



Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

Purple Finch,
Photo by Joshua Covill



Anna and Me: Update

By Michell De Leon Tyler



Anna on 12/7/25

It's late February, and Anna is still with me in Creston, Montana. Despite my concerns regarding recent storms, Anna was undeterred by the windblown snow and single digit temperatures. She continues to enjoy her backyard warming area and warm nectar in the mornings. By

9am, she is often perched on her favorite mountain maple branches, spending her days with chickadees, nuthatches, and juncos. I think she enjoys their company. The backyard has become quite the social hub for her!

As the days lengthen, she has become busier than ever, exploring her surroundings more. Recently, she began visiting my front yard after months of limiting herself to the backyard. To encourage her expanding range, I added a new feeder in front of the house, which she now visits regularly in addition to her backyard bower. Having options may serve her well when competing hummingbirds return in the spring and challenge her access to feeders.

Will Anna stay through the summer? Only she knows. If she does, will other Anna's Hummingbirds join her? We will have to wait and see. For now, I am gratified to see her continuing to thrive.



Anna at feeder on 2/21/26

To view a video of Anna, see this article online at <https://flatheadaudubon.org/birding/anna-and-me-update/>. You can also keep current with her activities by following Flathead Audubon on Facebook and Instagram.

Photos by Michell De Leon Tyler

What an Anna's Hummingbird in Montana Signifies

Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*) is a dazzling, medium-sized hummingbird native to the West Coast of North America. Males are easily identified by their metallic pink gorget and crown, while females and juveniles exhibit green and gray hues with hints of iridescent pink. They measure about 3.9 to 4.3 inches in length.

Traditionally a resident of the Pacific Coast, in recent decades the Anna's Hummingbird has expanded its range northward and eastward due to the increased availability of feeders and flowering plants. In Montana, the species is considered a rare vagrant, often appearing during fall and winter, when most hummingbirds have traveled south.

Anna's Hummingbirds are remarkably cold tolerant and may overwinter in Montana if shelter from harsh weather and food are available. In response to cold, they can increase their internal fat layers to add to their reserves, and they can enter a state of torpor that quiets their metabolism to save energy.

Montana sightings of Anna's Hummingbirds show the species' adaptability in response to changing conditions. These occurrences thrill local birdwatchers and contribute valuable data to citizen science projects tracking shifts in bird populations.



Anna on 1/3/26

How to Attract an Anna's Hummingbird in Montana:

1. Provide feeders filled with a sugar-water solution (4:1 water to sugar, no dye).
2. Plant native and late-blooming ornamental flowers.
3. Offer sheltered areas for protection.
4. Report sightings to birding organizations or platforms, such as eBird.

MARCH PROGRAM

Recalling Birds: A Photography Exhibit

Presented by Daniel Lombardi



Photo by Renata Harrison

Join us at the general meeting on March 9; photographer and naturalist Daniel Lombardi will present a mix of art and science featuring his photographs of birds at banding stations. His images capture the moment after a bird is weighed, measured, and banded, when researchers hold the bird reverently before releasing it. The photos, taken between 2021 and 2025, are unstaged, meaning the subjects were not posing for photographs but were simply holding the animals as part of a prescribed process. All animals were handled in accordance with official regulations and permits.

Daniel Lombardi began volunteering at the bird banding station in Glacier National Park in 2021. He quickly became captivated by the process of aging individual birds and delved into the study of bird molt. Soon after, he began volunteering at other banding stations throughout the northern Rockies.

Daniel's upcoming photography exhibit, "Recalling Birds," will be featured at the Good Luck Gallery in Kalispell from March 6 to April 17, 2026, with an opening reception on Friday, March 6, from 5 to 7pm. The show explores how his images might be interpreted a thousand years from now and what they convey about birds and our relationship with them. Prints will be available for sale, and profits will be donated to Flathead Audubon. For more information, see page 12.

MARCH 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 March 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>.

MARCH CALENDAR

Monday, Mar 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.

Friday, Mar 6, 5-7pm. Opening Reception, "Recalling Birds" photography exhibit benefiting FAS, Good Luck Gallery, 127 S Main St, Kalispell. See above and page 12.

Monday, Mar 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.

Thursday, Mar 19, 5-6pm. Osprey Project Volunteer Information Meeting via Zoom. See page 9.

Saturday, Mar 21, 9am-noon. Early Spring Waterfowl in the Lower Valley Field Trip. See page 8.

Friday, Mar 27, 6-7pm. Osprey Project Volunteer Information Meeting. Gateway Community Center, Room 26, US Hwy. 2 West, Kalispell. See page 9.

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



Flathead Audubon 2025 Christmas Bird Counts

This winter marked the 126th year of Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count, making it the longest running citizen science project in history. Each year, observers around the world document bird species and total numbers observed within defined count areas on a date of their choosing, between December 14 and January 5. Birds found during the “count week,” which includes the three days before and after a specified count day, can also be included.

In northwest Montana, hardy observers turned out to document birds within eight established 15-mile diameter circle areas (see the accompanying map). Summaries from these counts can be found on pages 3 through 7. Many hours of hiking, driving, counting, and compiling were invested by dedicated individuals to record an impressive number of bird species. A huge thanks to them for their efforts!

**Flathead Audubon
Christmas Bird Count Map,
Courtesy of National Audubon**



Location	# Bird Species	Total Birds	Observers	Date
Bigfork	85	11,551	29	12/20/25
Eureka	58	3,306	36	12/20/25
Glacier NP	45	1,484	24	12/21/25
Kalispell	83	17,404	75+	1/4/26
Libby	57	2,907	15	12/19/25
Ninepipe NWR	88	13,752	28	12/21/25
Swan (Upper)	19	216	11	12/20/25
Troy	56	2,849	27	1/1/26

Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge Christmas Bird Count

By James Oates

The 47th annual Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge Christmas Bird Count south of Ronan was conducted by 28 participants on December 21, 2025. Due to the mild weather conditions in December, there was more open water than usual. Temperatures were in the low-30s, with very light snow flurries in the late afternoon.

The overall count yielded a record 88 species and 13,752 individual birds. The most numerous species was Mallard (2,883), eclipsing the runner-up, European Starling (2,227). Waterfowl numbers and species were

generally higher than normal due to the conditions, as demonstrated by the Trumpeter Swan (112) total, which was almost four times the usual number. Other notable count results included a first-ever Purple Finch added to the species list and a Western Bluebird added as a count-week bird. Hawks and most other species numbers were down, except for crossbills and Pine Siskins.

Thanks to the observers who contributed to this record year!

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.

Glacier National Park Christmas Bird Count

By Lisa Bate

Glacier National Park (GNP) held its annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Sunday, December 21, 2025. Twenty-four participants contributed to this event, covering ten different routes in Glacier and one bird feeder, within the count circle, just outside the park. Participants spent the day counting all bird species and individuals detected. The weather was mild with little wind and temperatures hovering around freezing. In most places, there was little, if any, snow. Due to abnormally high temperatures, observers on both the Lower McDonald Creek and McGee Meadow routes had to take detours to get around flooded areas and roads. Skiing was not possible this year. Observers on the Avalanche route were able to bike the entire length of the Going-to-the-Sun Road up to Avalanche Creek.

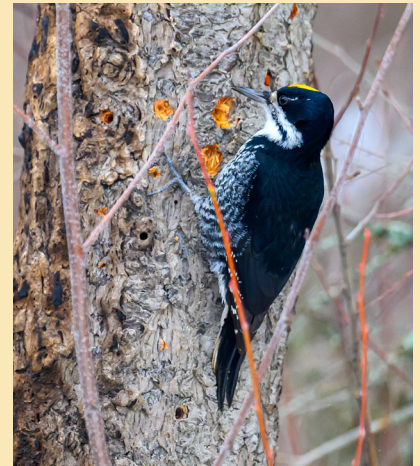
Birds were plentiful, with 1,484 birds detected on count day, comprising 45 different species. Bohemian Waxwings were the most abundant at 385, followed by 314 Pine Siskins and 171 Common Redpolls. We also counted many crossbills. A species new to Glacier's CBC was observed when a female Purple Finch was seen at the McClelland's bird feeder just outside the park, within the count circle. The next day, two of the more colorful



Female Purple Finch,
Photo by R McClelland

males showed up, dipped in their purple highlights. Purple Finches have been notable this year, with a good number detected throughout the Flathead Valley and even in East Glacier.

Another notable sighting was a single female Harlequin Duck observed on Upper McDonald Creek. Harlequin Duck expert Cyndi Smith suspected this was a first-year bird who lost its mom and siblings and did not know which way to migrate. This was the third time a Harlequin Duck was observed as part of the GNP count. Also, along Upper McDonald Creek, observers detected a "grand slam" of chickadees with all four species counted: Black-capped, Mountain, Chestnut-backed, and Boreal Chickadees! The sighting of two Black-backed Woodpeckers was another highlight. In addition to birds, observers documented lynx, otter, and skunk tracks.



Black-backed Woodpecker,
Photo by Chris Peterson

Glacier's first CBC was held 63 years ago, in 1962. Thanks to all participants for contributing their expertise, time, and energy to this annual event. Your efforts are invaluable in tracking long-term changes in species abundance, diversity, and range shifts, in Glacier and throughout North America. Thanks to Glacier National Park Conservancy and its donors for supporting birds and providing hot drinks and snacks both before and after the count. It was so good to see everyone again!

Upper Swan Valley Christmas Bird Count

By Taylor Tewksbury

Swan Valley Connections (SVC) hosted the Upper Swan Valley Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 20, 2025. Weather conditions were constant throughout the day, with partly cloudy skies and calm to breezy wind conditions. Temperatures remained in the low-to-mid 30s. Most waterways in the valley were open, and the ground was largely free of snow, with some patchy areas of snow and ice in the shade.

Eleven volunteers recorded 18 species (216 individual birds) during SVC's count day and one additional species

during count week. To accomplish this, SVC birding parties walked 13.1 miles in 12.55 hours and covered 43.5 miles in 2.1 hours of driving.

Count day highlights included a Northern Shrike (1) and an American Goshawk (1). The most numerous species were Pine Siskin (83), Red Crossbill (35), and Common Raven (20).

Thank you to the amazing participants who supported the success of this event!

Kalispell Christmas Bird Count

By Shannon Donaldson

The 27th annual Kalispell Christmas Bird Count (CBC) took place on Sunday, January 4, 2026. More than 75 participants surveyed the area, with 59 in the field and more than a dozen backyard feeder watchers. Observers tallied 17,404 birds, down from the record 25,645 birds tallied last year.

Conditions were similar to last year and fairly mild, with highs in the upper 30s and low 40s. Participants encountered a better snowpack than that found in the past couple of years, with reports of two to three inches in most areas, four to six inches in a few sections, and 10 inches in Batavia. The morning began with freezing rain, and a light drizzle continued for most of the morning, with patchy fog throughout the day. The sun finally broke out at day's end.

It was a very birdy day! While the total number of birds was down slightly from the record tallied last year, the species count was 11 species above average, with 83 total species, tying Kalispell's record high. This is just the second time in count history that the species count has exceeded 80, with 83 species also recorded in 2012. One new species was observed that had not been previously recorded, the Western Bluebird (3), bringing the all-time total species count to 135 for the Kalispell CBC. The following eight count-week birds were reported:

American Goshawk, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Great Gray Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, White-winged Crossbill, and Snow Bunting. Just before count week, a Snowy Owl was seen on December 25 off Church Drive.

New high counts were reported for 12 species. Species that more than doubled their all-time high counts were Trumpeter Swan (63), American Robin (2,662), and Bald Eagle (265). The total tally of 2,662 American Robins is quite significant, at more than 10 times the previous all-time high count of 211. Birders also came across the count's third Long-eared Owl (1) and second Canvasback (1). It was the fourth year for Rusty Blackbird (1), Lesser Scaup (1), and California Gull (1), the fifth year for Cackling Goose (1), and the seventh year for White-throated Sparrow (1). Redhead (1), which was a new count species in December 2023, has now been seen three years in a row. Other species with new high counts were Tundra Swan (20), Ring-billed Gull (577), Red-tailed Hawk (94), American Kestrel (7), Northern Flicker (497), Blue Jay (157), Black-capped Chickadee (876), Townsend's Solitaire (33), Dark-eyed Junco (1,089), and Brewer's Blackbird (103).

Thanks to everyone who participated and made this a very successful count!

Bigfork Christmas Bird Count

By Chris West

The 52nd Bigfork Christmas Bird Count (CBC) took place on December 20, 2025, the first Saturday of the count period. This year, 29 counters traveled nearly 300 miles by car and over 20 miles on foot to tally 11,551 individual birds of 85 species.

Conditions were unseasonably warm, with temperatures in the mid-30s and very little to no snow anywhere in the count circle. Winds were mostly calm, and skies were mostly overcast.

Notable this year was an overwintering Anna's Hummingbird at Michell De Leon Tyler's feeder in Many Lakes (see page 1). This was the 163rd all-time species for the count circle! A count-week Great Gray Owl in the Many Lakes area and two Whooper Swans (likely not wild) were also notable this year. Other interesting finds for the count this year included four Clark's Nutcrackers (a rather unusual sighting for this count), a surprise Short-eared Owl flying high overhead, and three Golden Eagles.

Also, a single Three-toed Woodpecker and 15 Chestnut-backed Chickadees were nice additions, as they have seemingly been scarce in recent years. Interestingly, the high count for Chestnut-backed Chickadee in prior years is a whopping 156!

There was a lot of open water this year due to a warm start to winter. As expected, waterfowl numbers were strong, with 16 duck species, three geese species, and two swan species (three, if including the feral Whooper Swans). Finch numbers were lower than expected, given the mild conditions.

As the new count compiler for Bigfork, I want to thank everyone who helped count and especially the section leaders who made my initial job of assigning count sections so very easy. It was lovely to meet most of the counters at the compilation. I look forward to next year, when the Bigfork CBC will be held December 20, 2026. Please consider counting with us next season!

Eureka Christmas Bird Count

By Ellen Sullivan

The 33rd annual Eureka Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on Saturday, December 20, a cool day with temperatures ranging from 31°F to 38°F. Kooacanusa Reservoir was open water, as were portions of nearby large lakes, while smaller lakes and ponds were mostly frozen. The Tobacco River was running high, with very few exposed rocks.

Nineteen people went to the field in 10 count parties, and 17 feeders were also counted. Fifty-eight species were recorded, which was in the upper half of species counts for Eureka’s CBC. (A record high of 72 species was reported in 2014.) A total of 3,306 individual birds were counted this year, which was also in the upper half of totals recorded over the years. Eleven of the 33 years have reflected over 3,000 individuals.

Wild Turkey (328) was the most numerous species observed. Other common birds included Bohemian Waxwing (314), American Robin (301), Common Raven (225), Canada Goose (205), and Black-capped

Chickadee (160). Record high counts were recorded for Dark-eyed Junco (174), Northern Flicker (81), and American Robin (301). Eighteen species had five or fewer individuals, including American Kestrel, Golden Eagle, Merlin, Wilson’s Snipe, Northern Shrike, Great-horned Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Canada Jay, Steller’s Jay, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Harlan’s Hawk, Pacific Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red-winged Blackbird, and Killdeer.

Most of the species commonly seen over the years were once again observed in 2025, including Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, and Bald Eagle. The notable exception was the American Dipper, which was not seen for the first time, most likely due to high water levels. Both Canada Goose and Mallard, while present, were seen in lower numbers than usual.

A special thanks to co-compiler, Eve Wills, and all the observers who contributed their time and efforts to another successful Christmas Bird Count!

Troy Christmas Bird Count

By Donald Jones



Long-tailed Duck, Photo by Donald Jones

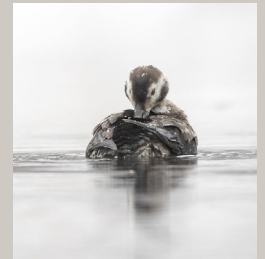
Troy’s Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was conducted on January 1, 2026, a good way to start the year. We had favorable weather, with temperatures ranging from 23°F to 31°F and little to no snow, which facilitated off-road surveys. We were able to get out of our cars and cover

more ground on foot, something I hope we can do more of in the future, as our circle does not contain much open habitat and is steep.

A good turnout of 22 field participants and five feeder watchers reported 56 species on count day and six additional species over the count week, a strong showing for the Troy CBC. By contrast, the total number of birds (2,849) was lower than average.

Surprises for the day included a lone female Long-tailed Duck, Western Bluebirds (5), Spotted Towhees (2), and Yellow-rumped Warblers (2). Where Bohemian Waxwings were absent, American Robins (229) were present in abundance. The most numerous species was Dark-eyed Junco (547), followed by Pine Siskin (404), and Canada Goose (283). Owling proved to be slow, with only a lone Barred Owl calling where Great Horned Owls are normally heard. Owling rarely yields much, but it is something I have done since participating in CBCs back in Chicago as a kid.

Thanks to all the participants who took part in the count. As I write this, a Yellow-rumped Warbler is bathing outside my office window. What a crazy winter!



Long-tailed Duck, Photo by Donald Jones



Cliff Swallow, Photo by Daniel Casey

Bluebirds and swallows begin arriving!

Libby Christmas Bird Count

By Gene Reckin



Western Bluebird,
Photo by Dorian Boling

On December 19, 2025, twelve observers headed out to conduct the centennial Christmas Bird Count in Libby, while three additional counters monitored activity at feeders. The Kootenai Valley experienced severe flooding

and high winds in two separate weather events prior to count day. As a result, the Kootenai River was too high to safely float, and numerous roads and bridges were washed out. Downed trees blocked other travel routes, which limited access in many areas. These abnormal circumstances certainly affected the count, but we all know that unfavorable weather on count day can still lead to a productive day.

We observed a respectable 57 species and a total of 2,907 birds. Wild Turkey (486) led the count, followed by Canada Goose (459), American Crow (297), Mallard (267), and Common Raven (233). American Robins (176) were also observed in unusually great numbers. Excitement was generated by two never-before-seen species: Long-tailed Duck, sighted just below the Libby Dam spillway, and Western Bluebird, seen at the confluence of Libby Creek and the Kootenai River.

Bluebirds were still in the area a month later, as were other species that should have moved on some time ago, very likely due to the absence of snow cover and the very moderate temperatures experienced this winter. Thanks go out to our observers for another successful CBC!

Save the Date!



Sharp-shinned Hawk
Photo by Elliot Riss

25th Annual
wings MONTANA AUDUBON
across the big sky
festival
2026

Presented by  **GLACIER BANK**

**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 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 weeks. See you there!

Meet Operations Coordinator, Dee Baginski

My name is Dee Baginski, and I am excited to be returning to the Audubon family as the new part-time Operations Coordinator for Flathead Audubon Society!

I graduated from Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania with a degree in Parks and Resource Management, and I have had the privilege of working with Glacier National Park, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and the U.S. Forest Service. These experiences have strengthened my commitment to conservation and deepened my love for the outdoors and for birds.

I currently serve as the Common Loon Citizen Science Project Coordinator for Glacier National Park. I have also volunteered locally as a Jewel Basin Hawk Watch Primary and with the Owl Research Institute at their Northern

Saw-whet Owl Banding Station, along with other activities. Being involved in these efforts has been incredibly meaningful.

In my new role, I will be coordinating group use of the Owen Sowerwine area, helping with public outreach, supporting membership and the newsletter, assisting with conservation achievement recognitions, and helping wherever it is needed. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to serve in this role, and I look forward to connecting with many of you soon.



Photo by Sunshine Flamer

MARCH FIELD TRIPS

EARLY SPRING WATERFOWL in the Lower Valley, Saturday, March 21, 9am–noon

Join Denny Olson to view returning waterfowl in the Lower Valley, which is a natural wonder during spring migration. We will visit Church Slough, which packs in a great diversity of ducks, geese, swans, eagles, and other waterfowl just after ice-out. Denny will teach identification tips in the typical “poor light at a distance” spring conditions using “Where’s the white?” flash cards. The trip will also visit the new Reed’s Slough viewing area and a surprise privately owned spot on Fennon Slough.



Sign-up is required, and space is limited to 12 participants. Please email Denny at docwild.mt@gmail.com to sign up. Bring binoculars and spotting scopes, if you have them. Meet at the Church Slough public boat access. Please note, we will carpool from the Reed’s Slough viewing area to the limited-access private spot.

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.

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.

Freezout WMA is state land. FWP requires anyone recreating on state lands to hold a current Montana conservation license. For additional information regarding conservation licenses and how to obtain them, see below.

Renewal Time: Conservation License (March-February)

By Margaret Parodi

Individuals aged 12 or older are required to hold a current Montana conservation license when accessing most Montana state lands, excluding state parks. Fishing access sites, wildlife management areas, wildlife habitat protection areas, and Montana state trust lands, including the Owen Sowerwine property, are examples of where this license is needed. Since there are numerous Audubon field trips that visit state lands, we encourage all Audubon members and field trip participants to get a conservation license each year.

The license year runs from March 1 through February 28, so consider buying your license in early March to obtain a full year of coverage. The conservation license is automatically included in Montana fishing and hunting licenses, or it can be purchased separately. It is available at all locations that sell Montana fishing or hunting licenses, such as Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) offices, sporting goods stores, and some gas stations and convenience stores, or online at <https://fwp.mt.gov/buyandapply/conservation-license>. The cost for Montana residents is \$8 for adults, or \$4 for seniors (62+ years) and youth (12 to 17 years). Nonresident licenses are \$10 each.

Project FeederWatch Reports from Around the Valley

Kalispell Report by Darcy Thomas

Watching birds this month has been a delight. Persistent and methodical, the Downy Woodpeckers contrast sharply with the raucous, bold Blue Jays, which often comically squabble over the best peanut to carry to the nearby hawthorn tree. The fearless Red-breasted Nuthatches, meanwhile, barely pause, grabbing seeds to cache in the bark of nearby trees and sometimes ignoring me entirely, even when I am close to the window. Observing these distinct behaviors makes for a truly rewarding morning.



Blue Jay, Photo by bj worth

Whitefish Report by Molly Miller



Window treated with evenly spaced strings to prevent bird collisions, Photo by Molly Miller

Project Feederwatch asked for volunteers to participate in the second year of its Bird-Glass Collision Study, and I signed up. I live in a house with plenty of glass, and I am very cognizant of the collision issue. My husband and I installed evenly spaced, full-length vertical strings on our windows during the pandemic, and they have dramatically reduced the number of collisions we experience.

For the study, I measured the four windows and glass doors around my feeders and described what kind of window treatments they provided to reduce collisions. Both windows had strings, and both doors had exterior screens. So far, I have reported no collisions.

This study continues through June 2026, beyond the Feederwatch final count date of April 30, 2026.

Osprey Project Volunteers Needed



Osprey with Beth Watne of MT Wild Wings Recovery, Photo by Jeremy Weber, *Daily Interlake*

Decades ago, local researchers Doug and Don McCarter documented Osprey nesting around Flathead Lake. In 2026, the Flathead Audubon Society is launching a pilot season to update that work, and we're looking for volunteers to help.

This project has two main goals: to learn how many Osprey are actively breeding in the Flathead Valley today and to document the presence of baling twine and other synthetic materials in nests that can pose a serious entanglement risk to adults and nestlings.

Volunteers will be encouraged to "adopt" a nearby nest to visit once per week, making simple observations. No prior experience is needed, just an interest in wildlife and a little time each week. Come be part of updating an important piece of Flathead Valley wildlife history while helping address one of the most preventable threats to Osprey.

Two Volunteer Information Meetings will be held:

A Zoom meeting on March 19 from 5-6pm. Join the Zoom meeting at: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83389204314?pwd=aCaKfkkZMyKO1XNbFAcFTTXH9jfjw7.1>, meeting ID: 833 8920 4314, Passcode: 541292

An in-person meeting on March 27 from 6-7pm in Room 26 at the Gateway Community Center in Kalispell.

Flathead Valley Bird Report

By Dan Casey

Rare and Notables – January/February 2026

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

An interesting mix of out-of-season birds characterized this continuing warm, dry winter. These included scattered **Spotted Towhee**, **White-crowned Sparrow**, and **Western Bluebirds**, as well as the continuing **Anna's Hummingbird** near Creston. Reports of **Williamson's Sapsucker**, **Vesper Sparrow**, **Harlequin Duck**, and **Long-tailed Ducks** were even more unusual. **Purple Finch** continued to be seen in Columbia Falls and Whitefish, but other "winter finches," like **Redpolls**, **White-winged Crossbills**, and **Pine** and **Evening Grosbeaks**, were sparsely reported. Gull diversity increased at the beginning of February, with at least seven species reported from the Flathead County landfill, and the first **Varied Thrushes** were heard singing.

01/12 – **Ferruginous Hawk** (1) Near Polson (N. Miller)
(also 01/16, 01/18)

01/14 – **Western Screech-Owl** (1) Lincoln Co.
(Stacey K.)

01/16 – **Western Bluebird** (3) South of Columbia Falls
(Jake B.)

01/16 – **Greater White-fronted Goose** (1) Charlo (Anon.)

01/17 – **White-winged Crossbill** (17) Lakeside
(Raylene W.) (highest of 9 reports)

01/23 – **Short-billed Gull** (1) Somers Bay (Dan C.)

01/23 – **Ferruginous Hawk** (1 dark morph) Lower Valley
(Paul R.) (02/01, Dan C.)

01/25 – **White-crowned Sparrow** (2 locations)
St Ignatius (Shawn R., Raylene W.)

01/26 – **Long-tailed Duck** (1) Libby Dam (Elaina G.)
(02/01, Eva W.)

01/28 – **White-crowned Sparrow** (3) Pablo NWR
(Shawn R.)

01/28 – **Harlequin Duck** (1 female) Wayfarer's SP
(Roy M.) (still present 01/29)

01/31 – **Snow Goose** (1) Lake Co. (Josh C.) (02/08,
Braydon L.)

01/31 – **Cackling Goose** (minima) (2) Polson (Dan C.)



Ferruginous Hawk, Photo by Erin Morin Braaten

01/31 – **Long-tailed Duck** (1) Polson (Josh C.)
(present through 02/08)

01/31 – **Ferruginous Hawk** (1) Creston (Craig H.)

02/02 – **Glaucous Gull** (1) Flathead Co. landfill (Dan C.)
(2 present 02/05 – 02/09)

02/02 – **Short-billed Gull** (2) Flathead Co. landfill
(Dan C.) (still present 02/06)

02/02 – **Lesser Black-backed Gull** (1) Flathead Co.
landfill (Dan C.) (through 02/11)

02/04 – **Spotted Towhee** (3) Wayfarer's SP (N. Miller)
(2 on 02/11, Derrick R.)

02/05 – **Williamson's Sapsucker** (1) Boulder Cr. Rd
(Raylene W.)

02/07 – **Vesper Sparrow** (1, extreme date) Mission
Valley (Luis RCH)

02/08 – **Yellow-headed Blackbird** (1) Egan Slough
(Dee B.)

What to Expect - March 2026

Barring a large shift in weather patterns, we should expect waterfowl migration to be well underway by the end of February. Time to start looking for flocks of **Northern Pintails** and **American Wigeons**, as well as the first **Eurasian Wigeons**. Both **Tundra** and **Trumpeter Swans** should be more widespread, as well as **Redheads** and **Greater Scaup**. The first **Mountain Bluebirds**, **Western Meadowlarks**, and both **Tree** and **Violet-green Swallows** are also likely before the next report.



Photo by Will Laurie

Nest Notes March 2026

By Jess Garby, FAS Conservation and Education Coordinator



What an interesting winter we are having. The shifting weather has kept both birds and birders on their toes, and it's been a good reminder that, even in winter, there is always something happening outside.

Planning is well underway for the Wings Across the Big Sky birding festival, to be held in Kalispell the weekend of June 12 to 14, 2026. A variety of field trips will be offered across diverse habitats as we attempt to see as many bird species as possible. Be on the lookout for registration brochures, arriving in your mailbox this month.

The lack of snow and ice has allowed us to make meaningful progress on the trails at Owen Sowerwine. In early February, we spent a productive morning chainsawing downed trees and improving trail accessibility so more people can safely enjoy the area. A huge thank you to Garrett Hogan, Keith Hammer, Pam Willison, Rod Wallace, Carol Buchan, and Ronda Howell for giving their time and energy to this effort. Their hard work makes a real difference for everyone who visits.

Flathead Audubon is excited to launch the pilot year of an observational study focused on breeding Ospreys in the Flathead Valley and the presence of baling twine in their nests. Entanglement in synthetic materials continues to pose grave risks to young birds. This project will help us better understand the scope of the issue locally. More information on how to participate in monitoring efforts can be found on page 9.

We celebrated the Great Backyard Bird Count in partnership with Lone Pine State Park on Saturday, February 14, and had an absolute BLAST! The morning kicked off with a guided hike around the park. Even with 40 attendees on the trail, we were thrilled to observe some exciting species, including Red Crossbill and Cassin's Finch. Throughout the day, more than 100 people gathered to learn about birds, count visitors at our three feeders, and participate in a variety of crafts and bird-related activities.



Photo courtesy of Lone Pine State Park

Recently, we hosted a program at the Columbia Falls Library and debuted upgrades to our Bird Beak Lab. The improvements make the activity even more interactive and engaging, especially for younger participants learning how different beak shapes are adapted to different food sources. It is always rewarding to see curiosity spark in the next generation of bird lovers.

Thank you for being part of this community. Whether you have been clearing trails, attending programs, or simply enjoying the birds in your backyard, you are a part of what makes this work meaningful.



Owen Sowerwine Work Crew, Photo by Jess Garby

50 for 50: Help Us Build 50 Owl Boxes for the 50th Anniversary!

50 boxes

for



years



Eastern Screech-owl. Photo: Tyler Pockette

help build screech-owl nesting boxes!

This year Montana Audubon is starting a new phase of the citizen science screech-owl project: building, placing, and monitoring screech-owl boxes!

Right now, we're in phase one: building the boxes. Can you help? We're looking for volunteers with carpentry know-how and the tools to build boxes. If that's you, please email Casey at casey@mtaudubon.org for more information and to volunteer.

If carpentry and woodworking aren't your thing, stay tuned. More opportunities are coming soon.

Thanks to project partner Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and to FenceCrafters for their generous lumber donation!

The History Corner: Call for Photos

By Karen Nichols



Want to help Flathead Audubon (FAS) make history? Do you have photos of Audubon members in action over the past 50 years?

The FAS History Committee invites you to submit your favorite photos of early Flathead Audubon field trips, campouts, or gatherings. We welcome pictures of people birding or interacting with others. We are happy to digitize the prints or slides you offer to share. We will use them in our FAS 50th anniversary publication in 2027, and/or our 50th anniversary celebration online content.

Please send any questions or photos to history@flatheadaudubon.org. If possible, please include the names of any people in the images, the name of the photographer, and the approximate date and location. Thank you!



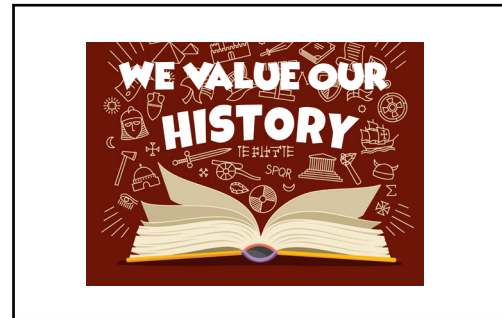
Kay Mitchell, left, and MaryJane Pannell, holding the FAS banner, led the Audubon group during the Bigfork Fourth of July parade in July 2017.
Photo by Bob Smith



Jean Robocker hosted school field trips to her farm in the 1990s, where she used taxidermied wild birds and her live chickens to teach children about birds.
Photo courtesy of Elle Eberts-Robocker.



Lauren Casey, left, Alice (Hannah) Casey, and Pattie Brown in the early 1990s on a "slimy and scaly" herpetology hunt north of Ashley Lake.
Photo courtesy of Dan Casey.



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.

"Recalling Birds" Photo Exhibit

By Daniel Lombardi

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When filling out your Montana tax form this year, think “wildlife” by donating to the Nongame Wildlife Program, found on Form 2, page 11, under Contributions. If your taxes are prepared, tell your accountant that you want to donate to wildlife! Your contributions are tax deductible on next year’s return. Montana has more than 500 species of “nongame” animals that benefit from public support each year at tax time. Since 1983, the check-off has contributed over \$27,000 annually to this important wildlife program.



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