



# the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society



## IT'S DECEMBER - LET'S COUNT BIRDS!



Ah, the Holidays. What better way to combat the stress and limited daylight hours, and ring in the new year, than to participate in one or more Christmas Bird Counts? This is the 106<sup>th</sup> year of this tradition, the longest-running bird survey on our continent. These counts are one-day surveys of all the birds within a circle 7.5 miles in diameter, conducted by teams of observers assigned to specific portions of the count area. They help us gain insight into bird populations, and offer a wonderful opportunity to learn and join in the camaraderie of a day afield with our fellow birders.

### Bigfork Christmas Count

The Bigfork count, centered at the "Little Brown Church" at highways 83 and 35, typically leads the state in variety (>80 species most years), because our dedicated observers cover a wide variety of forest, agricultural, mountain, valley and wetland habitats. The Flathead River and Flathead Lake add a unique element. Last year's count at Bigfork was our 31<sup>st</sup> annual count, and thirty people conducted the count, despite cold rain and fog. They found 7,924 individual birds of 81 species, including a female Snowy Owl, our 142<sup>nd</sup> species seen over the history of the count. We had new high counts for Double-crested Cormorant, Blue Jay and House Finch, as well.

### Kalispell Christmas Count

We had our best turnout ever for the Kalispell count, with 41 observers in the field. Their efforts were well rewarded, with 20,250 individual birds of 74 species found (previous high was 66). We set or tied new high count totals for 23 species, and found 5 species new to the count, bringing our cumulative 6-yr list to 92 species. Highlights included a Cooper's Hawk north of town (new), a Gyrfalcon along Columbia Falls Stage (new), 853 Mourning Doves, 35 Blue Jays, >5000 waxwings (both species), a Yellow-rumped Warbler (new) along Demersville Road, a White-throated Sparrow (new) at a feeder east of town, and 40 White-winged Crossbills (new). We also more than doubled our highest previous count of House Finches.

*(Learn which birds you can expect to see on Christmas Bird Counts, page 7)*



### DECEMBER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR



**Monday, December 12, 2005: Flathead Audubon General Meeting** begins at 7PM at The Summit, conference room #3. Program by Flathead Audubon's own Dan Casey. Refreshments served.

**Monday, December 5, 2005: Flathead Audubon Board of Directors meeting**, 6PM at 295 3rd Ave. EN, Kalispell.

**Sunday, December 11, 2005: Birding in the West Valley** (see page 3)

**CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS - Full Schedule and Contact Information on Page 5**

# BIRD OF THE MONTH

## Your Christmas Goose: Canada or Cackling?

One of the most significant changes for birders in the 2004 supplement of the American Ornithologist Union checklist, according to Sibley, was the split of Canada Goose into two species. "The former broad Canada Goose species has been divided into a large-bodied, interior- and southern-breeding species, and a small-bodied tundra-breeding subspecies. The large-bodied group is still known as Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) while the small-bodied group takes the name Cackling Goose (*Branta hutchinsii*). Cackling Goose includes the subspecies *hutchinsii*, *asiatica* (probably extinct), *leucopareia*, *taverneri*, and *minima*. Canada Goose now includes the subspecies *canadensis*, *interior*, *maxima*, *moffitti*, *parvipes*, *fulva*, and *occidentalis*."

Distinguishing between all of these subspecies is challenging, since some of their field marks overlap. In general, cackling geese subspecies are smaller, have a relatively shorter bill, are relatively darker on the back and the breast, and have high-pitched squeaky voices or barks, hence the name "cackling." According to Dan Casey, they also have an overall squared shape of the head, and in a relaxed posture the neck is noticeably shorter than larger Canada Goose subspecies. The black stocking of the neck often ends in a diffuse border between the black and whitish feathers of the breast. Also in body form and posture, the Cackling Geese look a bit short-legged, due to tarsus length in relationship to body mass when compared to Canada Goose subspecies. Harry Krueger warns that "because of intergrades, human assisted transplants, changing environmental factors, and a still developing understanding of each of these races and their interactions with each other, it will often be impossible for even the most skilled and well-informed field observer to identify each goose they encounter." Despite the challenges, there has been much reporting recently of cackling geese sighted by Montana Online Birders. Bob Rost reported last week that he had found 6 Cackling Geese on the Polson Golf Course. He reported that "they were with a large flock of Canadas in the little pond and that they all forage the grass in herds. These little guys are very small, very dark on the breast with stubby bills. They always feed in a tight group, even in body contact most of the time." Barb Jaquith, of Red Lodge, also reported earlier in November that "among a huge number of Canada Geese on Cooney Dam we found a few small individuals. At the time we were thinking that they were RICHARDSON'S CACKLING. Today, ...we are not sure that they weren't LESSER CANADA. That seems to be the only flyway through this area. Mike Schwitters agrees that "the identification of Cackling Goose in Montana is a very tough problem. This is particularly the case when trying to distinguish between the smallest of the Canada subspecies, *Branta canadensis parvipes*, aka Lesser Canada Goose and the largest of the Cackling Geese, *Branta hutchinsii hutchinsii*. Both forms can be found in Montana but *B. c. parvipes* seems to far outnumber *B. h. hutchinsii*."

Dan Casey reports that "Cackling Geese certainly occur here with some level of regularity. I have seen small flocks of Mallard-sized geese at Church Slough in spring. I have seen 4 Cackling Geese in a large group of Canadas in Polson that I photographed. I saw another on the Ninepipe CBC last year. We expect Cackling Geese to show up more in spring than in the fall. Local observers should carefully note overall size, relative darkness of the back and breast, bill size and voice to help sort out just how frequently and in what numbers Cackling Geese occur here."

If you are interested in finding out more specifics about the type of goose you might be sighting (or cooking) this Christmas season, come to the December program and check out these web sites:

<http://www.idahobirds.net/identification/white-cheeked/introduction.html>

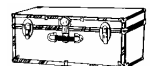
[http://www.sibleyguides.com/canada\\_cackling.html](http://www.sibleyguides.com/canada_cackling.html)

<http://www.oceanwanderers.com/CAGO.Subspecies.html>



By Linda DeKort

The Classroom Mentor's Trunk Workshop has been rescheduled for Tuesday, December 6, 2005, from 4-7p.m. at the Kalispell Montessori School. Flathead Audubon Society will be hosting this training for anyone interested in learning how to be a classroom volunteer. I am looking for individuals or partners who would like to volunteer time in local classrooms and at local natural areas assisting teachers with bird education units. If you would like to become a classroom volunteer, please call 270-5919 to register. Pizza dinner will be provided! From Rochelle Pope, FAS Education Coordinator





## December 2005 Program



### Early Winter Birds of the Flathead Valley by Dan Casey

It's time again for the entertaining mix of identification tips, anecdotes, and science that is Dan Casey's annual pre-Christmas Count presentation. Continuing his long-time tradition of summarizing our Christmas Count data in preparation for this year's counts, this show is always guaranteed to have an abundance of great bird photos, and with the move to PowerPoint, animations to highlight identification tips. The show will focus on those species we expect to see in the valley this time of year, and will include reminders of how to tell similar species apart, and what to look for when trying to spot a rarity. As always, Dan will speculate on what new surprises may await this year (no wagering, please.) Come learn what these count data have shown us over the years, and you are guaranteed to come away enthused about participating in this year's counts.

Dan Casey is the Northern Rockies Coordinator for the American Bird Conservancy, where he facilitates bird habitat conservation planning and action from western Wyoming through central British Columbia. A member of the Flathead Audubon Board, he has led field trips and coordinated Christmas counts in the Flathead for 20 years. Dan teaches birding classes at FVCC, and is the current chairman of the Montana Bird Records Committee. His talks draw from more than 35 years of avid birding experience.

We will be beginning to assign count areas to teams the night of the meeting, so please come if you are planning to go out on the 17<sup>th</sup> (Bigfork) or New Year's Day (Kalispell) counts (or any other regional counts!) Also at the meeting, Conservation Achievement Awards (rescheduled from the November meeting) will be presented to the Flathead Land Trust and Montana Land Reliance.



### APPRECIATION FOR SEEDY CHARACTERS!



Thanks to all who purchased bird seed from Flathead Audubon this year! By the end of distribution day – October 22 – we had sold 235 sacks. Proceeds from this sale will help fund a variety of FAS activities, ranging from postage costs for mailing the Pileated Post, to scholarships that send local students to nature study camp.

Big thanks go to June and Rod Ash, who handle advance sales and coordinate the ordering and shipping of the seed. The distribution site organizers this year were: Sonja Hartmann in Columbia Falls, Mike Fanning in Whitefish, Lindas de Kort and Winnie in Kalispell, Lisa Discoe in Bigfork, and June Ash in the Swan Valley. The organizers wish to thank all those who helped them with the distribution: Lesley Collins in Whitefish; Dick Fretheim in Kalispell; Jim Fiddler, and Neal and Pattie Brown in Bigfork. Thanks also to Rod Walette, Dick Fretheim, Bob Lopp and Bob Lee, who provided rodent-safe

storage of the seed that was left after distribution day. And a special "Thank You" to Bill Rous, the truck driver who brings the sacks to us from eastern Montana the Friday before distribution day. Bill then graciously volunteers his own time to deliver the seeds to the distribution sites on Saturday, and helps off-load the sacks throughout the day.

If you forgot to order your bird seed this year or need more - or you want to buy someone a great Christmas present - **it is not too late buy one of our 50-pound sacks of black, oil sunflower seeds.** We still have about 15 sacks to sell. The price is \$17 a sack, and half of that is tax deductible as a charitable contribution to Flathead Audubon. You can purchase a sack at the FAS December meeting, or contact Mike Fanning (862-8070) or Bob Lee (257-0363) or [RML3@centurytel.net](mailto:RML3@centurytel.net).

From Linda Winnie



### Field Trip for December 2005

**Sunday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005: Birding in the West Valley.** Spend a morning wandering the byways of the West Valley in search of the raptors and songbirds that grace our valley in the winter months. Eagles, hawks and the occasional falcon will be our main focus but there are always a few surprises. Meet at Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 490 N. Meridian in Kalispell at 9AM. Contact Leslie Kehoe for details at 837-4467.

**FROM THE BOARD:**

**PAULA SMITH**

**FAS BOARD MEMBER**



**JOHN JAMES AUDUBON *The Making Of An American*  
by Richard Rhodes, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2004.**

When **JOHN JAMES AUDUBON *The Making of an American*** was published last year, I realized that I knew almost nothing about the man after whom our Audubon Society is named. I wasn't far into the biography when I began to wonder why a movie has not yet been made of the exciting life of this risk-taker and adventurer. What personable, tall, handsome actor could bring verisimilitude to the role of this American original who possessed so many talents and skills: draftsman, portrait artist, horseman, sportsman, hunter, fisherman, crack shot, fencer, singer, dancer, musician (flute, violin, guitar), skater, swimmer, diver, merchant, entrepreneur, naturalist, biologist, competitor, and FAST walker! Indeed, a series of action-adventure movies could be based on the conflicts and hair-raising events in Audubon's life.

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Richard Rhodes subtitles his biography "The Making of an American," because John James Audubon was descended from "French maritime bourgeoisie." John James Audubon was born Jean Rabin in 1785 in St. Domingue (now Haiti). He was the natural child of planter Jean Audubon and chambermaid Jeanne Rabin, who died while he was still an infant. Prior to a general slave revolt in 1791, his father, also a sea captain and retired from the French navy, removed his two natural children, John James and half-sister Rose, from St. Domingue, and had them taken to France. However, not even children were safe from the guillotine in France then, so Jean and his wife adopted the children to protect their lives and their inheritance. Jean Rabin became Jean-Jacques Fougere Audubon (and at a later age, John James LaForest Audubon.) The family barely survived the counter-revolution and subsequent reign of terror. The biographer suggests that John James' life-long passion for beautiful, living birds may have been a response to the violence witnessed in his youth.

In 1803, Jean Audubon sent his 18-year-old son to America to avoid conscription into Napoleon's army and Jean-Jacques became John James. Jean Audubon owned Mill Grove, a Pennsylvania plantation where his son could settle and perhaps find an occupation. At nearby Fatland Ford, John James also found his future wife. He met the prosperous Bakewell family and fell in love with the accomplished Lucy Bakewell. It was here that John James "focused on observing, collecting, mounting and drawing birds." This biography is about his struggle to become an artist and give life to birds through illustrations. It was not customary in ornithologies of the time to depict the natural behavior of birds in their native habitats. Rhodes describes Audubon's experiments to achieve his objective—sketching from stuffed and hanging specimens, from life, puppetry, constructing a universal bird manikin—until he created a mounting board with a grid for impaling specimens with wires in lifelike positions.

Audubon returned to France in 1805 to obtain his father's permission to marry Lucy Bakewell. His father had been his first mentor. The Audubon home near the estuary of the Loire river was a "paradise of birds" and was where he first drew birds in pencil and pastels. He was mostly self-taught and a quick study. He had some formal art training in France. But when he needed credentials, he more than once risked claiming to have studied under the famous French painter David. He learned to weigh and measure specimens and referred to field observations in available natural histories. He met two of several naturalists in his life who would foster his interests and talents. They were physicians who shared his scientific curiosity. And, a young man wanting to teach himself ornithology needed learned mentors with reference works as most libraries were in private hands.

In 1806, it was necessary again to escape France to avoid conscription. His father arranged to have John James smuggled out of France under a false passport to America. En route to America, his ship was captured and robbed by an English privateer, but his stake survived.

Audubon set out for the "trans-Appalachian frontier" in 1807. He speculated in commodities in Louisville and then became a successful merchant in Henderson, KY. He married Lucy at age 23, started a family, and became a U.S. citizen at age 27. In his life, Audubon survived skating through...

*(John James Audubon, continued on next page)*

(John James Audubon, continued from previous page)

river ice, quicksand, yellow fever, an assault and battery charge, eviction by Lucy's landlady, and being thrown into jail for debt. But he did not survive bankruptcy brought on by his new country's "Louisiana debt" and the financial panic of 1819. This was the catalyst for Audubon to devote himself to art.

Destitute, Audubon supported himself in the next several years by teaching drawing, painting, music, French, fencing, dancing, portraiture and hunting. He traveled and worked unceasingly at procuring an historical collection of North American birds. His development as an observer and keeper of field notes chronicles his evolution as a biologist. His work went beyond scientific illustration to "expressive" art as he successfully drew birds in flight and developed a "foreshortening" technique. He used pastel, watercolor, gouache and pencil to illustrate his birds. He began exhibiting and raising funds to go to Europe to publish the collection.

Taking 300 drawings and letters of introduction, Audubon sailed for England in 1826 to find an engraver. He and his drawings were a success. He formed a multi-year plan for publishing and financing, through subscriptions, a work like no other. The four volumes of *THE BIRDS OF AMERICA* were completed in 1838. "*THE BIRDS OF AMERICA* is...the finest work of colored engraving involving aquatint ever produced (and)...the last...lithography quickly replaced engraving in art book production." The work consisted of 435 engraved plates illustrating 497 species, with most of the 1,065 figures drawn from life. Four artists painted the backgrounds. Five volumes of *ORNITHOLOGICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY* and a *SYNOPSIS* for listing the species in scientific order followed. A smaller Octavo edition of *THE BIRDS OF AMERICA* was subsequently published in the U.S. In later years, Audubon also mounted an expedition to the junction of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers to render 150 species for *QUADRUPEDS OF NORTH AMERICA*.

Rhodes writes poignant and beautiful descriptions of frontier life with its hunting culture and very young population. The numerous quotes from Audubon's writings evoke the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the cusp of the industrial revolution for the reader. We read of extraordinary means he took to gain knowledge, such as, climbing up the inside of a giant sycamore at night through exuviae to observe swallows. He painted vivid word pictures of the slaughter of tens of thousands of passenger pigeons, golden plovers, gannets, and the harvesting and chilling destruction by "egggers" of wild bird eggs. The great naturalist witnessed the destruction of nature—the disappearance of eastern forests, aborigines, elk, deer and buffalo. Through their letters and miscommunications, the reader is made to share the hardships and anxieties of the Audubons during their years of separation. He was also honored by prestigious societies for his achievements and met numerous historical personages.

John James Audubon began showing signs of dementia in 1847. He died in January 1851 at Minniesland, his Manhattan Island home on the Hudson River, and was buried at Trinity Cemetery. What happened to his original works? He burned his earliest drawings to force self-improvement. Subsequent drawings of about 1,000 birds were destroyed by rats. Poor again, Lucy sold the original drawings of *THE BIRDS OF AMERICA* to the New York Historical Society in 1863 for \$2,000. The copper engraving plates were sold for scrap and melted down. His extant journals and hundreds of letters are now in libraries.

## A CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT FOR EVERY CORNER OF THE VALLEY

Saturday, December 17, 2005

**Eureka CBC** Contact Lewis or Lynda Young at 889-3492 for all details

**Glacier National Park CBC** Sign up with Susan Sindt, 892-7406

**Bigfork CBC** Attend Flathead Audubon meeting to sign up with Dan Casey or call 857-3143

Potluck afterwards at Bigfork Senior Center, bring table service and a dish; baked ham provided

Sunday, December 18, 2005

**Ninepipe/Mission Valley CBC** Contact Jim Rogers at 883-3611 or [irogers@polson.k12.mt.us](mailto:irogers@polson.k12.mt.us)

Sunday, January 1, 2006 (New Year's Day!)

**Kalispell CBC** Attend Flathead Audubon meeting to sign up with Dan Casey or call 857-3143

Meet at Finnegan's at 7:30 a.m.

Date To Be Announced

**Swan Valley CBC** Call Rod Ash, 754-2289, for date and all details



**WHERE HAVE ALL THE BIRDS GONE? BIRDING IN WINTER**

By Bob Lopp, FAS President



Snow caps the mountains, the leaves have fallen and daylight shortens every week. The large flocks of geese and ducks, blackbirds and hummingbirds have gone south. What is left for avid birders to do from now until the flocks return in the spring?

First, clean up and fill your bird feeders! There are still a few bags of sunflower seeds left from the "Seed Sale." Be sure to hang up suet as well. Many birds need that concentrated energy to stay healthy. At our feeder we have seen the usual finches, chickadees, a downy woodpecker, and blue jays. Oh, and two raccoons this morning!

Tom Ulrich, professional nature photographer, presented a stunningly beautiful slide show from his trip to the Falkland Islands at the Flathead Audubon meeting on November 14<sup>th</sup>. You just can't see those great programs in the summer! No meetings in June, July and August! Put the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of every month on your calendar for the Flathead Audubon meetings. The programs are always worth your time and it's a great time to see old friends and make new friends.

The summer is full of birding trips but there are also good trips all winter. Saturday, November 19<sup>th</sup>, there was Bob Rost's November Birding Blast – A Trip to the Mission Valley. Sunday, December 11, will be Birding in the West Valley.

The Bigfork Christmas Bird Count will be Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, and the Kalspell Christmas Bird Count will be Sunday, January 1, 2006. Dan Casey will be organizing these (phone 857-3143). The Christmas Bird Count is not only very important for bird conservation statistics but also great fun.

For those of you who keep life lists or other records, winter is the time to pull all of the lists together and get them entered. Winter is also reading and learning time. The Sibley guides and other birding books are full of information that will make next summer's birding that much more meaningful. No one reads them when they are out in the field looking for birds! The more you learn about specific birds, the easier it will be to accurately identify them. What are the key differences between a downy and a hairy woodpecker? What about all of those LBB's we couldn't identify more closely than "Little Brown Bird" last summer!

Winter brings its own collection of birds to the Flathead, birds that normally stay north of here but get blown further south by the winter storms. I would love to see the crossbills again. They were regular visitors when I was growing up on Flathead Lake.

Yes, there is great birding all winter long! Different birds, different locations, but just as exciting. Happy Birding!

**The Recycling Wagon Vanished!**



Sometimes we make big plans that never happen! With Brent away hunting, I had every intention of having the Mitchell Recycling Wagon at the November FAS meeting for all of you to drop off your recyclables. Bill Marcure, brave soul that he is, had even volunteered to do the maneuvering and backing up for me (I know my limitations!) But the flu bug came between us. So bring your growing collection to the December meeting and we guarantee that the MRW will be there and fully "staffed!"

Several of you have asked about paper recycling, which seems to change all the time. The latest word is this: the centers want it sorted into 2 categories - white and brown. White includes magazines, typing paper, packaging that is white inside, pastel colored paper, and white envelopes, even with plastic windows. Brown includes cardboard, newspapers, paper grocery-type bags, packaging that is brown or grey inside (like cereal boxes), and tubes from the middle of toilet tissue and paper towel rolls. Paper items that you still have to send to the landfill include packaging with metallic, plastic, or wax coatings, dark or brightly colored paper (like gift wrap), and paper that has been "used," such as paper plates, Kleenex, paper towels.

Next month, we'll cover the subject of recyclable plastics.

Kay Mitchell

## This Year's Counts Need Your Help!

We are hoping to have about 40 people in about 15 groups afield for each of this year's counts. Dan Casey, the compiler, will be calling last year's participants to arrange area coverage. We will finalize arrangements at the December meeting (see announcement elsewhere in this issue), so plan to attend or give Dan a call at 857-3143 (evenings) or 756-2681 (days). There is still a mandatory fee of \$5 per adult participant, to cover the editing, data management and publishing costs of the annual CBC issue of American Birds. But the fun you'll have is a bargain at that price! As in past years, there will be a **potluck compilation dinner at the Bigfork Senior Center starting at 5:00 pm on the day of the Bigfork count.**

**Plan on taking part in Montana's premiere Christmas Counts! Birders of all skill levels, members and nonmembers alike, are encouraged to join in, as are feeder-watchers and half-day helpers.**

## Early Winter Birds in the Flathead



The following list includes all the species of birds seen on the Bigfork and Kalispell Christmas Bird Counts since their inception (in 1974 and 2000, respectively). Those seen fewer than 3 times over the 31 years of the Bigfork count are highlighted in **bold**, as are those that have been seen only once in the years of the Kalispell count. Species in *italics* have been seen once or more during count week only, but not on count day. Underlined species have been seen only on the Kalispell count. More detailed summaries are available from Dan Casey at [dcasey@abcbirds.org](mailto:dcasey@abcbirds.org), or you can query the CBC databases for these or for any count circles by visiting the National Audubon website at [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc).

Common Loon	Sharp-shinned Hawk	Short-eared Owl	Cedar Waxwing
<b>Pacific Loon</b>	Cooper's Hawk	Long-eared Owl	Northern Shrike
Pied-billed Grebe	Northern Goshawk	<b>Northern Hawk-Owl</b>	European Starling
Horned Grebe	Red-tailed Hawk	<b>N. Saw-whet Owl</b>	<b>Yellow-rumped Warbler</b>
Eared Grebe	Rough-legged Hawk	Belted Kingfisher	<b>Spotted Towhee</b>
Red-necked Grebe	<b>Ferruginous Hawk</b>	<i>Red-naped Sapsucker</i>	American Tree Sparrow
Western Grebe	Golden Eagle	Hairy Woodpecker	<b>Fox Sparrow</b>
Double-crested Cormorant	American Kestrel	Downy Woodpecker	Song Sparrow
Great Blue Heron	Merlin	Three-toed Woodpecker-	<b>Lincoln's Sparrow</b>
Tundra Swan	<b>Peregrine Falcon</b>	<b>Black-b. Woodpecker</b>	<b>Swamp Sparrow</b>
<b>Trumpeter Swan</b>	<b>Gyr Falcon</b>	Northern Flicker	White-throated Sparrow
<b>Greater White-fr. Goose</b>	<b>Prairie Falcon</b>	Pileated Woodpecker	<b>White-crowned Sparrow</b>
<b>Snow Goose</b>	Chukar (feral)	<i>Say's Phoebe</i>	Harris's Sparrow
Canada Goose	Gray Partridge	Horned Lark	Dark-eyed Junco
<b>Wood Duck</b>	Ring-necked Pheasant	Gray Jay	<b>Lapland Longspur</b>
Green-winged Teal	<b>Spruce Grouse</b>	Steller's Jay	Snow Bunting
Mallard	<b>Blue Grouse</b>	Blue Jay	Red-winged Blackbird
Northern Pintail	Ruffed Grouse	Clark's Nutcracker	<b>Western Meadowlark</b>
<b>Blue-winged Teal</b>	<b>Sharp-tailed Grouse</b>	Black-billed Magpie	<b>Yellow-headed Blackbird</b>
Northern Shoveler	Wild Turkey	American Crow	<b>Brown-headed Cowbird</b>
Gadwall	N. Bobwhite (feral)	Common Raven	Brewer's Blackbird
American Wigeon	American Coot	Black-capped Chickadee	<b>Common Grackle</b>
Canvasback	Killdeer	Mountain Chickadee	<b>Rusty Blackbird</b>
Redhead	Common Snipe	B.-c. x Mtn Chickadee	<i>Brambling</i>
Ring-necked Duck	<b>Franklin's Gull</b>	Chestnut-b. Chickadee	<b>Gray-crowned Rosy Finch</b>
Greater Scaup	Ring-billed Gull	Red-br. Nuthatch	Pine Grosbeak
Lesser Scaup	<b>Mew Gull</b>	White-br. Nuthatch	Cassin's Finch
<b>White-winged Scoter</b>	California Gull	Pygmy Nuthatch	<b>Purple Finch</b>
<b>Harlequin Duck</b>	Herring Gull	Brown Creeper	House Finch
<b>Long-tailed Duck</b>	<b>Glaucous-w. x W. Gull</b>	Winter Wren	Red Crossbill
Common Goldeneye	<i>Glaucous Gull</i>	Marsh Wren	White-w. Crossbill
Barrow's Goldeneye	Rock Pigeon	<b>House Wren</b>	Common Redpoll
Bufflehead	Mourning Dove	American Dipper	Hoary Redpoll
Hooded Merganser	<i>Western Screech-Owl</i>	Golden-cr. Kinglet	Pine Siskin
Common Merganser	Great Horned Owl	<b>Ruby-cr. Kinglet</b>	American Goldfinch
Red-breasted Merganser	Northern Pygmy-Owl	Townsend's Solitaire	Evening Grosbeak
Ruddy Duck	Barred Owl	American Robin	House Sparrow
Bald Eagle	<b>Great Gray Owl</b>	<b>Gray Catbird</b>	
Northern Harrier	<b>Snowy Owl</b>	Bohemian Waxwing	



# FLATHEAD LAND TRUST AND MONTANA LAND RELIANCE TO BE RECOGNIZED FOR CONSERVATION ACHIEVEMENTS

Two leading conservation organizations, Flathead Land Trust and Montana Land Reliance, will be recognized for their conservation achievements at the December meeting of Flathead Audubon. These two organizations are making a difference in the Flathead Valley and Montana by helping private land owners preserve and protect what makes us "The Last Best Place."

Montana media utilize imagery of glorious Montana landscapes and culture to attract readers, listeners, and viewers. "Heritage Hotels," "Great Escapes", "Where the Buffalo roam" represent some of the images purveyors of our lifestyle wish to sell to all those longing for a better life. Awe-inspiring photos and music from home-grown men and women often accompany these titles. Within minutes of experiencing these natural extolling images, we are ready to shed where we are for a bit of the Montana landscape and historical towns and people. After all, our human density is approximately 6.2 people per square mile compared to the national average of 79.6 people per square mile. These scenic vistas, cultural heritage, and open spaces are in danger as immigrants flock to absorb this quality of life.

An awareness and need to act to protect these resources that we hold so dear launched two innovative private organizations decades ago. The Montana Land Reliance (MLR) began in 1978; Flathead Land Trust (FLT) started in 1985. These private, nonprofit nonpartisan organizations help landowners voluntarily donate rights of development called conservation easements. These easements stay with the land's title forever. The landowners who donate the easement may take some federal tax deductions, but maintaining clean water, air, and soil results in a healthy lifestyle and that is their priority. Conservation easements prevent subdivisions and commercial development, and they promote protection of historically and ecologically important land. Agricultural, wetlands, riparian zones, and open spaces are priorities. MLR provides guidance, but the landowners manage their own land.

Montana Land Reliance has many entrepreneurial professionals and advisors throughout the eastern, central and Glacier Flathead offices. Amy Royer, Executive Director of the Glacier Flathead office notes how privileged she is to work with such amazing folks and to get to know such knowledgeable and caring landowners. The MLR professionals utilize team management and focus on each landowner. They spend time at kitchen tables,

listening to landowners' dreams and then protect them with legally sound conservation strategies. As of December 2005, they have guided over 600,000 acres of private Montana land into conservation easements suited to each landowner's needs and land. That is at least 938 square miles of land and over 1000 miles of river frontage that will forever maintain those Montana values to which we all aspire. Over 90,000 acres are in crop/hay/pasture and 483,276 are in range/forest. Elk habitat is 283,622 acres and wetlands are over 7,156.

Ken Siderius, President of the Flathead Land Trust board, promotes an active organization that supports preservation of open spaces, agricultural lands, riparian zones, wetlands, river corridors and wildlife habitat in the Flathead. FLT currently holds 32 easements on 7000 acres. Boards of directors, volunteers, and professional staff members produce easements designed by the landowners. This diverse group supports each other in creating new and better management techniques.

Their most complex project was the McWennegar-Weaver slough that involved six tracts of land, five different landowners, and some land purchased with agricultural and wetland grants. This project of over 1500 acres is located less than seven miles southeast of Kalispell. It involved dozens of dedicated citizens, agencies, and landowners over several years to finalize.

MLR and FLT are diligent in reassuring the surrounding communities that development to accommodate a growing population is necessary. Their presence does reflect a growing sense of stewardship of those landowners who can conserve. By their example, maybe all of us can do a little to keep our "Last Best Place."

We appreciate that Montana Land Reliance and Flathead Land Trust have had the vision to lead us to better conservation through easements. This leaves the land to the landowners and preserves the heritage, wildlife, and open spaces we may have taken for granted. Flathead Audubon's Conservation Achievement Recognition is presented to Flathead Land Trust and Montana Land Reliance with our gratitude and thanks for all they have done for Montana and our appreciation and thanks go also to the visionary landowners who have embraced conservation in this way!

By Shirley Harrison, FAS Board Member







## LAST YEAR'S MONTANA CHRISTMAS COUNT RESULTS

By Dan Casey



The 30 counts of the 105<sup>th</sup> CBC (2004-2005) in Montana yielded 139 species, plus 2 count week and 2 exotics. Those counts conducted early in the period generally had mild conditions; 21 counts had high temperatures above 32F. Fort Peck had daily temperatures 12F above normal for the first half of December, and added four new (lingering) species to their count. Later counts found more "normal" winter conditions (e.g. Warm Springs, 1-15F, 4-12 in. snow). Many new count high totals were established for species such as the Mourning Dove and Blue Jay, the latter in keeping with an increasing regional trend. Not unexpectedly, Bigfork and Stevensville again had the highest species counts (81 each), with Ninepipe NWR close behind with 80 (a new count high there). Cackling Goose was the only new species for the cumulative Montana CBC list (204 countable species).

Four Ross's Geese at Pompey's Pillar were the only white geese reported last year, and represent only the third occurrence of the species on a MT count. Cackling Geese were reported from two counts (Ninepipe (1) and Stevensville (5)), but the photo submitted from the latter did not eliminate Lesser Canada Goose. Much work remains to be done to delineate the distribution and abundance of this "new" species in Montana. Trumpeter Swans (on 7 counts) again outnumbered Tundra Swans statewide. Two Common Loons at McNeil Slough (Malta) were a surprise; most CBC records of the species have been from western lakes. Two Pacific Loons were seen count week at Glacier National Park. American White Pelicans were found on three counts, as were Double-crested Cormorants (in testament to a warm early winter). The eight pelicans doubled the number seen on all previous Montana counts.

A total of 13 Cooper's Hawks tied the previous high state total for a species that has been slowly increasing. The 276 Red-tailed Hawks was just below the highest previous Montana total; but 399 Rough-legged Hawks was below the recent (10-yr) average of 460. One Harlan's Hawk at Bozeman was the furthest east of 8 reported, a bit below the average number in recent years. Four Gyrfalcons scattered about the state was typical for a species found 17 of the past 20 years in the state.

A Sora on the Stevensville count was just the 8<sup>th</sup> ever reported on a Montana count. It was an unremarkable year for gulls and shorebirds. Fort Peck had its usual Thayer's Gull (cw). Killdeer and Wilson's Snipe were reported in good numbers.

An unprecedented and remarkable number of Eurasian Collared-Doves (75) were reported from the Pompey's Pillar count with details and photos; they also documented 3 Ringed Turtle Doves. Mourning Dove numbers also continue to verge on the remarkable, with 1532 statewide this year, including 853 at Kalispell. Just 6 were seen in the first 50 years of Montana counts; it took another 30 years to find >200. Mild winters and feeders are apparently offsetting the increasing loss of agricultural lands in western valleys. A Snowy Owl at Bigfork was new to that count; perhaps more surprising was a Barred Owl in Ballantine (Pompey's Pillar count), a new latlong record, and the first in winter east of the divide.

The Hermit Thrush at Troy was only Montana's third on a CBC. A single Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler at Kalispell was a count first there; one at Missoula was their third. There have been just 39 Yellow-rumped reported over the 90 years of Montana counts. Perhaps the sparrow event of this CBC season was the extraordinary total of 89 Song Sparrows on the McNeil Slough count, where the species was new to the count. High counts for this species have almost always been in the western valleys. No Hoary Redpolls were reported, for just the third time in the past 10 years. Common Redpolls were widely reported, with 1388 on 19 counts. Evening Grosbeak numbers remained well below historic levels, but House Finch numbers seem to have finally leveled off after 34 years of steady (and nearly geometric) increases. Still, the 7754 reported on 26 counts was the third highest reported.

Every year brings reports of out-of-season birds with minimal or no documentation. Last year, a Loggerhead Shrike was reported (no details) at Libby. Although the species has been reported 16 times before on MT counts, I am not aware of any that have been conclusively (e.g. photo-) documented. There is also a precedent for Chipping Sparrow reports on MT counts (5 previously-accepted reports, including one of 50(!) in 1975). But with a plethora of active birders with cameras and an active list serve, there are no firm winter records. In my opinion, a photo will be necessary to accept a MT CBC Chipping Sparrow, and it is likely to be a single bird. This year, reports of 15 at Missoula and 1 at Libby (no details) were rejected. Thank you to all the compilers who diligently submitted documentation from across the state, and to all the observers who continue to expand our knowledge of Montana birds.





Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

DECEMBER, 2005



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The Flathead Audubon Society is affiliated with Montana Audubon and the National Audubon Society. Flathead Audubon meets on the second Monday of each month from September through May. The meeting starts at 7:00PM and includes a featured guest who presents a conservation or nature program. The Board of Directors meet the Monday preceding the general meeting, at 6PM at 295 3rd Ave. EN, in Kalispell. Both meetings are open to all those interested.

**THE PILEATED POST** is published September through May and is sent to members of the Flathead Audubon Society as a membership benefit. For membership information or address change, please call Mike Fanning at 862-8070.

**Deadline for newsletter copy is the 18th of each month. Contact newsletter editor at 755-1406; email submissions to pileatedpost@hotmail.com**

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