



Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

Great Gray Owl



Photo by Kurt Lindsay

BIRD OF THE MONTH

The Extraordinary Eyesight of Birds

By Linda Fine Hunt

We all know birds are amazing. Studying bird vision reveals one of their most valuable assets. A bird gains more information about its surroundings through its eyes than through all its other sense organs combined. Bird vision detects direction, distance, size, shape, brightness, color hue, color intensity, three-dimensional depth, and motion of an object. Through evolution, bird vision has reached a state of perfection not found in other animals.



Photo courtesy of USFWS Mountain-Prairie, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

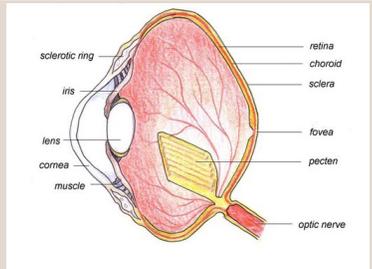
Eye position in a bird's head shows close correlation with its life habits. Inoffensive vegetarians, such as ducks, quail, and pigeons, have eyes laterally placed where they can view possible enemies coming

from any quarter. The eyes of hawks and other predators, intent on their next meal, are directed more toward the front. Owls nearly match humans with their frontal eyes. Unlike humans, owls' eyes are almost immovably locked in their sockets. To compensate, owls can twist their heads at least 270 degrees, as shown above.

All birds have three eyelids. Two of these are external, an upper and a lower lid, of which the lower one is more movable than the upper one. Birds are also equipped with a so-called "third eyelid," known as a **nictitating membrane**. This thin, retractable layer swipes across the eyeball horizontally, as shown in photos to the right, providing protection against damaging airborne particles and offering lubrication and cleansing functions. The nictitating membrane also protects the eyes of birds of prey from injury while hunting. It helps diving ducks keep their eyes open and able to see underwater, preventing

impurities from getting into their eyes and damaging their vision.

Light enters the eye's **cornea** and is focused through the lens deeper into the eyeball. In the diagram, the comb-like object behind the lens, known as the **pecten** or **pecten oculi**, is something human eyes don't have. It is a structure of blood vessels believed to both control the pH inside the eye and nourish the retina.



By Jimfbleak, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

The human retina has two kinds of light-receiving receptor cells: **cone cells** for daylight vision and **rod cells** for low-light levels. Bird retinas have a third kind of cell, known as **double cone**, enabling them to see more colors than humans. They may be able to perceive ultraviolet or near-ultraviolet light, which humans cannot.

A retina with more densely packed cone cells yields a sharper image. The human eye has at most 200,000 cones per square millimeter, while House Sparrows have approximately twice that number. Songbirds and predators such as hawks are believed to have the sharpest vision among birds. They can see details at distances two-to-three times farther away than humans.

Stay tuned! Next month continues with how birds navigate their environment through vision and cognition.



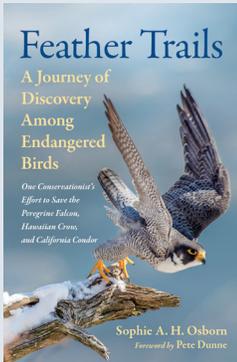
Photo by Toby Hudson, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

OCTOBER PROGRAM

Feather Trails: A Journey of Discovery Among Endangered Birds

Presented by Sophie Osborn

Photos provided by Sophie Osborn



Join us as we welcome author Sophie Osborn to the October 13 general meeting. Her recent book, *Feather Trails: A Journey of Discovery Among Endangered Birds*, recounts her personal experiences reintroducing endangered Peregrine Falcons, Hawaiian Crows, and California Condors to the wild. Birds are visible, vocal sentinels that alert us

to environmental harms through their declining numbers or their failure to thrive. While immersing readers in the triumphs and tribulations of being a wildlife biologist, Sophie explores the threats that imperiled these birds, and reveals that what harmed them threatens us, too. She will discuss what led to the endangerment of these three captivating species, recount the efforts of biologists

to recover their populations, and read a few excerpts from her book.

Sophie Osborn is an award-winning environmental writer and wildlife biologist whose work has included the study and conservation of more than a dozen bird species in the Americas. She contributed to reintroduction efforts for several endangered birds and served as the field manager for the California Condor Recovery Program in Arizona for four years. Her first book, *Condors in Canyon Country*, won the 2007 National Outdoor Book Award for Nature and the Environment. Reviewers for the American Birding Association chose her second book, *Feather Trails*, as their favorite bird book of 2024.



OCTOBER 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 October 13, 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 get an audio connection by phone, contact jake@flatheadaudubon.org.

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

OCTOBER AUDUBON CALENDAR

Thursday, Oct 2, 6-8pm. Sandhill Crane Viewing at West Valley Field Trip. See page 5.

Friday, Oct 3, 8am-noon. Bad Rock Canyon Field Trip. See page 5.

Friday, Oct 3, 4:30-5:30pm. Fall Bird Speaker Series: Flathead Birds by Season. See page 9.

Monday, Oct 6, 5:30pm. FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Gateway Community Center, Room 26, US Hwy. 2 West, Kalispell. You may bring your dinner.

Wednesday, Oct 8, 7pm-approx. 9 to 10pm. Saw-whet Owl Banding and Survey. See page 5.

Thursday, Oct 9, 8-11am. Smith Lake in Whitefish Field Trip. See page 5.

Monday, Oct 13, 7pm. Flathead Audubon General Meeting. Gateway Community Center, US Hwy. 2 West, Kalispell. East side of Gateway Mall, along Glenwood Dr. All are welcome. To join remotely, see above.

Wednesday, Oct 15, 1-4pm. Golden Eagle Migration Field Trip. See page 5.

Saturday, Oct 25, 1-5pm. *Wingspan* Board Game Day. See page 9.



Courtesy of Freepik

Great Fish Community Challenge: We Surpassed our Goal!!

Our deepest thanks to you, our amazing Flathead Audubon community! Your response to the Great Fish Community Challenge has left us speechless. We aimed for \$40,000, but your passion and generosity delivered over \$47,000! This phenomenal success will strengthen our conservation efforts and educational outreach for the benefit of the birds we love and the people who adore them. We couldn't do this vital work without you.



Hello from *Pileated Post's* Bird of the Month Editor

By Molly Miller



Photo by Mark Jungerman

Bird of the Month (BOM) editor Molly Miller is a native Tennessean whose route to Montana runs through New Mexico and California. She and her husband, Mark, have lived in Whitefish since 2001. Molly started her career as a proofreader for The University of Tennessee Press and became an editor at their Publications Service Bureau soon after. In New Mexico, she studied mathematics and computer science, which ultimately led to a career in Silicon Valley, California. There she served as a public relations agent for networking start-up companies. She retired in 2010 to enjoy the beauty of Montana. She spends her time hiking with friends, road cycling, downhill skiing, and gardening.

Bugging the Invasive Weeds!

By Pam Willison

On a warm morning in mid-August, Pam Willison and Keith Hammer waded the Stillwater River to access the "Big Island" portion of Owen Sowerwine. The purpose of this visit was to release 200 knapweed root weevils into several patches of knapweed on the west side of the island. These biological control insects were coordinated through the Flathead Conservation District and collected and provided through the Montana Biocontrol Coordination Project, located in Missoula.



and fungal infections. The impact is usually noticeable within a few years of release.

The Montana Biocontrol Coordination Project is a grassroots network created to help landowners and managers understand and access biological control agents for various invasive plants. In 2024, the project supported the release of 1.6 million insects to treat noxious weeds on 11,556 acres. This effort reduced the use of chemical treatments and provided an ongoing treatment method intended to be self-sustaining.

The adult weevils emerge in late summer to early fall, at which time they are captured, relocated, and released so they can breed and lay eggs on the root crown of the knapweed plant at the release site. Each female can lay more than one hundred eggs, which hatch into larvae that bore tunnels to the center of the root to overwinter. In early summer, the larvae pupate into adults, which emerge. The cycle begins again.

The Project collects and distributes biological control insects for a variety of noxious weeds, including spotted knapweed, leafy spurge, whitetop, yellow toadflax, dalmatian toadflax, and St. John's wort. The biological control agents work in various ways, and some are more effective than others. Research is ongoing to identify additional agents for addressing other noxious weeds.

The weevils impact knapweed plants in several ways. Larval feeding can kill small plants. When multiple larvae occupy a root, the damage is greater, and this harms larger plants. In addition, openings created by weevils tunneling into the roots expose plants to bacterial



Here is hoping that the Owen Sowerwine knapweed root weevils have a productive hatch and survive the coming winter so they can do further damage to the knapweed next year.

Photos by Pam Willison



Photo by Will Laurie

Nest Notes September 2025

By Jess Garby, Flathead Audubon Education Coordinator

September was all about getting back into the swing of things.

On September 5, I presented at the Bigfork Library on the history, science, and impact of

Hawk Watch. It was a huge success! Attendees left with a deeper appreciation for our migrating raptors, and some signed up for a field trip to the survey site. One participant was so inspired she immediately joined Flathead Audubon (FAS) as a new member.

That new member, Carol, and her husband had first joined me on a Migratory Bird Day field trip in the Swan Valley back in May. While they already loved birds, they weren't sure how to take the next step in learning more. They asked about binoculars and marveled at how I could identify the chorus of songs around us. After I introduced them to the powers of the Merlin app, they were hooked. Now, just a few months later, they spend their days watching and listening to the birds in their own backyard. Stories like theirs remind me why I love sharing the magic of birds with the public, especially when that spark of inspiration grows into lasting engagement with our community. I'm so honored to represent Flathead Audubon in this way.

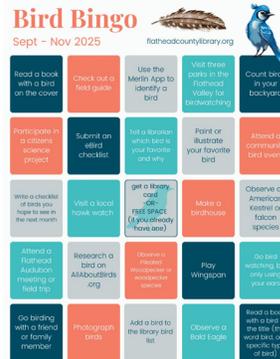
I encourage you all to join us at our next Library Lecture Series at the Bigfork Library. Dan Casey will be presenting on Friday, October 3; see page 9 for details. As a reminder, pick up your bird bingo card at any Flathead County Library NOW. You have until the end of November to



Jess presenting at Bigfork Library
Photo by Halie Williamson



Illustration by Jess Garby



Get a Bingo and win a collectible sticker!
(That's 5 squares straight across, up/down, or diagonal)

get a line of bingo and win a fun bird-themed prize! We are also co-hosting a *Wingspan* Board Game Day at the Kalispell Library on Saturday, October 25; see page 9 for details.

September also brought me back into classrooms, where I shared the wonders of Sandhill Cranes with 80 seventh-graders in Bigfork. After learning about these incredible birds in class, the students boarded a bus to West Valley to see them in person. It's always a highlight to watch students look through a spotting scope for the very first time and see birds up close.

And the excitement doesn't stop there! Students from Columbia Falls High School and Glacier High School are set to experience their first scientific survey at the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch. I can't wait to see them discover the thrill of seeing Sharp-shinned Hawks dive at the decoy owl!

Finally, I wanted to thank everyone for supporting FAS in the Great Fish Community Challenge. We are so honored to have your support. Your donations allow FAS to continue expanding our education and conservation efforts.



Courtesy of Sporting Lead-Free

Protect Wildlife - Hunt Lead-Free

By Jess Garby

With big-game rifle season approaching, hunters have an opportunity to protect the wildlife they value. Lead

bullets, even copper-jacketed ones, fired from high-velocity rifles fragment on impact, losing up to 40 percent of their mass when they hit an object. As many as 200 fragments disperse throughout the carcass, often not visible. The fragments permeate the meat you bring home and riddle the gut piles and carcasses left in the field.

For scavengers like Golden Eagles, Bald Eagles, and other raptors, those gut piles are a vital winter food source. Unfortunately, when birds ingest lead fragments, they suffer from poisoning. Every year in Montana,

overwintering eagles test positive for dangerously high lead levels, and many die from acute poisoning. Hundreds more raptors fall ill.

Simply switching to lead-free bullets makes a difference. A voluntary program, Sporting Lead-Free, aims to encourage hunters to switch to lead-free bullets, resulting in a corresponding decrease in the blood-lead levels of eagles frequenting the area. Lead-free bullets are available in factory-loaded ammunition and for handloaders. Lead-free ammunition costs about the same as premium lead bullets.

Give our eagles and other wildlife a break and consider switching to lead-free bullets.

OCTOBER 2025 FIELD TRIPS

SANDHILL CRANE VIEWING at WEST VALLEY, Thursday, October 2, 6-8pm.

Join Darcy Thomas 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 language. For a preview, check out "Sandhill Cranes: Voices from the Eocene," one of our YouTube educational videos. Please contact Darcy Thomas to sign up at 406-407-8263 or darcy@flatheadaudubon.org.



BAD ROCK CANYON, WMA, Columbia Falls, Friday, October 3, 8am-noon.

Join Michell DeLeon Tyler at the Bad Rock Canyon entrance located by the power lines on Hwy 2 in Columbia Heights for a scenic three-mile hike. This canyon serves as a gateway to Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Marsh birds, songbirds, hawks, and eagles inhabit this area. Temperatures will be cool, so dress in layers. Although this is an easy, fairly level walk, good hiking shoes or boots are recommended. Bring along a snack, drinking water, and your binoculars. A Montana Conservation License is required for this hike and can be purchased at the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks website. The cost is \$8, or \$4 for seniors 62 years and older. Please call Michell De Leon Tyler at (406) 250-5238 to sign up.

NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL BANDING SURVEY, and Flathead Lake Biological Station (FLBS), Wednesday, October 8, 7pm-approx. 9 to 10pm.

The Owl Research Institute (ORI) is running a Northern Saw-whet Owl banding station at FLBS this fall. Data collected from the station contributes to global efforts to learn more about the migratory routes and timing and the habitat use of this charismatic little owl. This outing offers an opportunity to learn, observe, and ask questions. ORI researchers will give a short presentation explaining the process and then begin checking the mist nets every half hour. Between net checks researchers will discuss owl ecology and answer questions. Typical evenings yield from zero to ten captures, with each owl being banded.

Dress for the weather, as this will be outside and it can be quite chilly. Bring hot beverages, snacks, a foldable chair or stool to sit on, and bear spray. A staff member will meet us at the locked FLBS main gate at 7pm to admit us. Parking will be in the main lot, followed by a short 1/3-mile walk to the banding station. People with disabilities can be accommodated, if we know in advance. You can stay as long as you wish, until midnight, since the gate opens automatically when exiting. There will be items available for purchase if you desire (shirts, etc.).

Sign-up is required. Please contact Margaret Parodi at (406) 837-1371 or mrparodi@charter.net. Sessions will be canceled or rescheduled if it is raining, snowing, or excessively windy. Please provide both a phone contact and email address so we can notify you in the event of scheduling changes.

SMITH LAKE in WHITEFISH with Whitefish Legacy Partners, Thursday, October 9, 8-11am.

Flathead Audubon, represented by Jess Garby (FAS Educator), is excited to partner with Whitefish Legacy Partners for a morning of birding at Smith Lake in Whitefish. Enjoy fresh coffee provided by Whitefish Legacy Partners as we explore the area, learn about local bird species, and soak in the solitude of this beautiful lake. Sign-up is required. Please e-mail Jess Garby at jess@flatheadaudubon.org to sign up or for more information.

GOLDEN EAGLE MIGRATION at LAKE McDONALD LODGE, Wednesday, October 15, 1-4pm.

Join FAS president Darcy Thomas for an afternoon watching migrating Golden Eagles from the comfort of your camp chair at Glacier National Park's Lake McDonald Lodge, while learning about their migration routes and patterns. Bring binoculars, a camp chair, a spotting scope if you have one, a flask of something hot to drink, and a warm blanket to cover your legs, as this is a "birdwatching from a chair" outing on a potentially cold day. Unlike the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch on Mount Aeneas Ridge, where birds pass at eye level, eagles migrate high over the McDonald Valley with their numbers peaking in early October. For those of us who are unable to hike the strenuous trail to Jewel Basin or up Mount Brown, we can still enjoy Golden Eagles and other raptors from a parking lot. Depending on the weather, dozens of Golden Eagles and other raptors can be observed in a single hour, as this is one of the best eagle migration sites in Montana. No need to sign up. Meet at the Lake McDonald Lodge parking lot near Jammer Joe's. Contact Darcy Thomas at darcy@flatheadaudubon.org with questions regarding the trip.

The Three Levels of Audubon

By Linda Du Lac

As Membership Chair, I have the opportunity to speak to many new and returning Flathead Audubon Society members. The most frequently asked question I get is, "How come you sent me a membership renewal notice when I have already paid for my membership?" Investigating almost always reveals that the person joined or renewed their National or Montana Audubon membership, not their Flathead Audubon Society membership. The following should help clarify the distinctions among the three Audubon organizations and how they relate to each other.



Photo by Julie Oswald

National Audubon Society. www.audubon.org

Your National Audubon Society (NAS) membership supports National's many excellent nationwide education and conservation programs. With a National membership, you receive both *Audubon* magazine and the Flathead Audubon monthly newsletter. NAS has chapters, such as the Flathead Audubon Society (FAS), throughout the United States. If you join NAS, you automatically become a chapter member in the geographic area where you live. Because your NAS membership donation stays at the national level, we encourage you to join your local chapter to support local education and conservation programs.

Montana Audubon. www.mtaudubon.org

Montana Audubon (MA) is an independent conservation organization that works at local, state, and national policy levels to protect our national heritage. Flathead Audubon supports Montana Audubon by having a representative on its board. During the Montana legislative session, we provide a small amount of financial support to help fund "Action Alerts" and to advocate for regional issues.

MA partners with FAS in the management of the Owen Sowerwine area, providing insurance and helping with management expenses. A membership in MA stays within that organization.

Flathead Audubon Society.

www.flatheadaudubon.org

When Flathead Audubon Society was established in 1977 we became a local chapter of NAS. Historically, to join FAS, you simply joined the national organization. Each year, NAS sent each chapter a "dues share" funding payment based on the number of that chapter's members. In 2001, the dues share was eliminated, and chapters were required to become self-supporting.

Your membership in FAS supports the many local education and conservation programs we offer, including free field trips, the *Pileated Post* newsletter, and management of the Owen Sowerwine area. FAS members do not automatically become members of NAS.

We appreciate the support you continue to give us through your FAS membership and donations. It is through your generous support that we have been able to continue expanding our education and conservation programs, offering free field trips, publishing the *Pileated Post* newsletter, and managing the Owen Sowerwine area.

Should you have any membership questions, I can be reached at membership@flatheadaudubon.org or lindadulac@flatheadaudubon.org.

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.

Jess Garby, FAS Education Coordinator, 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.

HELP WANTED



Illustration by
Jess Garby

Flathead Valley Bird Report By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – August/September 2025

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

As might be expected in late August and early September, shorebirds and raptors comprised the bulk of the notable finds. The reservoirs and refuges of the Mission Valley produced repeated sightings of Short-billed Dowitchers, American Golden-Plovers, Buff-breasted Sandpipers, and Hudsonian Godwits. Broad-winged and Swainson’s Hawks showed up in the Jewel Basin and elsewhere, and it was a good season for rare warblers, with both the Palm Warbler and the Black-and-white Warbler reported.

08/19– **Short-billed Dowitcher** (7) Pablo Reservoir (Braydon L.) through 08/24 (m.ob.)

08/20 – **Swainson’s Hawk** (1) Bigfork (Jake B.); 08/21 West Valley (Craig H.)

08/22– **American Golden-Plover** (1) Pablo Reservoir (Will M.) through 08/29 (m. ob.)

08/24 – **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** (1) Pablo Reservoir (Jill L.)

08/25 – **Broad-winged Hawk** (1, first of season) Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (Jake B.)

09/02 – **Broad-winged Hawk** (1, dark morph) Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (Dan C.)

09/03 – **Hudsonian Godwit** (1) Ninepipe NWR (Stanley S.)

09/03 – **Swainson’s Hawk** (2) Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (Josh C.)

09/05 – **Palm Warbler** (1) Jewel Basin Hawk Watch (Josh C.)

09/06 – **Black-and-white Warbler** (1) Flathead Lake WPA (Roy M.)

09/06 – **Tundra Swan** (1, early) Ninepipe NWR (Sasha R.)

09/12 – **White-faced Ibis** (1, late) West Valley (Craig H.)

09/12 – **Palm Warbler** (1) Creston (Craig H.)



Photo of Broad-winged Hawk
By Jake Bramante

What to Expect - October 2025

As the raptor migration starts shifting from accipiters to eagles, the first **Rough-legged Hawks** of the season will also be arriving. Watch for flocks of mixed waterfowl, especially diving ducks (**scoters, scaups, Redheads**). Check lakes for migrating loons, with both **Pacific** and **Red-throated Loons** possible. **Bohemian Waxwings** should show up and rapidly increase in numbers. Sparrow flocks, now dominated by **Savannah** and **Chipping Sparrows**, will start to have more **White-crowned, White-throated, Lincoln’s** and potentially (in wetland habitats) **Swamp Sparrows**.

Jewel Basin Hawk Watch 2025: Season Update



Photo by Elliott Ress

The eighteenth fall monitoring season at the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch got off to a great start, with 16 surveys conducted by eight different primary observers between August 25 and September 12. We counted 831 raptors of 15 species during this period, well above average for the early part of the season. Most notable were nine Broad-winged Hawks, two Swainson’s Hawks, and well-above average numbers (433) of our most common species, the Sharp-shinned Hawk. Our totals as of September 12 are listed below. Check out the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch link on our website for more information.

Turkey Vulture - 4	Red-tailed Hawk - 73
Osprey - 11	Buteo, species - 2
Bald Eagle - 8	Golden Eagle - 23
Northern Harrier - 37	American Kestrel - 35
Sharp-shinned Hawk - 433	Merlin - 9
Cooper’s Hawk - 148	Peregrine Falcon - 5
American Goshawk - 8	Prairie Falcon - 4
Accipiter, species - 12	Falcon, species - 4
Broad-winged Hawk - 9	Raptor, species - 4
Swainson’s Hawk - 2	

TOTAL: 831 birds of 15 species

Lights Out By Gael Bissell

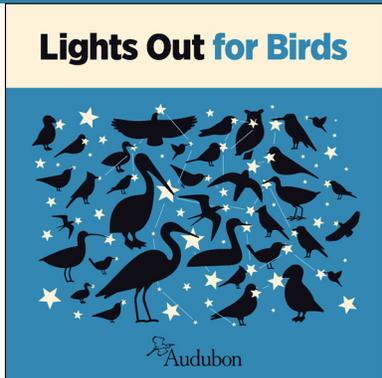
The reasons most birds migrate at night are varied. "Migrating at night allows birds to avoid certain predators," explained Connie Sanchez, who manages the National Audubon Society's Bird-Friendly Buildings program. "It's also more energy-efficient. Birds can conserve more energy on their migratory route by flying in cooler temperatures in the dark." Natural sources of light at night, such as the moon, stars, and the illuminated horizon of dawn and dusk, help guide birds along their journey, providing yet another reason to fly during the night.

Unfortunately, as light pollution from artificial sources has increased, birds have been paying the price. Birds, like humans, evolved beneath dark skies and are well adapted to detecting low levels of natural light from the moon and stars. When the sky is flooded with artificial light, their natural systems are disrupted.

Each year, billions of birds migrate north in the spring and south in the fall, most of them flying at night, navigating by the stars. Artificial lights along their migratory pathways confuse birds, drawing them off course and often leading to window strikes. While many birds are weakened by expending precious energy trying to regain their way, an estimated one billion birds die each year in the United States as a result of colliding with buildings.

Sanchez acknowledged that the number of deaths may be much higher than estimated. "The estimate is hard to quantify because we do not see most collisions happen. In many cases, the bird becomes stunned after colliding with a glass window. They then fly away and die elsewhere, often from an internal injury that is not visible, or a predator (like a cat) snatches them."

Audubon's Lights Out program, launched in the United States over 20 years ago, has gained rapid traction across North America in the past eight years. The goal is simple: get property owners, building managers, and local governments to turn off, shield, or dim unnecessary



Lights out graphic from National Audubon

lighting during spring and fall migration to reduce bird collisions. Recent collision-monitoring data have shown a 70 percent drop in bird collisions at one site in the Lights Out Philly program. Scaling that impact across the country shows that, with greater adoption, many more birds could survive migration each year.

In total, more than 45 cities now have active Lights Out programs, with several statewide and regional efforts underway. Network expansion continues, raising

awareness about how artificial light harms birds, and how easy it is to make a difference. A national partnership between Audubon and the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) is connecting local chapters and staff with IDA affiliates. This combination of diverse expertise helps protect the night sky for both birds and people.

Light-induced collisions can occur year-round, but they peak during migration seasons or in places with high concentrations of nocturnal species. Because birds can be active throughout the night, reducing unnecessary artificial lighting at night is always encouraged. Let's all do our part to keep birds safe year-round by implementing the accompanying Light Reduction Guidelines.

Light Reduction Guidelines

- ✓ Turn off exterior decorative lighting
- ✓ Install motion sensors and automatic controls wherever possible
- ✓ Turn off interior lighting, especially on upper floors
- ✓ Extinguish spotlights and floodlights
- ✓ Pull window coverings for late night work
- ✓ Use outdoor lighting that directs light to the ground, not up toward the sky



Photo by Darcy Thomas

Smith Lake Field Trip Report By Darcy Thomas

Nine gals and a beautiful sunrise made for the start of a great day of birding at Smith Lake in Kila on September 13. Other than getting a tad chilled, we had a very fun morning and saw such wonderful birds. Merlin, American Kestrel, Bald Eagles, Northern Harrier, a variety of ducks, and a multitude of cormorants and Pied-billed Grebes were among those we enjoyed the most.

FLATHEAD AUDUBON

Office Open House

CELEBRATE OUR NEW OFFICE SPACE!

TOUR THE NEW SPACE, MEET THE FAS TEAM, LEARN ABOUT UPCOMING PROGRAMS & EVENTS!

PLUS WINE + CHEESE

GATEWAY COMMUNITY CENTER
1203 U.S. HWY 2 W STE 36, KALISPELL, MT 59901
LOOK FOR FAS SIGNS

NOVEMBER 17, 6-7PM

Email Jess at jess@flatheadaudubon.org for more info

Photography by Hunter D'Aniuno | Flathead Beacon



FLATHEAD BIRDS BY SEASON: TRENDS AND HOTSPOTS WITH DAN CASEY

Bigfork Arnlund Community Room: Friday, October 3rd, 4:30-5:30pm

Flathead County Library is teaming up with the Flathead Audubon Society for a second presentation, this time with Dan Casey, retired ornithologist and active member of the birding community.

Learn about the birds of our area by season and about the e-bird app and what it can tell us. Dan Casey founded the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch site.

Library FLATHEAD COUNTY
flatheadcountylibrary.org

Bigfork Library
186 Bridge St, Bigfork, MT
406-837-6976

Wingspan Board Game Day

Join other bird and board game enthusiasts at the Kalispell Library, 247 1st Avenue East, on Saturday, October 25, from 1 to 5pm for a round of *Wingspan*. *Wingspan* lets you build your own wildlife preserve and compete to attract the most birds. We'll have multiple game sets available, so bring your flock of friends, or fly solo and meet fellow enthusiasts. Each round takes about two hours, plenty of time to spread your wings and show off your birding smarts! To make the most of our limited time, please familiarize yourself with the game's rules and playthrough here: youtube.com/watch?v=IqDgcLI2B0U. Co-hosted by Flathead County Library. Ages 16+.



Wingspan game logo
By Natalia Rojas



Osprey | Photo: Erika Greene

wings MONTANA AUDUBON
across the big sky
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!

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The History Corner: The Beginnings of Two Audubons

By Linda Winnie



After organizing the first Bigfork Christmas Bird Count in 1974, Ron Lang hoped to start an Audubon chapter. Believing it required 40 members, and with the Bird

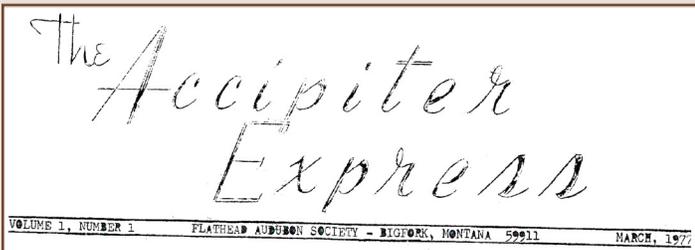
Count group being smaller, he instead proposed a bird club. The resulting Bigfork Bird Club flourished, with many enjoying the close-knit, local focus on birding. Others, however, sought a broader mission. In the 1960s and 1970s, environmental issues gained national attention, and many Club members shared that concern. The National Audubon Society (NAS) combined birding with environmental advocacy, which appealed to these members. Since many were already NAS members, affiliation seemed natural.

In fall 1976, an NAS representative visited the Club to explain the process of forming a chapter and offered support. "We weighed the pros and cons," recalls Rick Trembath, "and the pros won." At the potluck following the 1976 Bigfork Christmas Count, members voted to become an official chapter. While some NAS requirements remained, the group began meeting as the Flathead Audubon Society.

Birding remained central. Two birding trips were announced, to the potholes between Bigfork and Somers, and to Kerr Dam, combined with a picnic meeting. The chapter built and sold birdhouses and feeders, and contributed six Wood Duck boxes to the new Swan River National Wildlife Refuge, where members were also doing monthly bird counts. Members also submitted daily checklists to Wanda Jamieson, third chapter president, for Wanda's quarterly report to the NAS journal *American Birds*.



FAS letterhead 1977, designed by Elmer Sprunger



Accipiter Express header March 1977

Flathead Audubon's first meeting was February 1977. The first issue of *The Accipiter Express* newsletter was mailed before the March meeting. It shows the chapter already engaged in environmental issues. The March program included presentations on both the proposed Great Bear Wilderness and the proposed Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, "the most important conservation legislation in 100 years." The chapter's first field trip was a two-day canoe trip down the Lower Flathead River, where the Army Corps of Engineers was proposing new dams. Details about an upcoming Polson hearing on this proposal were included.

By May 1, 1977, the Flathead Audubon Society had fulfilled NAS requirements and was officially chartered.

In this same period, FAS leaders helped create another Audubon organization. In fall 1976, Dan Sullivan attended a meeting of Montana chapter presidents to discuss forming a cooperative alliance. At the time, four chapters existed in Montana; Flathead Audubon would soon be the fifth. This group formed the Montana Audubon Council, which consisted of representatives from all the Montana chapters. The Council met twice annually, the site rotating through the chapter cities. In 1979, the chapters began pooling funds to hire a lobbyist for the state legislature. This Council later evolved into the independent organization now known as Montana Audubon.

In four years, 1974 to 1977, four successful institutions were born: the Bigfork Christmas Bird Count, the Lower Valley Bird Club, the Flathead Audubon Society, and the Montana Audubon Council, each with a significant, lasting legacy. We owe much to the small group of birders responsible for those beginnings.



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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.

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