



Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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Citizen Science Projects



It's almost fall, and time to start thinking about your old friends at the feeder! If you are an avid feeder watcher, then the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has a Citizen Science project for you! Project FeederWatch, Classroom FeederWatch, and The Great Backyard Bird Count are just a few of the fun ways you can enjoy bird watching while helping scientists understand more about birds!

Classroom FeederWatch

Are you a teacher who likes to promote science in your classroom? Here's a great ongoing Citizen Science project that will really get your students interested in birds, whether they are in kindergarten or high school! The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has been promoting Citizen Science for many years, and has several projects open to teachers and students. **Classroom FeederWatch** is Citizen Science at its finest!

Students enjoy feeding and watching local birds, while scientists learn from their findings. To begin Classroom FeederWatch, students and their teacher must simply set up a bird feeding station near the school grounds, then observe which birds are feeding there each week during specific times. Students use the scientific method as they predict, observe, and record information. Data is then entered into the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website, helping scientists to track bird populations, locations, and patterns.

Classroom FeederWatch comes with a great curriculum full of ideas for activities and extensions, which can be adjusted for all ages, ability levels, and busy schedules! The program costs approximately \$100 for the first year, to cover the curriculum, and \$15 each year following. Flathead Audubon has awarded annual grants to teachers wishing to participate in this exciting Citizen Science opportunity. Please contact Ansley Ford, Flathead Audubon Education Chair, at 857-6788, or any other member of the Flathead Audubon Board of Directors to find out how to apply for grants.

Learn more about Citizen Science at www.birds.cornell.edu/. To go directly to Classroom FeederWatch, go to www.birds.cornell.edu/cfw. Happy Feeder Watching!
From Ansley Ford

FAS MEMBERSHIPS EXPIRE IN OCTOBER

All FAS memberships except those submitted since April must be renewed by October 15. The October Pileated Post will be the last issue for those who do not renew. Don't miss an issue, and continue your generous support to our local chapter. You can renew at www.flatheadaudubon.org, or by sending in the form on the last page of this newsletter. Thank you!

Mike Fanning, FAS Membership Chair

SEPTEMBER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, September 11, 2006: Flathead Audubon General Meeting begins at 7PM at The Summit, conference room #3. More details on page 3.

Tuesday, September 5, 2006: Flathead Audubon Board of Directors meeting, 6PM at 52 West View Drive, Kalispell. (Note temporary change of day and place for this month only.)

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Northern Harriers, Hunters of the Marsh

We have been watching a family of raptors swoop and soar around a neighborhood wetland throughout the summer. These relatively small hawks are Northern Harriers. Harrier means hunter and the harrier jet, which can take off and land vertically, was named for it. This avian hunter was formerly known as the Marsh Hawk because it prefers hunting in open areas such as grasslands and wetlands. The scientific name, which has not changed, is *Circus cyaneus*; *Circus*, which means circular, most likely refers to the beautiful wide surveillance flights made close to the ground. They fly with slender wings held up elegantly in a slight "V" and when they spot their prey, such as small mammals (especially voles), birds, reptiles, or insects, they will plunge suddenly out of sight.

Northern Harriers are widely distributed around the northern hemisphere. According to Montana Partners in Flight, Eastern Montana supports some of the highest densities of this species in the nation; it is estimated that as much as 70% of the state could be suitable habitat for the species. They are threatened today, like so many other avian species, by loss of habitat (wetlands and native grasslands) and pesticides.

These hawks are easily identified by their very distinct white rump patch at the base of the tail. The adult male and female look quite different, however: the male is white below with a light gray back and hood and obvious black wingtips; the female is brown above and speckled white and brown below. The female is also quite a bit larger than the male. Body lengths of adults range from 17-24 inches and the wingspan can be 4.5 feet. The adults weigh usually between 12 and 20 ounces. The Peregrine Fund reports that, unlike most hawks, harriers can use their sense of hearing to help locate prey. Harriers have an owl-like facial disk to help with directional hearing and soft feathers for a quieter flight. The eyes of an adult male are yellow. The female is born with brown eyes which turn yellow at about three years of age. Juveniles resemble adult females, but have gray eyes and have buff underparts.

Montana Natural Heritage Program reports that Harriers arrive here to breed in March and April. Northern harriers usually return to the same area to nest. Courtship occurs through early May and the acrobatic flights of the agile males consisting of a series of U-shaped maneuvers are elaborate. Their courtship call is a series of "kek" or "ke" notes. Males may have two mates, but usually only one female is able to successfully produce young because the male typically favors one mate and her nestlings with food. Northern Harriers nest on the ground or over water on platforms of emergent vegetation. The majority of nests are located in undisturbed wetlands or grasslands which have thick vegetation such as brome, wheatgrass, and western snowberry. The female lays 3 - 6 eggs depending on the abundance of food. The eggs are pale blue when first laid but then turn to dull white; some may have brown spots. The female begins incubating with the second to fourth egg and the eggs will begin hatching in about 32 days. The male helps care for the young by hunting for food and bringing it to the female in mid-air. A female, after receiving prey in flight from the male, will not return directly to the nest but will make several false landings to confuse predators. Female harriers will aggressively protect their nests; we have watched one chase away a red tail hawk half again her size. It has also been reported that humans who approach too close to a nest are often dived at by these vigilant mothers. The call given by harriers when they are threatened has been described as a rapid nasal chattering, ke-ke-ke. The begging call is a piercing, descending scream. It can be startling. The young that hatch in June can fly at 30-35 days and are on the wing in abundance in early August. Harriers mature in 2 - 3 years, but may be able to breed their first year if prey is abundant.

Some harriers may winter in Montana, though most head south beginning in September. They head for Mexico, Central America, northwestern South America and the West Indies. Becky Lomax in a 2004 *Montana Outdoors* article reported that raptors travel along the Rocky Mountain Front on their annual migratory paths. Many birds of prey fly near Rogers Pass, along the Continental Divide about halfway between Helena and Great Falls from September through mid-November. On an average day during the fall migration, over 40 raptors fly over Rogers Pass including Golden eagles, Sharp-shinned hawks, red-tailed hawks, rough-legged hawks, Cooper's hawks, northern goshawks, kestrels, and of course, northern harriers. Blustery days are better for viewing than balmy ones because prey are often out on the good days and raptors are feeding rather than flying. Becky included these directions to the viewing area on Rogers Pass:

(BIRD OF THE MONTH, continued on page 3)





September 2006 Program

WOLVES AND BIRDS OF ISLE ROYALE NATIONAL PARK

Naturalist Cristina Eisenberg will present a program about the effect of wolves on the ecosystem of Isle Royale National Park in Ontario, Canada, at our September meeting. Isle Royale is one of Canada's least visited national parks. Early in the fall of 2005, Cristina and her daughter Bianca, age 14, traveled seven hours by boat across Lake Superior to get to this wild and magical isle. Once there, they backpacked around the isle, as no cars or motorized vehicles are allowed. Cristina and Bianca observed the relationships among the organisms that comprise its food web: wolves that prey on moose; moose that browse particular plants; and altered habitat for birds.

Cristina and Bianca were on Isle Royale during the peak of the warbler migration. Point Pelle, Ontario, is the last landfall on the migration corridor in the fall for birds going south, except for Isle Royale. The area is a major migration staging ground for these neotropicals. Warblers were in their non-breeding plumage, presenting a challenge in identifying the many species. However, Cristina and Bianca were able to observe the tired warblers at very close range as they ate berries and insects. Bianca also found the isle's only pair of nesting Peregrine Falcons.

Many of you may already be familiar with Cristina Eisenberg's poetic prose in her natural history column in the LAKESHORE COUNTRY JOURNAL. Cristina's permanent address is in Bigfork. However, she is now working on an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Wildlife Biology and Forestry at Oregon State University, where she also teaches graduate courses. This summer she began a 5-10 year research project in Glacier National Park and Waterton Provincial Park. As she and her assistants study the food web of the Crown of the Continent ecosystem, they will also be looking at wolves and surveying bird communities.

Please join us on Monday, September 11, at 7 p.m. at The Summit.

ARE YOU A SNOWBIRD?

If you plan to do some migrating of your own this winter, be sure to take the *Pileated Post* with you. Send your email address to lindawin@centurytel.net and read the *Post* anywhere in the world that you may be roosting!



BIRD OF THE MONTH, *continued...*

"follow U.S. Highway 287 north from Wolf Creek. The next 21 miles run along the FWP survey route. At Bowman's Corner, turn west onto Montana Highway 200 toward Rogers Pass. A few miles past the Stearns-Augusta road crossing, a marked pullout on the road's north side denotes the Rocky Mountain Front Eagle Migration Area with an "Eagle Watch" sign. You can monitor migrating raptors with scopes and binoculars there and at any unmarked pullouts between there and Rogers Pass. In early fall you can watch from the Continental Divide Trail north or south from Rogers Pass. If you plan on walking off-road in the Rogers Pass area, don't bother or disrupt researchers trapping and banding raptors. Walk quietly and move through the trees rather than out in the open, where raptors can spot you from afar." Another opportunity to view this magnificent raptor migration is to enroll in a Glacier Institute class taught by Rob Domech, October 13-15; call (406) 755-1211 for more information. One way or the other, I think that we will be heading over to Rogers Pass this fall to catch a last glimpse of these elegant hunters of the marsh as they head south for the winter.

Researched and compiled by Linda deKort, Past President

FLATHEAD AUDUBON MISSION STATEMENT

THE FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY IS AFFILIATED WITH
THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY.

- OUR MISSION IS TO CONSERVE BIRDS, WILDLIFE HABITAT, AND ECOSYSTEM DIVERSITY.
- WE PROMOTE AWARENESS AND APPRECIATION OF THE NATURAL WORLD THROUGH EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND ADVOCACY PROGRAMS.
- WE WORK WITH DIVERSE GROUPS AND AGENCIES TO ACHIEVE SOUND DECISIONS ON NATURAL RESOURCE ISSUES.
- WHILE FOCUSING OUR EFFORTS IN NORTHWEST MONTANA, WE BELIEVE IN THE PROTECTION OF THE EARTH AND ALL OF ITS INHABITANTS.

PRESIDENTS-COLUMN

WHAT A SUMMER! HOW ABOUT YOURS?

May ends with the unlimited promise of summer, vacations, lots of free time to go birding, catch up on reading, a little hiking and fishing. Two days and three fish later it is August and time to write an article for the Pileated Post! September starts next weekend, Labor Day zips by and we can all be enjoying the Flathead Audubon program at the Summit on September 11th at 7:00 p.m.

Flatheadaudubon.org is the great new website for birding in the Flathead Valley! Check on upcoming field trips, meetings, and events! Bird lists, bird songs, birding hotspots, and links to other sites provide instant information.

Quoting from the website, "Flathead Audubon's education committee works to provide educational materials, training opportunities and people knowledgeable about birds and bird conservation to help educators teach about birds. We make it fun with the many educational trunks and materials available free of charge. We also offer educational programs throughout the valley that you and your family can attend to broaden your knowledge of our local birds and their interactions with this valley we all share."

Birding is much more than just looking at birds or keeping a bird list. It includes caring for the preservation of bird and other animal habitats. That includes our homes and neighborhoods. As land is developed, are measures included to protect migration corridors, riparian areas, and winter feeding grounds? Growth is not bad. Logging is not bad. How it is done can be very detrimental to the future of our children and the environment they will inhabit.

Being politically aware and active is also part of birding. The birds and other animals cannot protect their future but we can. Yes, I get tired of all the political mailings but by paying attention to the objectives of each organization, I can decide which ones I will support and which I will oppose. I too, would rather just look at birds but I want my granddaughters (we have six, no grandsons) also to be enthralled with a vibrant nature to explore. Three of the six attended camps this summer at Big Creek directed by the Glacier Institute.

Now is the time to join Flathead Audubon! What will you receive for your \$15? Fabulous programs every month, guided field trips to great local birding areas, opportunities to volunteer, management of the Owen Sowerwine Nature Area, educational opportunities for yourselves and children, monitoring of local political issues impacting our environment, and through Montana Audubon, active interaction with state government and the legislature. It only costs \$15 per year to help protect your opportunity to continue birding in the Flathead Valley.

From Bob Lopp, FAS President



JUST THE "BEAR" FACTS!

Yes, you can feed the birds and not create problems for bears! Get creative with the 10/5 rule (that's 10 feet up and 5 feet out from any surface a bear can climb). Try a 10 foot metal post sunk in the ground. Or put your feeder



on a wire stretched between two tree branches or a tree trunk and your house. How about a tray feeder on an upstairs window sill? Or hang your feeder from the eaves of your house, with a rope to raise and lower it. You only have to set it up once and then you can use your "invention" year after year.

11th Annual Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, January 12-15, 2007

MORRO BAY, CALIFORNIA: Come to where the birds are and join Morro Coast Audubon Society (MCAS) for the 11th Annual Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival. Located on California's scenic Central Coast, Morro Bay is an important stop on the Pacific Flyway and one of the country's pre-eminent birding spots. The area is recognized worldwide for its diversity of both resident and wintering birds, and at last year's festival, over 200 species of birds were identified! The Festival gives you the chance to join local and national birding experts on a variety of field trips and workshops. Field trip group sizes are limited to maximize spotting and identification opportunities. The Festival also offers workshops aimed at sharpening your birding skills, as well as evening programs with outstanding speakers. For more information about the Morro Bay Festival, go to www.morrobaybirdfestival.org, or call (805) 772-4677. Information brochure and online registration will be available in October 2006. Registration deadline is January 4, 2007; early signups are encouraged, as the most popular events fill up quickly.



FROM THE BOARD: **SHIRLEY HARRISON**

FAS BOARD MEMBER

The Flathead Valley is experiencing several stream bank and lakeshore restoration projects. Many of these projects are the outcome of the Critical Lands Project sponsored by the Flathead Lakers, after determining that runoff and erosion from unhealthy stream banks are adding to the pollution of rivers and lakes.

What do healthy stream banks and students from the H.E. Robinson Agricultural Center (Ag Center) have in common? Since February 2003, freshmen earth science and biology students have been on a journey to determine exactly what a healthy stream bank is and how to restore them. The Flathead Conservation District (FCD), Department of Natural Resource & Conservation (DNRC), Department of Natural Resource & Conservation (NRCS), Flathead Audubon, MFWP, USFS, USFWS, and several local experts have all joined forces to ensure students and staff received the latest information.

Students took all this information in stride and enthusiastically researched even more. They modeled with stream tables, and completed several ground-truthing expeditions along the Stillwater oxbow banks before drafting a plan for restoring these eroding and sloughing banks. Overall they wanted up to 100' of vegetation next to the river, much of it with deep roots to hold the soil. They generated several options to artificially shore up the loose soil to support the new vegetation until their roots were strong enough. They proposed a new animal science barn to replace the barn that is now too close to the stream bank. They proposed revised farm management practices to reduce erosion and pollution. Their succinct proposals went statewide and generated enough state and federal help to receive grant moneys to restore over 1000' of stream bank or approximately 1.5 acres on the north side of the oxbow. (See picture)

Their comparison site was the Owen Sowerwine Area located north of the Ag Center. Visits reinforced what they were learning. Healthy stream banks with several layered tiers of vegetation canopy provided clearer and cooler water, increased plant and animal diversity, and more fun to walk through. They also realized that there were some isolated areas around the school and farm that were healthy as well. Science classes for 2004 and 2005 inventoried plants and animals around the Ag Center, again verifying what they were noticing around the Owen Sowerwine Area - that healthy stream banks and resulting riparian areas produced more diversity and wildlife.

In May and June of 2006, the freshmen science, sophomore, junior, and senior Ag Science classes worked generously through 90-degree days, mosquitoes, mud, and electric fences, doing seeding, soil preparation, and planting over 2,000 native shrubs and trees. (See picture) They were led by the FCD, NRCS, Flathead Lakers, scientists and engineers. This year's science classes (2006-2007) will be collecting vegetation, erosion, herbivore predation and animal diversity data to begin charting if research and theory meet outcome.

The theory behind restoration is to prevent additional erosion of soils and polluted runoff into rivers and lakes. Increased vegetation also increases diversity of plants and animals. So, what do healthy stream banks and Ag Center students have in common? If they can help recreate healthy stream banks, they and all of us will benefit with healthier rivers and lakes. This restoration project is a work in progress for students and staff to help ensure its success. The Ag Center students are learning in an outdoor environment that needs their attention. May they always have this opportunity.



Denver Holt of the Owl Research Institute invites you (and anyone you know) to the center's annual Hat Party on September 9 in Charlo. Music starts at 3:30 and food will follow. A \$10 donation, along with a wild hat of your

choice, gains you entrance to the party, great music and food. The fund-raiser helps support owl research and education efforts in the Mission Valley and beyond. Call the center at 644-3412 for information and directions.





Stand up for conservation of private lands

If you live in the Flathead Valley and enjoy the clean water, wildlife habitat and beauty of working farms, then you benefit from voluntary conservation agreements, also known as "conservation easements." Likewise, everyone should be alarmed that a few folks involved in county politics have a grudge against these valuable, free-market tools for private lands that conserve community values.

Hunters, anglers, birdwatchers, boaters, just about everyone in the Flathead Valley, benefit from conservation easements. Maintaining our water, beauty and wildlife helps our entire valley prosper.

In short, conservation easements are agreements between landowners and a non-profit land trust. Under these agreements, landowners limit or restrict development on their property to conserve the working landscape, habitat, clean water or other public good. The land stays in private hands, remains on the tax rolls, and is generally used for agriculture or timber production. The public is guaranteed that values such as scenery, open space and wildlife habitat will remain intact because the easement continues, no matter who owns the land.

Here are some examples of private land conservation in northwestern Montana:

- The Flathead Land Trust and private landowners have agreed to conserve 2,000 acres of sloughs and associated wetlands in the lower valley, between Kalispell and Flathead Lake. University of Montana experts have identified these lands as crucial natural filters that keep Flathead Lake clean. Under the agreement, the lands may be farmed or used in other ways compatible with clean water, but will never be subdivided.

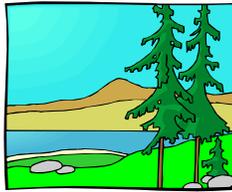
- The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and Plum Creek Timber Company have conserved 300,000 acres of corporate timberland in the Thompson River country. Under this agreement, Plum Creek (or a future landowner) is free to log the land as they see best, but the land will never be subdivided. So the land will provide wildlife habitat and remain open for deer and elk hunting.

- Home Ranch Bottoms, south of Polebridge, is well known for its views of Glacier Park and for its resident herd of deer and elk. It's prime habitat for endangered species, such as wolves and grizzly bears, as well as big game winter range. Shortly before he died, rancher Tom Ladenberg signed an

agreement with the Nature Conservancy of Montana, allowing the land to be ranched, but not split up.

- Since 2000, Montana Land Reliance has helped 12 Bigfork-area landowners place voluntary conservation agreements on their land, protecting its rural and scenic heritage as well as natural areas and fish and wildlife habitat. The agreements total 1,608 acres in the Bigfork area alone.

Communities like Missoula, Helena and Gallatin County have passed local bonds that help fund conservation easements. Hunting groups like Ducks Unlimited and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation use conservation easements to protect crucial nesting habitat or winter range. The valuable thing about conservation easements is they offer certainty. Future generations are guaranteed cleaner water, robust wildlife, and freedom to hunt and fish, under traditional conservation easements. Clearly, conservation easements are a flexible, voluntary land management



tool that both landowners and communities find valuable. No wonder landowners in the Flathead are lining up to place easements on their land.

Unfortunately, some misguided critics are out to undermine conservation easements. For example, they are trying to discourage conservation easements in the county growth policy, now being written by Flathead County.

Critics want to replace that certainty with "term easements" that expire after a set time, say a decade. The landowner only promises not to develop the land for a period of time, and may be compensated for it. This results in subsidized land speculation — where a landowner is rewarded for sitting on a parcel, but is still free to subdivide it later, most probably at a profit. This flawed tool lacks the long-term certainty for the public and does not carry the same kind of tax benefits for landowners.

Please contact the Flathead County Commissioners by emailing enelson@co.flathead.mt.us and Long Range Planning task force by contacting the chair of the task force Committee on Natural Resources, Karen Reeves at kbr@cyberport.net. Tell them that we voters of Flathead County appreciate the long-term benefits of traditional conservation easements. If we treasure our freedom, our clean water and our natural beauty, Flathead County must accept no substitutes.

By Ben Long



Yes, the Recycling Wagon will be at the west end of the Summit parking lot prior to the September 11 Flathead Audubon meeting. Time to clean out the garage!

FLATHEAD AUDUBON'S ANNUAL SUNFLOWER SEED SALE



Feed your feathered friends and
support local Audubon projects!

Black Oil Sunflower Seeds 50 lb. Sack - \$19

Highest Quality--Grown in Montana

This sale is Flathead Audubon's primary fund-raising
project and your purchase will help fund local
conservation and educational programs.

DELIVERY--OCTOBER 21

- Bigfork (837-1456)-----IGA Parking Lot-----9:00-11:00AM
- Columbia Falls (387-4150)-Glacier Bank-----10:00-12:00AM
- Whitefish (862-8070)----Train Depot-----11:00-1:00PM
- Kalispell (862-8070)-----Fairgrounds North End-12:00-2:00 PM
- Swan Valley (754-2289) Call June Ash for pickup information
- Eureka (889-3492)---Call Lewis Young for pickup information

Clip and Send the Order form below to:
Mike Fanning, 380 Tally Lake Rd., Whitefish, MT 59937
Phone: 862-8070

----- CLIP HERE -----

SALE CLOSSES OCTOBER 14--ORDER NOW!

ORDER FORM - SUBMIT BY OCTOBER 14

Number of Sacks: _____ @ \$19 = Amount Enclosed: \$ _____

I will pick up my order Saturday, October 21 at (check one)

Bigfork____ Columbia Falls____ Condon____ Kalispell____ Whitefish____ Eureka____

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Are you a member of Flathead Audubon? Yes _____ No _____

If you are not a member, you can join for only \$15. Use the form on back of the newsletter.



Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

P.O. Box 9173
Kalispell, MT 59904-9173

SEPTEMBER, 2006



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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 Flathead Audubon Society as a membership benefit. For membership information or address change, please call Mike Fanning at 862-8070. To receive this newsletter electronically, email your request to: lindawin@centurytel.net. **Deadline for newsletter copy is the 18th of each month. Contact newsletter editor at 755-1406; email submissions to: pileatedpost@flatheadaudubon.org**

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

Website: www.flatheadaudubon.org

John Kyle: Flockmaster@flatheadaudubon.org

OFFICERS

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Secretary	Gail Sullivan	932 Columbia Ave., Whitefish 59937	862-5775
Treasurer	Bruce Tannehill	239 Deer Trail, Whitefish 59937	862-4548
Past-President	Linda deKort	(dekort@montanasky.com)	755-3704

DIRECTORS

2004-2007	Dan Casey	(dcasey@abcbirds.org)	857-3143
2004-2007	Bob Lee	(rml3@centurytel.net)	257-0363
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2005-2008	Shirley Harrison	(shirley107@centurytel.net)	844-2291
2006-2009	Lewis Young	50 Garrison Dr., Eureka 59917	889-3492
2006-2009	Barbara Grove	(grove10@centurytel.net)	862-6086

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MONTANA AUDUBON

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e_griffing@hotmail.com



Photo by Dave Menke, USFWS

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Mail this form with your check to:

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