



# the **Spileated** **Post**

**Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society**

**VOLUME 31**

**NUMBER 7**

**MARCH 2007**



## **OUR NEIGHBORS TO THE SOUTH**

Last December, my husband Frank and I drove across our southern border and traveled 600 miles south to the Copper Canyon area of Mexico for the third year in a row to assist with the work of Habitat Raramuri. That organization consists of one employee, Ramiro Millan, who coordinates funding and Habitat for Humanity volunteers involved with building adobe and cement block homes for the indigenous Tarahumara, known locally as Raramuri, which means runners, and they are indeed noted for their long distance running ability. Their competitions involve running through the Sierra Madre Mountains in sandals for 100 miles at a stretch and kicking a hard ball in front of them. The ability to survive in these deep mountain canyons has allowed them to continue to live a traditional subsistence lifestyle inhabiting adobe or cave shelters and raising corn, beans, and some livestock. The present population of Tarahumara is estimated at 55,000. In addition to tending their crops, many men work in rustic furniture workshops and create pots to be traded locally. The

women continue to grind corn on stone slabs and gather firewood from the forest. They do not cut living trees but rather prune trees and gather limbs from the forest floor. There are no snags in this upland forest which consists of juniper, pine and oak; the overgrooming partially explains the demise of the imperial woodpecker and the limited number of bird species found here.



Pruned juniper tree - Frank/Linda adskort

This year we arrived with a pickup jam-packed with donations from Flathead Audubon members. We were accompanied by Stacey and Anna Bengtson who provided youthful energy and joviality to our adventure. We distributed the donations to the free clinic for the Tarahumara, to an indigenous school and to clients of Habitat Raramuri. I wish that you could have seen the expressions of appreciation for these donations; it is cold on the top of the canyon (7000') and the blankets, sleeping bags, warm clothes and cuddly toys *(continued on page 9...)*

### **MARCH FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR**

**Monday, March 12, 2007: Flathead Audubon General Meeting, 7PM, The Summit.**

**Monday, March 5, 2007: Flathead Audubon Board of Directors Meeting. 6PM at 295 Third Avenue East North, Kalispell (Jane Lopp & Associates Building) All are welcome.**

**Saturday, March 17, 2007: Lower Valley Waterfowl Tour, Part One, see page 5**

**Saturday-Sunday, March 31-April 1, 2007: Annual Freezout Lake National Wildlife Management Area Field Trip, details on page 5**

**Saturday, April 7, 2007: Lower Valley Waterfowl Tour, Part Two, see page 5**

**Wednesdays, April 11, 18, 25, and May 2, 2007: Beauty of Birds Classes, see page 5**

**Friday - Monday, June 1-4, 2007: Montana Audubon Bird Festival, Ennis, MT (FAS members will receive a mailing about this festival)**

**Friday - Sunday, June 22-24, 2007: Bitterroot Birding & Nature Festival, see page 5**

# BIRD OF THE MONTH

## Sound the Trumpet for the Return of Trumpeter Swans

by Marcy Mahr

The Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) is the largest waterfowl in North America and the largest swan in the world. Yet there's more than their size to blow a horn about—Trumpeter Swans are making a comeback. Once abundant and widespread within a wide band extending from Alaska along the Pacific Coast to the Midwest in the U.S., and throughout western Canada, Trumpeter Swans were nearly extinct by 1900. Both their numbers and their distribution were severely reduced by extensive market hunting, the commercial plumage trade, and widespread loss of wetland habitat. The only Trumpeters that survived were those that lived year-round in remote areas or whose traditional migration patterns avoided areas of human settlement. Decades of conservation efforts have rescued the Rocky Mountain Trumpeters from near extinction, creating a conservation success story. Trumpeters breeding in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem have responded well to international restoration programs, growing from only 69 birds remaining worldwide in 1932, to nearly 500 in recent years. These birds are joined each winter by an additional several thousand Trumpeters from western Canada to form the Rocky Mountain population of Trumpeter Swans.



Phil and Judy Subbitt

In 1993, I was first introduced to the grace and bravado of Trumpeter Swans when I spent a summer conducting field research at Red Rocks Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in the Centennial Valley of southwestern Montana. I was frequently distracted from surveying plants by a sharp bugle announcing the arrival of *Cygnus* Flight #756. With wings spanning up to eight feet, and both neck and legs fully extended, Trumpeters are powerful flyers capable of speeds up to 50 miles per hour. I also enjoyed watching flotillas of swans and their cygnets (young of the year) bobbing on the shallow lakes of the refuge, swimming with their necks erect in regal beauty.

Red Rocks Lakes National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1935 specifically to protect Trumpeter Swans because nearly half (i.e., less than 40 birds) of the Trumpeter Swans known to exist were found in this area. Today, the refuge continues to be one of the most important habitats in North America for these majestic birds. Over the

years, the Red Rock Lakes refuge flock has served as an important source of breeding birds for reintroduction efforts in other parts of the country. You may be thinking, "Brrr! Isn't the Yellowstone area freezing in the winter?!" Yes, it can be a frigid place; yet the area's system of warm springs provides year-round open waters where Trumpeters find food and cover even in the coldest weather.

Trumpeter Swans must remain near open water to obtain their preferred diet of aquatic plants. Their staple diet includes waterweed, pondweed, water milfoil, and duck potato. A mature adult will consume up to 20 pounds of wet herbage each day!

They also feed occasionally on grain, seeds, freshwater invertebrates, snails, and worms. Trumpeters have broad flat bills with fine tooth-like serrations along the edges that strain water when they eat aquatic vegetation. They use their strong webbed feet to dig into the pond or lake bottom for roots, shoots, and tubers, then plunge their heads and necks underwater to eat what they have dug up. Their long necks and powerful bills allow them to reach down three to four feet and pull up roots and stems other birds can't reach.

Aside from Trumpeters, there are two other species of swans in North

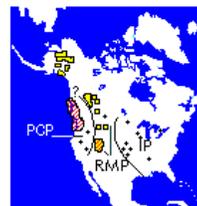
America: the native Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*, formerly known as the Whistling Swan); and the non-native Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*), a Eurasian species that has been introduced or escaped from captivity, and now breeds in several parts of North America.

This spring on Smith Lake, I saw several big, white swans. Trumpeter? Tundra? Since Trumpeters often mix with flocks of the more common Tundra Swan during migration, I consulted my field guide. Following are a few tips to help with species identification:

*(Trumpeter Swans, continued, page 4)*

Distribution of the Trumpeter Swan

- Breeding areas
- Wintering area
- Breeding and wintering area



Source: <http://www.hww.ca>

- \* Introduction sites
- PCP Pacific Coast Population
- RMP Rocky Mountain Population
- IP Interior Population
- ? The boundary between the Pacific Coast Population and the Rocky Mountain Population is unknown in the northern part of the range

March 2007 Program

30 YEARS OF WILDLIFE



Flathead Audubon member and professional photographer **Jan Wassink** has selected many of his favorite photos from some of his memorable trips to show at our March 12 meeting at 7 p.m. at The Summit. These will include a wide range of wildlife photos taken from Florida to Alaska, from Canada to Mexico, and from Africa to Brazil.

In addition to photographing in Montana, Jan has traveled from Florida to Alaska and California to photograph birds and other wildlife. In 2002, he took a memorable photo trip to Africa which included time in the Serengeti and the Ngorongora Crater. He spent some time in 2004 in San Blas, Mexico, and also had the opportunity to spend time in the Pantanal, Brazil, last September.

His photographs taken over the years have been used in the seven books Jan has either authored or coauthored. His latest book, published in 2006, is *The Watchable Birds of the Black Hills, Badlands, and Northern Great Plains*. Among his other books are *Birds of the Central Rockies* and *Birds of the Pacific Northwest Mountains*. Jan has also written hundreds of articles and educational materials and has had thousands of photos published over the last 30 years.

Jan Wassink was born and raised in northwestern Iowa where he spent much of his time fishing and hunting. After graduating from high school in 1969, he moved west and attended Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado, to pursue a degree in Wildlife Biology. Although he had always enjoyed birds, an ornithology course from Dr. Ronald Ryder really sparked an interest that has never waned in things with feathers. After receiving his B.S. in Wildlife Science in 1973, Jan and his new wife Dar moved to Logan, Utah, where Jan received a M.S. in Wildlife Management. His masters project was on the relationship between land use patterns and weather on ring-necked pheasants in Cache County, Utah. While in Utah, his fascination with birds was coupled with an interest in photography. Challenged by the high cost of good equipment, he began sending photos and story ideas to magazines. His first article, sold to *BOWHUNTER* magazine, was followed by articles in *RANGER RICK*, *UTAH OUTDOORS* and a weekly wildlife column in the local newspaper.

His next move was a short stint in Kuna, Idaho, where he worked for the Bureau of Land Management as the avian prey biologist at the Snake River Birds of Prey Natural Area. The birth of his oldest son in 1976 prompted a move to a different career and he went to work for a consulting engineering company. That company moved him to Kalispell, Montana, to establish a branch office.

In 1980, Jan went back to his father's trade, working as a carpenter until a co-worker introduced him and his family to llamas in 1985. In 1989, Jan and Dar started THE LLAMA LINK which they published until January of 1996 when Jan became the Registrar of the International Lama Registry and Dar became the administrator of the Alpaca Registry.

2007 Legislative Session



The 2007 Montana Legislative session is in full swing, and Janet Ellis, lobbyist for all of Montana's Audubon members, is working overtime. Thanks to all of you who have contacted your legislators to support Montana Audubon's top priority bills. For the most up-to-date information on how those bills are doing, check the Montana Audubon website: [mtaudubon.org](http://mtaudubon.org).

It is not too late to sign up to get Montana Audubon's fast breaking alerts telling how you can help support conservation legislation this year. Just send your name, address, phone number and/or email address to Molly Immen, Montana Audubon Legislative Intern, at [mtmagpie@mtaudubon.org](mailto:mtmagpie@mtaudubon.org). Or you get this information to Molly by phone at (406) 443-3949.

It's that time of year again, when we put out "the call" for any Flathead Audubon member who would like to join the Board of Directors or work on a committee beginning in September. Your own personal interest is the most important qualification, and our activities cover such a broad range that we can accommodate almost anyone who wants to help. Your participation can be as simple as setting up chairs before the meetings or making a few phone

calls to last year's bird seed purchasers, or you may want to be more involved in our conservation issues or in publishing the newsletter. You don't even have to be a long-time Audubon member or be great at bird ID, just have a bit of time to give and an interest.

Put your skills (or muscles!) to work for a good cause! All you have to do to get started is talk to, call (755-3704), or email Linda deKort at [dekort@montanasky.com](mailto:dekort@montanasky.com). ☆

## In Remembrance of Sharon Bergman

Sharon Francis Bergman passed away on January 19, 2007, at the age of 81. Born in Denver, her family homesteaded in Gila Bend, AZ, then moved to Polson, where Sharon graduated from Polson High School in 1942. She relocated to Hollywood, CA, where she married Ray Bergman, raising 4 children. The family returned to Montana in 1960 to cattle ranch in Hamilton. When she and Ray divorced in 1964, Sharon went to work for the electric co-op and ran a Laundromat in Corvallis.

Sharon returned to southern California in the early '70s and took a position with the Women's International Bowling Congress. She managed the Rules Department of the Congress and wrote the rule books that governed women's bowling. She also became a passionate and excellent bowler. When she retired in 1988, Sharon returned to Polson where she wrote for the Polson newspaper and remained involved in bowling—coaching junior bowlers and working in the media room at the national bowling tournaments. She was active in the Polson community, working at the Senior Center until August 2006.

Sharon loved the outdoors, and was an active member of Flathead Audubon. She served on Flathead Audubon's Board of Directors for three years (1994-1996), and served as the Editor of The Pileated Post for eight years, (1990-1998). During this period, Sharon shifted the composition of the Post from typewriter to computer, experimented with green print for the December issue, changed the page color of the Post from blue to its current cream, and developed the basic layout and topic format that still dominate the Post today. While she was editor, the Post received a Special Recognition award in the National Audubon chapter newsletter contest. Beyond her duties as editor of the newsletter, Sharon also was instrumental in updating and rewriting the by-laws of Flathead Audubon into the version we still use today.

Sharon had a special relationship with her children, and strong connections with her wide circle of friends. She will be fondly remembered for her vivacious and enthusiastic participation in her bowling groups, her Polson community, and this Audubon chapter. She touched the hearts of all who knew her.

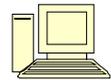


## 30 Years of FAS Newsletter Editors

Dan Sullivan 1/78-10/78  
Steve Dagger 11/78-12/79  
Marcy Bishop 1/80-12/80  
Billie Firpo 1/81-12/81

Stan & Janet Bones 1/82-12/83  
Thea Darwell 1/84-11/85  
Leo Keane 12/85-5/90  
**Sharon Bergman 6/90-5/98**  
Leslie Kehoe 6/98-4/03

Karen Nichols 5/03-5/04  
Bob Lee 6/04-5/05  
Kay Mitchell 6/05-present  
& Linda Winnie



*Trumpeter Swans, continued from page 2...*

**Size:** Trumpeters are much larger than Tundra Swans but both are huge birds and size differences may be difficult to distinguish unless the two species are side by side or seen at close range.

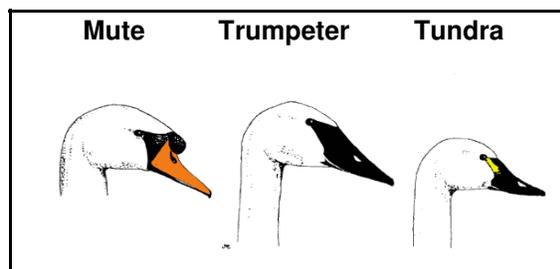
**Voice:** Their call is a sure method of species identification if you're lucky to hear it. **Trumpeters** have a loud, low-pitched, hoarse, bugling call of *hurrp* or *hur di di*, which D.A. Sibley likens to the honk of a European taxi. **Tundra Swans** have a high-pitched, quavering, melancholy *klooo* or *kwooo* with an accentuated *oo-oo-oo* sound, and a hooting or barking quality that may sound like 'whoops' from a distance.

**Head and Bill:** **Trumpeters** have a black bill with red border on their lower mandible; bill is heavy in proportion to head with a straight profile; angular head shape somewhat resembles a Canvasback Duck; V-shaped forehead with a pointed front border of white into the black; eye not distinct from bill. **Tundra Swans** also have a black bill, usually have some yellow on the lore in front of the eye however this spot may be absent on some Tundras; bill more dish-shaped in profile, smaller in proportion to head compared to Trumpeter; head smoothly rounded;

U-shaped forehead; eye usually distinct from bill.

This spring when a big white bird's in view, be sure to look carefully at the edge of the bird's lower mandible for a red border or stripe of lipstick; check the eye area for any yellow on the lore; and see whether the eye is distinct from the bill or is contained in the black mask of the face. At a quick glance you should be able to see the size and position of a Tundra Swan's eye easily, while that of a Trumpeter is more hidden. Happy birding!

For more information on Trumpeter Swans, go to <http://www.trumpeterswansociety.org>, <http://redrocks.fws.gov> and [www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds).



## 2007 MARCH AND APRIL FIELD TRIPS



**SATURDAY, MARCH 17: LOWER VALLEY WATERFOWL TOUR, PART ONE.** The first of two trips that focus on the spring waterfowl migration, this four hour trip will visit wetland sites near Somers and in the Lower Valley. We should see hundreds of ducks and other early spring arrivals, such as Northern Pintail, Tundra Swan, American and Eurasian Widgeon. Meet Tour Leader Bob Lopp at the Park n' Ride, intersection of Hwys 93/Hwy 82 at 8:30AM. For more information, contact Bob at 257-6886.

**SATURDAY & SUNDAY, MARCH 31 & APRIL 1: FREEZOUT LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA FIELDTRIP.** The spring waterfowl migration at Freezout Lake WMA is an experience not to be missed. Snow Geese can be counted by the thousands; more than 40 bird species have been seen in past years. Please call Dan to arrange carpool. The trip leaves at 10:30 AM Saturday from the Tidyman's parking lot in Kalispell which will get us to the WMA just in time to watch the white geese arrive at Freezout Lake that evening. Stay overnight at the Bella Vista Motel (406-466-5711) in Choteau. Other motels in Choteau include The Stage Stop Inn (888-466-5900) and the Gunther Motel (877-491-5444). After watching the geese leave the lake Sunday morning, we will head for home in time to arrive in Kalispell by 5 p.m. Contact field trip leader, Dan Casey, at 857-3143 or [dcasey@abcbirds.org](mailto:dcasey@abcbirds.org)



**SATURDAY, APRIL 7: LOWER VALLEY WATERFOWL TOUR, PART TWO.** Join FAS for a 3-4 hour guided tour of the wetland areas in the Somers area and the north shore of Flathead Lake. We will search for resident and migrating waterfowl, but should also see a wide variety of raptors and early songbirds. This is a great time to bone up on your ducks and get into the spirit of spring. Join us for a morning of early spring bird watching. Meet Tour Leader Leslie Kehoe at the Park n' Ride, intersection of Hwy 93/Hwy 82 at 9:00AM. For more information, contact Leslie Kehoe, 837-4467.



**Bitterroot Birding & Nature Festival  
June 22-24, 2007 at the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge.**



In addition to providing opportunities to bird in Lewis & Clark Country, the Festival will include juried art show, BioThon, family activities, golf tournament, live raptors and snakes, activities featuring western culture, and the Montana Junior Duck Stamp Award Ceremony. Proceeds from the Festival assist Friends of the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge in supporting the Lee Metcalf Refuge and its mission of wildlife and habitat conservation. To register, call 406-777-5552 or go to [www.bitterrootbirdfestival.com](http://www.bitterrootbirdfestival.com).

*He who by reanimating the old can gain knowledge of the new is fit to be a teacher. Confucius*



## BEAUTY OF BIRDS

Spring is just around the corner, and for birders that means...time to hone your birding skills! Join Flathead Audubon for our annual spring series, "Beauty of Birds." Audubon volunteers and local bird experts team up to present four evening courses focusing on local bird identification. Classes will be held Wednesday evenings from 6-8 p.m. at Flathead High School. Dates will be April 11th, 18th, 25th, and May 2<sup>nd</sup>. For more information, please call Ansley Ford at 857-6788. To register, call Flathead High School at 751-3500. Sign up soon, as space is limited! Hope to see you there!

Ansley Ford



## Thirty Years Ago

*Bird classes are not new for Flathead Audubon. The following appeared in the first Accipiter Express (March 1977, p. 3)*

**BIRD COURSE OFFERED:** For the 2<sup>nd</sup> year a beginning course in birds sponsored by the chapter will be offered for credit through Flathead Valley Community College. The two credit course, entitled Bird Study, will begin 27 April and continue for five weeks. There will be five Wednesday night meetings (7:30 – 9:30) and five Saturday morning field trips. Classes will be held in Kalispell at FVCC with registration at the first class. Cost is \$16.00. Besides field identification the course will cover classification of birds, distribution and habitat ecology, behavior and natural history, and bird structure and function. The course was popular last year with 35 registrants. For further info contact FVCC or Daniel Sullivan.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

WILL THE "REAL" BIRDER PLEASE STAND UP?

When Jane and I were first married and I was teaching in Stevensville, we would occasionally go over to Mrs. Templin's to watch TV with her. We did not have a TV, because they were too expensive and we were poor newlyweds with college bills. One of the programs was "What's My Line" where three people would claim to be the "real" doctor, fireman, mechanic and the audience had to guess which person was the "real" one.

Often I hear someone described, "he/she is a "real" birder! This usually means that the speaker does not feel qualified, doesn't know enough, makes lots of mistakes, doesn't have time, and the list of reasons goes on. So what makes a "real" birder different?"

Some people are professionals like Dan Casey, Jeff Marks or Denver Holt. Of course they have to know a lot more than the rest of us. That is their business, and their careers depend on it. I am sure they also enjoy birding. Then there are people like Harriet Marble, who is a Montana Audubon board member or our Flathead Audubon member, Gene Grove the photographer, who have the time and resources to travel wherever they wish in pursuit of particular birds. I am also sure they enjoy it.

I love going along on a birding trip with Leslie Kehoe or Bruce Tannehill because I know I will see more birds and correctly identify them than if I went alone. I have learned a lot through Flathead Audubon field trips. I buy lots of books, and get some of them read! I have been a birder since at least high school because I have always been fascinated about the world around me. Am I a "real" birder? Sure.

What about the people who come to the Flathead Audubon meetings, don't know much about birds, may or may not have a bird feeder, may not be able to accurately identify more than 10 birds by sight and only one or two by sound? Are they "real" birders? They sure seem to enjoy the programs and attend the meetings when they have time. Yes, they are "real" birders.

As long as someone "enjoys" birds and birding and stops to see and listen when a bird pops into their world, they are "real" birders. Skill level is something else. We all are growing, learning, and developing our skills, the more we take time to let the birds "talk" to us and become a part of "our" world. What makes birding enjoyable for Denver Holt, Leslie Kehoe, Bob Lopp or anyone else will be different. Enjoying birds is the common thread that makes us all "real" birders.

Bob Lopp, FAS President



Educational Scholarship Awarded

For quite some time, Flathead Audubon has been offering grants and scholarships toward local conservation and educational opportunities. Most recently, a scholarship has been awarded which will allow two local boys to attend Ravenwood's Mountain Mentor program. Have you heard about Ravenwood? Think of the ideal setting for an outdoor science school, and you've got Ravenwood. Nestled at the base of the Swan Mountains, and housed in a converted barn, Ravenwood's founders Brett and Laura Holmquist offer a variety of programs. Mountain Mentors is a winter program in which adolescent boys and girls troop into the woods to learn winter survival skills, and even spend a night in a snow shelter! Kids who have experienced this program have found it very valuable (and very fun). And, thanks to Flathead Audubon, two more boys were able to experience this year's program. The scholarships were awarded to Swan River students Abraham Malley and Taylor Johnson. Keep up the fun of learning, Ravenwood!

From Ansley Ford



TAXING ISSUES

As you are filling out your tax returns this season, remember to check the Non-game Wildlife Contribution box on your Montana form and give a little extra if you can. That check box is there to enable bird watchers and others to do our part to support care for Montana's wildlife species that are not funded by hunting and fishing license money.



Not sure how to come up with dollars to contribute to the Non-game Wildlife check-off? Remember that \$9 of every bag of sunflower seeds that you bought from Flathead Audubon this year can be deducted as a charitable contribution. If you take the deduction and put the taxes you save into the Non-game Wildlife box, your dollars do double duty!



## BOARD MEMBER VIEW: **MARCY MAHR**

FAS BOARD MEMBER



nature.canada.ca/naturecanada/eng/1/1/1/mwswan.htm

### Got Connections?

#### Restoring Migratory Patterns of Rocky Mountain Trumpeter Swans

In this issue's "Bird of the Month", I sound the trumpet for the return of Trumpeter Swans after near extinction during the 1800s in North America. The comeback of Trumpeters to nearly 16,000 is an impressive testament to conservation efforts. Yet, when we further consider their biological and ecological necessities, the triumphant bugling fades and somber violins take over. Successful recovery of an imperiled species depends upon both growing its population numbers and securing its existing and potential migratory corridors to allow for expanded dispersal and evolution over time. In the case of Trumpeter Swans, we have learned that as their populations were declining, their migrations to traditional wintering areas were almost totally destroyed. So long as migrations are restricted, options remain limited and swans are vulnerable.

A few years ago while I was science director for the Yellowstone to Yukon ("Y2Y") Conservation Initiative I learned about the Rocky Mountain Trumpeter Swan Migration Project. The migratory cycle of most Trumpeters uses the entire 3,200-km Y2Y corridor—they breed on remote lakes in the Yukon, winter in Greater Yellowstone, and stop over on several lakes in between on their journey from one Y to the other. Trumpeters fast became one of my favorite emblems of the connectedness within the Rocky Mountain's web of life.

Researchers with the Rocky Mountain Trumpeter Swan Migration Project are concerned that no historic wintering sites are being used by Trumpeters anywhere south of Yellowstone. During the past decade of unusually mild winters, increasing numbers of Canadian Trumpeters have been able to winter in Greater Yellowstone, feeding on aquatic vegetation in waters that would otherwise freeze during a severe winter. With thousands of Canadian Trumpeters migrating to Yellowstone each winter joining the resident breeding population, this great funneling of swans in to a very limited geographic area is creating a bottleneck. Both Canadian and resident populations are dependent upon this area; and both populations are vulnerable to high mortality during severe winters. Unless historic migrations southward from this region are re-established, a severe winter in Greater Yellowstone could lead to the starvation of large numbers of swans. Such mortality could set back the restoration of Trumpeter Swans in western Canada, and jeopardize the continued existence of the Greater Yellowstone population.

The goal of the Trumpeter Swan Migration Project is to reduce the winter vulnerability of the Rocky Mountain Trumpeter Swans population. A solution is to rebuild diverse migrations in order to expand swan distribution and restore the essential connections between Canadian nesting areas and suitable secure wintering areas other than Yellowstone. One of their recent studies set out to answer three fundamental questions:

- Are Western Canadian Trumpeter Swans successfully rebuilding migrations to diverse wintering areas that could be used in restoration programs to improve security?
- What is the extent of the breeding range of the swans that are wintering in Greater Yellowstone where the risk of winter mortality is high?
- What migration routes and key spring and fall stopover sites are the swans using?

During July 2002 and 2003, researchers used a float plane to capture 43 flightless swans during the mid-summer molt on their breeding areas in the Yukon and northern British Columbia. They placed satellite-tracked radio transmitters on 13 adult Trumpeter Swans and put individually coded neck bands on an additional 30 adults to increase sample size. Swans were members of territorial pairs and most had cygnets. Capture locations were distributed as widely as possible to increase the chances of detecting diverse migratory patterns.

The radio-collared swans were tracked by satellite to provide data on migration routes and timing. Satellites collected information on locations of key migration stopover habitats and duration of use; location of wintering areas and movements within wintering areas; mortality; and the extent of the breeding area from which Canadian Trumpeters were funneling in to Greater Yellowstone.

The researchers had hoped to find that undetected dispersal of Trumpeters had been occurring. Unfortunately, that's not what they discovered. Here's what they learned—

*(Board Member View, continued on page 8)*

## FAS NEWSLETTER TURNS 30!!

March 1977 the first issue of the new Flathead Audubon Society's newsletter was published. (FAS was by then all of three months old!) President Dan Sullivan's explanation of the purpose of this publication is an insightful account of the role the newsletter continued to play as FAS developed over the next 30 years – and still plays today:

"With the publication of our first newsletter the Flathead Audubon Society has made an initial step in joining together our members into an effective organization.... Since our membership is scattered throughout the Flathead area, making meeting attendance difficult for many, the newsletter will provide our primary means of communication."

The look of that first issue is quite different from the newsletter you are reading today. It consisted of two sheets of yellow paper, stapled together, with text on both sides—this text obviously produced on a somewhat cranky typewriter. The contents of the first issue covered such familiar topics as the place and time of upcoming meetings, program for the next meeting, field trips, conservation issues, and a bird class being offered. The first President's column filled more than half of page 3.

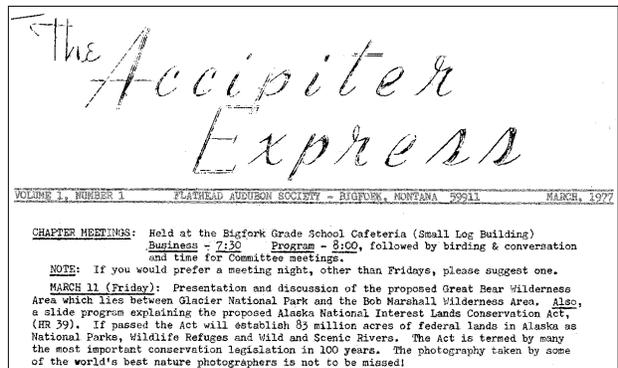
Perhaps most striking to today's readers of *The Post* is the fact that the name of the FAS newsletter at first was *The Accipiter Express*. It was not until November 1978 that our familiar Pileated Woodpecker logo appeared in the header of the FAS newsletter, and it took almost another year before the name of the newsletter was changed to match the logo. The September 1979 issue was the

first to be called *The Pileated Post*.

Initially *The Accipiter Express* had an erratic publishing schedule – "with funds at a premium... we will publish as funding is available," explained Dan Sullivan in the first issue of the *Express*. For the first 5 years, the FAS newsletter appeared roughly 4 times a year. Starting with the January 1982 issue, the by-then *Pileated Post* went onto our now familiar publishing schedule—monthly, September through May.

Crucial to the success of Flathead Audubon over its 30 years of growth has been the series of fine editors willing to take on the big job of getting the Society's newsletter out reliably, on time, and with accurate information. If you look through the 30 years of *Express/Post* issues that these people produced, you can also see evidence of their skill at layout and prose editing, and their remarkable attention to style and aesthetics. The Flathead Audubon Society has been extremely fortunate to have had a series of such talented volunteer editors working to design and produce its newsletter.

From Linda Winnie



### Board Member View, continued...

- The migration corridor currently used by the Western Canada Population in spring and fall follows a narrow band along the eastern front of the Rocky Mountains. Most migrating Trumpeters spend a month or more foraging along the migration route. Although swans use a variety of wetlands as stopover foraging sites, most lie within a band that is often <50 miles wide.
- Radio data and neckband re-sightings provided no evidence that any swans from the Western Canada population have successfully rebuilt severed migration patterns to wintering sites outside of the Greater Yellowstone region; all radioed birds wintered in a few sites in eastern Idaho. The entire Western Canadian population, as well as the Greater Yellowstone population, could be impacted when a severe winter strikes the region and freezes major foraging areas.
- Swans from nesting areas throughout the eastern and central Yukon, east of Highway 2 from Whitehorse to Dawson, are all funneling into the Greater Yellowstone wintering area. Swans nesting west of Whitehorse appear to be affiliated with the Pacific Coast Population and migrate to wintering areas in southern British Columbia and northwest Washington.

Protection of wetlands in the narrow migration corridor along the East Front of the Rockies in southwestern Alberta and central Montana will be essential to ensure the quality of migration stopover sites is maintained in the future. Nutrition gained at these sites will likely be quite important for both the winter survival and nesting productivity of the population. The Western Canada Population will remain vulnerable to high winter mortality, however, until migrations to more diverse wintering sites are rebuilt.

*SOUTH OF THE BORDER, continued...*

were needed. Thanks to all for your generosity.

Our work in Mexico has been two pronged. One part is documenting the work of Habitat Raramuri using our digital camera. The photos are used to verify progress on current projects and to apply for future grants. The second part has been assisting a specific family who request help. This winter, since there were no current construction projects, we were asked to help with instruction in the indigenous school. The school was started by local women who wanted their children to stay in the village to be educated rather than to be shipped off to boarding schools. The women create traditional crafts (coiled pottery, woven belts and baskets) to sell to support their school. (Our pickup was refilled with many of these craft items which we brought back to Kalispell and are selling at FAS General Meetings.) The school emphasizes place-based education; the younger classes are taught only in the native language; the older grades use Spanish texts but much instruction is in Tarahumar.

The students wear their traditional dress to school and play traditional games; they learn Tarahumara dances, songs, and crafts. Mathematics is stressed and taught by the use of very creative manipulatives. While we were there, geography was being taught and there were many maps on the walls. There is no electricity in the school, so classes do not begin until 10 am. A warm lunch is cooked at the school for the kids, usually corn tortillas and soy gruel. There are plans to build new outhouses, a covered ball court and a library.

Fortunately, we had brought along a bird costume (donated by Flathead Audubon) and *Bird Beyond Borders* curriculum in Spanish, featuring birds that could be seen in the local Sierra Madres. All of the children learned the parts of the bird in Spanish and learned the Spanish names of common birds: Black and Turkey Vultures, Kestrels, Northern Harriers, Starlings and Mexican Chickadees. (Mexican Chickadees are smaller than our Black-capped Chickadees and their caps only extend down to the middle of their eyes.) I noted that the students were most knowledgeable about the birds that ate their corn and was told that the Tarahumara have names such as "one who sings before the wind arrives" and "one who sings before the snow arrives"; but I have yet to figure out to which species each of those phrases refers. We brought a cou-

ple of pairs of binoculars (and left one pair with the school); the teachers and students took turns learning how to use them and watching the ravens in the field. I hope that they will get a good workout during spring migration. We hope to gather up more binoculars for our next journey.

Each of our trips has involved a side trip to explore one of the seven rugged canyons in this geological system. This year we drove down to the Urique River, a 5900' descent. We located Mario Munoz, a guide from San Isidro, who helped us find amazing birds in the lush riparian area: white-eared hummingbirds, summer tanager, green-throated, blue-gray and tufted gnatcatchers, ash throated and gray throated flycatchers, greater pee wees and black phoebes. Stacy spotted an elegant trogon, called the Mexican Flag Bird because of its brilliant red, green and white coloration. The most extravagant bird I saw in the wild was the Squirrel Cuckoo which we had encountered years before in Costa



Lilac crowned parrot - Frank/Linda deKort

Rica. Its head and upperparts are bright chestnut orange and the long conspicuous tail is boldly banded in black and white. The bill and eye-ring are yellow and the iris is a glimmering red. It is large (43-46 cm long and weighs 95-105 g) and gets its name because it resembles a squirrel as it leaps from branch to branch plucking off insect prey. We watched a pair fly short distances, gliding and only occasionally flapping; their call was loud so we could easily track them. We also observed a beautiful lilac-crowned parrot but its wings had been clipped and it was being kept as a pet; another explanation for the demise of native species.

We also saw some of our familiar migrants: Red tailed hawk, American robin, Hermit thrush, Cave and Violet green swallows, white breasted nuthatch, Red-naped sapsucker, Townsend's warbler, Stellar's jay and many Yellow rumped warblers. This was a brilliant reminder of how interdependent our bird populations are and how valuable programs are that bring us together for a common interest. We are fortunate that the birds can ignore political barriers and are able to fly above the ugly wall being constructed between us and our neighbor to the south.

We plan on returning next winter; we will keep you posted.

Gracias! Linda de Kort



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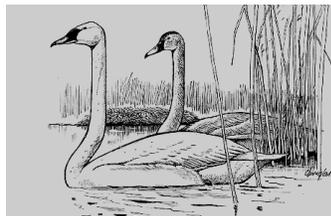
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