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DALE BECKER AND CSKT WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM TO RECEIVE CONSERVATION ACHIEVEMENT RECOGNITION

Dale Becker has been the Tribal Wildlife Program Manager for the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes for 18 years and leads a talented staff of 10 full-time wildlife biologists and technicians, most of whom have been with the program more than 7 years. The staff has 126 years of collective professional wildlife management experience.

The Tribal Wildlife Management Program was developed in 1988, contracted from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Dale and his staff have achieved several highly visible wildlife projects and many less visible yet important projects. One of the best recognized ongoing projects is the incorporation of numerous wildlife mitigation features into the Highway 93 reconstruction through the Flathead Indian Reservation. After years of negotiations with Federal and State highway authorities, many wildlife and habitat-friendly features were incorporated into the design on newly reconstructed portions of Highway 93. Bridges now span the entire riparian area, not just the water, allowing uninterrupted wildlife movement corridors in vital riparian zones. The completed project will include approximately 50 large wildlife crossing structures. Less noticeable are fencing and underpasses to allow large and smaller wildlife to safely cross the highway.

Another widely known and visible project is the restoration of trumpeter swans on the reservation. The swans are often visible from wildlife viewing areas along Highway 93.

Other successful restoration projects include peregrine falcons and northern leopard frogs. Big-

horn sheep herds started in 2 locations on the reservation have increased and now provide a hunting season and a source of transplants to other areas.

About 2/3 of the staff are involved in the Kerr Dam mitigation program. The Tribal Wildlife Management Program is heavily involved in implementing the approved mitigation on over 8000 acres of replacement wildlife habitat through acquisition, rehabilitation, restoration, and management.

Grizzly bear conservation has always been a strong cultural, spiritual and ecological interest of the Tribes; the staff conduct regularly scheduled grizzly surveys and are cooperating with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to gather movement and habitat use data using a GPS collar on a grizzly.

Regular surveys are conducted for bald eagles, amphibians, birds, and bats. The Tribal Wildlife Management Program was instrumental in developing survey techniques for forest carnivores that were later applied across the northwest. Program staff use satellite telemetry to track migrating common loons, have conducted a comprehensive Columbian sharp-tailed grouse habitat analysis, and maintain an ongoing evaluation of amphibian populations.

The CSKT Wildlife Management Program provides a successful, positive conservation example to others. The staff is a highly productive team of wildlife management professionals. Dale Becker and the CSKT Wildlife Management Program are worthy recipients of the Conservation Achievement Recognition from Flathead Audubon Society.

By Lewis Young, Conservation Chair

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Article and Photos by Jeannie Marcure

THE AMERICAN DIPPER



One of my favorite things about bird watching is that it can be done almost anywhere and can easily be combined with other pastimes. If you're quietly aware of the natural world around you, great birding moments often happen when you least expect them. One such ser-

endipitous moment occurred for me last summer as my husband and I took our annual hike to Virginia Falls in Glacier Park on July 8, a good 2-3 weeks later than usual due to the late opening of Logan Pass. Near the bridge below Virginia Falls, a small dark bird flew in and landed on a rock across the stream. After a quick check with the binoculars and because of the bobbing motion as it perched there, I recognized this bird as an American Dipper. Further inspection told me that this was not an adult but rather a newly fledged juvenile. Shortly after its somewhat uncertain landing, the small bird began to call loudly, and almost immediately an adult Dipper appeared with a morsel which she promptly offered to the juvenile. This continued for 20 to 30 minutes with the juvenile never entering the water and the adult returning with food every few minutes. Although I've often seen Dippers in this area, this was my first chance to observe a juvenile and its interaction with its parents, so I was motivated to learn more about these unusual little birds.

With a uniformly slate-gray color, long legs, a somewhat stocky body and short tail, the Dipper (sometimes called the Water Ouzel) is 7- 8 inches long and weighs just 1.5 to 2.5 ounces. The sexes are similar but the male is larger. Its most identifiable feature is its constant bobbing as it perches on streamside rocks.

Inquiry at www.scienceperspectives.com told me that although Dippers are aquatic birds, they are not waterfowl but rather songbirds, and their closest relatives include chickadees, robins and wrens. Despite this close relationship with songbirds, Dippers spend their entire lives in or near the water of clear mountain streams and feed entirely on aquatic life, with their favorite foods including mosquito larvae, caddis fly larvae and small fish. They are often seen walking along the bottoms of fast-moving streams probing for food. They can also "fly" underwater, moving upstream in the rapid water by using their wings for propulsion. Interestingly, they can also fly straight into the air from underwater.

When moving to a new location, Dippers fly just above the water, even when the watercourse curves and a land route would be shorter. Because their globe-shaped nests are made of moss and mud and placed streamside or perhaps even behind a waterfall, they are hard to spot unless you're lucky enough to see the bird entering or leaving. Both sexes sing and defend a linear mile of streamside territory. Unlike most songbirds, Dippers do not migrate to warmer climates in the winter but rather stay in the breeding territory as long as there is running water. If the stream does freeze, they move downstream just far enough to find running water again. Dippers are regularly found on the Kalispell and Bigfork Christmas Bird Counts.

Dippers possess several unique adaptations that allow them to live in the sometimes harsh environment of mountain streams. Imagine spending most of your life with your feet in that cold water! Dippers have a thick undercoat of down that protects them from the chilling temperatures of the mountain streams that they call home. They also use a preen gland which secretes oil that is used to waterproof their feathers. This gland on the Dipper is ten times larger than that of any other songbird. David Attenborough, in his video series *The Life of Birds*, says that Dippers are so well-oiled that the resulting buoyancy causes them to have trouble staying submerged and they can only manage 15 seconds or so at a time. A low metabolic rate and extra oxygen-carrying capacity in its blood also help the Dipper. A flap that closes over the nostrils under water works much like nose plugs used by human swimmers. In addition, a highly developed third eyelid acts like a windshield wiper to help clear the eyes after diving. You can observe this eyelid as the white flash that you see every time a Dipper blinks.

Unlike most other songbirds, but similar to ducks, the American Dipper molts its wing and tail feathers all at once in late summer. It is flightless during this time.

Next time you hike or fish along one of our beautiful mountain streams, watch closely for a small dark bird flying low over the water. Listen for the buzzing trill and perhaps you too will be lucky enough to watch an American Dipper as it walks under the water searching for a meal.





February 2008 Program



WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ON THE FLATHEAD INDIAN RESERVATION

Our February program will be presented by staff from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe's Wildlife Management Program, headquartered in Polson. Dale Becker, Tribal Wildlife Program Manager, and co-presenters will provide an overview of the Wildlife Management Program on the Flathead Indian Reservation. They will talk about the history of the program and will describe program accomplishments and special projects currently in progress.

From 1978-1988, the Bureau of Indian Affairs operated a small wildlife program on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Since 1988, the program has been tribally-operated under contract with the BIA. Under Salish and Kootenai management, the original limited-focus program has evolved into a holistic program concerned with all terrestrial wildlife species. Rather than concentrating on endangered species, the philosophy is to have a well-rounded full wildlife program. Program projects include big game, non-game wildlife, waterfowl, amphibians and bats.

To mitigate effects of change to reservation lands, program staff must have knowledge of all species and species groups. The staff include 9 wildlife biologists, 1 vegetation ecologist who specializes in wetland and riparian restoration, and 2-4 seasonal technicians. Three biologists have completed a wildlife training program for tribal members and are working on various topics. With both tribal and non-tribal members, the staff collectively have 126 years of fish and wildlife experience, with Dale Becker serving as program manager for 18-1/2 years. Diverse wildlife philosophies are represented among staff because their academic backgrounds stretch across many universities. Most of the staff have completed graduate work.

Please join us at 7 p.m. on Monday, February 11, in the Community Room of The Summit, 205 Sunnyview Lane in Kalispell for an overview of the wildlife management program on the Flathead Indian Reservation.

Sunflower Seed Sale Results in Cash for Flathead Audubon

This past Fall, Flathead Audubon partnered with WBC (Western Building Centers) to donate a portion of the sale on every bag of sunflower seed purchased from October 1 through December 31. On January 14, Doug Shanks, the general manager of WBC, presented a check in the amount of \$610 to Bob Lee, FAS Vice President. On behalf of the entire FAS Board, I want to thank all who participated in the seed sale and I encourage everyone to support their local WBC store throughout the upcoming year.

Mary Nelesen, Birdseed Chairperson



APPLES FROM THE TEACHERS

Thanks from the Education Committee for the old calendars that so many people brought to us! We are able to use the photos from them in our work in classrooms!



Winter Birds in your Backyard

Announcing! -- A family program to learn about the common birds visiting your snowy backyard. Who are they? We'll use our bird costume to help with ID! What feeders for what birds? Type of food: seed, suet or succulent fruits? We'll also make a pine cone feeder to take home for your backyard bird treat. Presented by FAS Education Coordinator Nancy Zapotocki. Questions? Contact naz@centurytel.net or call the library. See FAS Calendar (next page) for more details!



Beauty of Birds



Are you interested in birds?

Do you want to learn more?

Then sign up for **Beauty of Birds!**

Classes include guest speakers, activities, slides of local birds,

and a trip into the field to practice our skills.

Classes will be held April 2nd, 9th, 16th, and 23rd, 6-8 p.m., at Flathead High School.

For more information call 857-6788.

To sign up call Flathead High School at 751-3500.

Come join Flathead Audubon Society in this annual celebration of the

Beauty of Birds!





FEBRUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR



Monday, February 11, 2008: Flathead Audubon General Meeting. 7 PM, The Summit, Conference Room 3. Dale Becker and staff present a program on Wildlife Management on the Flathead Indian Reservation.

Saturday, January 26, 2008: Winter Birds in Your Backyard. 1 PM, Whitefish Branch Library

Saturday, February 2, 2008: A Winter Outing in Glacier National Park. See Field Trips, below

Monday, February 4, 2008: Flathead Audubon Board of Directors Meeting. 6 PM at 295 3rd Ave EN, Kalispell (Jane Lopp & Associates Building) All are welcome.

Monday, February 4, 2008: Winter Birds in Your Backyard. 10:30 AM, Kalispell Main Library

Wednesday, February 6, 2008: Winter Birds in Your Backyard. 10:30 AM, Kalispell Main Library

Wednesday, February 13, 2008: Winter Birds in Your Backyard. 10:30 AM, Columbia Falls Branch Library

Sunday, February 17, 2008: A Wander in the Mission Valley. See Field Trips, below

Wednesday, February 20, 2008: Winter Birds in Your Backyard. 10 AM, Bigfork Branch Library

Saturday, March 16, 2008: Lower Valley Waterfowl Tour, Part One. See Field Trips, below

Saturday - Sunday, March 29-30, 2008: Annual Freezout Lake Birding Trip. See Field Trips, below

WINTER FIELD TRIPS FOR ALL!

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2008: A WINTER OUTING IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK. Join Flathead Audubon for a morning of snowshoeing and bird watching along the Flathead River in Glacier National Park. Meet at the West Glacier Post Office at 9:30AM. Bring snowshoes or skis, snacks and dress for the weather. Contact Bruce Tannehill at 862-4548 for further information and to sign up for the trip.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2008: A WINTER WANDER IN THE MISSION VALLEY. We will spend most of a day in the beautiful Mission Valley in search of wintering migrants and year round denizens. In years past we have seen snow buntings, a variety of hawks, several owl species, a falcon or two and, even a chilly American robin. Meet at Park 'n Ride at the intersection of Hwy 93 and Hwy 83 at 8:00AM. Bring lunch and winter weather gear. Contact Leslie Kehoe at 837-4467 (evenings) to sign up for the trip.

SATURDAY, MARCH 16, 2008: LOWER VALLEY WATERFOWL TOUR, PART ONE. This first of two 4-hour trips focusing on waterfowl migration 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 at Park n' Ride at the intersection of Hwy 93 and Hwy 82 at 8:30AM. For more information, contact Leslie Kehoe at 837-4467 (evenings).

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, MARCH 29 & 30: FREEZOUT LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA FIELD-TRIP. Spring waterfowl migration at Freezout Lake WMA is an experience not to be missed. Snow Geese can be counted by the thousands and more than 40 bird species have been seen in past years. The trip leaves at 10:30 AM Saturday from the K Mart parking lot in Kalispell and will get us to the WMA 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 Dan Casey at 857-3143 or dcasey@abcbirds.org to arrange carpooling and to sign up for the trip.



HEADING EAST?

6th ANNUAL POTHOLE & PRAIRIE BIRDING FESTIVAL

June 4-8, 2008 - Carrington, North Dakota

For details, featured birding experts, and full agenda, go to www.birdingdrives.com





PRESIDENTIAL MUSINGS

From Mike Fanning, FAS President



I presume most of you have read the Mission Statement of Flathead Audubon. If not, it is on our website www.flatheadaudubon.org under the "About Us" tab (it also appears in the newsletter from time to time). Your board is actively involved in fulfilling that mission statement. I want to point out some of the recent board actions which are aligned with that statement. Lewis Young, as conservation chair, has responded to a Forest Service salvage logging plan and a Fish, Wildlife & Parks plan to allow Peregrine Falcon nestlings to be captured. Brent Mitchell and Linda Winnie have spent hours developing plans for maintaining and improving the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area which FAS manages under a lease from DNRC. Leslie Kehoe sets up field trips and manages our refuge projects. Paula Smith makes sure all our events are widely publicized. Rob Ford and Leo Keane obtain speakers who are both educational and entertaining for our general meetings. Ansley Ford and Sonja Hartmann with our Educational Consultant, Nancy Zapotocki, handle our educational efforts. Linda Winnie and Kay Mitchell produce the monthly newsletter. Lois Drobish and Lisa Discoe make sure that there are refreshments at our general meetings. I do as little as possible, especially during the ski season. I've left out the officers, because their contributions cut across all the activities and I've not listed all the other board actions such as grants and contributions to other organizations.

All of this costs money, on the order of \$15,000 each year. In the past, we spent less (by doing less) and sold lots more birdseed (where are those grosbeaks that used to fund our chapter with their enormous appetites?). Our main increase in expense comes from the addition of the Educational Consultant. Nancy's accomplishments in that position have been fantastic. She works with many other conservation organizations in the valley, giving programs at meetings, writing grant applications, and keeping our bird trunks up to date. The bottom line is that we are now spending more than we receive. I've tried to get the Federal Government to tell me how this can work over a long period, but they tell me I need a printing press and authority to print FAS dollars. Since that won't work, we are looking at some fundraising ideas. We are forming a fundraising committee to come up with a program to match our income with our expenses.

I believe that our expenditures in education are more than justified by the results. We are making a significant contribution to the long term health of the valley ecosystem. I am also confident that the extra funds can be raised. Anyone who thinks they can help, please let me know.

Montana Audubon presents 2 fundraiser tours for travel-minded birders. Each tour limited to 8 participants.



AUSTRALIA

June 29—July 11, 2008
September 14—26, 2008
November 9—21, 2008



Queensland is the northeastern state in Australia. The geographic isolation of the Australian continent has fostered the evolution of a spectacular variety of endemic flora and fauna. This tour will allow opportunities to observe the multitude of birds that reside amidst the scenic grandeur of Queensland: fairywrens, birds-of-paradise, bowerbirds, honeyeaters, and many brightly-colored parrots. Photographic opportunities are numerous. It is possible to see about 250 species of birds. For full tour details, consult www.KingfisherBirdTours.com.



ECUADOR — Andes Tours

January 10-22, 2009
February 14-26, 2009
February 28-March 12, 2009



More than 1,600 bird species have been recorded in Ecuador. This avian richness provides for the premiere Neotropical birding experience. We expect to see more than 400 species of birds, including 50+ hummingbird species, 60+ tanager species and 70+ species of flycatchers on this tour! We'll spend time on the west slope, exploring highland and subtropical rainforests, along with Andean cloud forests and will also visit the Choco lowlands there, which are home to several Choco endemic species found only on this western Andean slope. For full tour details, consult www.KingfisherBirdTours.com.



Adventures of an Excited Education Committee



It was January 9th, steaming mugs of coffee and tea were in hand, and members were seated on cozy couches in the back meeting room of Colter Coffee in Kalispell. The first Education Committee meeting of the year saw the addition of some new faces. We are excited to welcome Kay Martinez, a retired teacher from Lakeside, Josh Covill, freshman at Columbia Falls High and Aurielle Cohen, sophomore at Glacier High School. They will add new energy to our growing committee.

It was quickly evident that there was a lot to discuss! Nancy Zapotocki, Conservation Educator, started us out with updates on her recent projects. Nancy has been working with the Flathead Conservation District to submit a grant for riparian education, including multi-county coordinated television and newspaper advertisements on the importance of maintaining and restoring riparian vegetation. She is also submitting a grant to pay for developing a riparian and wetlands education trunk. She has been participating in Montana Watershed Coordination Council (MWCC) and Community of Resource Educators (CORE) meetings. With other members of CORE, FAS plans to participate in the 2008 Earth Day event in Kalispell with an education display and booth. There is also a plan for an educational trunk workshop in August. Nancy is working with Montana Watercourse to hold a spring workshop for educators, "Project Webfoot", that will be co-sponsored by FAS, Northwest Montana Educational Cooperative and Montana Watercourse, using a curriculum that Ducks Unlimited has developed that should be great fun! Nancy is also working with Ansley and the Lakeside School to count birds for the Backyard Bird Count, and continuing outreach and partnership with the Northwest Montana Educational Cooperative to get our education trunks into the schools.

Nancy and Sonja updated us on work needing to be done with our educational trunks. Thanks to Amy Jacobs and Siobahn McGuire-Fender (who was at the Educational Coop), many of our trunks now meet the Montana standards to which teachers are required to teach. We want to finish up this project and create vocabulary lists for each trunk as well. Sonja and Kay volunteered to help Amy with this task.

Ansley Ford, FAS Board member and Co-Chair of the Education Committee is gearing up for the "Beauty of Birds" class FAS offers at Flathead High School in April. This is a class for all levels of birders who want to learn more. Ansley also reminded us that Feb. 15-18th is the Great Backyard Bird Count, sponsored by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. (See article on page 3)

The other big news that Ansley brought from the Board is that FAS will be organizing a fundraiser to help fund conservation education work, and are looking at having a film festival event, with a keynote speaker and a raffle. The education committee is excited to help organize this event in support of educational activities with FAS!

In the last part of the meeting we heard from our guest speaker, Elly Jones, on her vast experience with banding hummingbirds. Wow, was that fun! Did you know that an average hummer usually weighs the amount of a penny, but that before they head out on their long migration to Mexico, they weigh more like a nickel? Elly could have kept sharing amazing stories, fun facts and her great props into the wee hours of the night! Thanks so much, Elly, for sharing your wealth of knowledge.

This meeting was a great start to 2008, and we all left fired up for our projects ahead. Our next meeting will be April 9th. It will include an interactive discussion on teaching techniques. If you have interest in getting involved, please contact Sonja Hartmann at 387-4150.

Science Tidbit



From *National Geographic*, December 2007 – "On the Wings of the Albatross"

The feats of the albatross seem impossible. As the article states, "A 50-year-old albatross has flown at least 3.7 million miles." This is nearly 150 times the circumference of the earth at the equator, or about 3 times around the earth per year. "A parent albatross may fly more than 10,000 miles to deliver one meal to its chick." With an 11½ foot wingspan, it does not have the strength to flap its wings for more than a short burst. Only with the energy of the wind does sustained flight become possible. The albatross' strategy is to glide perpendicular to the wind for long distances and then to turn into the wind to gain a burst of potential energy. This gain in elevation allows it to turn again and glide on looking for breakfast for its chick. If it does not get tricked by a baited hook from a long-line fishing boat or swallow too much plastic refuse, it will return to fill its chick with a predigested meal that will sustain it for twenty days.

Submitted by Bruce Tannehill





2007 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS



From around northwest Montana come reports of 2007 Audubon Christmas Bird Counts. In addition to the following summaries, full tallies of individual birds will be available at http://cbc.audubon.org/cbccurrent/current_table.html.



UPPER SWAN VALLEY - STEVE LAMAR

The 14th annual Upper Swan Valley Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 15, 2007. Eleven observers braved snow, occasional wind, and temperatures ranging from 13 to 33 degrees to search the count circle for winter birds. We sighted 25 species this year, and a total of 445 individual birds, with another 4 species recorded during count week. These numbers are about average for the Upper Swan count. There were no real surprises this year. Some of the most numerous species we saw were Steller's Jay (24), Black-capped (76) and Mountain (51) Chickadees, Snow Bunting (50) and Common Raven (139). We saw both Bald (13) and Golden (7) Eagles, as well as 2 Belted Kingfishers, 2 Pygmy Owls, 1 Black-backed Woodpecker and 1 Winter Wren. These latter species are not unusual for winter in the Upper Swan, but they are sometimes hard to track down on the day of the Count.



EUREKA - LEWIS YOUNG

The 15th annual Eureka Christmas Bird Count was conducted December 22, 2007. Fifteen field observers and 20 feeder watchers counted 49 species of birds and 1346 individual birds. Over the 15 years of the Eureka Christmas Count, the number of species sighted in any one year has ranged from a low of 42 in 1993 to a high of 66 in 2007 with an average of 51. Altogether, a total of 103 species have been sighted over the 15 years. Some of the most numerous birds sighted were Bohemian waxwing (275), common raven (223), black-capped chickadee (123), wild turkey (121), and mountain chickadee (71). By contrast, only 4 or less individuals were sighted for 16 species with a few examples being common merganser, ruffed grouse, great gray owl, American three-toed woodpecker, and northern shrike. Only 1 species new to the Eureka count was sighted this year—great gray owl. They are considered winter residents in our area but in low numbers and just had not been sighted previously on count day. The American three-toed woodpecker sighting was the first since 1993 when the Eureka count began.



NINEPIPE NWR - JIM ROGERS

A sunny day with temperatures in the low 40s during the afternoon enabled 32 participants to enjoy a great day of birding and counting. A total of 73 species were sighted. Most notable, if not inexorable, were the 12 Eurasian-collared doves that represent not only a count first, but perhaps the shape of things to come. A single Lincoln's sparrow was also a count first, and a pair of Canyon Wrens were counted for only the second time. High counts were established for the following species: Great Blue Heron (18), Trumpeter Swan (15), Merlin (4 - tie), Rock Dove (823), Mourning Dove (38), Pileated Woodpecker (5), Gray Jay (6), Winter Wren (4 - tie), European Starling (3317), and Pine Siskin (315). For the 4th time in 5 years, we counted more Red-tailed hawks (101) than Rough-legged hawks (69).



GLACIER NATIONAL PARK – SUSAN SINDT

Glacier NP did its part to contribute to the 108th CBC tallies on December 16, 2007. Nineteen observers on 10 traditional routes plus one feeder-watcher produced sightings of 527 individual birds of 32 species. The number of individuals was higher than counts in recent years, whereas the species total was about the norm. The most abundant species was the Common Redpoll with a total of 131. This is an increase over recent years for this species. Next numerous were 60 Canada Geese. Due to mild conditions (temperatures in the mid-thirties by the afternoon with minimal snow cover), water birds were well-represented, including Horned Grebes, Mallards, both Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes, Bufflehead, Common Mergansers, and one Great Blue Heron that flew along Lower McDonald Creek. However, no Belted Kingfishers or Killdeer were spotted. Most spectacular along the waterways were 35 Bald Eagles (27 adults and 8 subadults), who were taking advantage of spawning salmon near the tributaries of Lake McDonald. Grouse numbers were down and no Pine Siskins or Rosy Finches were seen. Five species of woodpeckers were sighted. Special sightings that added a species to the list included one each of Winter Wren, Brown Creeper, House Finch, Ruffed Grouse, and Black-backed Woodpecker. Additional species seen count week were Western Grebe, Gadwall, White-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Siskin, and Song sparrow. Thanks to all the participants who brought this information together!



2007 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

KALISPELL – DAN CASEY



TOTALS: **74** species (plus 1 count week); **16,835** individuals. We once again had 38 people in 13 parties in the field on a partly cloudy and calm day, with temperatures reaching the mid-thirties. **Northern Pintail, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Northern Pygmy-Owl, and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch** were all new species for this count, bringing our 9-yr total to 101 species. We tied or set new high counts for an additional 20 species. These included a remarkable 20 **Wood Ducks** in Evergreen, 65 **Bald Eagles**, and 230 **Pygmy Nuthatches**. Hawk numbers were generally higher, as were the number of gulls, although only two species of the latter were seen.



BIGFORK -- DAN CASEY



The 34th annual Bigfork Christmas Bird Count took place Saturday, December 15th. Among the rewards for our 35 observers on this blustery day were 674 Black-capped, 154 Mountain, and 90 Chestnut-backed Chickadees, all marking new count highs. New records were also set for Bald Eagles (64), Hooded Mergansers (169), Wilson's Snipe (2), Herring Gulls (64), Mourning Doves (150) and Horned Larks (50). We counted more than 14,000 individuals of 82 species, about average for recent years, but well above totals seen on most other Montana counts. Other highlights included a single Trumpeter Swan along the Flathead River and a Prairie Falcon in the Lower Valley, just the third time we have found each of these species. A Long-eared Owl along the north shore of Flathead Lake was a good find, as were the six Red-breasted Mergansers and three Mew Gulls in Somers Bay. Wild Turkey numbers continued their recent downward trend, with 288 recorded. Five species were found during count week but not on count day, including a Boreal Owl along the Swan River near Ferndale. This is a species we have never found on the Bigfork count. Thanks to everyone who took time in their busy holiday season to keep the tradition alive!

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT IS GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH NATURE



In February, volunteers throughout the U.S. and Canada are invited to "Count for Fun, Count for the Future!"

Millions of novice and accomplished bird watchers can make their fascination with nature add up for science and for the future during the 11th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, led by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. During "Presidents' Day" weekend, February 15–18, 2008, observers count the highest number of each species they see during at least 15 minutes on one or more of the count days and enter their tallies at www.birdcount.org. The web site provides helpful hints for identifying birds. Participants can compare results from their town or region with others. They can also view bird photos taken by participants during the count and send in their own digital images for the online photo gallery and contest.

"These volunteers are counting not only for fun but for the future," said Tom Bancroft, Chief Science Officer for Audubon. "It's fun to see how many different kinds of birds can be seen and counted right in your backyard or neighborhood park. Each tally helps us learn more about how our North American birds are doing, and what that says about the health and the future of our environment."

"Literally, there has never been a more detailed snapshot of a continental bird-distribution profile in history," said John Fitzpatrick, Director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "Imagine scientists 250 years from now being able to compare these data with their own!"

"People who take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count see the results of their efforts in the news and in bird conservation work taking place across the country," said Audubon Education VP, Judy Braus. "Whether counts occur at home, schools or nature centers, they're more than educational science activities for young people and adults, they're a contribution to the conservation of birds and habitat nationwide."

In 2007, Great Backyard Bird Count participants made history, breaking records for the number of birds reported and the number of checklists. Participants sent in 81,203 checklists tallying 11,082,387 birds of 613 species.

For more information on how to participate, including identification tips, photos, bird sounds, maps, and information on over 500 bird species, visit www.birdcount.org.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is sponsored in part by Wild Birds Unlimited.

THREE MONTANA BIRDS ON THE 2007 WATCHLIST

WatchList 2007, the newest and most scientifically sound list of America's birds at greatest risk, was released in November 2007 by National Audubon and the American Bird Conservancy. The bird species on this list are often rare and limited in range; consequently, they face a more imminent threat of extinction. Forty of these imperiled species spend at least part of the year in Montana. Three of those birds are profiled here:

Long-billed Curlew. This species is listed as "Highly Imperiled" in the North American Shorebird Conservation Plan, and has shown significant range-wide declines as native grassland habitat is converted to other uses. Fragmentation of the remaining large blocks of grassland habitat in Montana remains a significant threat to this species. Long-term survival will depend on protection of these areas (such as the Rocky Mountain Front) and livestock grazing management that provides grassland in the proper condition for nesting. American Bird Conservancy has worked closely with The Nature Conservancy and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Wildlife Program to delineate important curlew habitat on private lands along the Rocky Mountain Front, and to protect important sites in the Madison and Big Hole Valleys. Montana Audubon's IBA program has identified a number of critical nesting sites for the curlew, including extensive grasslands in northern Valley County.

Dan Casey



Dick Cannings

Flammulated Owl. This tiny migratory owl depends on mature stands of ponderosa pine and Douglas fir with open, shrubby understory near grassland edges. It continues to lose habitat to residential development on the fringes of Montana's western valleys, and as a result of crown fires in pine stands that have grown thick with young Douglas-fir. Restoration of pine stands by thinning, providing snags for nesting, and by maintaining grass/shrub areas for the owl's insect prey have great potential to reduce fire risk and increase habitat for this species. American Bird Conservancy's recent survey work in the Bitterroot Valley has expanded the known range

of the owl in Montana, and identified key private land parcels for habitat enhancement efforts and long-term protection. In addition, the University of Montana's Avian Science Center is organizing a network of volunteers to conduct Flammulated Owl playback surveys in likely habitat across portions of western Montana.

Lewis's Woodpecker. This species, first discovered by Lewis and Clark near Helena, has declined throughout its range. Like the Flammulated Owl, it prefers large snags for nesting in pine forests, as well as old cottonwood trees in riparian areas, where it must now compete for nest sites with the European Starling. Mature cottonwood stands along our rivers continue to be lost to agricultural activities and residential development. The Bitterroot River IBA (from Lolo to Hamilton), recently identified by Montana Audubon, is home to more than 40 nesting pairs of Lewis's Woodpeckers.



Dan Casey

For the complete WatchList and details on how to help, visit www.audubon.org. To learn more about Montana Audubon's work protecting these and other species, visit www.mtaudubon.org.



In Florida, Laughing and Bonaparte's gulls perch on the heads of brown pelicans that have just caught a fish. As the pelicans open their bills to shift the fish into position to swallow, the gulls snatch the food! — *1001 Questions Answered About Birds*

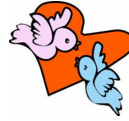
Photo by Donna Dewhurst
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One thing about snow – it makes your yard look as good as your neighbor's!



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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

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MONTANA AUDUBON

P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624
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www.mtaudubon.org

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