



Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

VOLUME 50, NUMBER 4

Bohemian Waxwings



Photo by Daniel Casey

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Feeder Birds: Rufous Hummingbirds

By Molly Miller

Photos by Daniel Casey

I saw my first male Rufous Hummingbird on April 25 this year, as he buzzed and clicked his way to the feeder. Acting uncharacteristically shy at first, he took a long drink and flew to a nearby bush. He preened his colorful feathers before whirring in for a second drink and buzzing back off.



Seen head-on, Rufous neck shimmers.

By the second week of May, I had regular traffic at four feeders, with three species of hummingbird: Rufous, Calliope, and Black-chinned. Local hummingbird densities increased, such that by mid-June, my backyard hummingbirds could consume a full quart of nectar in one day!

Of all the hummingbird species in my yard, the bright-orange male (and orange-green female) Rufous Hummingbirds are the easiest to watch. They're bold! They are combative at the feeder, protecting the nectar with raucous buzzing and chatter, tail feathers flaring. In contrast, they also like to perch on or near a feeder for long periods, often in mating pairs, sometimes almost torpid, providing me with ample time to observe them.

I often see a male Rufous fly to the feeder to sip nectar, his shimmering throat accented by a white breast, before returning to his perch, where his throat colors darken to black. The feathers of male hummingbirds are



Rufous neck appears black at some angles

structured to amplify and reflect one special color of light straight ahead of the bird, while the iridescence changes with throat position. Only when a male Rufous looks at you head-on can you fully see its shiny vermilion throat, which is intended to help him attract a mate.

Beyond eye-catching colors, Rufous Hummingbirds are also big flirts! When a male Rufous sees me working in

the garden, or even through a window, he may fly very high, then swoop down in a J-shaped dive, whirring and stuttering at me. He repeats this dive over and over, creating a circle of delight. All of our backyard hummingbirds are curious creatures, flying up to closely inspect me without fear. I have no doubt they recognize me as the one who keeps their nectar fresh and available.

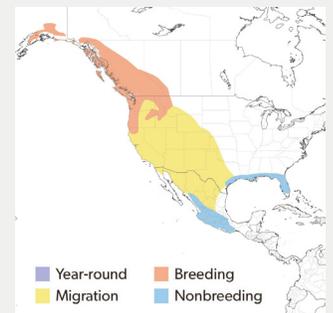
Hummingbirds have a memory for spatial cues. They recognize the flowers (and feeders) whose nectar they prefer and return to the same food sources year after year. Over time, flowers favored by hummers have evolved structurally, such that hummingbird tongues are optimized to retrieve their nectar.

Recent field science has shown that a Rufous can locate a flower or a feeder over a vast area, even if it has visited it for only a few seconds! Rufous Hummingbirds also keep track of the quality and content of nectar, visiting blossoms only when both are optimal.

By the first week of August, migration was in swing, and my sightings of Rufous Hummingbirds declined to only a few hardy birds. Males are generally the first of the species to migrate south to Mexico, leaving as early as July. At up to 4,000 miles, they make one of the longest migratory journeys of any bird, as measured by size.

Now, as fall turns to winter, I look forward to the return of my backyard Rufous Hummingbirds next spring, when I will enjoy their colorful bluster once again.

Attention potential BOM authors: Want to share your bird knowledge and observations? Send your submissions our way at bom@flatheadaudubon.org!



Map courtesy of Birds of the World

DECEMBER PROGRAM

Flathead Audubon Christmas Bird Count

Presented by Denny Olson



Photo by J.P. Edge

and author, Denny Olson, for his presentation at our December 8 meeting. Denny will present the history of global Christmas Bird Counts and recount the rich history

It's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) time! Join former Flathead Audubon Conservation Educator and lifelong teaching naturalist, "edutainment" performer,

of the Bigfork and Kalispell counts. In preparation for our upcoming local counts, Denny will share tips about how to identify certain challenging birds, count flocks on the fly, and report rare winter bird sightings, as well as regale us with stories of unusual sightings from prior counts.

But Denny has always promoted participation rather than presentation, so the real "meat" (or tofu) of the program will be short descriptions by you, the audience, of your favorite sighting or two from past CBCs. Come prepared to share (voluntarily, of course) your stories with us. Some amazing things have happened on past counts, and we want to hear all about them! Don't prepare, just share!

DECEMBER 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 December 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.

Videos of previous FAS meeting programs are available at

<https://flatheadaudubon.org/videos>.

DECEMBER/JANUARY CALENDAR

Monday, Dec 1, 5:30pm. FAS Board of Directors Meeting. Gateway Community Center, Room 26, US Hwy. 2 West, Kalispell. You may bring your dinner.

Friday, Dec 5, 4-5pm. Bigfork Library and **Monday, Dec 15, 4-5pm,** Kalispell Library, Craft for Conservation Workshop. See page 11.

Monday, Dec 8, 7pm. Flathead Audubon General Meeting. Gateway Community Center, US Hwy. 2 West, Kalispell. East side of Gateway Mall, along Glenwood Dr. All are welcome. For presentation information and/or to join remotely, see above.

Friday, Dec 19, full day. Libby Christmas Bird Count. See page 12.

Saturday, Dec 20, full day. Bigfork, Eureka, Upper Swan Valley Christmas Bird Counts. See page 12.

Sunday, Dec 21, full day. Glacier NP and Ninepipe NWR Christmas Bird Counts. See page 12.

Sunday, Dec 21, 3pm. Winter Solstice Celebration. See page 7.

Saturday, Jan 3, 2026, full day. Troy Christmas Bird Count. See page 12.

Sunday, Jan 4, 2026, full day. Kalispell Christmas Bird Count. See page 12.



Peeps from the President

By Darcy Thomas



Photo by Rob Thomas

SAVE THE DATE! Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival will be held at the Red Lion Hotel in Kalispell from June 12-14, 2026. The festival coincides with Montana Audubon's 50th anniversary celebration. Great speakers, field trips, and fun events are planned, with Jake Bramante and Jess Garby emceeing this fun

event. Please mark your calendars and plan to join us next summer.

Until then, consider joining our Board of Directors or volunteering to be part of the important work being accomplished by our committees. You can protect birds by participating in one or more of the committees listed under the Flathead Audubon Society Directory on page 13. We recently welcomed Dale Becker and Kelly Bednara to the Conservation Committee, but we could use more support to strengthen our conservation efforts.

A big thank you to the many people who work behind the scenes to move Flathead Audubon forward. Although board members handle most of the responsibilities and deserve a big round of applause, we have a wonderful group of members filling other vital roles. Jan Metzmaker assisted with the Great Fish Community Challenge. Susie Waldron, Julie Oswald, and Molly Miller are the heartbeat of the newsletter. Denny Olson and Dan Casey joined FAS Education Coordinator Jess Garby in giving presentations during this fall's Library Speaker Series. Dan Casey also organized and managed the 18th season of the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch, assisted by primary observers Dan Stoken and Josh Covill, as well as many other unnamed volunteers who sat on the ridge counting raptors. Kelly Bednara is assisting Jess with redesigning the conservation section of the FAS website. Linda Winnie, Ben Long, and Karen Nichols have been recording the Flathead Audubon's history for longevity.

I wish I had room to thank every person who loves birds and goes the extra mile to help our chapter be excellent. Please know you are valued!



Meet Board Member Michell De Leon Tyler

As a young girl, Michell loved being outdoors and listening to the birds sing. She felt there was such happiness in their voices. She could sit for hours listening to them and watching their antics. This early start of observing nature firsthand, coupled with her Grandmother's gardening influence, led Michell to eventually start her own landscaping business. She is passionate about planting landscapes that support birds and bring beauty to her clients' homes. Michell has transformed her own yard into a sanctuary for birds and enjoys capturing beautiful photos of her winged visitors.

"I have been an Audubon member for many years and have enjoyed learning more about birds from FAS. I recently became a board member in hopes of helping birds and, like so many others, being a voice for them," says Michell.



Photo courtesy of Michell De Leon Tyler

Highlights from the November 3, 2025 Board of Directors Meeting

By Michele Tohtz, Secretary

- ✚ The current financial report was passed and approved by the Board. Rod continues wise management and investment of the FAS funds.
- ✚ The Red Lion Hotel has been booked for the 2026 Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival.
- ✚ Jess still needs cardboard toilet paper rolls and bird magazines for school projects.
- ✚ Shannon will coordinate the annual Kalispell Christmas Bird Count.

The History Corner: Christmas Bird Counts

By Karen Nichols



Birders in Northwestern Montana enjoy a rich tradition of Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs), dating back nearly 100 years and encompassing eight communities.

Today, there are about 30 consistent CBC count circles in Montana, engaging hundreds of hardy winter bird enthusiasts. Locally, these include Bigfork, Kalispell, Ninepipe, Upper Swan, Glacier National Park, Eureka, Libby, and Troy. Just as the national CBC has provided a continent-wide picture of changing bird ecology, Montana CBCs also reveal trends over many decades.



Barb Boorman & Gael Bissell, Bigfork 2011 CBC
Photo by Linda Winnie

The Christmas Bird Count began in 1900 in response to the Christmas “side hunts,” during which participants would compete to kill as many birds and other animals as possible. Ornithologist Frank

Chapman of the American Museum of Natural History was appalled by this wasteful slaughter and proposed censusing birds instead of killing them. That first CBC included 25 locations across the continent. The tradition spread to become one of the longest-running citizen science efforts in the world.

The first CBC in northwestern Montana was conducted near **Libby** in 1925 by Winton Weydemeyer. The Fortine tree farmer was a pioneering Montana naturalist, forester, and state legislator, who also wrote many scientific papers about Montana birds. Although Weydemeyer’s CBCs were short lived, the Libby count has run consistently from 1980 to 2025, according to Libby educator Gene Reckin, who has participated for more than 40 years.

The Libby counts reflect the area’s changes. For example, Weydemeyer did not record a single Bald Eagle or Common Raven near Libby in 1926. By comparison, in 2023 Libby counters tallied 249 Bald Eagles and similar numbers of ravens, likely reflecting habitat changes that provided new food sources, most notably the creation of Libby Dam and Lake Kookanusa in the 1970s. “Open water attracts so many more birds than Winton observed pre-dam. He saw very few waterfowl,” said Reckin, who

often canoes down the Kootenai River to access habitat for the count.

Flathead Audubon leader and bird biologist Dan Casey has participated in Christmas Bird Counts nearly every year since 1967 (when he was a pre-teen in New Jersey).

In 1999, Casey started the **Kalispell** count, locating the count circle to include Smith and Foy’s Lakes, Owen Sowerwine, and the landfill. He said Montana CBC data has helped inform conservation grants to protect and restore important wetlands. The counts have also illuminated trends, such as steadily increasing numbers of House Finches and Eurasian Collared-Doves in the Flathead Valley and fewer raptors, like Snowy Owls and Prairie Falcons, in the Lower Valley due to habitat loss. Those birds depend on prey species like voles, who rely on a diminishing supply of agricultural lands. Casey anticipates that species like Anna’s Hummingbird, Spotted Towhee, Mountain Bluebird, Gray Catbird, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet will be seen more frequently as many birds shift their ranges northward due to climate change.



Trumpeter Swans, Bigfork 2024 CBC
Photo by Karen Nichols

The **Bigfork** CBC is closely linked to the Flathead Audubon Society, as pioneers of the Bigfork count established the Flathead Audubon chapter in 1977.

At 98 species, the Bigfork CBC hosts the greatest species diversity seen on a single Montana CBC. “Bigfork has far and away been the most frequent count with

the highest species total,” said Casey, longtime compiler of both the Bigfork and Kalispell counts. Bigfork also regularly has the greatest variety of waterfowl species of all Montana counts. Casey, who has censused the same section of the Bigfork count for nearly 40 years, says the Flathead and Swan Rivers, Flathead Lake, and varied habitat contribute to the high tallies.

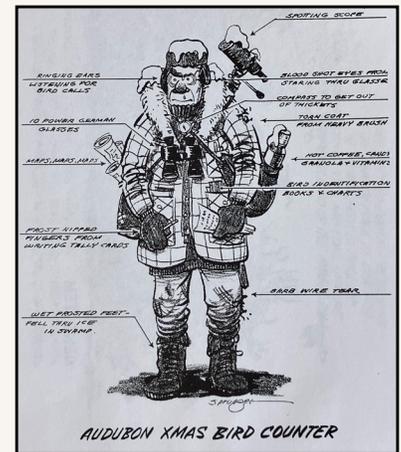


Illustration by Elmer Sprunger

The History Corner: Christmas Bird Counts

By Karen Nichols



50 YEARS

(continued)

In the 1970s, Bill Hammer and Harry Smith started the **Troy** count. Harry Smith's daughters still participate in the event. Around 2000,

Hammer and Smith recruited Troy wildlife photographer Don Jones to lead the count for "just one season." "I'm still doing it to this day, and I love it," Jones said. "I put down the cameras and head out with binos around the neck, much like I did as a child growing up and attending CBCs in the Chicago area."



Rough-legged Hawk
Photo by Daniel Casey

The **Ninepipe** count, initiated in 1978, is known for abundant raptors, said longtime organizer Jim Rogers. According to National Audubon data, the count held the record nationwide for 17 years for the greatest number of Rough-legged Hawks. Another year, Dan and Susannah Casey saw

all five North American falcon species while assisting with the Ninepipes count. Jim Oates, current compiler at Ninepipes, said several rarities were noted in 2024, including Common Loon, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Canyon Wren, and Snow Goose.

Glacier National Park CBCs began in 1962. Former Glacier Park biologist Dr. Riley McClelland and his wife, Pat, took over the counts in 1965. McClelland, now retired, lives within the 15-mile diameter circle and counts birds from his feeders with his daughter. Last year, they reported a Ring-necked Pheasant, rare for the Glacier count. Park biologist Steve Gniadek and his wife, Susan Sindt, both led the count at different times.

Lisa Bate, another park biologist, has led the Glacier count since 2009 and says many of the 20-25 participants have been involved for decades. Last year's count yielded several unusual species, including a Yellow-billed Loon, a Northern Hawk Owl, and a Greater Scaup. Bate says she values the community of the CBC; many participants are friends she only sees that one day a year. Some families who've been doing the count for decades have become deeply attached to their segment of the circle.

Swan Valley conservationists and Flathead Audubon volunteers Rod and June Ash started the **Upper Swan Valley** CBC in 1993. Longtime participants Steve and Sharon Lamar of Condon said that bird counts are a valued source of social connection in the remote Swan Valley, with the small group of 10 to 12 gathering for potlucks after the counts.

Longtime Audubon leader and Kootenai National Forest biologist Lewis Young started the **Eureka** CBC in 1993. Young's colleague Ellen Sullivan helped Young with the count until Young died unexpectedly in 2023. Sullivan then took over compiling. Sullivan said Young had an encyclopedic memory of when and where birds were seen. "I really miss him," she said. "His passion was birds, and he shared that with me."

Sullivan remembers seeing a Snowy Owl during the very snowy year of 1996 and again in 2015. Other highlights include a Curve-billed Thrasher in 2006 and 2013. She noted the steep declines in Evening Grosbeaks in the past decade, reflecting deeply concerning declines seen across their range.



Snowy Owl, Photo by BJ Worth

While CBCs do provide a remarkable source of data about bird distribution and abundance, they also provide a deeply cherished winter tradition and foster a sense of community.



White-tailed Ptarmigan's changing plumage provides camouflage year-round

Photo by BJ Worth

Nest Notes December 2025

By Jess Garby, Flathead Audubon Education Coordinator



Photo by Will Laurie

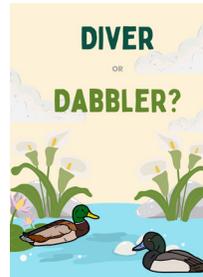
Can this be the last *Pileated Post* of 2025? It's hard to believe I began this job as Flathead Audubon Society (FAS) Education Coordinator a full year ago, in December 2024. Every

FAS member, FAS board member, and even folks from National Audubon have made me feel so at home in this community. Over the past year, I've visited 16 schools in Flathead County and one in Lake County, working with K-12 students and reaching more than 1,500 learners through classroom programs and field trips. It has been such a joy to see how naturally students connect with birds. I've learned that most students have a connection to birds before FAS visits their classrooms, whether they are hunters, their grandparents have bird feeders, or they are fascinated by the birds they see on the bus ride to school.



Photo by Cara Rathke

If you have a young nature enthusiast in your life, we have a fun winter opportunity coming up this month! We are partnering with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) and the Flathead Lake Biological Station from December through March to offer take-home Junior Ranger Kits. These kits will be available for pickup at the Polson Library, Columbia Falls Library, Wayfarers State Park, and the FWP office in Kalispell. The kit, titled "Diver or Dabbler?" will be ready for pickup on December 5 at all locations.



On a personal note, I am excited to be participating in Project

FeederWatch, a Cornell Lab of Ornithology initiative, for the first time! Project FeederWatch is a community-driven effort that runs

from November through April, collecting data on wintering birds. It's a simple and exciting way to contribute valuable information on bird trends. You simply count the number of species that visit your feeder on a periodic basis. I have submitted two counts so far, with only six species per count. I am hoping for more frequent and exciting results to report as the snow falls.

I've also been focusing my energy on two exciting National Audubon initiatives. First, Flathead Audubon was invited to join the Indigenous Partnerships Support Community of Practice, a group of chapters from across the country learning about meaningful and collaborative partnerships with local tribes. National Audubon has hired an external consultant to learn how to engage respectfully and build trust working across cultural lines. We are eager to learn how we can better support and promote the tribes' existing conservation programs.

Lastly, I am working diligently on the Audubon in Action Grant. Each year, National Audubon Society provides two types of grants to Audubon chapter projects that contribute to Flight Plan, Audubon's 2023-2028 strategic plan. Flight Plan's community-building milestone aims to drive widespread public action by expanding the number of people who care about, and take action for, birds. I am excited to share more about the project we are working on in the near future!

Great Fish Community Challenge Results

By Darcy Thomas

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts! This year's Great Fish Community Challenge was a phenomenal success, due to the incredible generosity of you, our donors. Over 170 donors contributed a total of \$49,065, exceeding our (admittedly) ambitious goal of \$40,000. On top of that, the [Whitefish Community Foundation](#) and the [Circle of Giving](#) made a matching contribution of \$17,000, bringing the total funds received by Flathead Audubon Society to an astounding \$66,065!

We are truly amazed and humbled by your support, and we are eternally thankful for the hard work and dedication



of the [Whitefish Community Foundation](#) in helping us further our efforts. We will honor your trust by applying these gifts wisely to conserve birds, wildlife habitat, and ecosystem diversity in northwest Montana through education and conservation programs.

DECEMBER 2025 FIELD TRIPS

CRESTON RAPTOR QUEST, Date & Time TBD (see below, likely in the first half of December)

Join Michell De Leon Tyler to look for winter-resident raptors and other birds as we travel back roads in the Creston area. Hawks, including Red-tailed and Rough-legged, Northern Harriers, Bald Eagles, owls and various accipiters and falcons may be seen.

Due to the unpredictable weather in late fall/early winter we have decided to offer an outing that will be held as weather permits. E-mail or call Michell at michell@flatheadaudubon.org or (406) 250-5238 to be put on a list of interested parties. Michell will contact you a day or two in advance when she feels conditions will be amenable for the outing. You can confirm when notified, if the time works for you.



Bigfork Christmas Bird Count



The 51st Bigfork Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 20, with Chris West serving as the new organizer and compiler. New counters are welcome, along with all returnees. If you plan on participating, please notify Chris via email prior to December 1. If you have been a region leader in past years, please indicate as soon as possible if you plan on returning or not. All other participants are asked to indicate whether they are new or returning, and whether they have experience and/or a preference for counting a particular section.

Bigfork CBC packets with bird checklists and their respective sub-region maps will be emailed out to region leaders the first week of December, if not before. If there are multiple people in your region, please get your group together and form a plan to ensure adequate coverage.

All counters will be notified of a post-count meeting location once one is chosen. Packets with maps and bird checklists should be returned to Chris as soon as possible following the count so results can be tallied. You may submit them via email, in person at the post-count meeting, as an eBird trip report, or by depositing them in Chris's mailbox at 215 Spruce Rd, Apartment E (mailbox E), Kalispell, 59901.

Chris may be reached by phone at 608-475-9016 (text message preferred) or email at chris.w.birder@gmail.com.

CELEBRATE WINTER SOLSTICE WITH FLATHEAD AUDUBON

DATE: SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21

TIME: 3:00 PM

LOCATION: LAWRENCE PARK

Join Flathead Audubon President Darcy Thomas and Education Coordinator Jess Garby for a joyful Winter Solstice celebration in the park! We'll make birdseed ornaments, share winter poetry, and make a wish in the labyrinth. Then we'll explore how certain birds adapt to the challenges of winter during a guided bird walk through the park.

Winter Solstice marks the shortest day of the year: a time for reflection, renewal, and hope. We'll light a candle to symbolize the return of longer, lighter days as we move through winter and prepare for spring.

Come celebrate the changing season, connect with nature, and discover the incredible resilience of our winter birds! Hot cider will be provided. Please bring your own mug.

Sign-up is required. For more information or to register, contact Jess Garby [at \[jess@flatheadaudubon.org\]\(mailto:jess@flatheadaudubon.org\)](mailto:jess@flatheadaudubon.org).



Kent Meireis

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!

ATTENTION LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHERS!



Ring-necked Pheasant, Photo by Steve Lull

Do you have eye-catching shots of local birds?

Would you like to share your bird photographs with our readers? If you would be willing to share your photos on an as-needed basis, please email julie@flatheadaudubon.org.

Eighteenth Jewel Basin Hawk Watch Season Completed

By Dan Casey, JBHW Coordinator



Sharp-shinned Hawk, Photo by Josh Covill

Dan Stoken and Josh Covill counted just 25 birds during more than 19 hours over three surveys during the last week of October to close out the 2025 season. With more than two feet of snow having fallen on the ridgetop, these latter surveys from our lower observation point were hoping for a late season pulse of Golden Eagles, which did not materialize. Nonetheless, our season was a stellar success by every metric, with 357 hours of surveys over 51 days yielding our third highest season total count of 3,431 raptors. These included above average



Peregrine Falcon, Photo by BJ Worth

total counts (in bold below) for all but three of the 17 species we counted, and record high counts for two species (the Broad-winged Hawk and the Peregrine Falcon). We have now recorded more than 50,000 birds over the course of our surveys. Of note, these numbers consist of greater than 33,000 Accipiters (including more than 24,000 Sharp-shinned Hawks), and greater than 8,000 eagles and 5,000 Buteos. Our 2025 totals were as follows:

Turkey Vulture – 8	Broad-winged Hawk – 79	American Kestrel – 106
Osprey – 17	Swainson's Hawk – 3	Merlin – 38
Bald Eagle – 78	Red-tailed Hawk – 252	Peregrine Falcon – 24
Northern Harrier – 97	Ferruginous Hawk - 1	Prairie Falcon – 16
Sharp-shinned Hawk – 1,852	Rough-legged Hawk - 21	Falcon, species – 5
Cooper's Hawk – 410	Buteo, species – 5	Raptor, species – 18
American Goshawk – 19	Golden Eagle – 332	
Accipiter, species – 49	Eagle, Species - 1	
TOTAL RAPTORS: 3,431		

Thanks to Dan Stoken and Josh Covill, who served as contracted primary observers for 35 surveys, and to B.J. Worth, Dee Baginski, Denny Olson, Eric Godin, Jake Bramante, Lisa Bate, and Nickie Derue, who joined me in conducting one to six surveys each.

A full report, summarizing this year's data and 18-year trends, will be produced this winter and made available on the Flathead Audubon website.

Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – October/November 2025

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

The weather remained mild throughout the period, with snow and ice restricted mostly to the mountains. This made for a gradual influx of winter birds, although **Bohemian Waxwings** and **Rough-legged Hawks** were fairly widely reported by the end of the period. **Snow Geese**, normally more common in spring, made a good showing around the valley. Other notables included lingering breeding species (e.g. **Red-naped Sapsucker**, **Spotted Towhee**, **Western Bluebird**), as well as “expected” migrant waterfowl, shorebirds, and waterbirds. The **Short-billed Gull** first found 12 Oct in Lakeside was present through 27 October, but gull abundance and diversity were surprisingly low. An **Anna’s Hummingbird** was present in the Many Lakes area throughout the period (Michell DLT).

10/14 – **Snow Goose** (12, first of season) Creston Wetland (Craig H)

10/15 – **Red-naped Sapsucker** (1, late) Old Freight Road, St Ignatius (Anon.)

10/16 – **Wilson’s Warbler** (1, late) Polson (Glenn S)

10/24 – **Lewis’s Woodpecker** (1, late) Wild Horse Island (Derrick R)

10/24 – **Surf Scoter** (1) Foy’s Lake (Craig H) present through 10/27 (Jake B)

10/27 – **Ferruginous Hawk** (1) Lower Valley Rd (Dan C)

10/28 – **Pacific Loon** (2) Bowman Lake (Steve G, Eric G)

10/30 – **Dunlin** (1) Flathead Lake WPA (Shawn R, Raylene W)

10/31 – **Dunlin** (2) Creston Wetland (Jake B)

10/31 – **Western Bluebird** (1, late) Creston Wetland (Jake B)

10/31 – **Snow Bunting** (1, first of season) Upper Whitefish Lake (Josh C)

11/04 – **Snow Goose** (500) (seasonal max) Kalispell (Beth V)

11/07 – **Cackling Goose** (3) West Valley Viewing Area (Dan C)

11/07 – **Surf Scoter** (1) West Valley (Patrick B)

11/09 – **Spotted Towhee** (1, late) St Ignatius (Dan S)

11/11 – **Ferruginous Hawk** (1) South of Columbia Falls (Jake B)

What to Expect - November/December 2025

Late November and early December can continue to provide surprises, particularly if our lakes stay ice-free. It’s a good time to scan flocks of diving ducks, and loons should be scrutinized closely to look for the rarer species. Gull diversity should continue to increase as **Glaucous**, **Iceland**, **Lesser Black-backed**, or even **Glaucous-winged Gulls** arrive. It’s also a great time to look through the wintering raptors for **Harlan’s Red-tailed Hawks** and the diverse plumages of **Rough-legged Hawks**.



Cackling Geese, Photo by Daniel Casey

Montana Audubon Wildlife Fund Grants



Since 1996, Montana Audubon has awarded small grants to individuals or organizations in support of research and education projects that directly benefit wildlife in Montana. In 2025, the organization awarded seven grants to support research, habitat clean-up, a hawk watch station, and raptor rehabilitation centers. Visit the [grant website](#) to see updates from each recipient.

Applications for the 2026 cycle are now available. All proposals must be received no later than Friday, January 16, 2026. Winners will be announced in March 2026.

See grant guidelines, download the application form, and read updates from 2025 recipients [here](#).

Robocker Field Trip Report

By Jess Garby



Photo by Keith Hammer

Elle Elberts-Robocker, granddaughter of founding FAS member Jean Robocker, has been hard at work preserving and stewarding the land her grandmother left behind. The Robocker family first settled on Egan Slough in 1907. Doug and Jean Robocker built the house and barn there in 1950, where Jean, a lover of the outdoors, lived until she passed away in 2021.

The land has been a home to people for thousands of years. Managed historically by the Salish and Ksanka (Kootenai) people, it has sustained countless generations. In the 1980s Jean and Doug put the property under conservation with The Nature Conservancy, to be protected as both farmland and wildlife habitat for future generations. In the years since, hundreds of surrounding acres have also been protected. Recent conservation work has been conducted on the farm through the generosity of friends, the Flathead Conservation District, and Flathead Audubon.

Elle has graciously invited Flathead Audubon to be a part of the Jean Robocker Farm legacy. A goal of hers is to eventually invite local school groups and FAS members to enjoy the trails she and her team have built.

FAS Board Member Pam Willison worked with Elle to create trail signage and a brochure. After constructing trails throughout the spring and summer of 2025, Elle invited the FAS Board of Directors to visit and explore the property, while learning about the rich history of the land.

It was an exciting day for all. The trails hug Egan Slough, [an eBird hotspot](#), yet the slough has never provided public access. Therefore, it was the first time for many of us to see the slough up close. A family of Snow Geese flew over as we admired the surroundings. Elle shared the historical land uses, from Native peoples regularly burning the land to the modern farming techniques used today.



Swamp Sparrow, Photo by Jake Bramante

Along the way, we spotted some incredible birds, including a rarity for Montana birders, the Swamp Sparrow! When Jake Bramante heard the unfamiliar notes, he took his time finding the bird. After searching through the brush, he got eyes on the rusty-capped sparrow.

Other notable bird species observed included a Pacific Wren, the trifecta of nuthatch species (Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Pygmy Nuthatch), and a Great Horned Owl. For the full eBird checklist on all birds seen, please [click here](#).

Thanks to Elle and her wonderful team for all their hard work and for graciously hosting the FAS Board. We hope to provide future Flathead Audubon field trips at the Robocker Farm. In the meantime, please note this is private property and access is by permission only from the Robocker family.

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To switch to the email version, simply contact us at info@flatheadaudubon.org.

Thank you!

Montana Audubon Citizen Science Reports

This year, Montana Audubon organized three Citizen Science surveys: a new pilot project surveying for Nighthawks; the second year of Western and Eastern Screech-Owl surveys; and the continuation of a Long-billed Curlew initiative, now in its 13th year.

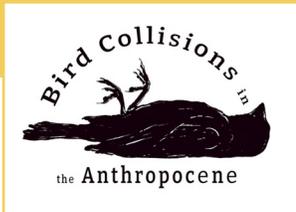
Across all three projects, 221 citizen scientist volunteers conducted 167 survey routes, covering an estimated 1,287 miles! In total, 1,713 target species were observed and counted. The data collected will help researchers create conservation action plans for these species.

Montana Audubon sends a big thanks to everyone involved with Citizen Science surveys this year! In addition to the hundreds of volunteer participants, the surveys are supported by the following sponsors and partners: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Montana Natural Heritage Program, Tracy Aviary, L.E.A.W Family Foundation, Blackfoot Challenge, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

Read the reports here: [2025 Citizen Science Reports Now Available | Montana Audubon](#)



Craft for Conservation Workshop



Friday, December 5th, 4-5pm, Bigfork Library
Monday, December 15th, 4-5pm, Kalispell Library

Join the Flathead Audubon Society and Flathead County Libraries at a crafting workshop intended to raise awareness about bird conservation.

One of the major threats to bird populations is collisions with glass buildings and windows. To educate the public on this issue, the international art and conservation project "Bird Collisions in the Anthropocene," based in Illinois, is crowdsourcing the creation of 10,863 hand-sewn birds. This number represents one hand-sewn bird for every bird found in 2023 by the Chicago Bird Collision Monitors after striking glass. The term *Anthropocene* refers to the current geological age, known as the "Age of Humans," during which human activity has had a significant influence on the natural world.



Photo by Holly Greenberg

Workshop participants will use upcycled cloth to handcraft life-sized bird sculptures. Each figure commemorates a real bird that lost its life after hitting glass. You'll also learn from Flathead Audubon Education Coordinator Jess Garby, as she shares insights into bird conservation strategies.

Sewing experience is recommended but not required. If you have spare fabrics, please bring them along. The workshop is

open to participants aged 16 and older.

For more information about "Bird Collisions in the Anthropocene," visit: <https://www.hollygreenberg.com/bird-collisions-anthropocene> or watch Bird Collisions in the Anthropocene.

For program-specific information, email Jess at jess@flatheadaudubon.org.

Join Us for 2025 Local Christmas Bird Counts



There are eight local Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs), each within defined 15-mile diameter circles that remain constant from year to year. Participants count birds within these areas on select dates between December 14 and January 5.

The establishment and evolution of local CBCs is explored in this month's History Corner article on pages 4 and 5. CBCs will also be the topic of Denny Olson's presentation at the December 8 FAS general meeting. See page 2 for more details.

Your participation is welcome and encouraged, whether you are a seasoned birder or a beginner. Review the following list for count locations and dates. If you would like to take part, contact the area organizer. Information regarding the Kalispell and Bigfork counts is provided separately below and on page 7, respectively.

Local Count Locations, Count Date, and Contact Information

Bigfork, Dec. 20 Sat, Chris West, chris.w.birder@gmail.com, 608-475-9016
 Eureka, Dec. 20 Sat, Ellen Sullivan, ellenlouise1963@gmail.com, 406-291-1794
 Glacier (GNP), Dec. 21 Sun, Lisa Bate, Lisa_Bate@nps.gov, 406-888-7833
 Kalispell, Jan. 4 Sun, Shannon Donaldson, shannon@flatheadaudubon.org, 406-261-3466
 Libby, Dec. 19 Fri, Gene Reckin, gnreckin@gmail.com, 406-291-8482
 Ninepipe NWR, Dec. 21 Sun, Jim Oates, oates65@gmail.com, 406-270-7826
 Swan (Upper), Dec. 20 Sat, Taylor Tewksbury, taylor@svconnections.org, 406-754-3137
 Troy, Jan. 3 Sat, Don Jones, don@donaldmjones.com, 406-546-3832

Kalispell Christmas Bird Count



The 27th annual Kalispell CBC will take place on Sunday, January 4, 2026. The Kalispell count area is centered at the junction of Highway 93 and West Reserve Drive by Home Depot. From Happy Valley to the north and Herron Park to the south, Fairview Marsh to the east and McMannamy Draw to the west, the Kalispell CBC covers a wide variety of habitats. It includes the Flathead River corridor between Pressentine and Foys Bend, the Whitefish River downstream from Hodgson Road, and the Stillwater River downstream of Ray Kuhns Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Favorite birding spots like Lone Pine State Park, Foys Lake, Owen Sowerwine, McWenneger Slough, Kuhns WMA, the "Flathead Gull Sanctuary" (Flathead County Landfill), and much of West Valley lie within its boundaries, as well.

Everyone is welcome to join the Kalispell CBC effort, whether out in the field or counting backyard feeder birds. With many birds being concentrated at feeders this time of year, feeder data is valuable and easy to collect. If you reside in the count area and enjoy collecting feeder data, we're happy to get more feeder watchers signed up. For those able to lead, we are seeking at least one experienced birder to cover a section this year. If you observe an unusual or rare bird during count week, January 1 through January 7, please let us know.

Shannon Donaldson will organize and compile this year's count. If you covered a section last year, she will be in touch to arrange for getting your packet to you. On count day, feel free to meet for breakfast at 7am at Kalispell Kitchen, 660 E. Idaho St. in Kalispell (formerly Finnegan's/4B's). Following the count, counters will convene at Nickel Charlie's.

Over the past 26 years, the Kalispell count has produced a total of 134 species, with Horned Grebe and Short-billed Gull being the newest additions last year. The count averages 72 species, with a maximum of 83 species in 2012. Last year, counters recorded 76 species and tallied a record 25,645 birds, many thousands more than the 9,503 birds counted in the foggy conditions of the previous year.

You can reach Shannon at 406-261-3466 or by email at shannon@flatheadaudubon.org.

In Memory of Sue Carpenter

From Leo Keane
and Gail Leonard



FAS Endowment Fund

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

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

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Content Editor Julie Oswald julie@flatheadaudubon.org

Layout Editor Susie Waldron susie@flatheadaudubon.org

Bird of the Month Editor Molly Miller bom@flatheadaudubon.org

Mail Distribution Jake Bramante jake@flatheadaudubon.org

Email Distribution Jess Garby jess@flatheadaudubon.org

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

OFFICERS

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 Vice-President Linda Du Lac lindadulac@flatheadaudubon.org
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DIRECTORS

2021-2027 Jake Bramante jake@flatheadaudubon.org
 2023-2027 Ronda Howell ronda@flatheadaudubon.org
 2023-2026 Gael Bissell gael@flatheadaudubon.org
 2023-2026 Linda Du Lac lindadulac@flatheadaudubon.org
 2023-2026 Bob Lee bob@flatheadaudubon.org
 2023-2026 Carole Jorgensen carole@flatheadaudubon.org
 2023-2026 Cindy Roberts cindy@flatheadaudubon.org
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 2025-2028 Margaret Parodi margaret@flatheadaudubon.org
 2025-2028 Bridger Donaldson bridger@flatheadaudubon.org
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 2025-2028 Ken Fielder ken@flatheadaudubon.org
 2025-2028 Mitchell Tyler michell@flatheadaudubon.org
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COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Conservation Gael Bissell gael@flatheadaudubon.org
 Carole Jorgensen carole@flatheadaudubon.org
Field Trips Margaret Parodi margaret@flatheadaudubon.org
 Darcy Thomas darcy@flatheadaudubon.org
Finance Rod Walette rod@flatheadaudubon.org
Great Fish Darcy Thomas darcy@flatheadaudubon.org
Membership Linda Du Lac lindadulac@flatheadaudubon.org
Newsletter Julie Oswald julie@flatheadaudubon.org
 Molly Miller bom@flatheadaudubon.org
Nominations Bob Lee bob@flatheadaudubon.org
Owen Sowerwine Darcy Thomas darcy@flatheadaudubon.org
 Pam Willison pam@flatheadaudubon.org
Outreach Jake Bramante jake@flatheadaudubon.org
Programs Ronda Howell ronda@flatheadaudubon.org

EDUCATION COORDINATOR

Jess Garby jess@flatheadaudubon.org

FAS REP ON MT AUDUBON BOARD

Gael Bissell gael@flatheadaudubon.org



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