissolved oxygen impacts biodiversity and abundance of macroinvertebrates in the Swan River. Gubits and Pris learned that macroinvertebrates thrive in areas with higher dissolved oxygen.

The second award was granted to high school student Colin Lincoln. Lincoln set up game cameras in areas of low, medium, and high human traffic to study how the varying levels influence deer activity. Based on his data analysis, he concluded deer exhibit more guarded behavior in areas of greater human activity.

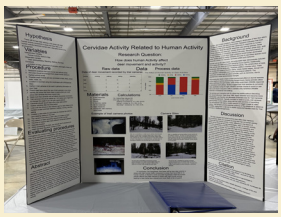


Photo by Jess Garby

Congratulations to our three Wildlife Conservation Award winners!

Save the Date: Family Forestry Expo, Saturday, May 10, 2025

The Family Forestry Expo offers hands-on exposure to the role forests play in our everyday lives. The yearly event takes place through the dedicated involvement of over 30 diverse organizations, such as local service clubs, forest industry organizations, government natural resource agencies, conservation groups, professional societies, and local businesses.

Come spend a few hours, or the whole day, exploring how the different parts of a forest make up a dynamic living system, and how people and all parts of the environment are dependent on one another.

APRIL AUDUBON CALENDAR

Saturday, March 29, 9am-noon. Owen Sowerwine Spring Migrant Field Trip. Call 406-250-8293 to sign up.

Monday, April 7, 5:30pm. FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Gateway Community Center, Room 26, US Hwy. 2 West, Kalispell. You may bring your dinner.

Saturday, April 12, 8am-1pm. Herron Park Hike & Early Spring Migrants Field Trip. See page 5.

Saturday, April 12, 10am-11am. Grand Opening: Reed's Slough Viewing Area, Corner of Manning and North Somers Road, Kalispell. Due to limited parking, RSVP is requested. See page 7 for details.

Monday, April 14, 7pm. Flathead Audubon General Meeting. Gateway Community Center, Room 26, US Hwy. 2 West, Kalispell. East side of Gateway Mall along Glenwood Dr. All are welcome. For program information and how to attend remotely, see page 3.

Saturday, April 19, 9am-3pm. Earth Day Expo, Flathead Valley Community College. See page 6.

Monday, April 21, 9am-noon. Spring Migrants at Smith Lake Field Trip. See page 5.

Sunday, April 27, 8am-11am. Sonny Boon Memorial Trail Field Trip. See page 5.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Rock Wren *Salpinctes obsoletus*

By Darcy Thomas

Photo by Danny Tipton

Rock Wren is an apropos name for a bird that lives in sparsely vegetated, arid, rocky canyons. These birds breed on talus slopes, scrublands, and dry washes, from desert to alpine in western North America. They are also found in nonrocky environments if there are crevices, nooks, crannies, and recesses available, and will even use concrete or stone buildings and other structures.

I saw my first Rock Wren in Utah at the Visitor Center of Dinosaur National Monument near Jensen. A metallic trilling call note that seemed to echo around the rocks caught my ear. Walking toward the sound, I scanned the barren rocky hillside. These pale grayish birds blend in well with the similar-colored landscapes they prefer, and it took a few moments to locate the bird. Or birds, as it turned out. They were a pair bouncing up and down on short legs. As I watched the birds I noticed what appeared to be a little pathway built of pebbles and small flat stones leading to a rocky crevice. Believe it or not, this “front porch” to the nest cavity was built by the Rock Wren pair.

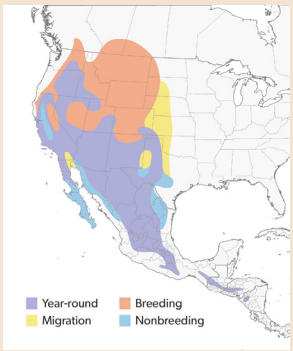
Socially monogamous, Rock Wrens pair up for the breeding season and may have up to three broods of up to five or six eggs each. Males guard the female and bring food to her, especially before egg-laying. The pair builds a loose cup nest of grass, weeds, and twigs, lining it with animal hair, spider silk, and feathers. The nest site is often reused from year to year.

Photo by Allison Shock

The foundation of the nest is made of pebbles and extends out from the nest to form a “front porch” or “sidewalk.” Some couples get quite elaborate with their porch by incorporating human-made objects and hundreds of stones that can be up to a foot in length. Scientists are uncertain of the function of this pathway. One theory speculates that the raised pathway decreases the size of the opening to the nest, protecting it against predators. It may also function to keep the nest dry.

An equally interesting fact about Rock Wrens is that they are not known to drink water, even in captivity. They glean water from the insects, spiders, and earthworms they extract from crevices with their fine bills as they hop along. They take prey caught in spiders’ webs and will supplement their diet with seeds and other plant matter.

Your best bet to find a pair of Rock Wrens is to hike into a dry, rocky area in the cool of morning during the nesting season, May through early September. Listen for the male singing as you scan stony perches. Likely hotspots near the Flathead include Cromwell Creek Road, SKQ Dam, and the CSKT Bison Range.



Birds of the World

Bears and Bird Feeders

By Darcy Thomas

By the time you read this article your bird feeders should be stored away until bears go into hibernation again in late fall. Living in bear country comes with a responsibility; taking bird feeders down is the proper thing to do. Bears get into trouble when enticed by bird seed and other attractants left outside, such as garbage and pet food. Once they discover a feeder or other attractants they are likely to return again and again. When bears get comfortable around people, conflicts can result that may cost them their lives. Bears that cannot be successfully relocated may be euthanized.

Photo by Jake Bramante

Removing bird feeders is also good for birds. It encourages them to go after insects, caterpillars, seeds, and other natural food sources. Taking down bird feeders as bears emerge from hibernation benefits our local wildlife, birds as well as bears.

APRIL PROGRAM

The Grandeur of Glacier National Park

Presented by Denny Olson, retired Flathead Audubon Conservation Educator

Photo by JP Edge

When people see Glacier National Park (GNP) for the first time the scenery -- the big, big picture -- is beyond obvious. They stand slack-jawed as "nature's stun gun" overwhelms their senses. The grandeur is all-encompassing. GNP speaks for itself with huge mountains, clear azure lakes, giant snowfields, active glaciers and what they carved – vertical, vertical, vertical. Glacier is one of the rare areas, and maybe the only national park, that has always had all of its original animal species, ones that have been there for thousands of years.

Join recently retired FAS Conservation Educator, Denny Olson, at the April 14th meeting as he shares fascinating Glacier stories. Olson has spent 27 years teaching Road Scholars, Glacier Institute students, and rangers in Glacier. He wrote the entire "Nature & Science" section on the GNP website, and he created a K-12 curricula of 88 activities about Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. Denny averages 250 to 300 miles of teaching on the trail every year. These experiences, and a dose of insatiable curiosity, have given him stories to share about bog and fen plants, tailed frogs, fire-adapted species, wolverines, grizzlies, and more. And he won't short-change us on Glacier's birds, with stories both oddball and spectacular. Glacier has 26 species of nesting birds in danger of disappearing this century, along with pikas, arctic plants, and endemic stoneflies. Denny will talk about what we can do to help prevent their disappearance.

APRIL MEETING FAS

Our meetings are available both in person and virtually. For those attending the meeting in person on Monday, April 14, we'll meet in Room 26 of the Gateway Community Center at 7pm. This room is located on the east side of the building along Glenwood Drive. Look for our banner outside.

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

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

Highlights from the March 3, 2025 Board of Directors Meeting

By Michele Tohtz, Secretary

- Rod reviewed the financial report, which was unanimously approved.
- Gael will continue to be our representative to MT Audubon through 2026.
- Shannon will complete the 2025 Great Fish application in April.
- Jess has had a busy month visiting schools and leading field trips.
- Flathead Land Trust is hosting a Grand Opening Celebration at Reed's Slough on April 12th at 10:00 AM.
- April and May field trips will highlight returning migrants.
- New FAS merchandise will be available in the near future.

Peeps from the President

By Darcy Thomas

Photo by Rob Thomas

Do you ever feel like you have so much to say, but no one will listen to you? There is nothing worse. Your ideas and opinions matter to us. The Flathead Audubon Board wants to hear from you. We are willing listeners. Do you like what we have been doing? Are there events you would like us to offer? Are there field trips you want us to plan to your favorite bird spot? Do you have suggestions for how we could be better? Shoot me an email at darcy@flatheadaudubon.org or call me at 406-407-8263.

On another note, our elections are just around the corner. Pam's term as Vice President is up in May, and she is not planning to run for another term. We really need this position filled, and I am excited to see whom I will be working with next. If you think you are the right person for the job please call me. I would love to hear from you.

On a personal note, I have another bit of news. Years ago I enjoyed taking bird photos. Then my 400mm Tamron lens broke and I got out of the habit of taking pictures. Linda, Christy, and other people send me bird photos. I love to see them, but found I was becoming green with envy. I wanted to take the same amazing pictures to enjoy later or share with other people. Deciding enough was enough, I went to Video Plus today. They sold me a nice, used Canon 100-400mm zoom lens I can carry while birdwatching.

I am going to Sedona for a couple of days, and will try to capture some nice bird photos. Photos are not only good for proving that you saw that amazing, rare bird, they are also a great tool to help you identify challenging birds. When you get home, you can take a closer look at your images for more details you missed in the field. I enjoy sharing photos with others, so, if I am successful, I will share my best bird photo with you next month.

Photo by Michell DeLeon Tyler

Nest Notes

By Jess Garby, Flathead Audubon Education Coordinator

Illustration by Jess Garby

Happy April, dear readers of *The Pileated Post*! The past weeks have been filled with school visits, ranging from Creston to Somers to West Valley. I have reached 261 students in four weeks just from these school visits alone.

Fifth graders are much hardier than I previously thought! Somers Middle School fifth graders braved single digit temperatures to join Linda Du Lac, Ronda Howell, and me for the first Great Backyard Bird Count of 2025. The students learned to identify Common Ravens by their iconic "row" flight style and Northern Flickers by their call and undulating flight. Thank you, Linda and Ronda, for sharing your love of birds with these students.

My wonderful group of 22 FVCC Senior Institute students has been thoroughly enjoying the six-week course I'm teaching, Birds of Northwest Montana. I have to admit, they have been a highlight for me too! Each Friday I speak for two hours about a variety of different bird topics, from silhouette identification, to bird songs and calls, and a deep dive into raptors of the Flathead Valley. To give the students a break from hearing me excitedly talk about birds, the course has also featured speakers from the local bird community. Our very own Audubon Board Member, Jake Bramante, shared how to find more birds in the Flathead Valley throughout each season. Stay tuned to hear about the final weeks of the course.

In mid-February I spent an entire Saturday talking about my favorite group of birds - raptors! Laura Katzman, from Flathead Land Trust, and Denver Holt, of the Owl Research Institute, joined me on an all-day tour in the Mission Valley. At the end of the morning tour I was excited to find a Ferruginous Hawk perfectly perched on a fence post. The gorgeous feathered-legged buteo sat patiently as we admired its beauty with awe. All the field trip participants were shocked to see the size difference between the Red-tailed Hawks we saw most of the day and the much larger Ferruginous Hawk.

I also recently had the honor of judging at both the Kalispell Montessori School Science Fair and the Flathead County Science Fair. Flathead Audubon presented special Wildlife Conservation Awards at the County Science Fair. See page 1 for more information.

In other news, I had a very fantastic bird sighting this month: a Long-eared Owl in my yard! It truly surprised Mica and me while on our evening dog walk. I should make a life-list for all the birds my now 9-month old puppy Mica has seen!

Photo by Jake Bramante

APRIL AND EARLY MAY 2025 FIELD TRIPS

HERRON PARK HIKE and EARLY SPRING MIGRANTS, SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 8am-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 includes an elevation gain of 750 feet. There will be sweeping views of the park looking out to the valley and down on Foys Lake. 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 MIGRANTS at SMITH LAKE, KILA, MONDAY, APRIL 21, 9am-noon.

Join Flathead Audubon 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.

SONNY BOON MEMORIAL TRAIL, SOMERS, SUNDAYS, April 27 and May 11, 8am-11 am.

Dan Casey will lead 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 arriving migrant landbirds reliant on the diverse riparian habitat. Indeed, 169 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 3 hours. Attendance is limited to 10 people. Please text Dan at (406) 270-5941 to reserve a spot on the attendance list and receive logistics information.

CELEBRATING SPRING MIGRATION at CRESTON FISH HATCHERY, SUNDAY, May 4, 8am-11am.

Join Karen Nichols and Kathy Ross as they explore the easily accessible Hatchery trails in search of avian migrants--warblers, vireos, thrush, Osprey, and many others--returning to breed in our beautiful valley. Our favorite "locals," such as dippers, nuthatches, and chickadees, will join the spring symphony! Also learn about the native flora (nature's bird food), which is essential for parent birds as they work to feed their chicks! We will also explore a new area of the Hatchery trail system. Field trip is limited to 12 participants. For meeting place, questions, and to sign up, contact Kathy at mtkat67@gmail.com or leave a message at (406) 837-3837.

SPRING BROOK RANCH, THURSDAY, May 8, 8am-noon.

Join field trip leaders, Karen Nichols and Kathy Ross, and landowner Jim Watson for a morning of exploration of the diverse plant and bird habitat at the Spring Brook Ranch southwest of Kalispell. We will focus on both birds and plants as we wander through the Birch Creek riparian habitat, rich with willow, aspen, western larch, and Engelmann spruce. We will also explore the rolling ponderosa pine and Douglas fir uplands. Landowners Jim Watson and Carol Bibler manage their large ranch with a special focus on native plants, birds, and wildlife, and will talk about their conservation philosophy. We will be walking 2-3 miles, mostly off-trail in wetlands and rolling hills. Please come prepared with binoculars, hiking boots, clothing layers, rain gear, and drinking water. Space is limited. Contact Karen Nichols at (406) 261- 6230 or knichols.flathead@gmail.com to sign up.

Warbler Days at Tally Lake – June 2025

By Ronda Howell

Flathead Audubon's annual Warbler Days at Tally Lake will be held this year from Friday, June 6, through Sunday, June 8. 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.

Photo by Mike Hausler

The campground's group pavilion will be our central gathering place. It provides cover from rainy weather and a fire ring for warmth, equipped with cooking grates. We will have an optional potluck meal at the pavilion Saturday evening. Please bring firewood, if you have it, and chairs for sitting around the fire. There is plenty of space for tents and campers for those who want to spend the nights. Camping and day use will be FREE, courtesy of Flathead Audubon.

Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – Feb/Mar 2025

See also: https://ebird.org/region/US-MT-029?yr=all.

Late February highlights included continuing **Yellow-headed Blackbird** and **Common Grackle** in Creston (Craig H.). Waterfowl and gulls often provide the best birding opportunities in March, and this year is no exception. Typical of the season, up to four **Eurasian Wigeon** were at Church Slough Mar. 2-11 (Dan C.), including an apparent pair; females are often hard to pick out of the flocks. **Tundra Swan** and **Greater Scaup** numbers increased steadily at valley wetlands throughout early March. A few **Cackling Geese** could be found among the growing flocks of **Canada Geese**, the most recent being four seen at Apgar Mar. 12 (Dan L.). The first **Snow Geese** of the season included two in the West Valley Mar. 11 (Patrick B.), and a flock of 65 over Foothills Road Mar. 12 (Pam W.). A second-year **Great Black-backed Gull** at the Flathead County landfill Mar. 1-4 (Dan C.) was almost certainly the same bird seen in Coeur d'Alene, ID, a week earlier. It may also be the same bird seen in Helena in December 2024. It was the first local record, and just the sixth for MT. At least two adult **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were at the landfill Mar. 1 (Dan C.) and at the Flathead Lake WPA, the first of which was seen from Somers Beach SP, Feb. 27 (Elliott R.). A **Yellow-billed Loon** on Lake McDonald Mar. 6-11 (Steve G.) may have been the same bird seen on the Glacier CBC in December. There may have been a second bird there as well. Two **Spotted Towhees** at Wayfarer's SP Mar. 10 (Zackary S.) were a bit early. Single **White-throated Sparrows** were at Lawrence Park Feb. 28 (Karen N.) and in Columbia Falls Mar. 11 (Shannon D.). The first (3) **Western Bluebirds** were seen in the West Valley Mar. 1 (Craig H.).

What to Expect - Late March – Early April

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. **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Greater Scaup**, **Tundra** and **Trumpeter Swans**, and **Northern Pintails** are still present in good numbers. They are joined by increasing numbers of **Snow Geese, Northern Shovelers**, and more. **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 begin staking out their marsh territories, in some cases displacing **Red-winged Blackbirds** from prime sites. The first **hummingbirds** may arrive before mid-April.

Earth Day Expo at Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC)

By Jess Garby

Flathead Audubon Society's Jess Garby and the Education Team will be participating in Earth Day Expo at FVCC on April 19 from 9am to 3pm. The theme is "Healthy Planet, Healthy Community." The team will share information on the importance of birds and habitat conservation from its table in the Auditorium. Bird walks throughout campus and the surrounding area will also be offered. We hope to see you there!

MAY POTLUCK AND SILENT AUCTION COMING SOON MONDAY, MAY 12

Our favorite meeting of the year, the Flathead Audubon May Potluck and Silent Auction, is just around the corner! On Monday, May 12, doors will open at 5pm and dinner starts at 6pm. Come prepared to bid on a wonderful assortment of items available for auction, including bird books, outdoor gear, artwork, live bedding plants, homemade baked goodies, bird houses, feeders, and more.

The Silent Auction is the perfect time to recycle all the valuable "stuff" you'd like to pass along to others. Bring your Silent Auction donations between 5 and 6pm so they can be set out for everyone to bid on. Please be prepared to take home any items that do not receive a bid.

We look forward to seeing you!

Mission Valley Raptor Field Trip Report

By Linda Du Lac

Photo by Kathy Ross

In spite of threats of inclement weather, 10 participants joined Dan Stoken on February 23 to look for raptors and other birds in the Mission Valley. We were rewarded with an abundance of birds; 26 different species and 1,902 individuals were counted. Communication between our four cars was facilitated by use of Audubon walkie talkies. Frequent stops were made as we travelled slowly along the back roads west of Pablo and Ronan. Spotting scopes were quickly set up at most stops. Dan called out what he was seeing while Braydon recorded the observations in eBird. Of the raptors, Red-tailed Hawks were the most abundant with numerous different color variations observed. Dan explained his basis of identification — a wonderful learning experience. Memorable birds seen included four Prairie Falcons, one Ferruginous Hawk, several Horned Larks, nesting Great Horned Owls, Northern Shrikes, and two Short-eared Owls in flight display. In addition to birds, we were thrilled to see a red fox on top of a stack of hay bales.

Great-horned Owl
Photo by Karen Nichols

Reed's Slough Wildlife Area Grand Opening

You are invited to celebrate the grand opening of the new Reed's Slough Wildlife Viewing Area! Please join us Saturday, April 12, from 10 to 11am. Due to limited parking, we ask you to RSVP at info@flatheadlandtrust.org or (406) 752-8293.

The wildlife viewing area, soon to be open to the public, is situated on privately owned land. Through a collaborative effort with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, this space has been designated for public enjoyment and wildlife observation. It lies within a larger property protected by a conservation easement held by Flathead Land Trust. The conserved area serves as a vital habitat for migratory waterfowl within the Flathead Valley.

We would be delighted if you would join us for a short program with speakers from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Flathead River to Lake Initiative, Flathead Audubon, Flathead Land Trust, and Flathead Wildlife. Timing should be ideal for observing migrating birds, with Flathead Audubon providing expert birders and spotting scopes to enhance the viewing experience.

We are grateful for the many people and organizations that made this project possible. Special thanks to the Danford family, who graciously allowed the public viewing area to be created on their property, and to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, who funded and constructed the viewing area. The conservation easement was funded by the North American Wetland Conservation Act, Flathead River to Lake Initiative, Flathead Audubon, Flathead Wildlife, Cinnabar Foundation, FWP Wildlife Mitigation Program, and a donation from the Danford family.

Thank You to the Late Carol Daly and to Brent Mitchell

By Darcy Thomas

In 1995 Carol Daly launched the nonprofit Flathead Economic Policy Center (FEPC) and acted as its Executive Director until 2023, the year she passed away. The Center collaborated with the Forest Service, Native American communities, the Pinchot Institute, Western Governors Association, and many other entities to address forest stewardship and wildfire management. After Carol's passing the Center was dissolved and board members were able to suggest other nonprofits they would like the remaining monies to go to. Brent Mitchell, a previous FEPC board member, suggested some go to the Flathead Audubon Society. In March 2025 Flathead Audubon received a generous gift from FEPC to use for our education program. We were honored to receive this contribution for our conservation efforts on behalf of birds and will spend the money wisely. Thanks to Carol, Brent, and the FEPC Board for this generous gift.

Conservation Corner: Birds as Roommates

By Carole Jorgensen

Birds are wonderful until they become roommates. Birds are starting to look for good neighborhoods where they can show off for mates and build nests. If you, like me, have had a territorial bird's nest over your door so you had to wear a helmet and carry a broom to access your home, or had to listen to the percussive "music" of a woodpecker drilling into your expensive siding, keep reading.

Barn Swallows
Courtesy of All About Birds

Consider downgrading the appeal of your home by keeping food and water well away from your house. Birds like high places where they can watch for predators. Look for ledges, openings, and overhangs that can be sealed, plugged, or screened before birds find them. Chimney caps, wire, screens, and roof spikes can be effective items. However, birds are very creative and like to pull out your unsecured blocking material, which they may actually incorporate into their nests. Some roofing spikes are sized to deter large birds, but are perfect supports for small bird nests.

Deterrents, such as plastic owls, reflective material, or motion sensor lights, can work temporarily, but birds quickly learn they aren't threats, so plan to move them weekly. Scents, such as peppermint, can deter birds (and rodents). Wild Bird World recommends soaking cotton balls in a mix of seven drops each of peppermint and lemon oil in 1/4 cup of vinegar and 1/4 cup of water and placing them in potential nesting areas. There are also bird sticky repellent gels, which are non-toxic and last longer than home remedies.

Woodpeckers drum into noisy substrates to show their prowess and deter predators. Siding, metal, and utility poles can serve as excellent drumming platforms. The noise (and damage) can drive you crazy. Motion deterrents can discourage woodpeckers when hung by potential drumming sites. These can be constructed out of windchimes, recycled spoons, strips of foil, or old CDs. Even a cheap, recycled plastic bottle can be repurposed into an effective bird deterrent whirlygig: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXrNGg7DIOU.

Ideally, you can plant more appropriate native trees and shrubs a bit away from your structure to provide a more inviting neighborhood for birds. If all else fails, start charging them rent.

Osprey and Baling Twine: Deadly Consequences

Information Provided by the Owl Research Institute

When baling twine is left in a field or pasture, Osprey are likely to pick it up and use it as nesting material. This can have devastating consequences for the birds. Adult Osprey tangled in baling twine can become trapped in their nest and unable to fly (or stuck dangling from the nest), or can slowly lose toes—or a leg—due to cut-off circulation. When chicks get entangled they are less able to move around in the nest, which means they are less able to get to food their parents bring back and can slowly be outcompeted by their siblings and starve. If baling twine gets wrapped tight around a leg or wing, chicks can lose limbs or toes, rendering them unable to hunt.

Photo courtesy of ORI

You can help by cleaning up baling twine on your property, or when you come across it laying around. Store loose twine in closed plastic containers or inside buildings, out of the reach of birds of prey until you can dispose of it. Not only does recycling or proper disposal of baling twine help Osprey and other wildlife; it also benefits ranchers, farmers, and others who have livestock or horses. Baling twine typically ends up in a landfill, piles up on a landowner's property (where it can gum up machinery or be eaten by livestock and cattle, causing serious digestive issues or death), or is burned (which is unsafe, due to the toxic fumes emitted).

Keeping the areas around our streams, rivers, and lakes clean and free of human trash and waste helps not only Osprey and the fish they rely on, but all the other wildlife that depend on these habitats. Plus, more pristine landscapes are much nicer for human recreation and sustainability!

Use the following hyperlink to access additional information about Osprey: https://issuu.com/northwesternenergy/docs/osprey_book_pages_issuu.

If you are reading the paper Post, please go to https://flatheadaudubon.org/conservation/osprey-and-baling-twine-deadly-consequences/.

Long-billed Curlew Surveys Are Back!

By Lauren Smith, MT Audubon Communications Specialist

The warm and sunny days of Spring are fast approaching, and with them come the familiar "cur-leeee" call of the Long-billed Curlew, and Montana Audubon's citizen science surveys of these charismatic shorebirds.

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, meaning we need your help surveying across the Mission, Helena, and Blackfoot Valleys. Survey efforts for Long-billed Curlew began in 2012, and since then these surveys have not only tracked curlews, but have also tracked land-use changes in these three valleys.

The surveys consist of 10 predetermined survey points along a driving (or biking, if you're feeling adventurous) route. Each point requires five minutes of looking and listening for Long-billed Curlews and other nearby birds.

Two survey windows are available for citizen scientists to participate in this unique effort: April 8 - May 7 and May 8 - May 31. Virtual training for the surveys will take place on March 25 at 7pm over Zoom, where we will go over the species background, identification, survey protocol, and data collection, along with any questions! The training will be recorded and available on the Montana Audubon YouTube page.

Interested in participating? Fill out our survey interest form at our citizen science website https://montanabirdsurveys.weebly.com/long-billed-curlew.html. Visit this site for more information, or email questions to Gwynne at gwynne@mtaudubon.org.

Montana Legislative Update (March 12, 2025)

By Peter Dudley, Montana Audubon Policy & Conservation Ranching Specialist

Thank you to everyone fighting for clean air, clean water, public lands, and healthy, abundant wildlife. We're now past the halfway point, and are taking the transmittal break to re-collect ourselves so we can come out swinging next week.

While our focus is split across a number of issues, many conservation organizations are squarely focused on protecting the money allocated towards the Habitat Montana program. SB 307 would strip $20 million from Habitat Montana and $12.6 million from state parks, trails, and non-game wildlife funding over the next two years. Water quality and quantity will also be significantly impacted by this session, with three bills specifically proposing new carve outs for exempt wells, and several attacking Montana's nutrient standards. As in 2023, the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) is again under attack. This time more bills will tie the hands of the state and the Department of Environmental Quality to track greenhouse gases and act on their findings. One in particular, HB 285, seeks to make MEPA a "procedural" law with no teeth. And, as always, a few legislators have set their sights on wolves.

It's easy to get bogged down by these issues, but we also have several great bills to highlight. HB 477, sponsored by Rep. Marler, is a slow phase-out of styrofoam single-use containers over several years. The bill received support from composters, businesses that create and sell compostable containers, conservation organizations, and members of the public. It passed out of committee with only two nays and will be on the floor soon. Finally, Rep. France's HB 372 and Rep. Parry's HB 146 would raise license fees, primarily for out-of-staters, on upland game birds, cranes, and swans, allocating millions in funding to grassland and wetland habitat restoration programs.

For the most recent legislative news, read Montana Audubon's Action Alert emails on our website: https://mtaudubon.org/conservation-policy/action-alert/.

UPCOMING ELECTIONS

Flathead Audubon Society Board elections are coming soon! Nominations for President, Vice President, and several Board of Director positions will take place during the May Potluck and Silent Auction on May 12 (see page 6 for more information).

Although we get a lot of work done, everyone who serves says the work is fulfilling and we have a lot of fun in the process. We welcome new people to join us in our efforts to conserve birds. If you would like to run for a position or nominate someone please contact Bob Lee at 406-270-0371 or rml3@centurytel.net.

Flathead Audubon History Corner: Lex Blood Remembered

By Ben Long

Lex Blood, a lion of the Montana conservation community and one of the founders of Flathead Audubon Society (FAS), died in February at age 91. He is survived by his wife, Judith, and his daughter, Lisa Blood Flowers, both of Kalispell; and three sons that live out of the area, Tom, Peter, and Nathanial.

Photo by Judith Pressmar

A geologist by training, Lex received his doctorate in geology in 1968. After an international career in mining, Lex moved to the Flathead Valley in the mid-1970s to try his hand at cattle ranching. Soon after, he became alarmed about a proposal to build a coal mine at Cabin Creek upstream from Glacier National Park in the headwaters of the North Fork. In response, he helped create the Flathead Coalition, which over several decades developed binational plans that protected, rather than developed, the North Fork on both sides of the US-Canadian border. This marked the beginning of a leadership role in environmental education and conservation that continued for 50 years.

Lex Blood was a founding member of the Flathead Audubon Society in 1977. He also helped found Glacier Institute, Montana Environmental Information Center, Glacier Park Associates, Montana Environmental Education Association, Crown of the Continent Ecosystem Education Consortium, and the Flathead Forestry Collaborative Project, all while maintaining a vibrant teaching career in earth sciences and geography at Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC). At FVCC he was known for his enthusiastic lectures and adventurous field trips that traversed much of western North America. Lex lectured on the wonders of Montana geography wherever he happened to be -- in the classroom, behind the wheel of field trip vans, in the stern of a canoe, or from a lofty spot on any Glacier Park trail.

Although admittedly more interested in rocks than birds, Lex Blood was integral to the founding and growth of FAS's education program. In 2004, while serving as director of a local philanthropy called the Sustainability Fund, he granted FAS the seed money for a stipend to pay Sonja Hartman as FAS Community Naturalist. Building on that success, the Sustainability Fund continued to increase educational grants that FAS was able to leverage into more funding for educators and educational materials. This relationship continued until about 2012, when the FAS education program was able to stand on its own without the Sustainability Fund. Today the program regularly connects with thousands of students, both young and old, every year.

In 2006, FAS awarded Lex its Lifetime Conservation Achievement Recognition for his outstanding contributions to conservation and place-based education in the Flathead and across Montana, and in recognition of his crucial early support of Flathead Audubon's Conservation Education Program.

Lex supported a host of environmental, peace, human rights, and other issues. In retirement he continued to aid many organizations through the Sustainability Fund and the Non-Profit Development Partnership. Working hand-in-hand with his wife, Judith, Lex lent his decades of geological expertise to Montana Land Reliance, Flathead Land Trust, and the Nature Conservancy of Montana, conducting mineral analyses for conservation easements across Montana. He was also a valued mentor to many young professionals. Throughout his life he shared his vast knowledge of Montana geology and landscape forces with us all, shaping our understanding of where we live.

"He was sort of like the air you breathe," conservationist Steve Thompson, of Whitefish, recently recalled. "Any time you look out the window and see the mountains and the lakes and you remember that this is still a special place, you can thank Lex Blood for that."

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.

FAS Endowment Fund

Are you estate planning, looking to leave a legacy, or just want to make a contribution towards conservation? FAS has a permanent endowment fund through the Whitefish Community Foundation. Donating to the endowment fund will qualify you for part or all of the Montana Qualified Endowment Credit. For more information, contact Alan Davis at the Whitefish Community Foundation or visit their website at whitefishcommunityfoundation.org.

A SPECIAL GIFT is a way to honor or commemorate someone special to you by supporting Flathead Audubon's local projects in their name. Special gifts are acknowledged in this space each month with the name of the donor and the person honored.

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