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# Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

VOLUME 49, NUMBER 9



Lapland Longspur  
Photo by Tom Wilberding

## Peeps from the President

By Darcy Thomas

Because there is much in this world to concern us, we need to take time to find the beauty and good around us. As my first term serving as Flathead Audubon President comes to an end, I want to share what I have found to be both beautiful and good.



Photo by Rob Thomas

Of course, birds win the prize for being beautiful. Such flashing color! Such detail in the feathers! I could gaze at a Mallard for hours, just looking at the beautiful feathers! Yet, there is so much more.

Seeing friends who are new to birding increase their skills, as they learn more and more about birds, has been a thing of beauty. They are growing into decent birders and now know what they are seeing. Their gift of discovery has been wonderful to watch. Driving along Flathead Lake has, and always will, taken my breath away, with its mesmerizing waters reflecting the mood of the sky, from vibrant blue to green, turquoise, and steely gray. And of course, Spring blooms and all the twitterpation amongst the birds around us is beautiful. It really makes me smile when I see their breeding displays.

Flathead Audubon has seen a lot of good things happen

over the past two years, such as Jess taking off as our Education Coordinator with gusto! Everyone around her feels her good energy, and she has proven how much she has to offer. We have received some wonderful grants and donations, enabling us to expand our education program, and even have an office space. After years of effort, a conservation easement was placed on the Owen Sowerwine area, protecting bird habitat for the future. That was undeniably a good thing.

During my first term Flathead Audubon donated and installed a bench at Tally Lake. We also began making and selling merchandise, and finding other ways to make ourselves more visible in the community. We have had great success filling vacant spots on our committees. And we are welcoming new members!

I would love to continue as FAS President for a second term, if you will have me. I have found great purpose and joy in doing this job. It has been my honor, in fact.

I am hoping one more beautiful, good thing will come my way, a special person to fill the FAS Vice President position. That would be the most beautiful gift of all!

## MAY & SUMMER AUDUBON CALENDAR



**Sunday, May 4, 8am-11am.** Spring Migration at Creston Fish Hatchery Field Trip. See page 5.

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

**Thursday, May 8, 8am-noon.** Spring Brook Ranch Field Trip. See page 5.

**Saturday, May 10, 9am-approx 11am.** Migratory Bird Day. Swan Lake Refuge. See page 8.

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

**Monday, May 12, 5pm-8pm.** Flathead Audubon May Potluck and Silent Auction. Gateway Community Center, Room 26 (east side of the building along Glenwood Drive). See page 4.

**Tuesday, May 13, 6:30am-approx 3pm.** Beauties of the Bison Range Field Trip. See page 5.

**Wednesday, May 21, 8am-10am.** Wayfarers State Park Birds & Native Plants Field Trip. See page 5.

**Saturday, May 24, 7am-12pm.** Birds of Glacier Park, Oxbow to Fish Creek Field Trip. See page 6.

**Tuesday, May 27, 8am-noon.** Going-To-The-Sun Road Bike and Bird Field Trip. See page 6.

**Friday, June 6 to Sunday, June 8.** Warbler Days at Tally Lake. See page 10.

**Monday, June 16, 7:30am-1pm.** Neotropical Migrants of Lower Firebrand Pass Trail Field Trip. See page 6.

**Fridays, Aug 8 and Sept 12, 8:30pm-9:30pm.** A Swift Night Out Field Trips. See page 6.

# WILDLIFE OF THE MONTH

## Give Squirrels Some Loving

By Linda Hunt



American Red Squirrel  
Courtesy of Wikipedia

As I scattered food for the birds, an American red squirrel scampered over, eager to join the feast. The squirrel grabbed a nut and ran into the woods to bury it. A well-worn path existed from the squirrel's frequent trips. Another squirrel took nuts off the deck and

stored them in the platform birdfeeder! A third squirrel transformed the covered barbecue grill into a high-end condo. One room was his bedroom, with a nest made of grass and parts of our doormat. He stored nuts in his kitchen. At the far end was his dining room, where he ate.

These observations piqued my curiosity and made me decide to study squirrels. Here's what I learned. Squirrels are intelligent, persistent, and agile. Surprisingly, peanuts are not the best food to share with squirrels, and macadamia nuts can be toxic to them. It is essential to research the safety of each type of nut before feeding them to squirrels. No salt, of course!

To keep squirrels out of your home, take the following precautions.

- Inspect your home for any possible entrances.
- Screen all attic vents on the inside with hardware mesh.
- Install chimney, stove pipe, and vent pipe caps.
- Fill foundation cracks; block entrances to crawl spaces.
- Install gutter guards.
- Trim branches hanging over buildings.

If a squirrel falls down a chimney or stove pipe and can't get out, lower a braided rope down to the bottom and leave it. Squirrels will usually climb up the rope and be out within a few hours.

Let's meet some of the squirrels living in Montana.

American Red Squirrels (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) experience high mortality during their first year, as only about 20 percent of babies survive. They have an average lifespan of only 2.3 years, with a maximum of eight years. Predators include bobcats, coyotes, hawks, owls, foxes, American martens, and Canadian lynxes.

The American red squirrel is widespread across western Montana and easy to identify compared to other squirrel species. As the name suggests, it has a reddish color on top and white belly, making it easy to distinguish.

Northern Flying Squirrels (*Glaucomys sabrinus*) on average live less than 4 years. Owls are their main predator, which makes sense since both species are nocturnal. Their huge black eyes help them see in darkness. Unlike other squirrels, northern flying squirrels don't gather and store food for winter. Instead, when temperatures drop, they huddle together to help each other stay warm. It is rare to find these squirrels on the ground, as they are incredibly clumsy walkers. They spend their time in the tops of trees, gliding from branch to branch. The average length of their glides is between 16 and 82 feet!

Fox Squirrels (*Sciurus niger*) have been moving west, some naturally and others with human help. Many hitched train rides as stowaways. A physician who moved to Missoula in the 1960s brought his pet squirrels. He let them run around his yard, and because fox squirrels produce two litters of two to three young each year, it didn't take long for a thriving population to develop in Missoula.



Fox Squirrel  
Photo by Margaret King

Eastern Gray Squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) were introduced to Montana in the early 1900s. They spread rapidly and are now considered invasive. Ecologically, they compete with native species for food and habitat. Additionally, they are carriers of diseases that can affect both wildlife and humans.

Native squirrels in Montana contribute to nutrient cycling by dispersing seeds and burying nuts for winter. Their habits help with forest regeneration and provide food for other animals. They play a vital role in the ecosystem. The next time you see a squirrel give them some love for the role they play in our environment, and encourage children to appreciate them for their strong work ethic.



# MAY PROGRAM

## Take Action Now: Restore Habitat in Your Garden, One Plant at a Time

Presented by Kathy Ross



Bitterroot Illustration  
By Mary Eaton

Overwhelmed by the big picture? Think locally! Join Kathy Ross at our May 12 meeting to learn how you can reverse one of the biggest threats birds face, habitat loss, by planting a bird-friendly garden. Native plant gardens provide food and shelter for birds and pollinators, while also conserving water and eliminating the need for fertilizers and pesticides. Kathy will offer helpful advice on how to enhance your garden to support birds throughout the year. This will include suggestions for early spring pollen and nectar sources, as well as how to help fuel fall migration.



Photo by Casey Kreider  
Courtesy of Daily Inter Lake

Kathy is a native habitat advocate, landscape consultant, and volunteer naturalist. For over 30 years she has been helping gardeners weave a landscape where birds and pollinators can thrive. One of her favorite quotes encapsulates her message: "Gardeners are on the forefront of sowing hope by planting native plants. Gardens are not just a place of pretty bright plants and bushes. It is a living, breathing ecosystem that is feeding and supporting hundreds of species of wildlife above and below the ground." Kristen Currin, Author and Native Plant Ecologist.

## MAY MEETING FAS

May's meeting will be held on Monday, May 12, in Room 26 of the Gateway Community Center. Doors open at 5pm. The room is located on the east side of the building along Glenwood Drive. Look for our banner outside.

The meeting will include a potluck dinner and silent auction, in addition to the presentation. We will be unable to offer a virtual presentation for this meeting because of the variety of events taking place. See page 4 for more information.

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

## Highlights from the April 7, 2025 Board of Directors Meeting

By Michele Tohtz, Secretary

- ✚ Rod reviewed the current financial report, which was passed and approved by the Board.
- ✚ FAS received the Montana Audubon Wildlife Fund Grant. These funds will be used for the Hawk Watch.
- ✚ Jessie Walthers, Flathead Conservation District, will provide two opportunities for urban birding with help from FAS.
- ✚ Jess continues to connect with hundreds of students and to establish new relationships with additional organizations involved in conservation education.
- ✚ New hats, mugs, and notecards will be available at upcoming meetings.

## Thanks to "Bird of the Month" Authors

By Molly Miller

The Pileated Post is grateful to those birders who contributed their time and talent to writing "Bird of the Month" articles this year: Darcy Thomas, Beth Gardner, and Linda Hunt. The nine articles gave readers in-depth looks at backyard favorites and more uncommon species. If you would like to contribute an article next year, contact [bom@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:bom@flatheadaudubon.org).

# MAY POTLUCK and SILENT AUCTION

Join us **MONDAY, MAY 12, 5pm to 8pm** for our annual Potluck and Silent Auction, one of our favorite events of the year! We enjoy seeing you, sharing food together, and visiting before the summer break.

We are unable to offer a virtual presentation for this meeting because of the variety of events taking place. For those unable to attend the meeting in person, please accept our apologies for this inconvenience.

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. And consider bringing your own items for auction when the doors open at 5pm. This will be a perfect opportunity to pass along items you no longer need that could be someone else's treasure! (Be prepared to take home any items of yours that do not receive a bid.)

The event will be held at the Gateway Community Center, Kalispell, Room 26 (located on the east side of building along Glenwood Drive). Doors open at 5pm for set-up, laying out potluck dishes, and prepping/viewing items for Silent Auction. The potluck dinner starts at 6pm. Please bring your own plates, utensils, and cups. There is no way to wash dishes, so bring a sack to take them home. The meeting and presentation will begin at 7pm.

Kathy Ross will give a presentation on Native Plants and an election will be held for Officers and Board Members.

Be sure to arrive early enough to look over and bid on silent auction items!



Photo by Michell DeLeon Tyler

## Nest Notes

By Jess Garby, Flathead Audubon Education Coordinator



It's been a very bittersweet month for me, as I wrapped up teaching the Birds of Northwest Montana FVCC Senior Institute class. The final three classes were extraordinary. Rob Domenech, the Founder of Raptor View Research

through in-classroom programming and field trips. Some highlights included partnering with Flathead Land Trust to lead students from Two Eagles River school on a raptor-focused field trip in Pablo and teaching Hedges Elementary first and second-grade students about the fun traits and behaviors birds have. Watching the students' eyes light up as they learned about bird characteristics was incredibly rewarding.

Institute, and I co-presented a lecture on identifying raptors found here in the Flathead Valley, teaching the students the many nuances of in-flight identification. This was followed by local native plant expert Kathy Ross, who provided a plethora of planting resources, as well as native milkweed seeds for students to plant at home. For our final class we ventured to Church Slough, where Ronda Howell, Linda Du Lac, and I gave one final lesson on waterfowl identification. I was so excited to see my students with binoculars up to their eyes, experiencing the beauty of birds we spent weeks discussing. While there, I decided to give my students one last quiz: use the terminology and skills taught in class to describe to me what species they were observing through the spotting scope. Most of them excelled at this, and they were as proud of themselves as I was! To my surprise, a handful of my students have since joined FAS on multiple field trips. As we caravanned back to FVCC campus, I reflected on the past six weeks with gratitude and looked forward to teaching at FVCC again next spring.

I'm excited to share I've recently begun teaching at Columbia Falls and Whitefish schools that are new to Flathead Audubon's education outreach program. In early April, I had the honor of speaking to a Field Ecology class based out of Columbia Falls High School about different methods of studying birds in the field. The following week, I took 20 of those students to Owen Sowerwine for an immersive four-hour field day, where we collected information on the different habitats and performed four different point counts. Each student found something they love about birds, whether it was practicing their turkey calls for hunting season, or admiring the Northern Flickers calling around us.

I look forward to reporting back again in September. Until then, Happy Birding!



Hedges Elementary students  
Photo by Cara Rathke

Flathead Audubon's K-12 programming blossomed this month, as we reached 240 students and six schools

**MAY AND SUMMER 2025 FIELD TRIPS****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, including warblers, vireos, thrushes, Ospreys, 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](mailto: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](mailto:knichols.flathead@gmail.com) to sign up.

**SONNY BOON MEMORIAL TRAIL, SOMERS, SUNDAY, May 11, 8am-11am.**

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 arriving migrant landbirds reliant on the diverse riparian habitat. Indeed, 169 species have been reported at this eBird hotspot (<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1390990>). This round-trip walk is 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 and receive meeting information.

**BEAUTIES of the BISON RANGE, MOIESE, TUESDAY, May 13, 6:30am-approx. 3pm.**

Join Flathead Audubon field trip leader Darcy Thomas for a day of bird and wildlife watching at the Bison Range in the Mission Valley. The Bison Range is home to many birds, such as Bald and Golden Eagle, Lewis's Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Willow Flycatcher, Lazuli Bunting, and Grasshopper Sparrow. There is also wonderful native vegetation and many animals, including bison, white-tail and mule deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, coyote, and bear.

We will drive over Red Sleep Mountain, stopping to hike along the Bitterroot Trail, 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.

We will meet in Polson to begin the trip, which is limited to four cars and a maximum of 15 participants. Passengers are asked to pay drivers \$15 for mileage and the required day pass, which is \$20 for the day (\$60 for the season). 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 406-407-8263 or [darcy@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:darcy@flatheadaudubon.org).

**WAYFARERS STATE PARK BIRDS & NATIVE PLANTS, BIGFORK, WEDNESDAY, May 21, 8am-10am or WEDNESDAY, June 4, 7:30am-9:30am.**

Join local naturalist Kathy Ross in exploring the rich biodiversity that spring at Wayfarers has to offer. Experience a leisurely spring flower and bird walk, as we learn about the native plants and birds that thrive in this east shore native habitat of Flathead Lake. See and hear Spotted Towhees and Chipping Sparrows foraging in the lupine/ninebark understory, while Bald Eagles, Merlin, and Osprey soar overhead. Lazuli Bunting can be easily viewed, singing from chokecherry branches. Dress for variable spring weather conditions. Each walk is limited to 6 participants. For meeting information and to sign up, contact Kathy at 406-837-3837. **Special note:** if you are unable to walk the trails, we are happy to arrange a meeting at another time to share spring birds and blooms in Wayfarers Park with you. Leave a message with your phone and contact information at the above phone number.

## MAY AND SUMMER 2025 FIELD TRIPS

(continued)

### BIRDS OF GLACIER PARK--OXBOW TO FISH CREEK, SATURDAY, May 24, 7am-12pm.

Share the joy of spring birding in Glacier National Park with Steve Gniadek and Kathy Ross. Expect to see the recent songbird arrivals at "Warbler Heaven" at the Lower McDonald Creek Oxbow, plus various waterfowl species on the creek and Lake McDonald, possible loons on the lake, and maybe Harlequin Ducks. Includes short easy walks of up to 2 miles. For directions and to sign up, contact Steve at [grayjaybro@yahoo.com](mailto:grayjaybro@yahoo.com). Be sure to bring binoculars and appropriate gear for weather. Field trip is limited to 14 participants.



### GOING-TO-THE-SUN ROAD BIKE and BIRD, TUESDAY, May 27, 8am-noon.

Join Jess Garby and Jake Bramante as we pedal up the Going-to-the-Sun Road, stopping frequently to listen and look for birds. Target species include Harlequin Ducks, Varied Thrushes, Pacific Wrens, Fox Sparrows, and many more! Hopefully the road will be open to Avalanche Campground and we will pedal approximately 4.5 miles to Logan Creek and back. Participants will need to have a park pass, bicycles, and a way to get there. Group size is limited to 10 participants. Signup is required at [jess@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:jess@flatheadaudubon.org).

### NEOTROPICAL MIGRANTS of LOWER FIREBRAND PASS TRAIL, MONDAY, June 16, 7:30am-1pm.

Join Flathead Audubon field trip leader Darcy Thomas for a morning of birdwatching along the lower portion of Firebrand Trail in Glacier National Park. We will look for birds in the ponds, streams, and willow flats, including Willow and Olive-sided Flycatchers, Marsh Wrens, Veerys, sparrows (Lincoln's, Fox, and White-crowned), Northern Waterthrushes, warblers (MacGillivray's, Yellow, and Wilson's), Black-headed Grosbeaks, Common Snipes, Ring-necked Ducks, and Barrow's Goldeneyes. Limited to 12 participants with the physical ability to walk a moderate trail up to 3 miles. To register, contact Darcy at (406) 407-8263 or [darcy@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:darcy@flatheadaudubon.org).

### A SWIFT NIGHT OUT, FRIDAYS, August 8 and September 12, 8:30pm-9:30pm.

Join Field Trip leader Darcy Thomas for a sunset viewing of Vaux's Swifts as they congregate in communal roosts prior to their fall migration. We will watch as they gather in the air, circling their chosen roost in a local chimney, before descending tail first into the chimney for the night. Location TBD based on swift activity. Contact Darcy for information and to sign up at 406-407-8263 or [darcy@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:darcy@flatheadaudubon.org).

## Church Slough Field Trip Report

By Jake Bramante

Initial interest was so high that we decided to expand the Church Slough field trip into separate morning and afternoon sessions. The weather had other plans. A forecast of rain, snow, and wind caused an advance bail-out. The morning of the trip, March 22, brought up to seven inches of fresh snow, decreasing numbers even further.



Photo by Darcy Thomas

A total of 12 brave participants, divided between the two sessions, were rewarded for their hardiness. The weather held off for most of the morning, providing us with a wide variety of waterfowl, including ample numbers of American Wigeon and Northern Pintails. We counted 50 Trumpeter Swans, while hundreds of Tundra Swans flew

in as the weather began to turn. One of the Trumpeter Swans had a satellite band, from which we determined it had been banded in Oregon on its way up to Canada! Four Snow Geese were also spotted during the morning.

The inclement weather came on strong, lasting through lunch, but began to lift for the afternoon group, who were rewarded with many of the same birds. In addition, a Eurasian Wigeon was spotted, and a large flock of more than 400 Snow Geese flew over with their squawky mayhem. Despite chilly weather and a bit of precipitation, all hardy souls stayed warm with a little migration fever!

**THIS IS YOUR LAST PILEATED POST UNTIL SEPTEMBER**

## Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

### Rare and Notables – March/April 2025

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

Mid-March offered its usual diversity and abundance of waterfowl, with great numbers of geese and ducks throughout the valley (despite the late ice-out). Eurasian Wigeon were seen among the flocks at many sites around the valley, from March 17 through Apr 11. A Eurasian Green-winged Teal at Creston on Apr 11 (Craig H.) was just the 5th local (and state) record of this subspecies. Ospreys, Turkey Vultures, bluebirds, Western Meadowlarks, and particularly swallows, arrived later than usual as winter weather lingered. A few winter visitors were slow to leave (e.g., Snow Bunting, Northern Shrike, Rough-legged Hawk).

03/18 – **Glaucous Gull** (1) Flathead Lake North Shore (Shawn R.); 04/02 Lower Valley (Leslie K.).

03/19 – **Western Screech-Owl** (1) Fish Creek Campground, Glacier NP (Collin M.).

03/20 – **Purple Finch** (1) Bigfork (Leslie K.); last report of this overwintering bird.

03/20 – **Black-necked Stilt** (1) N. of Bigfork (Denny O.); record early arrival date for MT.

03/28 – **Short-billed (Mew) Gull** (1) Somers Bay (Dan C.); present through 04/07.

03/30 – **Lesser Black-backed Gull** (1) Egan Slough Rd. (Craig H.).

04/04 – **Snow Bunting** (1) Egan Slough Rd (Craig H.).

04/05 – **Trumpeter Swan** (collar “9@5”) Church Slough (Dan C.); marked in OR in 2021.

04/05 – **Eurasian x American Wigeon** (hybrid) (1) Church Slough (Dan C.).

04/06 – **Lapland Longspur** (1) West Valley (Josh C.).

04/11 – **(Eurasian) Green-winged Teal** (1) Creston area (Craig H.).

04/12 – **Greater White-fronted Goose** (3) Egan Slough Rd. (Craig H.).

04/14 – **Horned Grebe** (389) Dayton to Elmo, Flathead Lake (Dan C.); extraordinary numbers.

04/15 – **Williamson’s Sapsucker** (1) Herron Park (Shannon D.).

04/15 – **Northern Shrike** (1) West Valley (Markus & Erin B.); late winter visitor.

### What to Expect - April/May 2025

It’s time to put out the hummingbird feeders, as Earth Day, April 21, 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.



Field trips are filling up fast, so register today! (Book your hotel room at the Holiday Inn Missoula Downtown before April 30 to secure the special festival rate.)

## 24th Annual Wings Across the Big Sky Join us in Missoula May 30 — June 1

Learn more and register online:

<https://mtaudubon.org/events/wings/>

### Field Trip Highlight: Hellgate Osprey Nest

Iris is one of the oldest-known ospreys in the world – about 30 years old! She is the star of the Hellgate Osprey Nest Camera, with millions of viewers all over the world. To the delight of all, she returned to her nest on April 7, 2025! In 2024, after several unsuccessful years with a different mate, she successfully raised two chicks. Only time will tell what happens this year.

On this trip, we will visit Iris’ nest, and you will get a chance to see “behind the scenes” of a nest camera. This special tour will be led by two local raptor researchers who have been studying local Osprey and other raptors for decades.



## 2025 Flathead Audubon Society Elections

By Bob Lee

Each spring, the Flathead Audubon Society elects officers and directors for their dedication and leadership. This year we have an impressive list of candidates for your consideration. 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 President and Vice President elections. Directors serve for a three-year term, with no limits on the number of terms.

This year's election will be held at our May 12 Potluck and Silent Auction meeting (See page 4). Below is a list of nominees for your consideration. You will see that the two incumbent officers are running for re-election. In addition, we have five individuals seeking your vote to serve on the Board of Directors: three nominees are currently serving terms that expire this year, and two nominees are seeking election for the first time. There is no limit to the number of directors that can serve on the Board. If you are interested in serving, please talk with one of our officers or directors. Nominations will also be taken from the floor.

**President, Darcy Thomas.** Current President, Darcy Thomas, is finishing her first term. She would like to continue in this leadership position, serving the Flathead birding community and advocating for birds.

**Vice President, Pam Willison.** Current Vice President, Pam Willison, stepped up last year to fill an empty Vice President position. She is now running for the position as a candidate, so she may continue to serve in this vital role.

**Current Directors with Expiring Terms: Margaret Parodi, Shannon Donaldson, and Bridger Donaldson.** All three of these directors have served with distinction over the last three years, and would like to renew their commitment for another term.

**New Director Candidates: Ken Fielder and Michelle Tyler.** Both Ken and Michelle have been active members at various levels within FAS. Now, each would like to step up into a leadership position on the Board.



## Urban Birding!

COME EXPLORE OUR LOCAL BIRDS WITH FLATHEAD CONSERVATION DISTRICT AND FLATHEAD AUDUBON.

BACKYARDS IN URBAN AND SUBURBAN AREAS CAN ATTRACT MANY BIRD SPECIES. IF YOU PROVIDE A LITTLE HABITAT, SUCH AS NATIVE PLANTS, SHRUBS WITH BERRIES, POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY SPECIES, OR A BIRD FEEDER, WE'LL EXPLORE THE FLATHEAD CONSERVATION DISTRICT'S DEMONSTRATION GARDEN TO DISCOVER WHAT BIRDS ARE VISITING THESE NATIVE PLANT ENVIRONMENTS.

WEDNESDAY MAY 14<sup>TH</sup> 10:00 AM  
TUESDAY JUNE 10<sup>TH</sup> 10:00 AM  
LOCATION: FLATHEAD CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
133 INTERSTATE LANE, KALISPELL, MT 59901  
CALL 406-752-4220 OR CONTACT JESSIE  
AT [JESSIE@FLATHEADCD.org](mailto:JESSIE@FLATHEADCD.org) FOR MORE INFORMATION.  
NO ADVANCE REGISTRATION REQUIRED.



## Migratory Bird Day

By Jess Garby

Please join Flathead Audubon and Swan Valley Connections to celebrate Migratory Bird Day on Saturday, May 10. We will meet at Swan Lake Refuge at 9am for a one-hour birding tour through the refuge. Following the birding tour, Swan Valley Connections will be discussing the restoration work that's been completed over the years. Come learn about the impactful restoration projects and see some amazing birds!



Photo by Jess Walthers

## Spring Cleaning!!

By Pam Willison

Nesting houses at the West Valley Viewing Area and West Valley Ponds are ready for new residents. Pat Jaquith, Ronda Howell, and Pam Willison cleared 16 nest boxes, suitable for bluebirds or swallows. It had been a few years since they were last maintained, so several had layers of nests, and some



Ronda Howell  
Photo by Pat Jaquith

were full to the top. Two broken houses were replaced by new boxes Pam built, and others were repaired to secure backs, tops, and sides. Several Tree Swallows were in the area, ready to select a home for the summer. Happy Nesting!

### Thank You, Kay Mitchell!

By Darcy Thomas

Kay Mitchell is stepping down from the FAS Board this month after serving 17 years, nine years as Board Director and eight as Executive Committee member, including two terms as President.



Photo by Linda Winnie

During her early years on the Board, Kay became involved in overseeing the development of two major projects: the Owen Sowerwine (OS) Project and the FAS Education Program. Kay's involvement in the OS Project went beyond oversight to include monitoring vegetation, keeping research records, planning Work Days, canoeing volunteers to the Big Island, and donning a respirator mask and backpack sprayer to eradicate weeds.

During those years, she also upgraded Flathead Audubon's outreach capacity. She transformed The Pileated Post from a black-and-white, scissors-and-paste, newsletter into the full color, digital publication you are reading today. And she worked with several other board members to learn website software, and then restructure and upgrade FAS's original website.

Under Kay's guidance as President, FAS added the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch to our scientific portfolio, and mounted a successful fundraising campaign that contributed \$15,000 to the West Valley Ponds conservation easement. While President, Kay also helped steer the FAS Education Program through the recruitment of three

Conservation Educators, building its capacity to provide the high-quality nature education it is known for today.

After her Presidency, Kay once again became a Board Director, and took on yet another project for FAS when she spearheaded Flathead Audubon's participation in the Great Fish Community

Challenge fundraising campaign, sponsored by the Whitefish Community Foundation. She completed the necessary applications to get FAS accepted, and coordinated Flathead Audubon's participation in the program. Great Fish funding has enabled FAS to expand its Conservation Education Program to include a full-time employee this year. After stepping down, Kay will mentor our next Great Fish coordinator to ensure continued success in the campaign.

Kay's calm, quiet manner and tactful approach made her an enormously effective Board member and President. She is a planner and a doer. Her eagerness to listen and learn from others and her lively sense of humor made her a pleasure to work with. Flathead Audubon has been extremely fortunate she chose to contribute her energy and talents to so many FAS efforts for so many years.

THANK YOU KAY for your many years of service to Flathead Audubon!

### Twenty-Year Club Recognition for Kay Mitchell

By Darcy Thomas

At the Whitefish Community Foundation's annual 2025 Community Grants Awards Ceremony, Kay Mitchell was inducted into the Twenty-Year Club in recognition of her dedicated and long-term service to the Flathead Audubon Society. The Twenty-Year Club is an expression of gratitude to individuals who have significantly contributed to the local nonprofit landscape through their commitment to a Flathead Valley nonprofit.

Congratulations Kay! We are so proud of you and grateful for all you've done.

### Herron Park Field Trip Report

By Jake Bramante

In mid-April, eight of us gathered at the Herron Park parking lot on a chilly, bluebird sky morning. It didn't take very long to see actual Mountain Bluebirds and a host of forest birds that were singing in the trees. Mountain Chickadees serenaded us the entire day with their three note, minor melody. While looking for birds, we stumbled across bluebells, yellowbells, a couple shooting stars, and a glacier lily, delighting us with early spring color! A Cooper's Hawk made one call, letting us know it



White-breasted Nuthatch  
Photo by Jake Bramante

was there, and perched in a larch. One of our target birds, a Spotted Towhee, didn't make an appearance until we climbed quite a bit, but we did see it! On the south end of the trip, our first-of-year Ruby-crowned Kinglets sang and sang and sang, while a very cooperative White-breasted Nuthatch flew within 10 feet of us. We finally heard the distinctive drum of a Williamson's Sapsucker and spotted a few more bluebirds on our way back to the trailhead with a final list of 30 species!

### NEW! Citizen Science Nightjar Surveys

Montana Audubon, in collaboration with Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, is excited to announce our newest Citizen Science project---nightjar surveys! Common Poorwills are a Species of Greatest Inventory Need and a Potential Species of Concern in Montana. Common Nighthawks lack statewide population and distribution data, and populations are declining nationally. These surveys will take place across the state, from June 1 to August 1. Thanks to the Tracy Aviary for funding support!

Mark your calendars for one of our upcoming trainings:

- May 9, 6pm @Montana Audubon Center, Billings
- May 14, 7pm, Zoom
- June 27, 7pm, @Montana WILD, Helena

Learn more and sign up on our citizen science website: <https://montanabirdsurveys.weebly.com/nightjars.html>



## Monitoring for Nightjars

Every year, Tracy Aviary provides grants to organizations who are carrying out bird conservation projects!

This Summer, Montana Audubon (with support from Tracy Aviary) will launch a statewide citizen science project focused on Montana's Nightjar species: Common Poorwill and Common Nighthawk.



MONTANA AUDUBON

### 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

Our speaker this year will be Mike Koopal, founder and director of the Whitefish Lake Institute. Mike will provide updates on the vital work the Institute is doing to provide aquatic resource protection in northwest Montana. His

presentation will begin at 4pm on Saturday, June 7.

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 on Saturday evening. Please bring firewood, if you have it, and camp 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.

### Loon Band Contest

By Darcy Thomas

Now is the time to view loons in NW Montana. These beautiful, fish-eating birds are enthralling to see, and Montana Loon Society would love to hear about your sightings. In fact, they are offering cash prizes for observations of banded loons or confirmed unbanded breeding loons. (Breeding loons are those with a mate, nest, or chicks.)



Photo by John Rockwood

Two \$100 awards will be decided by random drawing from all individuals who submit at least one observation. One drawing will be held mid-June and the other mid-July.

Winners will be announced at the Montana Common Loon Working Group’s July summer meeting.

In Montana, the Common Loon is listed as a Species of Concern. Reporting your loon sightings can help with their management and support their population health. Loons are very sensitive. Please observe them from a distance.

For complete contest rules and observation reporting instructions, visit <https://montanaloons.org> and select “Report Loon Sightings” from the menu bar.

## Conservation Corner May 2025

By Gael Bissell

### 2025 Legislative Update

Flathead Audubon, along with other Montana Audubon chapters, supports two lobbyists during every biannual legislative session. This role is one of the major reasons Montana Audubon was formed: to support monitoring, responding, and alerting the public to those issues that affect birds, wildlife, and their habitat. These activities are performed both during and between legislative sessions. As most of you know, you can sign up for brief, timely, informative alerts from Montana Audubon and/or Montana Wildlife Federation on their respective websites.

As the 2025 legislative session winds down over the next few weeks, we are happy to share the following positive developments.

To see the current status of bills, go to Montana Bill Explorer at <https://bills.legmt.gov/>, type in the bill #, click, and view "Status" on the far right.

### The Good News!

First, that pesky **HB 57** that would have designated non-native Gambel's and California Quail as Montana game birds, allowing for their legal introduction, died on the Senate floor February 21. Thanks to all of you who contacted your House and/or Senate legislators to defeat this bill.

Secondly, **SB 307**, which would have stripped more than \$20 million of recreational marijuana taxes from Habitat Montana and over \$12 million from Montana's state parks, trails, and wildlife conservation programs, failed to pass an important Senate Finance and Claims Committee vote on April 1. The bill could be revived, but it will likely be replaced by other much better, and more popular, bills listed below.

### Support Favorable Legislation Now Pending!

**HB 932**, a good marijuana tax bill, is working its way through the Senate. This bill allocates revenue from recreational marijuana taxes to Habitat Montana conservation easements and acquisitions, wildlife crossings, and a variety of other habitat improvements. HB 932 passed the House Appropriations Committee with a vote of 16-7, and then passed second and third readings on the House Floor. The bill next heads to the Senate Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Committee for a hearing on April 15.

**SD 537** would maintain funding for FWP habitat conservation programs by establishing a Habitat Legacy Account and a Big Game and Wildlife Highway Crossing

account where a significant portion of marijuana tax money would be deposited. It would also fund various social programs, such as alcohol treatment and homeless shelter support, and provide funding for law enforcement. This bill was submitted to the Montana House Taxation Committee on April 3.

**HB 855** calls for the establishment of a specialty license plate to generate funding for a designated account benefiting wildlife crossings and accommodations. The bill had a hearing on March 28, passed the Committee unanimously, and subsequently passed floor votes in the House. It is now moving through the Senate Transportation Committee, and, hopefully, to final passage on the Senate floor.

### Oppose Pending Bill HB 285!

**HB 285** essentially disembowels the Montana Environmental Policy Act, one of Montana's major pieces of legislation passed decades ago to ensure our state government maintains our right to a "clean and healthful environment," as stated in our Constitution. HB 285 revises the purpose and intent of the Act (emphasizing it is only procedural); limits what agencies can do or recommend; removes CO2 and greenhouse gases from consideration; and places the burden of proof on a plaintiff if they disagree with a state action. This bill was amended and sent back to the House Committee on April 4. Track this bill, and let your legislators know your concerns.

**Personal calls are the most effective way to reach and impact your legislator.** Call 406-444-4800. A Capitol operator will take down your brief message (e.g., vote NO on HB 285 because you support MEPA and want a clean and healthful environment). The message will be delivered immediately. We are told emails are not as effective; the legislators receive too many and do not have time to read them all.

Thank you!





## History Corner: Remembering Mary Sloan Citizen Scientist Extraordinaire

Compiled by Karen Nichols

Whitefish naturalist Mary Sloan left behind a legacy of conservation, education, and generosity when she died on February 10, 2025, at the age of 90.

Mary was born in Deer Lodge and grew up in Superior, where her father worked a mining claim through the Great Depression. She met Gary Sloan in the 1960s at Whitefish High School, where they were both teachers. They married in 1968. Outdoors people, Mary and Gary backpacked, canoed, hunted, and fished throughout their time together, until Gary died in 2019.

After retiring in their 50s, Mary and Gary turned their full attention to the natural world. The couple dedicated 30+ years to conservation organizations, including both the Flathead and National Audubon Societies, Montana Native Plant Society, Montana Loon Society, Nature Conservancy's Pine Butte Preserve, Montana Wilderness Association, and the Flathead Forestry Project. For decades, Mary generously shared her photography, artwork, and organizational skills with the conservation community.

From 1992 to 2002, Mary and Gary monitored loons for the Forest Service on Upper and Lower Stillwater Lakes, the Stillwater River, and surrounding smaller lakes. They visited the larger lakes five to 20 times each season, often paddling out in search of loons and nesting sites, while keeping detailed records and maps, building and installing loon nesting platforms, and erecting educational signs. Besides chronicling loons, they helped the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks monitor Bald Eagles and Trumpeter Swans in the Whitefish-Stillwater area during the 1990s.

Mary's passion for native plants was ignited after she helped with a multi-year research study measuring plant succession at the Miller Creek Demonstration Forest, west of Whitefish. A longtime member of the Montana Native Plant Society, she served as chapter president



Photo by Karen Nichols

from 1996-2000. Together, Mary and Gary helped inventory old growth stands near Murphy Lake; started the Family Forestry Expo's plant identification station; and championed the protection of Johnson Terraces near Whitefish, inspiring its recognition as a Botanical Special Interest Area. They also contributed two permanent exhibits to the Whitefish Community Library: an extensive wildflower herbarium with detailed descriptions, preserved specimens, and Mary's photographs of more than 100 native species; and a tree slice from a 690-year-old larch, detailing fire history and the concurrent human timeline.

The Sloans' contributions were well appreciated, as evidenced by numerous awards. They received the 2018 Conservation Achievement Recognition from Flathead Audubon; a 2015 Special Achievement Award from the Montana Native Plant Society; the Montana Loon Society's Volunteer of the Year Award in 1995; and the Flathead National Forest's Danny On Conservation Award in 1996 in recognition of their work assembling fire history data, monitoring loon nesting, documenting vegetation succession following the Little Wolf Fire, and monitoring owl boxes. Danny On Award language described the Sloans as "independent, thoughtful people who are looking for solutions to difficult problems. They are role models to all of us on how to disagree with people and yet still work constructively together."

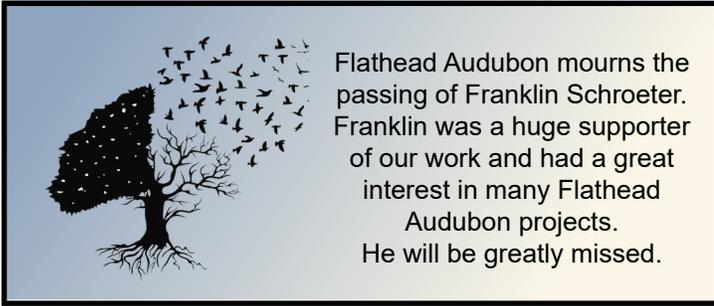
On a personal note, in 2015 I hiked to Baptiste Lookout to visit Mary and her close friend, Inez Love, who was volunteering as lookout. Mary greeted me with a lovely bouquet of fireweed, asters, and huckleberry leaves. She was 81 and had hiked the nearly 6 miles and 2700 feet to the lookout days before. Athletic and never one to be idle, she had used a Pulaski to build a trail hundreds of feet, from the lookout to the outhouse. She even lined the trail handsomely with rocks. I tried my novice hand at the Pulaski under Mary's clear instruction. Thirty years her junior, I couldn't match Mary's work ethic, skill, and enthusiasm. She will continue to inspire me and many others with her life's example.

### 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 to Trumbull Creek Educational Forest to explore how the different parts of a forest make up a dynamic living system, and how people and the environment are dependent on one another.





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.

**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](http://whitefishcommunityfoundation.org).

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