



Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

Anna's Hummingbird
Photo by MDL Tyler



Anna and Me

By **Michell De Leon Tyler**

Photos by **Michell De Leon Tyler**

It's a chilly January morning in Creston, Montana, and outside my kitchen window, an Anna's Hummingbird perches contentedly on a clematis vine beneath the glow of a warming lamp. "Anna" has been a resident visitor for four months now, and I look for her every morning when I have my first coffee.



I noticed Anna in mid-September, when some of the perennials in our backyard were still in bloom, offering her nectar. Her favorite perch was on a mountain maple branch, where she would watch over me and chatter as I removed spent flowers in the perennial bed and prepared my garden for winter. Back then, when it was a warm 70° to 75°F, I enjoyed my coffee at the patio table outside. Anna would flutter close in front of me as if to say, "Good Morning!" How special she made me feel!

As October rolled in with lower evening temperatures, all the remaining flowers in the yard had frozen. The daily nectar Anna received from me was her only food source. I thought to myself, "She should be moving on!"

Research suggested the longer she stayed, the more likely she would overwinter in Montana. So I did my best to keep her happy and safe. I covered her favorite perch, the clematis trellis, with a large umbrella to keep things dry, and I installed a heating lamp underneath it to keep her warm. To give protection from wind, cold weather, and predators, I attached a small Doug fir tree and some juniper and red osier dogwood branches to the bower.

Anna watched as I worked. Once I finished, she flew in and perched beneath the heat lamp. It met her approval!

In addition to the original nectar feeder that I put outside for her daily, I keep a heated feeder under the umbrella that won't freeze when temperatures drop. I give her fresh food every day. The heater bulb is only 125 watts, but it could potentially sour the nectar in 24 hours. Since there are no more flying aphids or mosquitoes left for Anna to eat, I have supplemented her nectar with crushed mealworms, alternating Nektar-Plus supplements every other day. She always has both a feeder with a sugar-water mixture and a feeder of water.

During the day, Anna perches outside on the mountain maple branches. She remains very active, sometimes chasing away nuthatches, chickadees, and juncos that might intrude on her space. She has the spunky attitude of a survivor!

While we experienced a mild fall with no hard freezes, December temperatures dropped to single digits, and we had some very windy days. Anna seemed warm and happy in her sheltered bower, doing all the things hummingbirds do. I remain hopeful that she will continue to survive the winter here in Northwestern Montana if I keep helping her along.



Next month, look for Part II of this story, "What an Anna's Hummingbird in Montana Signifies." I will also provide an update on Anna's progress.

FEBRUARY PROGRAM

FWP Recreation and Conservation Projects on Flathead Lake

Presented by Dave Landstrom

Join us at the February 9 general meeting when we welcome Dave Landstrom, Region 1 Parks and Outdoor Recreation Manager for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). Dave will share information about recent projects undertaken on FWP lands surrounding Flathead Lake. The projects have been geared towards addressing recreational demands for public access to the lake, while simultaneously conserving or improving wildlife habitat. Specifically, the presentation will highlight erosion control efforts through the installation of dynamic beaches at three locations, reducing recreational impacts on Cedar and Bird Islands, upland habitat enhancement work at Somers Beach State Park, and completion of a

substantial renovation at Flathead Lake's Yellow Bay Unit.

Dave has a strong connection to Flathead Lake, spanning nearly three decades. He began his career with FWP as the Wild Horse Island State Park Ranger in the late 1990s and has served in his current position since 2007.



Photo by Laney Petersen

FEBRUARY 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 February 9, 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>.

FEBRUARY CALENDAR

Saturday, Jan 31, 7-9pm. Full Moon Hike. See page 8.

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

Archived board minutes from monthly Board of Directors' meetings can be found at flatheadaudubon.org/about-us.

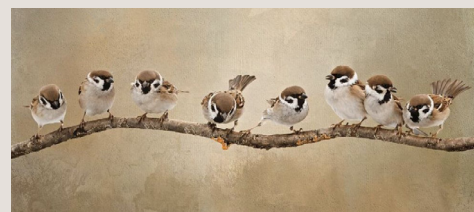
Monday, Feb 9, 7pm. Flathead Audubon General Meeting. Gateway Community Center, US Hwy. 2 West, Kalispell. East side of Gateway Mall, along Glenwood Dr. All are welcome. For presentation information and/or to join remotely, see above.

Friday, Feb 6, full day. Mission Valley Raptors. See page 8.

Saturday, Feb 14, 10am-1pm. Great Backyard Bird Count. See page 7.

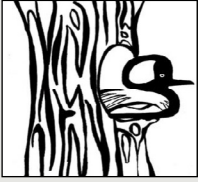
Tuesday, Feb 24, 4-6pm. Crafting for Conservation Workshop. See page 10.

Saturday & Sunday, March 28 & 29. Snow Goose Migration Field Trip to Freezout Lake. See page 8.



Volunteers of the Year Conservation Achievement Recognition

By Pam Willison, Owen Sowerwine Chairperson



Flathead Audubon has many people who step forward to volunteer for various projects. We depend on these wonderful

people to be helping hands on our field trips, presentations, Great Fish events, Hawk Watch, newsletter, and by serving as Board and Committee members. Sometimes, we even need a bit of muscle and skill for physically challenging jobs, especially in Owen Sowerwine.

In the fall of 2024, our Fall Work Day goal was to replace the two aging bridges in Owen Sowerwine, because they had warped and were a safety hazard. I served as the coordinator, but lacked the skills to plan and complete the job. Fortunately, our Conservation Achievement Recognition Volunteers of the Year, **Keith Hammer** and **Will Beyer**, took on the project from start to finish. They definitely earned this Conservation Achievement Recognition as Volunteers of the Year. Both provided knowledge, skill, muscle, and problem-solving abilities that helped the volunteer crews get both bridges installed in just over four hours. Pretty amazing!



Keith at work in Owen Sowerwine
Photo by Pam Willison

Keith researched and designed the bridges, prepared a materials list, purchased and pre-cut materials, staged tools and supplies, put in four hours of challenging demolition work, and ran one of the bridge-building crews on the Saturday Work Day. Will provided a truck and trailer to transport building materials; he also put in four hours of hard work on demolition day, ran one of the bridge-building crews, and loaded and transported all the demolition material to the dump.

In itself, this was a huge volunteer effort, but that is not all Will and Keith have done to help in Owen Sowerwine. Will has

helped build the education trail, fixed fences, contributed many hours to removing invasive houndstongue, cleared downfall from trails, been a sawyer on buckthorn-cutting projects, and braved the heat, mosquitoes, and pollen to weed-whack all the trails each summer. Keith has run a chainsaw on buckthorn-cutting projects, cut and cleared downfall from trails, repaired entrances, and installed signs. We could not have maintained Owen Sowerwine without their invaluable efforts. Many thanks to Will and Keith for all the help they have provided!

Peeps from the President

By Darcy Thomas



Photo by Rob Thomas

I missed wishing everyone a Happy New Year in January, but it is never too late. I hope all of you have a great 2026 and see amazing bird behavior.

What was your first bird of the year? I get the weirdest birds for my first sighting every year. One year it was a starling. Another year it was a magpie. This year I saw a robin! One year I even closed my eyes until my husband drove us to a place I was certain to see a wonderful bird. Yet, when I opened my eyes, I saw a crow. All my friends see raptors, swans, and other really amazing birds. This is not to say starlings, magpies, crows, and robins are not amazing. It is just that they are common. I want to see an eagle, or maybe a rare bird! Next year, I will have my husband drive me to a birding hotspot before I open my eyes. Keep your fingers crossed for me.

On another note, I would like to talk about conservation. Flathead Audubon is committed to conservation. Our

mission is "to conserve birds, wildlife habitat, and ecosystem diversity through education and conservation programs, in northwest Montana." With conservation being a primary objective, our desire is to build the conservation program into a more vibrant effort that advocates for birds. With that in mind, we have a significant need for people who are passionate about conservation to join us in furthering this goal.

Come May 2026, we will no longer have a chairperson for our Conservation Committee. We absolutely must find someone who is willing, able, and excited to carry us forward. We have decided to reshape our Conservation Committee by defining new objectives and setting goals. This presents a great opportunity for an incoming chairperson to contribute new ideas.

If this speaks to you, WE NEED YOU! Please contact Gael Bissell (gael@flatheadaudubon.org) or Carole Jorgensen (carole@flatheadaudubon.org) to learn more and join our team!

Flathead's North American Loon Sweep (*almost*)

By Jake Bramante



Common Loon (left) and Yellow-billed Loon (right)
Photo by Elliot Ress

In March 2025, Steve Gniadek posted a rare bird alert, complete with a photo: a Yellow-billed Loon. The largest of North America's five loon species, with a mammoth, yellow bill while in breeding plumage, the Yellow-billed Loon is much more subdued in non-breeding plumage. With only about six birds found historically around the Flathead Valley, excitement around the sighting was high.

Common Loons are the most, well, common loons around here. They sport a jet-black head and red eyes; powerful black, dagger-like bill; well-defined stripes down the neck; and a green, iridescent collar. Their black backs are speckled with white in rows. Diving birds in tuxedos!

Common Loons can be found in lakes all across North America. They winter primarily along the coasts, migrate across the continental US, and breed in the north, including in our backyard lakes, the only loon to do so.



Pacific Loon on Bowman Lake
Photo by Steve Gniadek

The smaller Pacific Loon breeds across the Arctic and Subarctic tundra, usually migrates along the Pacific Coast, and overwinters along the Pacific Coast and in Mexican waters. There are occasional

sightings of this small-billed loon every fall and winter in the Flathead. Steve Gniadek and Eric Godin spotted a pair in October 2025 on Bowman Lake.

There are only two historical records of the petite, slender Red-throated Loon in Flathead Valley (and a couple in Lake County). Yet, Roy Morris spotted a Red-throated Loon towards the end of November in Wayfarer's State



Common Loon (left) and Red-throated Loon (right)
Photo by Jake Bramante

Park, far from the traditional coastal migration routes for loons. Many local birders enjoyed its two-week visit.

That brought Flathead Valley's loon count to four species for the year.

Then, on December 29th, Dan Casey spotted a potential Arctic Loon. Primarily a Eurasian loon with only a few Arctic Loons breeding on the Seward Peninsula in Alaska, there are occasional sightings along coastlines and no official sightings in Montana. Was this the first official sighting and the fifth loon species in one year?

The Pacific Loon and Arctic Loon can look very similar in both breeding and non-breeding plumages. The bird that Dan found had a small bill, but appeared more stout than a Pacific. It also sported the forehead in various looks that a Pacific lacks. The white along the flanks also was not definitive.

After much discussion with experts in Arctic Loon habitats, the bird was officially recorded as a Pacific Loon, to the chagrin of many. The search for Montana's first Arctic will continue!



Pacific Loon believed to be an Arctic Loon
Photo by Jake Bramante

If you're on the edge of a large, local, unfrozen body of water from October to March, keep an eye out for the classic loon shape of a waterbird with a pointed bill that sits low in the water. But don't just think it's a "Common" Loon. It might be an exceptional one.

Birds and Powerlines: Mixed Blessings

By Dale Becker



Trumpeter Swan
Photo by Dale Becker

We take electricity in our homes for granted, thanks to power grids and vast electrical energy resources. Local utility companies and cooperatives do an excellent job of distributing electrical power, despite growing demands.

As wildlife enthusiasts know, birds and animals can both benefit from and be adversely impacted by the power lines that crisscross the valleys of western Montana. Many passerine species perch on lines with little or no harm to themselves or to power transmission. Raptors use power poles as hunting perches. These structures also attract nesting birds. While beneficial, these uses can present obvious hazards. Each year, many birds, especially raptors, are killed or injured when electrical currents “arc,” jumping an interruption in the normal electrical path. Young birds with less flight experience seem more vulnerable, and windy conditions can exacerbate the situation.

Nearly sixty years ago, Morlan (Morley) Nelson, of Boise, Idaho, was concerned about Golden Eagle electrocutions in Idaho and elsewhere. He was a soil conservationist by profession, a raptor rehabilitator, and a falconer, as well as one of the foremost experts on the species at the time. He was frustrated and angered by the number of Golden Eagles he encountered that were killed or maimed by electrocution when landing or perching on power poles. He worked closely with Idaho Power Company to set up poles and non-electrified lines on his property, and then flew his trained Golden Eagle to and from the lines to learn how eagles were being electrocuted. His work helped us better understand how utilities could configure lines to protect against electrocution, while still effectively delivering power to customers.



Rough-legged Hawk
Photo by Dale Becker

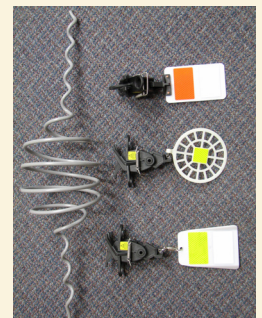
Since then, many utilities have moved to line configurations that reduce electrocution hazards. Still, Golden and Bald Eagles, as well as hawks, falcons, and owls, continue to be electrocuted when perching on power poles.

During my career as the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) Wildlife Program Manager on the Flathead Indian Reservation, I worked closely with

Mission Valley Power (MVP) on the Flathead Indian Reservation to reduce and prevent these incidents. In turn, MVP benefited from fewer outages, less equipment damage and service calls, and improved public perception.

Large birds are often attracted to electrical transmission and distribution lines and poles because their designs provide appealing nesting structures. The CSKT Wildlife Management Program (WMP) worked cooperatively with MVP, Montana Power Company, and Northwestern Energy to make power pole and line configurations less attractive nest sites, usually by installing obstacles on specific poles. In some locations, nesting platform structures were installed nearby, and on two occasions, clutches of Osprey eggs were successfully relocated to replacement nests where all the eggs hatched and all nestlings eventually fledged.

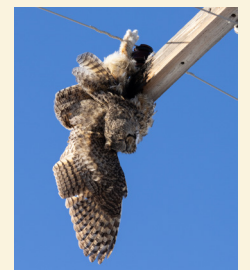
Birds, especially large raptors and waterfowl, also collide with electrical lines or structures. While managing the CSKT Trumpeter Swan Reintroduction and Restoration Project, I observed several collisions and retrieved dozens of other dead swans for examination. These collisions were the largest mortality source in the area, usually due to traumatic injury rather than electrocution. As a mitigative measure, the WMP worked cooperatively with MVP's staff to install flight diverters to make lines more visible to approaching swans in the Ninepipe and Kicking Horse Reservoir areas and adjacent wetlands, greatly reducing mortalities in those areas.



Diverters
Photo by Dale Becker

So, what should you do if you observe an electrocuted bird or an avian powerline collision? First, note the location. Many power poles have unique numbers that can be used for identification. Inform the local utility company and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Montana Wild Wings Recovery Center, in Kalispell, is another good resource. Due to legal, health, and safety reasons, it is best to leave the handling of birds to responding professionals.

While there are definite concerns about bird mortalities due to power lines, progress has been made. Opportunities exist to work cooperatively with utilities in further reducing these risks.



Great-horned Owl
Photo by Jake Bramante

Soaring Beyond Boundaries: Len Howard

By Linda Hunt

Gwendolen (Len) Howard trained to become a professional viola player. As a young girl in London, she became distracted by birds and intrigued by their songs. Boldly, she quit her musical career in 1938; purchased a small plot of land in Sussex, England; and started planning her life around birds. Howard built a modest house and named it Bird Cottage. There she studied birds as individuals and wrote about birds' personalities and behaviors.



Photo courtesy of Tumblr

Howard had misgivings about how birds were being studied by scientists who kept them in captive conditions. Birds in small cages could not fly. They were often alone, despite being social creatures. She thought captive birds feared those who were studying them. Howard and other future female ornithologists believed that these factors altered birds' behaviors and our understanding of them.

Taking a different approach, Howard covered her furniture with newspapers and opened the windows and door of her cottage. Birds flew inside and even nested there. Howard fed them; but she did not capture, domesticate, or tame them.

Patiently, she allowed birds to become comfortable with her presence. She maximized the birds' sense of security and developed relationships with them. Howard relayed a story of a bird that flew up to her and chirped a distress call. She followed the bird and found its nest on the ground, the eggs scattered. She gathered the eggs back into the nest and restored it to its original location.

In opening her home to wild birds, Howard gained their trust enough to make astonishing discoveries about their capabilities. Howard argued that individual intelligence, and not mere instinct, is a factor in much of bird behavior.

She wrote about tits, robins, sparrows, blackbirds, thrushes, and finches, among others. She singled out particularly striking individuals for her bird biographies. Howard's musical training gave her unique insight into birdsong; the final section of her first book, *Birds as Individuals*, is devoted to an in-depth analysis of this topic.

Howard rarely left Bird Cottage. She wrote at night while the birds slept.

The setup suited her, as she preferred the company of birds. A hand-painted sign at Bird Cottage issued the following warning: NO VISITORS, NESTING BIRDS, MUST KEEP COTTAGE QUIET, NO CALLERS.

After a decade of living like this, Howard wrote up her observations in great detail. She argued that wild birds living without fear behaved naturally. "By living with birds, I gain their complete trust so that they can reveal the extent of their intelligence and individuality," she wrote. Howard's writings highlighted the surprising complexity of bird behavior and dispelled the idea that their actions were chiefly unthinking and automatic.

Her work attracted the interest and approval of a host of senior scientists, including Julian Huxley, James Fisher, Roger Tory Peterson, and Niko Tinbergen. A reviewer in the *Daily Telegraph* called her home and garden a "national laboratory."

Howard died on January 5, 1973, at Bird Cottage. Her publications include *Birds as Individuals*. London: Collins Press, 1952; and *Living with Birds*. London: Collins Press, 1956. For more information, read *Bird Cottage*, a fictional book about Howard's life story by Eva Meijer and Antoinette Fawcett. I, for one, am waiting for the movie!

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.

Creston Project FeederWatch Report

By Jess Garby

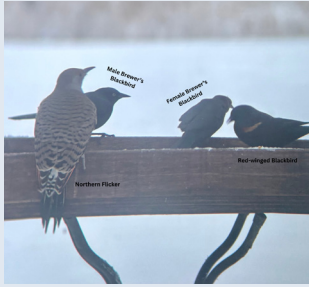


Photo by Jess Garby

January is always an exciting time for birders. Our species list gets to restart for the year. On the first of January, I was excited to peek at my feeder to see what my “First of the Year” (FOY) bird would be, secretly hoping it would be more exciting than a House Finch. To my surprise, there were two Northern Flickers enjoying the suet! This same morning, a Great Blue Heron rested near the pond on the property. Not a feeder bird, but surely an exciting yard bird to start off the year.

The highlight of my feeder this month has been regular visits by Brewer’s Blackbirds. A lone female Brewer’s Blackbird had been spending hours near my feeder. After observing her for a few days, I noticed one of her feet is completely detached from her tarsus, yet it still hung there. After learning about her injury, I paid closer attention to her behavior and noticed she is using my feeder and birdbath to rest and recover. She has brought me endless joy and hope.

One more surprise occurred in early January when, from inside the house, I heard the unmistakable squeal of a European Starling, a sound I recognized from seasons of trapping and banding Sharp-shinned Hawks. I immediately scanned the yard through the windows and soon spotted a juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk perched atop a recently captured European Starling, beginning to pluck its feathers. We gathered at the windows and watched as the Sharpie enjoyed its meal.

Great Backyard Bird Count

Where: Lone Pine State Park, Visitor Center

When: Saturday, February 14, 10am-1pm



Pileated Woodpecker
Photo by Casey Krieder

Join Flathead Audubon Society and Montana State Parks to celebrate and learn about the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), a worldwide bird count being held from February 13

through February 16. Be part of this global community science project by observing and counting birds, learning about local species, and enjoying hands-on crafts for all ages.

Each February, people around the world come together for four days to share their love of birds. Participants spend time in their favorite outdoor spaces watching and counting birds, and then report their observations. These contributions help scientists better understand global bird populations before their annual migrations.

All ages are welcome. No prior birding experience is needed. If you are unable to join us, you can still participate in the GBBC on your own. Follow this link for more information: <https://www.birdcount.org/>.

Save the Date! 25th Annual Wings Across the Big Sky Festival

Mark your calendars and join us this summer in Kalispell, June 12 through 14, 2026, for the *Wings Across the Big Sky* Festival! Both Montana Audubon and Flathead Audubon Society are celebrating 50 years, so we’ve been hard at work putting together a birding festival to commemorate the incredible history of both organizations.

The festival will feature prominent raptor biologist and conservationist, HawkWatch International founder, and former Montana Audubon executive director, Steve Hoffman, as the keynote speaker. In addition, field trips are planned to various locations in the Flathead Valley, including local conservation areas, state parks, and private properties under conservation easements, not normally accessible to the public. Special trip topics will include birds and native plants, and bird

wings across the big sky
2026

Presented by GLACIER BANK



Sharp-shinned Hawk
Photo by Elliott Ress

photography. You will even have the opportunity to join a bike and bird outing along Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park!

Registration opens in March 2026, and brochures will be mailed out in the coming months. We look forward to seeing you there!

WINTER FIELD TRIPS (late Jan, Feb, Mar)

FULL MOON HIKE at the Flathead Waterfowl Production Area, Saturday, January 31, 7-9pm

Join Jess Garby, FAS Conservation and Education Coordinator, and Pam Willison, FAS Owen Sowerwine Chairperson, for a full moon hike at the Flathead Waterfowl Production Area. This nighttime hike is great for those who want to experience the magic of the moonlit landscape, with hopes of hearing owls. Welcome in the "Snow Moon" with us!



Meet at the parking area south of the North Shore Farms entrance off Highway 82 by 7pm. The parking area is about 0.25 mile south on a dirt road. (See map at: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/Rn366jWoWyY5ajQz5>.) We will be walking a minimum of 2.5 to 3 miles through snow on mostly level, boot-packed trails, but keep in mind that the lakeshore can be quite icy, and we will encounter several slopes. Please bring a headlamp, wear good boots, and bring ice cleats and/or snowshoes. There are no restrooms available. The event is capped at ten participants. To sign up, please contact Jess at jess@flatheadaudubon.org.

MISSION VALLEY RAPTORS, Friday, February 6, 8am-approx. 4pm (Low-mobility participants welcome.)

Join co-leaders Darcy Thomas and Michell Tyler to view raptors and other winter birds in the Mission Valley. We will travel throughout the Mission Valley to areas with recent bird activity. Expect to see winter raptors, including Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, Bald Eagles, falcons, accipiters, and, possibly, Great Horned Owls. Other interesting winter birds may include Northern Shrikes, American Tree Sparrows, Snow Buntings, and swans.

We will meet at the Somers Park & Ride at 8am and stop at Super 1 Foods in Polson about 9am to pick up additional participants. Please bring water, lunch, snacks, binoculars, and a spotting scope (if you have one). Dress for cold weather. Plan to carpool, as the trip is limited to four vehicles due to limited parking at pullouts. We will return to Polson by 3pm and Kalispell by 4pm.

Sign-up is required. To register for this trip, contact Darcy Thomas at darcy@flatheadaudubon.org or 406-407-8263.

SNOW GOOSE MIGRATION: FREEZOUT LAKE, Saturday-Sunday, March 28 & 29

In a wildlife spectacle not to be missed, each spring vast numbers of migrating Snow Geese and other waterfowl stop at Freezout Lake WMA near Choteau, Montana, to rest and rejuvenate before continuing on to breeding grounds in the far north. Flathead Audubon Society is pleased to once again offer our annual weekend field trip to experience this phenomenon.

We will meet at 10am on Saturday morning, March 28, at the Burger King and Tractor Supply parking lot in Evergreen, located on the corner of Highways 2 and 35. Bob Lee will provide a suggested schedule and route for proceeding to Choteau, with birding along the way. An afternoon arrival should allow time for goose watching. After a night in Choteau, we'll head back to Freezout Lake just before daybreak on Sunday to watch the "mass ascension" of Snow Geese from the WMA ponds as they head to agricultural fields to feed. We'll then search the fields for closer observations of the birds. Participants are welcome to return to Kalispell at their own pace.

In recent years this has become a popular destination, making early lodging reservations essential as the limited options will fill up quickly. Please make your own arrangements as soon as possible. Local motel options include the Stage Stop Inn (406-466-5900), Gunther Motel (406-466-5444), and Big Sky Motel (406-466-5318). An Airbnb cabin is available a few miles away in Bowman's Corner (andrewgertge@gmail.com). Freezout WMA has primitive camping sites as well, which also may fill up quickly.

FWP requires anyone recreating on state lands to hold a current Montana conservation license. Licenses are available through the FWP website at <https://fwp.mt.gov/buyandapply/conservation-license>, or through any authorized license dealer. The cost is \$8 for residents, \$4 for youths and seniors, and \$10 for nonresidents. Note that the license year runs from March 1 through February 28 each year, so you are advised to wait until after March 1 to purchase your license for it to be valid for use on future 2026 FAS trips.

To sign up and for more information, please contact Bob at RML3@centurytel.net. Allow time for him to respond, as he will be traveling at times.

Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – December 2025/January 2026

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

The mildest December on record continued into January, with extraordinary numbers of **American Robins** still in the Valley. Lingering **Western Bluebirds** and **Sandhill Cranes** were also reported, and the **Anna's Hummingbird** near Creston (see page 1) was still present in early January. A single strong cold front finally brought more **Bohemian Waxwings** and **Rough-legged Hawks**. **Purple Finches** were present at multiple locations in unprecedented numbers.

Perhaps the biggest excitement of the season was a loon on Somers Bay, originally identified as what would have been Montana's first **Arctic Loon**. Careful study and review of photos by outside experts, notably from Europe, confirmed the bird was an unusual **Pacific Loon**, still a rare bird for December (see page 4).

12/13 – **Lewis's Woodpecker** (1) Fish Hatchery Rd, Ronan (Alex K.)

12/13 – **Sandhill Crane** (63) Ninepipe NWR (Dan S.); 14 still present 12/21 (Josh C.)

12/15 – **Snow Goose** (1-2) Polson-Ronan through 01/11 (many obs.)

12/17 – **Purple Finch** (4) Columbia Falls (Shannon D.) (up to 14 through period)

12/21 – **Western Bluebird** (13) Near Kicking Horse Res. (Dan S.)

12/21 – **Purple Finch** (3) Near Kicking Horse Res. (Dan S.)

12/21 – **Spotted Towhee** (1, continuing) Ronan (Dan S.)

12/21 – **Western Bluebird** (3) Creston area (Elle R.)

12/21 – **Sandhill Crane** (14) Ninepipe NWR (Josh C.)

12/29 –

Pacific Loon

(1) Somers Bay (Dan C.) (seen by many through 01/02)

12/31 – **Purple Finch** (1)

Whitefish (bj W.) (up to 3 through 01/12)



American Robin
Photo by Daniel Casey

01/01 – **Long-tailed Duck** (1)

Troop Lake, Eureka (Elaine G.)

01/01 – **Long-tailed Duck** (1) Troy (Randy B.)

01/03 – **Glaucous Gull** (1) Flathead County Landfill (Dan C.)

01/03 – **Rusty Blackbird** (1) East of Kalispell (Michell T.)

01/07 – **Purple Finch** (7) Owen Sowerwine (Jake B.)

01/11 – **Varied Thrush** (1) Alfred Lake, Lincoln Co (Pat G.)

What to Expect - February 2026

It will be interesting to see if winter decides to arrive in earnest in late January. A few surprises may show up at well-visited feeders, including **Sharp-shinned Hawks**, **Northern Shrikes**, and/or **Northern Pygmy-Owls**, all of which may be looking for easy "pickings." Keep watching for "winter finches," such as **Redpolls**, **White-winged Crossbills**, and both **Pine** and **Evening Grosbeaks**. By mid-February, the faintest glimmer of spring may appear in growing flocks of **starlings** and **Red-winged Blackbirds**. It's a great time to look over the gull flocks at Flathead Lake and the Flathead County Landfill for rarities (notably, **Glaucous** or **Glaucous-winged Gulls**).



Photo by Jake Bramante

Be on the lookout for Purple Finches



Photo by Will Laurie

Nest Notes February 2026

By Jess Garby, FAS Conservation and Education Coordinator



Starting a new year always feels refreshing and exciting to me. Not only do we birders get to start fresh with a clean slate of birds for the year, but we also get to

challenge ourselves to become better birders—and better advocates for birds. That is one of my big goals for this year. I encourage you to take a moment to reflect on how you can grow as a birder or supporter of birds in 2026.

If you are feeling inspired to take action, I'm happy to announce that we are hosting another Crafting for Conservation workshop. This project aims to raise awareness about bird-window collisions and teach participants how to make their windows bird-safe. We'll be crafting birds at the Columbia Falls Library on February 24 from 4pm to 6pm. For more information about the project, visit: <https://www.hollygreenberg.com/homepage>.

Although winter is often a quieter time of year, my programming has been anything but! We are a month into our Junior Ranger Kits project, in partnership with Montana State Parks and the Flathead Lake Biological Station. Our most recent kit focused on birds of prey. Participants learned the key traits of raptors, tips and tricks for finding them in the field, and how to recognize differences in their flight patterns. These kits are available

for pickup at the Polson Library, Columbia Falls Library, Wayfarers State Park, and the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks office in Kalispell.

Thank you to the thirty folks who joined us for the Winter Solstice Celebration! After creating unique birdseed ornaments, we assembled a spiral from a variety of greenery. Poems were shared, wishes were made, and hearts were full.



I hope to see you at the Great Backyard Bird Count at Lone Pine State Park! This event is your chance to join me for a guided bird walk, create a bottle feeder for the birds, and participate in a global community science project. See page 7 for more information.



Photos by Jess Garby

Crafting for Conservation
February 24, 2026
4pm-6pm
Columbia Falls Library
<https://www.hollygreenberg.com/homepage>




Bird Collisions in the Anthropocene

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The History Corner: Origins of the CAR Program

By Ben Long and Linda Winnie



How Flathead Audubon Turned Anti-Environmental Vitriol into a Community Celebration

Twenty-five years ago, an AM radio shock jock by the name of John Stokes launched a hate-filled campaign

against environmentalists in the Flathead Valley. He broadcasted a daily stream of highly offensive, anti-environmental vitriol, calling anyone who cared about the environment “green Nazis” or ecoterrorists. On Earth Day 2001, 300 of his listeners gathered at the station parking lot and lit a plywood green swastika ablaze. Stokes’ rants were often intensely personal. Several environmentalists reported vandalism, including green swastika stickers, at their offices or property. His antics earned national media coverage, with *High Country News* calling him “The West’s biggest bully.”



John Stokes lights a swastika on Earth Day, 2001. Photo by Robin Loznak

Stokes eventually turned his sights on Flathead Audubon (FAS). In early 2001, he learned that FAS held meetings in the conference room at the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) building. This outraged him, and he urged his listeners to descend on the next FAS general meeting to protest. Several armed FWP wardens guarded the meeting to keep the peace. That meeting proceeded without incident, and many attendees were not even aware of the threat.

From the depths of this ugliness, FAS turned the toxic rhetoric into conservation gold, and the Conservation Achievement Recognition Program (CAR) was born. Organized through the Flathead Conservation



CAR Founder Ferne Cohen. Photo courtesy of the Cohen family

Roundtable, conservationists met to discuss ways to counter the anti-environmentalist rhetoric and promote rational discussions. Flathead Audubon’s Ferne Cohen, the chapter’s Earth Day Coordinator and Chair of the FAS Quality of Life Committee, proposed spotlighting how conservation includes a diversity of productive activities carried out by a wide variety of people for broad benefit.

Ferne’s idea was simple: Stokes could rage, FAS would celebrate community, and with that, FAS began formally recognizing the progress of conservation leaders, both individuals and groups, by highlighting their accomplishments in the *Pileated Post* and the local news media.

The first CAR was presented in December 2001 to Bigfork businesswoman Elna Darrow, who, among other things, led the Flathead Basin Commission to protect the Flathead Valley’s water. The second went to FWP employees Alan Wood and Gael Bissell, who worked with timber companies to protect habitat surrounding the Thompson River and Thompson Chain of Lakes. The third was awarded to the six certified organic farmers of the Flathead Valley. This diversity of recipients and their achievements became the hallmark of the FAS Conservation Achievement Recognition Program. Later recipients have included the sportsmen’s group Flathead Wildlife Inc., Flathead Electric Cooperative, and the Bigfork High School Caving Club.



CAR presented to Flathead Electric (Alan Ruby) by Kay Mitchell (FAS president), 2016. Photo by Jake Bramante

In the twenty-four years since the inception of CAR, Flathead Valley conservationists have built momentum for significant conservation victories that will benefit generations to come, by building relationships and bridging core values. Overall, local conservationists emerged stronger from the Stokes era, passing important legislation, such as the Montana Legacy Project and the North Fork Watershed Protection Act. In addition, thousands of acres of conservation easements, several new parks, and miles of trails were created. The progress continues today.

CAR presented to Dan & Susannah Casey in 2016 by Gael Bissell. Photo by John Winnie





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