



the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

VOLUME 34

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DECEMBER 2009

ALL ABOUT CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS!

Local CBC Schedule and Contact Information (December 2009-January 2010)

Bigfork	Saturday, December 19	Dan Casey	caseys4@centurytel.net	857-3143
Upper Swan	Saturday, December 19	Jody Wolff	jmw4002@blackfoot.net	754-4002
Ninepipe NWR	Sunday, December 20	Jim Rogers	jmrogers2007@gmail.com	883-3611
Glacier NP	Sunday, December 20	Susan Sindt	sjsindt@hotmail.com	892-7406
Kalispell	Sunday, January 3	Dan Casey	caseys4@centurytel.net	857-3143

In Memory of Ferne Cohen

1923-2009

By Sonja Hartmann

When I grow up, I want to be like Ferne Cohen. Throughout her life she was a mentor to many, and forever passionate about making this a better world for all. She continually worked to improve the communities in which she lived, from California to Montana. In California she was active in Community Chest, American Association of University Women, and the Sea and Sage Audubon Society. In 1988, she and Marty moved to the Flathead, where Ferne continued her community service with active support and participation in Flathead Audubon Society, Glacier Orchestra, Citizens for a Better Flathead, Montana Society for the Blind, Temple Bet Harim, and the Whitefish Library.

Ferne was a pillar of Flathead Audubon for more than 20 years. She started out helping with the FAS Sunflower Sales in 1988, and by 1990 was elected to the FAS Board of Directors. She served almost continuously on the Board until 2004. Also in 1990 she became both Earth Day Coordinator and



Program Chair, and served as Program Chair or Co-Chair for four years. Ferne organized the Precycle/Smart Shopping Program in 1993, which for more than five years put volunteers in front of local supermarkets on the weekends to provide shoppers with information on precycling and the use of canvas grocery bags. In 1997 she started a FAS Quality of Life

Committee which organized General Meeting programs about the impacts of development on local wildlife and human habitat, and promoted the Reduce, Reuse, Recycle ethic both within and outside of Flathead Audubon. Two years later, in 1999, Ferne proposed the formation of an FAS Education Committee, and served as one of its original members. Then in 2001 Ferne proposed the FAS Outstanding Achievement in Conservation Recognition, wrote and organized the Recognition presentations for the first year, and then shepherded the program several years after that.

Ferne Cohen, continued on page 7 ...

DECEMBER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, December 14, 2009: Flathead Audubon General Meeting. 7 PM, The Summit, Conference Room 3. Program about Christmas Bird Counts from Dan Casey. See above schedule and page 3.

Monday, December 7, 2009: Flathead Audubon Board of Directors Meeting. 6 PM at 295 Third Ave. E.N. All are welcome.



BIRD OF THE MONTH

By Lisa Bate

Northern Flicker - Unsung Hero of the Cavity-Nesting World

See a flash of red-orange from a flying bird, hear the familiar “flicka, flicka, flicka” call and I know that one of my favorite birds has just landed. It is the Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*)! This species is unmistakable in the field because the lower surface of its wings and tail are a bright salmon color. Yet it is not just the color of the flicker that makes it one of my favorite birds. Northern Flickers play such an important ecological role for so many species, in so many kinds of habitat, that I am always grateful when I see this bird, knowing that without them, the wildlife world would not be nearly as rich.

Northern Flickers range throughout North America and are the second largest woodpecker in northwestern Montana. Only the pterodactyl-like Pileated Woodpecker is larger. Flickers are split into two subspecies: the eastern yellow- and the western red-shafted flicker. Their scientific name which refers to the yellow-shafted flicker has two origins. *Colaptes* comes from the Greek word “to peck” and *auratus* comes from the Latin word meaning “golden.”

In northwest MT we have the red-shafted flicker (*Colaptes auratus cafer*). In addition to the brightly colored lower surface of the wings and tail, red-shafted Northern Flickers have a brown barred back, gray head with brown cap. A white rump patch is easy to see when in flight. Males have a red moustache. They average 12.5 inches in length with a wingspan of 20 inches. Where the yellow- and red-shafted flickers overlap, ornithologists have been intrigued by hybrids of the two subspecies for more than a century.

Northern Flickers forage primarily on the ground for ants and other insects. In the winter flickers will also forage on seeds, fruits and at local bird feeders. In our area flickers will either migrate south, or to lower elevations, for the winter. Research shows that flickers rely more heavily on snags as foraging sites in the winter when the ground is covered with snow.

I think of the flicker as the unsung hero of the cavity-nesting world. Without Northern Flickers, many of our other wildlife species would either disappear or be present in much lower numbers. Ecologists refer to these as “keystone species.” A keystone species is one that makes up only a small number of the animals in an area, but whose presence allows for the presence of many other animals. The role of such an animal in an ecosystem is like the [keystone](#), or central stone, at the top of an arch. While there might not be



Tom Chisby

a lot of weight on the keystone because of its position at the top, without it, the arch would collapse. Without Northern Flickers, an entire web of other species would collapse.

Many species are considered cavity nesters, but most cannot excavate their own nest cavities and are thus known as secondary cavity-nesters. Flying squirrels are an example. They are the second ones to use a cavity made by a woodpecker. Species that are capable of excavating their own nest sites with their powerful beaks are known as primary cavity nesters. The Northern Flicker is a primary cavity nester and can excavate a new nest site every year. The abandoned cavities are then left for other species.

Flicker holes typically range from 2.5 to 3.5 inches in diameter. This is exactly the right size of cavity that many of our secondary cavity nesters need for their nest sites, just large enough for the secondary cavity nester’s body to pass through while limiting the chances of a predator getting in. For example, almost all American Kestrel nests are found in large (> 20 inches) diameter snags with an abandoned nest cavity made *only* by Northern Flickers. Kestrels do not use the abandoned nests of woodpeckers such as the Hairy, Three-toed, or Downy. These are too small. The abandoned Pileated Woodpecker cavities are too large. I once watched as a Cooper’s Hawk tried to prey on kestrel nestlings in an old flicker hole. After an hour, it still had not succeeded. It just could not get into the cavity.

When flickers nest near water, other bird species, like the Bufflehead, benefit. Although they are a duck, they are also a secondary cavity-nester and use old flicker holes almost exclusively for their nests. Can you imagine living in Montana without Mountain Bluebirds? Neither can I. Again, we have the Northern Flicker to thank for providing nest sites for the bluebirds. Both Tree and Violet-green swallows also nest in old flicker holes. Even some small owls take advantage of old flicker holes. European Starlings also strongly prefer flicker cavities (which, as you know, is *not* a good thing). Then there are the flying squirrels, the red squirrels, bushy-tailed wood rats, and small rodents that depend on flicker holes. Without flickers to excavate nest cavities, many of these species would disappear from an area. Thus, Northern Flickers are considered a keystone species.

Although Northern Flickers are still considered
(*Northern Flicker, continued on page 8 ...*)



December 2009 Program Why We Do Christmas Counts



What has happened to our Evening Grosbeaks? Are the winter ranges of birds changing over time? How do I tell a Cedar Waxwing from a Bohemian Waxwing? What can I do for exercise during the holiday season? Is mid-December really winter? The answers to these and other questions will be revealed by our December speaker, Dan Casey, in his annual pep talk for the upcoming Christmas Bird Count season, **Monday, December 14**. With a mix of bird photos, factoids and stories, Dan will reveal what more than 3 decades of the Bigfork CBC have told us about local bird populations, and what more than a century of counts across the continent have revealed about the power of "citizen science." Come prepared to be entertained, and perhaps mildly challenged, by some "virtual birding." Although some of our chapter veterans are skeptical, Dan insists he will leave time for questions, and for organizing the Bigfork and Kalispell counts (see below)!

Please join us at 7:00 PM on Monday, December 14, in the Community Room of The Summit.

Kalispell CBC Turns 11

No longer a "new kid on the block," the **Kalispell Christmas Bird Count** has proven to be just as interesting as the Bigfork count, and hopefully this year's 11th annual count on Sunday, **January 3** will be no exception. Last year we tied our previous high of 74 species, and we added Greater Scaup, American Coot, Iceland Gull, and Long-eared Owl, all new species for this count, bringing us to 109 species over the 10 years of this count. The Iceland Gull at the landfill was only the third one ever documented in Montana. Our traditional start to this count is a group breakfast at Finnegan's Restaurant on East Idaho in Kalispell, at 7:00 AM. It is here that we will assign circle segments (like Lawrence Park, Owen Sowerwine, West Valley, Evergreen) and set up teams for the day's efforts. Dan Casey is the compiler for both the Kalispell and Bigfork counts. If you are interested in participating, please sign up and leave your contact information at the December general meeting. You can also send an email to: caseys4@centurytel.net.



36th Bigfork CBC Coming Up

A circle 15 miles in diameter, centered at Streeter's Corner north of Bigfork, has hosted one of the most interesting Christmas Bird Counts in Montana since 1974. This year's **Bigfork Christmas Bird Count** will be held **Saturday, December 19**. We hope that the weather will be more "user-friendly" than last year, when 32 volunteers were confronted with temperatures down to -16F and snow up to 2 ft deep. But even under those conditions, we were able to find 76 species, and 3 Eurasian Collared-Doves near Somers became the 143rd species seen on this count (a list that also includes such winter surprises as Franklin's Gull, Long-tailed Duck, Snowy Owl, and Swamp Sparrow). Because we have been at this so long, we typically rely on veteran group leaders to scour their usual areas, and are always looking for additional participants to join in to help us gain a better understanding of our early winter bird populations. We will begin preparation for the count at the December 14th meeting, and will finalize groups before the count day.

Time to Stock up on Sunflower Seeds

From now through the end of the year, December 31, every bag of sunflower seeds purchased at WBC (Western Building Centers) will benefit FAS.

This is the third consecutive year FAS has partnered with WBC in this important fundraising event. A portion of the profit from each bag of sunflower seed sold will be donated to FAS to support our educational and environmental programs.

You can stock up for the winter by stopping at any one of the four WBC locations in the valley; Columbia Falls, Evergreen, Kalispell or Whitefish store before December 31. Be sure to say "thanks" for their generous support of FAS.



Mary Nelesen, Seed Sale Chair



BOOKS, CALENDARS, BIRD FEEDERS & MORE



Come to the sale table in the back of the room at our monthly meeting. We have books on birds, bats, and other nature subjects at **discounts**. Some of these items may just fill the need of a special

Christmas present while benefiting FAS. Especially featured is Sara Mailand's "A Book of Silence," about her experiences discovering the joys and fears of silence and solitude in this busy noisy world.

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For those of you receiving the Pileated Post electronically, there is another great opportunity to be informed about issues regarding current legislation that affects birds and habitat. The Audubon Advisory is rich with information, photos and directions on how to contact our legislators. It will arrive, without charge, in your email every month. All you have to do is subscribe: audubonaction@audubon.org.

From Linda DeKort



THOUGHTS ON RAVENS AND FAS FINANCES

By Mike Fanning, FAS Past President & Finance Chair



I bet you couldn't figure out how the two subjects are related. If you did, you were wrong since actually they are completely unrelated. They are simply the two subjects I want to discuss.

Let's start with the one which really interests me most, Ravens. Gail's article last month did a wonderful job of describing this magnificent species, my favorite bird. (I still remember announcing my preference in Dan Casey's beginning birding class many years ago and the sharp intake of breath through the room coupled with a lot of quizzical looks; Ravens have never been greatly loved.) I would like to add a bit of information to Gail's work. I remember in High School being taught that humans could be defined as the species which uses tools. Of course, we now know that this definition is as absurd as that produced by a Greek Academy in 5th century Athens which defined humans as "featherless bipeds"; that definition had to be discarded when someone threw a plucked chicken over the fence into the academy. Still, I found it quite remarkable to find out that Ravens not only use tools, they create them. There are a number of examples of this behavior in the literature. These, coupled with the meat on a string experiment described by Gail, show clearly that Ravens can conceptualize, which I find amazing. Most animals, when confronted with a new problem, proceed to try various approaches and, if

fortunate, one works and the problem is solved. A mature Raven who has never confronted a problem like the meat on a string, sits on the perch for a short time and then proceeds to solve the problem. Clearly the bird pictured the solution in its mind. I would recommend Bernd Heinrich's book "Mind of the Raven," in which much amazing Raven behavior is identified, to anyone interested in bird behavior. Also, if you want to hear what it's like to live with a pissed off Raven, talk to the FAS president.

Now to the subject of finances. No, please don't stop reading here and go on to the next article. As you know, our education program requires FAS to raise \$10,000 to fund it. This is actually only half the funding required for the program this year; the other half comes, as it has for the last several years, from The Sustainability Fund, managed by Lex Blood. Thus FAS gets a \$20,000 program for just \$10,000. But raising \$10,000 is not so easy. This year we were fortunate to get \$3000 from The Whitefish Community Foundation and The Tom and Teresa Quinn Fund. We have also received significant support from FAS members in both dues and special donations. We are on our way to raising the required funding but we have a ways to go. To help fill this gap, we ask each of you to consider a special donation to FAS in your year end gift giving. Thanks for your continuing support of FAS!

Focus on Clean Energy:

FAS Goes to Washington and Ferne's Quality of Life Committee Reinstated

Seventeen members from local Audubon Chapters met in Washington D.C. in October to study national legislation concerning clean energy and national security. The main focus for this Global Climate Change Workshop and Advocacy Training was two bills that are moving through Congress. House Bill #2454 passed in June and Senate Bill #1733 is presently weaving through Senate committees. I was one of two Montanans who attended the workshop. It was a steep learning curve about the legislative process and required compromises. I gained great respect for the thoroughness, patience and dedication of staff in the National Audubon office. They continue to keep us informed on this complex and controversial issue.

The goals of the two bills strengthen renewable energy and efficiency standards; boost investments (jobs and research) in "clean" technology, namely wind, solar, geothermal, biomass and nuclear; reduce CO2 emissions by a specific amount by the year 2020; provide incentives to avoid deforestation; provide rebates to low income families for energy bills; allow us to be independent from foreign oil. The Sen-



ate bill, thanks to Max Baucus, also provides funding to protect natural resources. If Congress cannot pass this legislation within the next two years, the Environmental Protection Agency has been given the authority, through the judicial branch, to impose CO2 emission standards. It will be interesting and important to keep an eye on this legislation.

My thoughts turned often to our dear friend and mentor Ferne Cohen as I prepared remarks and questions for our Montana Legislators. Ferne would remind us that energy efficiency and independence from fossil fuels is the only way quality of life on this planet can be sustained. With her positive unrelenting prodding she would encourage us to educate each other and use our creativity to address the challenge of increasing CO2 concentrations and resulting climate change. In that spirit, the FAS board reinstated the Quality of Life Committee that Ferne initiated and led 12 years ago. If you are interested in joining this committee, please contact me at 755-3704 or de-kort@montanasky.com.

By Linda DeKort

Thanks!

...to all those below who have made special donations to Flathead Audubon since September, 2009.

Eagle \$1000+
Tom & Theresa Quinn Fund
Whitefish Community Foundation



Dave Menke, USFWS

Snowy Owl \$250+
Tom & Mary Nelesen
In memory of Betty Nelesen



photography.com

Merlin \$100+
Nancy Svennungsen
Bruce Tannehill & Gail Cleveland
In memory of Ferne Cohen



Kestrel \$50+
Charles McCarty & Anne Lent
John & Linda Winnie
In memory of Ferne Cohen



Jeanette Marcure

My Own Vision \$25+
Ruth Schnitzer
In memory of Ferne Cohen
Hanna & Leo Cohan
In memory of Ferne Cohen



John Gould

Supporting Member + donation
Ruth Davis
Bruce Tannehill
Mary Wallace
Mary & James Sloan
Charles Sutfin



Frank DeKort



GRANTS RECEIVED FOR FAS EDUCATION PROJECT

On Thursday November 5, The Whitefish Community Foundation at their annual celebration announced the recipients of grants for 2009. FAS had submitted an application for a \$1000 grant to increase our education programs in the Whitefish area. We were extremely pleased that The Foundation saw fit to fully fund our grant. This will allow us to work closely with Whitefish schools, the library and other organizations to bring more nature education to the area. At the same celebration FAS received a \$2000 grant from The Tom and Teresa Quinn Fund of the Whitefish Community Foundation to support our education program. This was a grant for which we had made no application and was completely based upon the Quinns' generosity and belief in our education program. We are enormously grateful to both The Foundation and the Quinns for these contributions.

Mike Fanning, Finance Chair

SPECIAL GIFTS

I wish to help make Flathead Audubon's vision a reality. Here is my contribution to the continued success of our chapter.

- Eagle Donation, \$1000+
- Osprey Donation, \$500+
- Snowy Owl Donation, \$250+
- Merlin Donation, \$100+
- Kestrel Donation, \$50+
- My Own Vision, amount of my choice



Dave Menke, USFWS

* * * *

The FAS activity which most interests me is:

- Education Programs
- Owen Sowerwine Natural Area
- Scholarships and Grants
- Field Trips and Outdoor Events

* * * *

I want my gift to recognize another:

In memory of _____
In honor of _____

Please send a notification of this gift to:

Name _____

Address _____

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State _____ Zip _____

* * * *

Donor's Name _____

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* * * *

Please make checks payable to:

Flathead Audubon Society
P.O. Box 9173
Kalispell, MT 59904



HAPPIEST OF ALL HOLIDAYS TO YOU!

**From your newsletter editors,
Linda and Kay**



2009 Raptor Migration Monitoring in the Jewel Basin



Background: At an elevation of 7,100 ft on the northwest flank of Mt. Aeneas in the Flathead National Forest northeast of Bigfork, the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch site is uniquely situated for stunning views of passing migrant raptors. After nearly two decades of intuition about this site, Dan and Susannah Casey of ABC first explored its true potential in 2007. Preliminary observations that year suggested that the site was an exceptionally narrow pathway for a great diversity of migrating raptors, with more than 200 birds of 10 species seen in less than 10 hours of observation. On 27 Sept. of that year, we saw 168 birds in just over 4 hours, including one hour with **57** passing birds. With the help of a grant from the Plum Creek Foundation, we counted **2,113 raptors of 17 species** during the 2008 migration season (see Table). Our results confirmed the value of the site for monitoring *Accipiters*, which comprised 56% of all birds seen. More importantly, the close proximity of the passing birds allowed us to classify more than 80% of the birds by age class (immature vs. adult), which may give us an index to reproductive performance in these populations.

2009: American Bird Conservancy initiated the 2009 survey effort 30 August. The effort was heavily reliant on volunteer participation, and we anticipate more than 500 hr of in-kind efforts this season (not yet totaled). Thanks to a cost-share agreement with the Flathead National Forest and a grant from Flathead Audubon, we were able to pay two part-time technicians and had support for data compilation and analysis. We saw 131 birds during our first 4 days. But after 31 days of data collection, we had some weather complications and collected data during portions of just 11 days in October. We finished the season with 42 days (272 hr) of data, and recorded **2011 raptors of 17 species**. We exceeded our 2008 season-long totals for 9 species (in bold), and had our best day on the 26th of September, with 207 birds counted. Remarkably, we counted 22 Broad-winged Hawks, a species not typically seen in western Montana. For the season, we averaged 7.4 raptors/hour, compared with 8.7 per hour in 2008. This was in part due to missing the relatively concentrated flights of eagles in October. Thanks to all who came to the ridge for another fine season in the Jewel Basin!

Species	2009 Total	2008 Total	Highest Daily Count 2009	Date of Highest Count 2009	Highest Daily Count 2007-2009	% of all Birds Counted All Yrs.
Turkey Vulture	6	5	1	12 Sep	2	<1%
Osprey	19	8	2	21 Sep	3	<1%
Bald Eagle	25	41	8	2 Oct	6	2%
Northern Harrier	62	46	11	24 Sep	8	3%
Sharp-shinned Hawk	812	779	117	26 Sep	117	39%
Cooper's Hawk	388	302	61	24 Sep	61	17%
Northern Goshawk	30	50	4	24 Sep	7	2%
Unidentified Accipiter	79	50				3%
Broad-winged Hawk	22	2	4	26 Sep	4	<1%
Swainson's Hawk	1	1	1	11 Sep	1	<1%
Red-tailed Hawk	152	173	16	16 Sep	20	8%
Ferruginous Hawk	1	1	1	5 Oct	1	<1%
Rough-legged Hawk	1	41	1	9 Sep	22	1%
Unidentified Buteo	8	11				<1%
Golden Eagle	241	474	26	6 Oct	58	17%
American Kestrel	100	35	11	26 Sep	11	3%
Merlin	31	21	3	2 Oct	3	1%
Peregrine Falcon	6	16	1	5 Oct	5	<1%
Prairie Falcon	9	7	3	25 Sep	3	<1%
Gyrfalcon	0	0				-
Unidentified Falcon	3	1				<1%
Unidentified Eagle	1	3				<1%
Unidentified Raptor	24	46				2%
Totals	2011	2113			207	



Nancy Zapotocki Awarded Together Green Fellowship

Flathead Audubon's Conservation Educator, Nancy Zapotocki, is one of 40 individuals nationwide selected as a 2009 *TogetherGreen* Fellow by National Audubon and Toyota.

The *TogetherGreen* Fellowship recognizes promising and proven leaders and nurtures individuals from across the country who are contributing to environmental conservation and restoration. The Fellowship offers professional development focused on leadership, innovation, communications, conservation planning, outreach to diverse audiences, and evaluation, in a creative and supportive learning environment. There is specialized training in conservation planning and execution, and the chance to work and share best practices with gifted conservation professionals, and assistance with project outreach and evaluation. Each Fellow receives a \$10,000 grant to help support an innovative Conservation Action Project, towards an engaging community-focused local project conserving land, water and/or energy, and contributing to greater environmental health. There are also networking opportunities with the Fellowship to meet and collaborate with other *TogetherGreen* Fellows and opportunities to establish strong professional connections with Audubon staff and other leaders in the conservation field.

Nancy will be working on a project with students at Owen Sowerwine Natural Area and State Important Bird Area. She is participating in the training in November at the National Conservation Training Center. The program provides financial support to attend this five-day Leadership Institute and a three-day, follow-up Retreat. We'll be eager to learn more after Nancy returns. Look for an article in the January Pileated Post.



Janet Ellis Receives TogetherGreen Fellowship



Long-time Montana Audubon staff member Janet Ellis also was chosen as one of National Audubon's *TogetherGreen* Fellows. Janet serves as Program Director for Montana Audubon, where she works on public policy issues, including serving as Audubon's lobbyist at the Montana Legislature. For her fellowship, Janet will work to protect some of Montana's most important wildlife habitat: streams and wetlands. These critical areas occupy less than 4% of the state, yet about one-third of the state's wildlife species depend upon these areas during their life cycles. Her *TogetherGreen* grant will support her work to assist local governments in their efforts to adopt stream protection measures. Janet understands the science behind stream and wetland protection, as well as the pros and cons of various strategies used by Montana local governments to protect these areas. She has also worked with numerous local government officials around the state.

"I'm honored to be a *TogetherGreen* Fellow", said Janet. "I have been working on stream protection issues for almost 20 years now. Receiving a *TogetherGreen* grant will enable me to broaden my skills so that I become more effective in my conservation work. Living in a rural state like Montana, we don't always have the resources we need to support our work."

Ferne Cohen, continued from page 1 ... With her husband Marty and son Richard at her side, Ferne lived a life that reflected their strong conservation ethics. Their home has been a model for others interested in living lightly on the land. Again and again they opened their doors to the community to come look and learn about sustainable building techniques such as passive solar, composting toilets, recycled gray water and use of products such as Hardi-Plank siding. Their home was a model for the home my husband and I have built that has a Phoenix composting toilet made in Whitefish, MT, and Hardi-Plank siding that is fire resistant. Even as her vision began to decline, Ferne continued to garden, and used native plants around her house to minimize water use and support native insects, birds and other wildlife.

I feel so blessed to have been mentored in many ways by Ferne, through her association with Flathead Audubon. I will cherish the memories of passionate discussions with Ferne about a myriad of topics, including how to keep rapid growth in the Flathead Valley from impacting quality of life for people and wildlife. Ferne was never without an opinion!! She would bestow on me, as Co-chairperson for the Education Committee, packages full of bird pictures and educational materials she had kept and wanted to share. Ferne was also an inspiration in the way she dealt with the challenge of macular degeneration, and loss of sight. She did not let this challenge keep her from learning, or doing the things she loved, and was always out walking and listening to birds.

The loss of this big-hearted woman will be felt, not only by those closest to her, but by the community at large. I have no doubt that Marty and Richard will keep up the important work their family has prioritized over the years. A big thanks to the Cohens for all they have done to keep our corner of Montana The Best Last Place.

A Celebration of Ferne's Life will be held Saturday, January 30, at the O'Shaughnessy Center in Whitefish. Further details will be available in the January Post.

Bigfork Falcon Project: Looking into the Lives and Health of Trans-border Indicator Species From Byron Crow, Project Coordinator



The Montana Raptor Institute for Research and Education, with support from groups and individuals, has now completed three years of an ongoing study to look into the lives of a family of peregrine falcons located near the north end of Flathead Lake.

This past summer we once again observed a double clutch, with the first clutch of four eggs being destroyed by the female, and the second clutch producing four eggs, with two young fledged on July 10th.

This is the third year that the female has destroyed the first clutch. This activity has led us to look into the subject of the presence of a possible chemical burden, brominated flame retardants (Brominated diphenyl ethers or BDEs) in the blood of the falcons. BDEs are used in textile production. How we came to look in this direction is another story, but with the research being done on BDEs and the symptoms exhibited by the female, BDEs provide us with a starting point.

We have one tool at our disposal which no other research organization has, that is, two video cams located at the cliff eyrie, one within the eyrie itself and the other on the ledge of the eyrie. Video documentation, along with future chemical analysis, will allow us to not only describe what chemical burden the peregrines are exposed to, but show what effect it has on their behavior and in their day-to-day activities.

This system was developed by MTRI in 2007 and runs from March to October, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The system was designed with a no-impact ideology in mind. It is man-portable, self contained, and best yet, when removed, no one can tell research had taken place. We went to great effort, right down to the color-matched grout, made for us by pulverizing a rock that we retrieved below the cliff, which we use to fill in the holes from the self extracting hangers which hold the cams in place.

Unlike the other 200,000 "nest cams," this camera system is located on a cliff and in a natural eyrie, not on a man-made structure. The camera has proven not to disturb the birds or promote unnatural activity.

Also, this season we reached another first. With the assistance of Bob Lee and the support of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we were able to place thermal tabs within the eyrie and on the cliff face. This will help us to see and graph the thermal characteristic of this geological site. During incubation, thermal regulation is an issue, particularly not getting too hot more than too cold, and this is a great first step in gathering such data from other eyrie sites across the state and seeing what, if any, characteristic plays a part in success of a clutch and the stability of ambient eyrie temperatures.

Any questions or comments may be directed to: byron@mtraptor.org, www.mtraptor.org or <http://mtraptor.ning.com/>



commons.wikimedia.org



WORDS OF JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

*I never for a day gave up listening to the songs of our birds,
or watching their peculiar habits, or delineating them in the best way I could.*



Vireo Thrush by Larry McQueen

Northern Flicker, continued from page 2 ...

... common throughout North America, there is evidence of a population decline noted since 1966, possibly due to loss of suitable nesting and foraging snags, competition with European Starlings, and pesticide applications on lawns, golf courses, and agricultural fields.

I do realize that everyone may not be excited about Northern Flickers. They can bring headaches if they decide that your house should become their house, too. The best way to keep flickers off your house is to provide them with suitable trees or snags for nesting nearby. Flickers are territorial, so if you have a pair nesting in a tree or snag in your yard, they will keep others off your house. Flickers will also forage on your house if there are insects hiding in the siding or roofing, so keeping the cracks and crevices to a minimum will also help.

To encourage Northern Flickers (and kestrels, bluebirds and swallows) to nest in your yard, allow some of your older trees with decay to remain. Flickers are not strong excavators and need softer wood to excavate their nest cavities. If a tree or snag is unsafe, consider topping it to 10 or 20 feet in height so they can have a nest site and you don't have to worry about high winds. They like larger diameter trees and snags. While gathering firewood, first examine the snag for signs of wildlife use. If you see a cavity or recent foraging signs, choose another snag for firewood. Other things you can do to help Northern Flicker populations are to discourage European Starlings from nesting in your yard. Finally, choosing lawn products that are wildlife friendly can help this ground feeder. Together, there are many things we can do to keep Northern Flickers strong in their role as the unsung hero of the cavity nesting world.

KIDZ

Let's Learn More About The Snowy Owl

By Abigail Fiske (West Valley School 5th grader)

With illustration by Meghan Levanen (West Valley School 5th grader)



O

The Snowy Owl's field marks make it unique and different from other owls. They have a round head, yellow eyes, black bill and dark brown spots. Their feathers are mostly white. Their wingspan stretches out 45 – 60 inches. Their average height is 20 to 27 inches. Their weight is 59 to 70 ounces. That's 3.5 to 4.5 pounds. Their call is more like a hiss, scream or snapping of their bill. They are mostly silent. These are some facts about the Snowy Owl's description.

R

Snowy owls living habits are incredible! Let's take a look. First, here is some of the food they eat. They love to eat lemmings, ducks, voles, geese, hares, and rabbits. After they are done swallowing their prey whole their stomach is not strong enough to digest the bones, fur and feathers, so they cough it back up. That is called a "pellet." I wonder what a Snowy Owl's pellet is like? Also, their hunting method is amazing. They hunt at night and during the day. They will wait until they see their prey. Then once it is able to reach it, it will approach. With its talons, it will come down and scoop it up. It will then tear the animal apart. Lastly, Snowy Owls nest on the ground in the Arctic. They don't normally have nests. They scratch out a small-shaped bowl in the ground.

N

Here is some information about Snowy Owl's habitat. First, their range is in Canada, Alaska, and the very northern part of the U.S. They live mostly in the open plains and tundra of the polar regions. They are also seen in the intermountain valleys or where it is very snowy. A place close by where you might see Snowy Owls is the bird refuge outside Ronan in Nine Pipes. That is where I have seen them.

E

A famous Snowy Owl that you might be familiar with is Hedwig from the Harry Potter books. In the book, Hedwig is a pet, but I think the best place for any owl is to be in nature. If you would like to find out more about Snowy Owls, there is a book called Snowy Owl, written by Ansley Ford and Denver Holt with some interesting facts in it.



Dan Casey

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RECYCLING NEWS



As promised in last month's Recycling News, here's information about sorting your recyclables. Since we are fortunate to have FVCC's Recycling Club making a special trip to the Summit to help us all recycle, it's only courteous to help them by bringing your recyclable items ready to go into their bins. Sort into these categories:

- * white paper, magazines (envelopes with plastic windows are OK, keep shredded paper separated)
- * brown and gray paper, boxes, grocery bags, paper towel/TP tubes
- * aluminum cans (they don't have to be flattened)
- * steel cans (and their lids)
- * newspapers and inserts
- * plastics #1 and #2 only (milk jugs, juice bottles, dairy containers—check bottom for #)
- * corrugated cardboard (look for the wavy lines between the layers)



Items that cannot be recycled with FVCC include glass, clothing (take to thrift stores), plastic shopping bags (take to container at grocery store), packaging material like bubble wrap, peanuts, etc. (take to UPS store), small appliances and electronics (take to annual electronics recycling drive), hazardous wastes like paints, used motor oil, etc. (take to County Landfill haz-waste area), batteries (recycle at Home Depot, Staples, etc.), and any of the above "sortable" categories that have food or dirt on them.

If you have extra food, take it to the Food Bank; unneeded books, donate to the AAUW annual book sale; kids' outgrown toys, donate to a day care center; burned out CFLs, recycle at Home Depot. There are lots of other possibilities, but whatever you have, don't just throw it away! Let's keep our landfill from becoming the next local ski mountain!

Kay Mitchell



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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. Meetings start at 7:00PM and include 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.

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