



# Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

VOLUME 50, NUMBER 1

Swainson's Thrush



Photo by Jake Bramante

## Well, Owl Be...

By BJ Worth and Jake Bramante



Photo by BJ Worth

Great Gray Owls are both fascinating and elusive. Unique plumage adaptations allow them to fly in total silence and hide in plain sight, giving rise to their moniker of Great Gray Ghost. Primarily residents of old growth forests, they have the greatest wingspan and longest body of any owl in North America. When hunting prey, their concave faces serve as a satellite dish to assist them in finding voles and mice. Ever elusive, even the most experienced birders are challenged to find Great Grays, and are awed when they observe these avian giants in the field.

Great Gray Owls are known to virtually ignore humans. However, as local Flathead birders BJ Worth and Jake Bramante recently learned, there are exceptions!

**BJ:** This summer word floated around the birding community of a Great Gray Owl hunting fields outside of Whitefish. One morning I was fortunate to locate the owl, watch it hunt, and photograph it. I texted fellow birder, Jake Bramante, to let him know what I was seeing.

The owl flew up and down a fence line, landing in the field, flying back up, perching, and repeating. The recently hayed fields were full of rodents, providing ample food for the owl to feed its hungry fledgling. After catching a vole, the adult would take the prey to its chick, who could be heard begging for food from the nearby woods.

**Jake:** I had heard about the Great Gray Owl and tried on an earlier occasion to find it, with no success. I was 40 minutes away when I received BJ's text, but decided to give it a try. I was in luck. As I pulled up I saw BJ with his camera and tripod, the owl on a fence between us. I took numerous photos as the magnificent bird glided silently along the roadside, listening, dropping, and pouncing.

**BJ:** At one point the owl, while perched on the fence, turned, looked right at me, and took off in my direction. I snapped pictures as the distance between us closed; the owl's eyes locked on me the whole time. Then I realized, "This owl might land on me!" I took a deep breath and exhaled, relaxing in preparation.

**Jake:** I saw the owl take off and head straight towards BJ. To my surprise, as it reached him the owl flared its wings and SETTLED ON HIS HEAD! I quickly pulled up my camera and caught one shot of BJ with his "Great Gray hat" before it flew off. I couldn't believe my good fortune at seeing and capturing the scene on camera.

Afterwards, we laughed and marveled at the crazy experience. I asked BJ if the owl's super-long talons had dug into his scalp. He said the owl landed very lightly and, while he could feel the tips of the talons, they didn't dig in. Truly a one-of-a-kind, human-bird interaction!



Photo by Jake Bramante

# SEPTEMBER PROGRAM

## Dry Tortugas

Presented by Jake Bramante

On September 8th, join Flathead Audubon's own Jake Bramante as he shares his experiences exploring the Dry Tortugas through photos and videos, birding the Atlantic Coast of Florida along the way. The Dry Tortugas are a small set of keys (low lying islands and reefs) located 70 miles west of Key West in Florida. This location in the Gulf of Mexico has obvious advantages for military installations, commerce, and for birds, providing the latter with important nesting spots and/or



Photo by Jake Bramante

a migration stop. Jake's trip included rookeries, endangered scrub jays, snorkeling, a Civil War-era masonry fort, bonus rocket launches, and, of course, plenty of birds!

Jake Bramante serves on the Flathead Audubon board and is the owner of Hike 734, providing detailed guides and maps for national park visitors. Jake is also a birding guide with American Birding Guides. He's out hiking and/or birding whenever he gets the chance.

## SEPTEMBER MEETING FAS

We will continue our hybrid meetings this month and continue through the fall/winter for the remainder of the year. For those coming to the meeting on September 8, we'll meet in Room 26 of the Gateway Mall (United Way building) at 7pm. This room is on the east side of the building along Glenwood Drive in Kalispell. Look for our banner outside.

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

For information on how to attend by Zoom, or how to get an audio connection by phone, contact [jake@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:jake@flatheadaudubon.org).

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

## SEPTEMBER AUDUBON CALENDAR

**Tuesday, Sept 2, 5:30pm.** FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Creston Fish Hatchery Pavilion, 780 Creston Hatchery Road, Kalispell. You may bring your dinner.

**Friday, Sept 5, 4:30-5:30pm.** Fall Bird Speaker Series: Jewel Basin Hawk Watch. See page 9.

**Monday, Sept 8, 7pm.** Flathead Audubon General Meeting and Dry Tortugas presentation. Gateway Community Center, US Hwy. 2 West, Kalispell. East side of Gateway Mall, along Glenwood Dr. All are welcome. To join remotely, see information above.

**Thursday, Sept 11, 10am-12:30pm.** Birds of Prey ID Workshop. See page 5.

**Saturday, Sept 13, 7-10am.** Birding at Smith Lake Field Trip. See page 5.

**Sunday, Sept 14, 8am-1pm.** Mission Valley Shorebirds Field Trip. See page 5.

**Saturday, Sept 20, 9am-noon.** Fall Work Day in Owen Sowerwine. See page 6.

**Saturday, Sept 27, and Thursday, Oct 2, 6-8pm.** Sandhill Cranes at West Valley Field Trips. See page 5.

**Sunday, Sept 28, 9am- approx. 5pm.** Jewel Basin Hawk Watch Field Trip. See page 5.



Image courtesy of StockCake

# BIRD OF THE MONTH

## Backyard Birds: American Robin

By Creston School Student Lila Tarrant



Lila Tarrant

Photo by Chris Tarrant

Hello, my name is Lila. I have loved birds since I was about five or six. I am nine now, and I am going to write about the American Robin. We have a lot of robins in our backyard, and I have been watching them all summer!

Did you know? Robins are part of the Thrush family. Their diet changes depending on the time of day; they usually eat earthworms in the morning and some fruits in the afternoon. When young robins leave the nest, they are slightly smaller than their parents, but they can look the same size. They have speckled white on their face and breast. Young robins do not have the orange-red breast color of their parents. While most robins migrate, others stay the winter, even in Montana.



Robin drawing/Credit Lila Tarrant

When I watch robins I notice how they hop, stop, and raise their chests up. I figured out they are actually looking for earthworms for a snack or to feed their chicks. The way I would describe the sound of the robin's song is "chirp-up chirp-up," then "put put put put." I have noticed that when robins sing, they wave their tail feathers up and down.

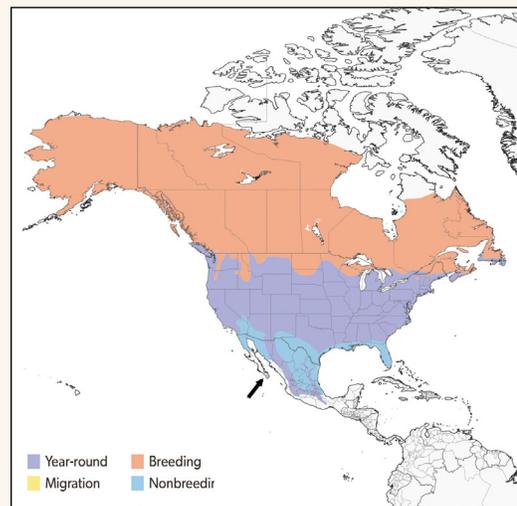
This year I watched a family of young robins learning to fly in our garden. Their flying was a short distance and kind of out of control. It probably takes a couple of days for them to learn right. Robins are sometimes thieves and steal our fruit from our strawberry patch. They also chase each other to play.

One day in May, sadly, a bird hit our living room window. I ran out and saw a young robin on its stomach with its wings stretched out. I went closer, and I saw it breathing! I went inside and got my dad and told him, "We have to move the bird, so our dogs don't get him!" We made a plan and got a pair of gloves for me.

Back at the bird, I went closer, carefully scooped it up, and walked out of our fenced yard and away from our dogs. I placed it under a mini tree as shelter and protection from predators. I went inside my house and watched through the window with binoculars to see if it was ok. Before bedtime we checked on it one last time, and the bird was gone! Hopefully it survived and flew away to its family. It was exciting for me to hold it and probably save a bird!

What a cool bird an American Robin is! I love its colored belly and cheerful song. I hope you like my article, and I hope you notice robins and they make you feel happy too!

Editor's Note: For more information on helping stunned birds, see <https://www.audubon.org/magazine/you-found-bird-crashed-window-now-what>.



Map courtesy of Birds of the World

*Attention potential BOM authors: Want to share your bird adventures or fascinating observations? Send your submissions our way at [bom@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:bom@flatheadaudubon.org)!*

### Jewel Basin Hawk Watch Enters 18th Full Season

By Dan Casey

The 18th full season of fall raptor migration monitoring is underway from August 25 through the first week of November, weather permitting, at the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch. Over the past 17 years, volunteers and paid observers have counted more than 47,000 hawks, eagles, and falcons from this scenic mountaintop site northeast of Bigfork. The survey effort has been a partnership between Flathead Audubon, Flathead National Forest, and Montana Audubon, with additional past contributions from the American Bird Conservancy and the Plum Creek Foundation. The hundreds of volunteer hours every year to help spot birds traveling south along the ridge to their wintering grounds have been critical to our success. Due to their (your!) efforts, more than 22,000 Sharp-shinned Hawks and 6,500 Golden Eagles, along with 16 other species, have been counted passing the site. Last year we counted more than 4,100 birds during a record effort of 396 survey hours over 56 days on the ridge.



Jami Belt Scanning  
Photo by Dan Casey

second half of September. The early part of the season sees a majority of Sharp-shinned and Cooper’s Hawks, with eagles dominating in October. However, it is not uncommon to see dozens (or even hundreds!) of birds of 10 species or more on a good day.

Flathead Audubon maintains a “Jewelers” email group, where observers can coordinate visits, see regular survey updates, check on predicted weather at the site, and see project reports and photos. If you would like to participate, you can contact Dan Casey at 406-270-5941. A visit to the site involves a one-way hike of just over 2.4 miles, climbing from the Jewel Basin parking lot to the ridgeline site at 7,100’ on the flanks of Mt. Aeneas. More details, updates, and past reports are available on the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch link at the Flathead Audubon webpage: <https://flatheadaudubon.org/conserv/jewel-basin-hawk-watch/>.

We hope you will plan on joining one or more surveys this fall. Huckleberries, colorful foliage, scenic views, and close-up sightings of passing hawks make for a wonderful way to spend a day!

The best days are typically warm days with southwest winds, with peak migration typically occurring during the

### Nest Notes September 2025

By Jess Garby, Flathead Audubon Education Coordinator



Illustration by Jess Garby

I’m so excited to be back with the Flathead Audubon Society after a two-month summer break! Many of my days were spent exploring the trails of the Swan Range, taking long bike rides, and crafting with friends. One of the highlights of my summer included my first trip out of the country!

spotted a few “lifers,” including a stunning and very vocal Indigo Bunting at Montréal’s iconic Mount Royal Park.

Back home, I spent much of the summer volunteering with The Making Place (TMP), leading kids’ craft activities at local markets and at the Boys and Girls Club. In my role as Volunteer and Outreach Board Member for TMP, I’ve been learning new strategies for engaging and recruiting volunteers. I look forward to applying those tools at FAS.

If you haven’t heard, FAS has a new home! We’ve moved, from our upstairs office at the Gateway Mall in Kalispell to a new space downstairs, right across from the Community Room where we host our general meetings. Our office is now more welcoming and accessible to the public, and has a much homier feel than our old space. Many thanks to Rod and Darcy for championing this change!

It’s great to be back. I’m looking forward to an exciting season ahead with the FAS community.



Jess tabling at The Making Place  
Photo by Avery Nunnen



Jess at Audubon Conference Montreal  
Photo by Garrett Hogan

FAS graciously sent me to the National Audubon Leadership Conference in Montréal, Québec, Canada. More than 450 conservation leaders from 11 countries, 48 states, and 22 colleges and universities gathered to celebrate Audubon’s 120th anniversary, and to look ahead to the future we are building together to reverse declines in bird populations. It was a memorable four days of learning, networking, and birding. The theme of Community was woven throughout the event, and connecting with leaders from national, state, and local Audubon chapters sparked inspiring conversations and fresh ideas. One of my key takeaways is the importance of community, and I’m eager to weave that into my upcoming programming. As an added bonus, I also

## SEPTEMBER 2025 FIELD TRIPS

### **BIRDS OF PREY ID WORKSHOP at WILD WINGS RAPTOR RECOVERY CENTER, THURSDAY, September 11, 10am-12:30pm.**



Veteran Hawk Watch and Wild Wings volunteer Kathy Ross will be joined by Karen Nichols for a discussion about Hawk Watch migration and identifying key raptor field markings. They will be assisted by Wild Wings ambassador raptors, 11 of which represent raptor species migrating through in the fall, from small Kestrels and Cooper's Hawks to Peregrine Falcons and Bald Eagles. Instruction will aid in identifying migrating raptors on the mountain and enhancing all your birding experiences. In addition, important conservation ideas will be discussed, from habitat to window treatments, to help you support and protect our wild birds. You are welcome to stay after and meet Wild Wings ambassador owls. Wild Wings is located at 37 Panoramic Drive, Kalispell. The workshop is sponsored by Flathead Audubon, with no charge to participants. Native plants will be available to support your bird-friendly habitat. To sign up, call Kathy at 406-837-3837.

### **BIRDING AT SMITH LAKE, SATURDAY, September 13, 7-10am.**

Join FAS field trip leader Darcy Thomas for a morning of early fall birding at Smith Lake Waterfowl Production Area. We will walk a portion of the paved Great Northern Historical Trail 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 will be looking for swans, geese, ducks, grebes, teals, cormorants, herons, raptors, and songbirds. Great Blue Herons and Osprey migrate away from the Flathead Valley by mid-September, so this is a good opportunity to see them before they go. A Montana Conservation License is required for this field trip and may be purchased at <https://ols.fwp.mt.gov>. A vault toilet is available at the beginning of the trip, as well as at the boat launch. Bring binoculars, water, and a spotting scope if you have one. To register, contact Darcy at 406-407-8263 or [darcy@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:darcy@flatheadaudubon.org).

### **MISSION VALLEY SHOREBIRDS, SUNDAY, September 14, 8am-1pm.**

Join field trip leader Dan Stoken for a morning of fall migration birding in the Mission Valley. The wetlands and reservoirs of the Mission Valley provide breeding habitat for many species of shorebirds. During migration, the valley also provides important stopover sites for shorebirds migrating from the boreal forests and arctic tundra of Canada and Alaska. We will spend the morning at Pablo and Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuges, and select other stops in the valley to observe the diversity of shorebirds passing through the area. Expect to see a variety of sandpipers, plovers, dowitchers, and more. Participants should bring their own water, snacks, and good shoes or boots for walking. There may be a modest amount of walking at either wildlife refuge, depending on conditions and the birds. Please contact Dan Stoken at (406) 880-2868 or [dan.stoken88@gmail.com](mailto:dan.stoken88@gmail.com) to sign up and receive additional information.

### **SANDHILL CRANES at WEST VALLEY, SATURDAY, September 27, & THURSDAY, October 2, 6-8pm.**

Join Denny Olson on Saturday, September 27, or Darcy Thomas on Thursday, October 2, to view Sandhill Cranes as they stage in the West Valley on their fall migration. See these magnificent birds as they fly in from their daily feeding in the surrounding fields to roost overnight in pothole wetland ponds around sunset. Cranes have been arriving here by the hundreds each year as a fueling stopover, and they have richly expressive body languages. For a preview, check out the FAS YouTube educational video, "Sandhill Cranes: Voices from the Eocene." To sign up contact Denny at 406-249-3987 or [docwild.mt@gmail.com](mailto:docwild.mt@gmail.com), or Darcy Thomas at 406-407-8263 or [darcy@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:darcy@flatheadaudubon.org).

### **JEWEL BASIN HAWK WATCH, SUNDAY, September 28, 9am-5pm (approximately).**

Dan Casey will lead a trip to the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch site on Sunday, September 28. The second half of September offers peak numbers and diversity of passing raptors. We expect to see well over 100 hawks of 10 or more species if conditions are right; our peak daily counts usually fall between September 21st and 28th. This trip includes a 2.4 mile one-way hike of moderate difficulty (4.8 miles roundtrip), gaining 1,400 vertical feet from the Jewel Basin parking lot. Attendees should wear sturdy footwear; hiking poles are recommended. You should also bring water, lunch, and clothing layers for changing weather conditions (we will cancel or reschedule if conditions are unsuitable).

The trip is limited to 10 participants on a first-come, first-served basis. Contact Dan at (406) 270-5941 if interested. He will share logistics information with confirmed attendees. The approximate times of 9am to 5pm include driving and hiking time from the Bigfork area. We will carpool, to the extent possible.

## Support Flathead Audubon Society During the Great Fish Community Challenge

Your Generosity Sustains Conservation and Education

Dear Flathead Audubon Friends,

We are thrilled to announce that the Great Fish Community Challenge is underway until September 12th! This is a pivotal time for Flathead Audubon Society, and the many conservation and education programs we champion throughout our valley.

As passionate bird enthusiasts and stewards of the natural world, our Audubon membership and valued donors play an essential role in all we do. The unwavering support you show empowers us to promote awareness, protect birds, and preserve the precious habitats they call home. Simply put, we cannot do this vital work without you.

We invite you to give generously during the Great Fish Community Challenge. Your donation will help ensure our programs flourish and our mission continues to soar. You may give to Flathead Audubon, and any of the other 84 nonprofits participating in the Challenge. There are several ways to contribute:

- Online: Make a gift through [Whitefish Community Foundation's website](#).
- By Check or Cash: [Download a donation form](#), complete it, and mail or deliver your contribution to Whitefish Community Foundation.



- In Person: Visit one of the pop-up donation stations during the Challenge for a hands-on giving experience.
- To donate stock or give via an IRA distribution, contact Whitefish Community Foundation at (406) 863-1781 or [finance@whitefishcommunityfoundation.org](mailto:finance@whitefishcommunityfoundation.org).

All donations are securely processed by Whitefish Community Foundation, and 100% of your designated gift goes directly to the nonprofits you choose, including Flathead Audubon Society.

By supporting the Great Fish Community Challenge, you're not only uplifting Flathead Audubon, but also strengthening a network of nonprofits working together to make our valley a more vibrant, healthy place for people and wildlife alike.

Let's keep birdsong alive in our community! Please consider making your gift today and help us continue our critical work for the future of birds and the beautiful places they inhabit.

Thank you for your steadfast support and for being a vital part of our flock.

With gratitude, Darcy Thomas, President

## Fall Work Day in Owen Sowerwine

By Pam Willison

Please save the date and join us for a work day at Owen Sowerwine, on Saturday, September 20, from 9am-noon. We will gather in the parking lot of Montessori (349 Willow Glen Drive). From there we will send one team to Treasure entrance, while another group will walk the Education Trail to work on young plants of the invasive common buckthorn. For questions or more information, contact Pam Willison, [pam@flatheadaudubon.org](mailto:pam@flatheadaudubon.org) or 406-270-0225. (Note: if you need to arrive a bit late, it will be easy to locate us by contacting Pam.)

The work will involve cutting off the small buckthorn seedlings (1/4" to 1" diameter) and using a dauber bottle to apply a glyphosate solution to the cut stem. We provide the daubers, but please bring good hand nippers (or loppers if you prefer), and wear gloves. Since these are small plants, you might also find a foam pad useful

for kneeling or sitting. Most likely we will work in teams of three, with two cutters and one dauber.

Dress for the weather and bring a water bottle. (We will provide a snack bar at the start.) Come prepared to have an impact on this invasive shrub that is choking out native plants!

Photo by Linda Winnie



## Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

### Rare and Notables – May through August 2025

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

While still scarce in NW Montana, reports of single **Common Grackles** were scattered throughout the region during the period. It was also quite a season for hybrids. They included a drake **Eurasian x American Wigeon** at Pablo Reservoir, April 28 (Pam W); a **Myrtle x Audubon's Yellow-rumped Warbler** at Wiley Dike, May 9 (Dan C); an apparent **Clay-colored x Brewer's Sparrow** at Garcon Gulch, north of Hot Springs, May 13 (Josh C); and a drake **Blue-winged x Cinnamon Teal** photographed near Ronan, May 16 (Shawn R).

A Somers yard hosted a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** and a **Lewis's Woodpecker** on back-to-back days, May 18-19 (Dan C). Another Lewis's Woodpecker found its way into a Ronan stove chimney, July 24 (Dan S). Lost Trail NWR hosted some locally uncommon species more typical of grassland areas, with a **Swainson's Hawk**, May 10 (Dan C), and a **Lark Sparrow**, May 26 (Pam W). A **Chestnut-collared Longspur**, photographed at West Valley Ponds, May 25 (Jake B), was the first local record of a species only very rarely seen west of the divide in Montana.

Singing **Alder Flycatchers** were seen in Glacier, June 29 (Caleb L) and July 9 (Shannon D).

An adult **Red-headed Woodpecker**, photographed on Fox Farm Rd in the West Valley on July 12 (Dick W), was the third area record in recent years. Single male **Indigo Buntings** were reported from Happy Valley, July 12-13 (Bruce T), and from Lincoln County, July 20 (Patrick B).

An **American Barn Owl** was photographed July 14 in a Lower Valley workshop (Shannon D). A **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** visited a feeder at the Libby Dam Visitor Center, July 22 (Sandy P).

A family of **Great Gray Owls** west of Whitefish entertained many birders throughout the month of July and into early August (see related article and photos, page 1). Continuing a recent trend of summer sightings, a **Broad-winged Hawk** was above McDonald Creek in Glacier, August 5 (Jake B). An out-of-season drake **Surf Scoter** was found at Pablo Reservoir, August 5-8 (Shawn R), representing just the second summer record for the species in Montana. A dark-morph, adult **Ferruginous Hawk** was seen in the Lower Valley August 11 (Natalie C), and a light-morph juvenile at the same location, August 13 (Jake B, Pam W).

### What to Expect - September 2025

Fall migration will be in full gear during September. Watch for large **mixed sparrow flocks** (Savannah, Vesper, Chipping, Song, White-crowned) on the roadsides and windrows. **Migrant hawks** can be seen throughout the valley, as well as on the mountain ridges, with American Kestrels, Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers, and Turkey Vultures most common in the Valley. **Shorebird migration**, which began in June (!), continues, with Pectoral Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers, and American Golden-Plovers among the ones to watch for late in the season. Some of the **first winter visitors** (e.g., Rough-legged Hawk, Bohemian Waxwing) may arrive by the end of the month.

## Fun Times at Warbler Weekend June 2025

By Pam Willison

The birders at Warbler Weekend were able to identify 53 species of birds, including six warblers (Wilson's, Yellow, Yellow-rumped, Townsend's, MacGillivray's, and American Redstart). Over 40 people participated throughout the weekend, and birding was only part of the enjoyment.

About 25 people attended the Saturday presentation by Mike Koopal, Executive Director and Founder of Whitefish Lake Institute. Mike recapped some of the work their organization does, and some of the successes they have had working with local government agencies to protect Whitefish Lake, as well as other local waters. He identified invasive plants and mussels, and aging and widespread septic systems, as



Photo by Jake Bramante

threats to the health and quality of the water. The presentation was followed by a potluck with many delicious offerings.

Seven parties camped for one or both nights. Lots of stories and laughs were shared around the firepit, as we swatted mosquitoes, waited for the Common Nighthawks to come out, and watched Jess and Garrett dip Reese's peanut butter cups into marshmallow crème and roast them over the fire on a willow stick (with moderate success!). Don't miss the fun next Spring (date to be decided), when Flathead Audubon will once again host this free group campout and birding bonanza.

## Lifetime Achievement Award to Joe and Lana Batts

By Montana Audubon

Montana Audubon was honored to present the Lifetime Achievement Award to Joe and Lana Batts at the May 2025 Wings Across the Big Sky birding festival, for their unwavering dedication and generosity in the service of bird conservation in Montana.

Joe and Lana, both Montana natives, met in the late 1960s at the University of Montana. In 1973, the couple settled in the Washington, D.C. area, where they both pursued successful careers. It was during this time that they developed an interest in birding. "We both have a deep love for nature," says Joe. "When we discovered birding—an activity that combined travel, wildlife photography, and a strong social element—we were immediately hooked." This sparked a lifelong love for birds and led to birding adventures around the world. In 2013, after more than 40 years on the East Coast, they returned to Montana, where their commitment to conservation deepened.



Joe and Lana Batts/Photo by Mandi Hinman

Joe and Lana have quietly, yet steadfastly, supported Montana Audubon for years. Joe serves as an at-large Board member and has previously been Board President and Vice-President. He has also held leadership roles with Flathead Audubon. Lana has served as a Board member and Chair of the Development Committee for Montana Audubon. Together, they are pillars of Montana's conservation community; more than just volunteers, they are true champions for wildlife and habitat protection.

Through their generosity and leadership, Joe and Lana inspire others to get involved and make a difference. They remind us that conservation is not just about saving a place, it's a shared responsibility and a collective effort. Please join us in honoring Joe and Lana Batts for their tremendous contributions to conservation!



## September is Peak Raptor Migration

American Goshawk juvenile  
Photo by BJ Worth

## Flathead Audubon Seeks Volunteers and New Leaders

By Jess Garby

Flathead Audubon Society is looking for passionate community members to join its mission of protecting birds, wildlife, and their habitats.

FAS needs education volunteers to help assist in school programs, nature walks, and community outreach events. No teaching experience is required, just an enthusiasm for sharing the wonders of the natural world.

In addition, the FAS is seeking a new Vice-President for its Board of Directors, as well as additional conservation board members. These roles offer a chance to shape the organization's programs, guide conservation efforts, and strengthen community connections.

For more information or to volunteer, contact Flathead Audubon Society at [Jess@FlatheadAudubon.org](mailto:Jess@FlatheadAudubon.org).

HELP WANTED



Illustration by  
Jess Garby

### Peeps from the President

By Darcy Thomas

Welcome back to another Audubon year! While everyone was out enjoying the great outdoors, family and friends, travel and birds, the work of Flathead Audubon continued. We moved into a ground floor office in the Gateway Community Center, Kalispell. We hope you will join us to see our new space during our upcoming Open House (date and time to be announced in a future issue). We sent Jess to Montreal to attend the National Audubon Leadership Conference, where she networked with leaders from across the nation and brought back ideas to boost our advocacy for birds. We established a presence on Instagram, led field trips, and made progress on our committees' dedicated projects.



Photo by Rob Thomas

or by following this link: <https://www.audubon.org/about/welcome-flight-plan>.

The Audubon Flight Plan is National Audubon Society's five-year strategic plan (2023-2028) to halt and reverse the decline of birds across the Americas. One of the Flight Plan's focus areas is building community. To protect birds, we must encourage people to care and act. We are achieving this with our education program, which helps grow our flock of bird advocates. We also do this through enriching activities, strategic outreach, and a welcoming spirit. Our plan is to engage with diverse communities and age groups, and promote educational programs, community science projects, habitat improvement projects, and social events. Birding plays a vital role in conservation and protecting our natural world. Join us in this exciting year!

As we move into this new year, we will be focusing on the Audubon Flight Plan, found on the Audubon.org website

### Fall Bird Speaker Series

By Jess Garby



The Flathead Audubon Society is partnering with the Flathead County Library to present a special **Fall Bird Speaker Series** at the Bigfork Library. The series will take place on the **first Friday of September, October, and November**, offering free, engaging programs for all ages.

Each event will feature a guest speaker sharing their expertise and passion for birds. Jess Garby will be presenting on Hawk Watch at Jewel Basin during the September program. Dan Casey and Denny Olsen will be the following speakers, with topics to be announced in upcoming issues of the *Pileated Post*.

Programs will be held at the Bigfork Library, 186 Bridge St, Bigfork, from 4:30 to 5:30pm on September 5th, October 3rd, and November 7th. We look forward to seeing you there.

### Lower Firebrand Field Trip Report, June 2025

By Darcy Thomas



On June 16th our group of nine embarked on an exciting birdwatching adventure field trip to the Lower Firebrand Trail in Glacier National Park. The trail offered a serene and picturesque setting, perfect for observing the diverse avian life in the area. During our walk, we were thrilled to spot a total of 41 bird species. Highlights included the majestic Sandhill Crane, elusive Waterthrush, powerful Golden Eagle, and a variety of ducks. Each species added to the richness of our experience, making the trip both educational and enjoyable.

In addition to birdwatching, we took time to appreciate the native plants along the trail. One of the most memorable moments was seeing bitterroot in full blossom, its vibrant flowers adding a splash of color to the landscape. Overall, the field trip was a great success, providing us with an opportunity to connect with nature, learn about local wildlife, and enjoy the beauty of Glacier National Park.



Iris



Bitterroot

Photos by Darcy Thomas

### Flathead Audubon Society Treasurer’s Report (7/01/2024 – 6/30/2025)

By Rob Walette

Flathead Audubon Society (FAS) continues to show strong growth in our operations and finances. This past year FAS hired a full-time Education and Operations Coordinator to cover positions previously contracted for. The position is currently for 10 months per year, but will evolve to a year-round position as we continue to grow.

With FAS’s needs changing, we are now renting office space for the employee and our large inventory of

educational kits, resulting in a 15% increase in expenses over the prior year. This was met with a 30% increase in revenue over the same period, due primarily to two large individual donations.

Our financial position remains strong, with good investment management by our fund manager. FAS financial statements, tax returns, and policies are available for review on our website.

### Evan Clark Donation Lifts Flathead Audubon to New Heights

By Darcy Thomas

Evan Clark was bit by the birding bug a couple of years ago when, during a trip to England, he bought binoculars to look for birds. Upon returning home to Washington, D.C., Evan took up the hobby in earnest, finding it suited him well. On a visit to his mother in Kalispell, Evan became an instant friend to Flathead Audubon birders when he joined my Creston Raptors field trip. We had a fun outing with great camaraderie and saw lots of birds. Subsequently, Evan went birdwatching with other FAS members, and was touched by the welcoming friendliness of those who shared their love of birds with him. Since then, birding has become an obsession of Evan’s, with plans for a worldwide birding tour to see 5,000 birds by the time he turns 70.



Photo by Molly Herrmann

Heron rookery and were overjoyed by a Pygmy Nuthatch. Our friendship and the special birds helped cheer him in a time of great sorrow.

Following his mother’s passing, Evan generously donated his inheritance to the Flathead Audubon Society, having been deeply inspired by his brother’s and sister-in-law’s charitable nature and exceptional care for his mother. This heartfelt gift serves as a thank you to them, and to his fellow Flathead Audubon

members for their cherished friendship and shared passion. His only request was that the funds be used thoughtfully for the benefit of the Flathead’s birds and birders.

We greatly appreciate Evan’s generous gift, which will enable Flathead Audubon Society to soar to new heights in promoting birds and birdwatching through our conservation and education programs. Our deepest thanks to you, Evan.

In the Spring of 2024 Evan’s mother was in her last days and he came to be by her bedside. To lift his spirits, he spent a bit of each day watching birds. He joined my Smith Lake field trip, where we discovered a Great Blue

### Be Smart – Don’t Feed the Bears!

By Julie Oswald

With fall in the air, our local black and grizzly bear populations are looking for available food sources to bulk up in advance of hibernation. Don’t let your home and property become a favored dining spot! Once bears find food sources, they’ll return seeking more. This can pose a real danger to you, your family, and the bears. Tragically, bears that associate humans with food are frequently euthanized through no fault of their own.

The steps below will help prevent bears from being attracted to your home.

Don’t put up bird feeders until after bears have gone into hibernation. Experts suggest waiting until after the end of hunting season, which this year is November 30.

Store feed, seed, grain, garbage, and pet food in bear proof containers or structures that don’t invite tampering or break-ins.

Harvest ripe fruit and produce promptly. If you’d like assistance you can connect with volunteer pickers at <https://www.facebook.com/FlatheadFruitGleaning>.

Create bear-proof chicken coops with electric fence, the method preferred by bear conflict specialists.

Let’s be smart and keep family, pets, livestock, and our native bear population safe this fall!



Photo courtesy of Grizzly Wolf Discovery Center

**September:**

**Grizzly bears are feasting on Ladybird Beetles**  
*(ladybugs that are gathering to hibernate)*



Illustration courtesy of James Corwin  
<https://www.jamescorwin.com/>

**Meet Pileated Post's Newest Content Editor**

**By Julie Oswald**

Hello Fellow Birders, Julie Oswald here, content editor of FAS's *Pileated Post*.

Change and adaptation have defined my life. I've lived in multiple locations on four continents; studied environmental biology and accounting; conducted a bobcat study for the National Park Service; and led a challenging career as CPA, auditor, and financial analyst.



Photo by Bill Oswald

It was my good fortune to find constancy when I fell in love with my husband, Bill, a native Montanan, who introduced me to NW Montana. After a decade in Missoula and a detour to assist aging parents, we settled in the Flathead Valley five years ago.

I enjoy running, walking trails with my dog, observing birds and wildlife, drawing, quilting, and soaking in the beauty of the great outdoors.

**FAS LIVE ON:**

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**2026**

Flathead Audubon Society is honored to commence its 50th Anniversary Celebration by joining Montana Audubon in hosting Montana's Premier Birding Festival, Wings Across the Big Sky, in Kalispell, from Friday, June 12, through Sunday, June 14, 2026.

The festival will offer a weekend filled with great speakers, workshops, field trips and fun events. Save the date! You won't want to miss it!

**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.*

## The History Corner: Before Flathead Audubon

Compiled by Linda Winnie



morphed into FAS. This month's History Corner looks more closely at the first two steps.

In 1974 Ron Lang, minister of the Bigfork Community United Methodist Church, worked with friends to start a new Audubon Christmas Bird Count in Bigfork. Written records and interviews with FAS elders indicate that, in addition to Lang and his wife Linda, the following people were involved. These people who helped start the Bigfork Count would become the first leaders of Flathead Audubon three years later.



Ron Lang in mid-70s  
Provided by Ron Lang

- Dan Sullivan, a good friend of Lang's, ran a Yellow Bay cherry orchard with his father. He'd recently graduated from U of M, where his passion for birds was awakened in a class with well-known ornithologist, Phil Wright. Dan became the first FAS President and organized the first FAS newsletter.
- Karen Sullivan, Dan's wife, worked with Lang as church secretary. Karen became the first FAS Membership Chair.
- Jean Robocker, a superb birder, operated a dairy farm with her husband near Egan Slough. She worked with the Girl Scouts, and had been on the FVCC Board of Trustees and the State Board of Education. Jean would be the compiler for many Bigfork Bird Counts, and would later take FAS nature education into local schools.
- Elly Jones was a medical technician who often proclaimed she was "born with bird-itis." She shared birding experiences with Phil Wright and, under his sponsorship, became a prolific bird bander. Elly was to serve as the second FAS Vice-President.
- Elmer Sprunger, nationally recognized artist known for his paintings of wildlife, was also a popular satirical cartoonist. Elmer served on the first FAS Board and designed our FAS Pileated Woodpecker logo.

- Jack Whitney was a legendary Swan Valley woodsman, wood craftsman, and naturalist. A close friend of Elmer's, he made the frames for Elmer's paintings. Jack served on the early FAS Board.
- Rick Trembath, forestry technician for the Swan Lake Ranger District, had become interested in birds as a Boy Scout. Rick became the second FAS President and organized FAS programs and publicity early on, serving as a driving force in the chapter's conservation activities.
- Nancy Paul, a Bigfork school teacher and Rick Trembath's future wife, was the first FAS Treasurer.

At the potluck after the first Bigfork Count, the group formed the Lower Valley Bird Club, popularly known as the Bigfork Bird Club. Ron Lang served as President, and Club members took turns hosting the meetings. For two years (1975 – 1976) they met mostly monthly, heard speakers, shared bird observations, went on field trips together, started a library of bird related books that members could borrow, conducted two more Bigfork Counts, and began compiling information about the bird species of the Lower Flathead Valley. Club activities were publicized in local newspapers, inviting others to join. The Club also sponsored an FVCC class on birds taught by Dan Sullivan, which brought in more birdy folks. "And the Club just kind of blossomed," recalls Sullivan.

The Bird Club was popular and successful. Why then was it replaced by an Audubon chapter? For the answer, see next month's History Corner, which will look at the establishment of FAS, and the related origins of Montana Audubon.



Members of Bigfork Bird Club on a bird walk, 1975.  
Left to right: Dan Sullivan (face not visible), Wanda Jamieson, Elly Jones (holding binoculars), Nancy Paul Trembath (back to camera), unidentified woman.  
Photo by Ron Lang

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## 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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