



the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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Join the Great Backyard Bird Count

February 12-15, 2010



Judy Howie Photo

Bird watchers coast to coast are invited to take part in the 13th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15, 2010. Participants in this free event will join tens of thousands of

volunteers counting birds in their own backyards, local parks or wildlife refuges.

Each checklist submitted by the "citizen scientists" helps researchers at Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how the birds are doing and how to protect them. Last year, participants turned in more than 93,600 checklists online, creating the continent's largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded.

Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from novices to experts. Participants count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and report their sightings online at www.birdcount.org.

"The GBBC is a perfect first step towards the intensive monitoring needed to discover how birds are responding to environmental change," said Janis Dickinson, director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab. "Winter is a vulnerable period for birds, so winter bird distributions are likely to be very sensitive to change. There is only one way—citizen science—to gather data on private lands where people live; GBBC has

been doing this across the continent for many years.

2009 GBBC data highlighted a huge southern invasion of Pine Siskins across much of the eastern United States. Participants counted 279,469 Pine Siskins on 18,528

checklists, as compared to the previous high of 38,977 birds on 4,069 checklists in 2005. Failure of seed crops farther north caused the siskins to move south to find their favorite food.

On the www.birdcount.org website, participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during the count. The site has tips to help identify birds and special materials for educators. Participants may enter the GBBC photo contest by uploading images taken during the count. All participants are entered in a drawing for prizes that include bird feeders, binoculars, books, CDs, and many other great birding products.

For more information about the GBBC, visit the website at www.birdcount.org. Or contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at (800) 843-2473 or gbbc@cornell.edu, or Audubon at citizen-science@audubon.org or 202-861-2242 ext 3050.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is made possible, in part, by generous support from Wild Birds Unlimited.



FEBRUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, February 8, 2010: Flathead Audubon General Meeting. 7 PM, The Summit, Conference Room 3. Joe Giersch presents a program about aquatic insects in Glacier National Park. See page 3.

Monday, February 1, 2010: Flathead Audubon Board of Directors Meeting. 6 PM at 295 Third Ave. E.N. All are welcome.

Monday, February 1, 2010: Flathead Audubon Education Committee Meeting. 4:30-5:30 PM, Colter Coffee, South Main Street, Kalispell.

Sunday, February 21, 2010: Field Trip to Mission Valley. See page 9 for details!



BIRD OF THE MONTH

By Lewis Young

Lewis's Woodpecker

Named for Captain Meriwether Lewis, who first scientifically described them during the 1804-1806 Lewis & Clark Expedition, Lewis's woodpeckers are unusual in that much of the year they feed mostly by catching insects in acrobatic flight. They swoop out from a perch like a flycatcher or circle in the air like a swallow to catch insects.

The Lewis's woodpecker may be identified by its distinctive colors, flight pattern, and behavior. Although dark overall at a distance, upon closer inspection the adults are very distinctive, with a greenish-black back and head, pinkish belly, pale gray collar and breast, and a dark red face. The wings and tail are all dark without any white patches or spots. Males and females are similar in appearance. Juveniles lack the collar and red face, and the belly may be only faintly pink.

At 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches long with a 21-inch wingspan, the Lewis's woodpecker is only 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch longer than the common Hairy Woodpecker but has a 6 inch greater wingspan. The long wings make deep, slow beats, resulting in a more buoyant flight than most woodpeckers and when combined with the occasional glide, the overall flight pattern and dark coloring can result in them being mistaken for a crow or jay. Unique to woodpeckers in our area, their frequent short flights from a perch to capture flying insects are another good clue to their identification. They are somewhat social and may form loose groups.

The range of this species covers much of the west, but its distribution can be patchy and inconsistent from year-to-year. The breeding range overlaps the range of Ponderosa Pine in North America, from southern British Columbia into southern New Mexico and from eastern South Dakota to the Pacific Coast. Lewis's woodpecker winters generally in the southern half of its breeding range. The distribution of this species has been reduced, especially in western British Columbia, western Washington, and southern California, but its range has expanded into southeastern Colorado, most likely because of habitat changes that include the presence of mature cottonwoods and corn. In the Flathead Valley and northwest Montana they are occasionally found in spring and summer and rarely in fall and winter. In fact, they are rarely found anywhere in Montana during winter. Christmas Bird Count records for Montana show only a handful of records and several of them from the Bitterroot Valley. Locally, none have been reported for the Bigfork or Kalispell counts and 1 for the Eureka count.



commons.wikimedia.org

Lewis's woodpecker permanently inhabits the southern half or more of its breeding range, but northern populations, like in north-west Montana, begin to migrate toward winter ranges in late summer. Usually traveling in flocks of a few to 150 and always moving slowly at low altitudes (10 to 500 feet), these migrants do not appear to follow traditional routes, but rather move through areas with the best food supplies. Migrants arrive on their wintering grounds in mid-fall and depart in March or April.

Lewis's woodpeckers breed in open forests of pine or cottonwood with ground cover, snags, and insects. Ponderosa pine forests are preferred at higher elevations, while riparian woodlands dominated by cottonwoods are preferred at lower elevations. Burned pine forests are also used and appear more productive for the woodpeckers. Winter sites are usually oak woodlands or commercial orchards and are chosen for available food storage places.

Diet varies by season and includes insects, acorns and other nuts, fruit, and cultivated corn. They capture insects from the air, the vegetation and on the ground. The Lewis's rarely excavate trees for wood-boring insects, but often fly after ants, bees, wasps, beetles, and grasshoppers. When insects are abundant, they hide the surplus. In fall and winter, they store broken nuts and grains in crevices of bark or cracks in telephone poles or fence posts; individuals protect their own cache, though several woodpeckers may use the same tree, pole, or post for storage.

Nesting begins in mid-spring, earliest in the southern and latest in the northern part of its range. Pairs appear to be monogamous and may re-form each year on the same territory, which the male defends with calls like the rapid "churr." Drumming is done only during courtship and is described as a weak roll followed by several taps. A raised wing display flashes the male's pink underparts to attract his mate and to warn intruders. Nesting is sometimes colonial.

The pair excavates a hole or refurbishes an old one in a large decaying tree, usually pine or cottonwood. Over a lining of wood chips, the female lays an average of 6-7 white eggs that hatch after only 12-16 days. The adults share incubation during the day but only the male incubates at night. Naked, blind, and unable to regulate their own temperature, the hatchlings require constant care. In about a month, the young leave the hole, and within a day or two, take their first flight. After another week or so ...

(Lewis's Woodpecker, continued on page 7)

February 2010 Program

GLACIER'S UNDERWATER WILDLIFE: AQUATIC INSECTS IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

At our February program, we will learn about the fascinating insects that live in the streams and rivers of Glacier National Park. Through the underwater photography of Joe Giersch, we will get a rare view of these often overlooked animals. We will learn about their adaptations, fascinating natural histories, and rarely-seen habitats.

Joe Giersch has worked in and around the streams and rivers of Glacier National Park for much of the last decade. His scientific field work takes him through backcountry and wilderness terrain in all weather conditions to study the unique habitats of the macroinvertebrates found in alpine streams and lakes. He received a Bachelor of Science degree from Evergreen State College and a Master of Science in Entomology from Montana State University. Joe's master's thesis was on the evolutionary relationships and biology of a group of caddisflies common in alpine streams. While working at the Flathead Lake Biological Station in the late 1990s, he assisted with several aquatic research projects in Glacier National Park. From 2003-2005, Joe worked as a seasonal fisheries technician in the Park. For the past five years, has been working as a contract entomologist, identifying aquatic insects from stream ecology projects. In addition, he also does biological illustrations for researchers and educators. Joe lives in West Glacier.

Don't miss this program! We meet at 7:00 PM on Monday, February 8, at The Summit, 205 Sunnyview Lane in Kalispell.



Sunflower Seed Sale Results in Cash for Flathead Audubon



For the third consecutive year, Flathead Audubon and Western Building Centers have joined together to supply our members with sunflower seeds. The sale of sunflower seeds from October 1 through December 31, 2009, has resulted in a donation of \$250.00 from Doug Shanks, general manager of WBC, to Bob Lee, President of FAS. On behalf of the entire FAS Board, I would like to thank all who participated in last year's seed sale and I encourage everyone to support their local WBC store throughout this coming year.

Mary Nelesen, Seed Sale Chairperson

Flathead Lake North Shore Designated an Important Bird Area



The North Shore of Flathead Lake is the newest Important Bird Area (IBA) in Montana. The designated area includes most of the north shore of Flathead Lake - about 3,600 acres, comprising the Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area and adjacent lands. The North Shore supports a wide diversity of birds during all seasons, particularly during migration, when the area is heavily used by flocks of waterfowl, water birds and shorebirds. About 230 bird species are known to use the area.

IBAs are sites that provide essential habitat for breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds. Identification of a site as an IBA indicates its unique importance for birds. The IBA identification process provides a data-driven means for cataloging the most important sites for birds throughout the country and the world. Flathead Lake North Shore was designated as an IBA in November by the Montana IBA Committee. For more information on IBAs, visit the IBA section of National Audubon's website: Audubon.org/bird/iba.

"Voices for the North Fork"

Last month, *The Pileated Post* provided information on how you can help save the North Fork of the Flathead River from coal strip mines and energy projects in the Canadian headwaters of that river. Now there is yet another way you can help.

This month, *Headwaters Montana* is kicking off a new campaign, "Voices for the North Fork," which promises to add further momentum to the efforts. The goal of the campaign is to increase the membership of *Headwaters Montana* to a total of 2010 by the end of this year. This increased membership will give *Headwaters Montana* more clout when dealing with industry and politicians and so make it more effective in its efforts to protect the headwaters of the North Fork. There is no membership fee.

To learn about *Headwaters Montana* and sign up as a member, call Dave Hadden at 837-0783, or visit www.headwatersmontana.org. To learn about the "Voices for the North Fork" campaign, go to <https://app.e2ma.net/app/view:CampaignPublic/id:36782.6578446073/rid:066a4069b6feb3558c100f68f909da26>.



BOARD MEMBER VIEWPOINT

From Kathy Ross, FAS Refuges Committee Chair

Notes from the Swan River National Wildlife Refuge

When I think of our local wildlife refuges, in particular the Swan River National Wildlife Refuge, wonderful images of birds and wildlife fill my mind. But also I recall the colorful wildlife of the human persuasion, folks like Ellie Jones, Neal and Patty Brown, and Leslie Kehoe and many other volunteers who have helped the Fish and Wildlife Service with their job of managing these areas, to conserve fish, wildlife and their habitat for the continuing benefit of all. They inspire us to continue their work.

For an enthusiastic aspiring naturalist and citizen scientist such as myself, the refuges, spread numerous around our local landscape, have become outdoor field guides packed with scat, tracks, nests and all sorts of new information about the natural world outside my window.

A year round observatory of animal movement and behavior in the area, the Swan River Refuge is a wonderful riparian forest/wetland/grassland area for experiencing birds of prey and the spring bird migration/nesting seasons. The birding opportunities continue in the winter months but can take on an exciting difference; delicate wing patterns, captured in fresh January snow, and a patch of vole fur, speak a story of an unidentified raptor and the success of a hunt the night before. I love contemplating these mysteries, even though I will never be privy to the entire story. It is enough that it is happening around me all the time. It is enough to just be the appreciating curious observer.

For interested visitors, the Swan River Refuge is situated at the south end of Swan Lake, just beyond the town. Be aware that weather plays wildly with this wide open area between two mountain ranges. That fresh January snow can easily be scoured from the landscape in minutes by wild intense winds moving out of the north. Blizzard conditions can develop quickly as a winter squall moves off of Swan Lake. When this happens, I have found it best to find one of the thickly-foliaged conifers sprinkled in this landscape and hide out until it passes. In the spring and summer, tumultuous thunderstorms move across the open valley. The sunsets are incredible. In the fall especially, the sun's last rays color the tall wetland grasses ripe with golden seed. Rich brown heads of cattails, earlier season perches for the dozens of Redwing and Yellow-headed blackbirds, now become part of the layers of autumn color.

In the spring, the blackbirds are lead singers in a symphony of bird song, joined by the winnowing



of snipes, twittering of tree, barn, and violet-green swallows, honking of Canadian geese, calls of sandhill cranes, American Bitterns, and bald eagles who nest a mile away in a cottonwood paradise along the river. And all of this is joined by the chorus of frogs and the howl of a distant coyote.

One spring, exploring for frog eggs or possibly emerging tadpoles in shallow pools and water-filled vehicle ruts on the bog road, I found the frog chorus was unusually boisterous. Stopping through the rising spring waters on the road, I discovered, in an open wet area off to the side, dozens of mating frogs. Perhaps I was a little early looking for tadpoles?

It is important to be aware that most of the refuges are closed from March 1-July 15 to limit disturbance to nesting birds. The Swan Refuge is no exception, except there is an excellent observation deck and limited travel down the only road; let the signs be your guide. From the road and observation deck in the summer, the elk herd can easily be seen in the evenings grazing along the edges of the trees that form the boundary to the south between the refuge and land in trust to the Nature Conservancy. Also, Spring Creek, running through the refuge and under the road, is home to otters, beaver, muskrat and mink. Even though you may not see them all when you visit, their calling cards of scat are often there and their tracks are often visible in the mud. The winter blanket of snow reveals a wealth of stories and activity when humans were not present -- otter slides and latrines along the creek, deep postholing tracks of the elk herd, voles creating patterns of tunnels across the entire landscape with coyote or fox tracks paralleling their tunnels. All of this is there for the observer traveling on cross country skis or snowshoes until March 1. These are permitted activities along with hiking in warmer weather, non-commercial wildlife photography and hunting and fishing during regulated seasons.

To landscapes like the refuges that give so much, asking nothing in return, except perhaps an unspoken request for respect, there are many opportunities to "pay it forward." A special thanks to those who have so graciously spent time and energy to maintain these beautiful refuge habitats. I look forward to a continued appreciation of the Swan Refuge as well as the other refuges and WPAs in our area, through field trips and volunteer projects. If you have an interest in exploring the winter landscapes, please contact me by email. After mid-January, weather conditions permitting, field trips are possible.

LOCAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT SUMMARIES

(Full count data is available on the FAS website: www.FlatheadAudubon.org)



36th BIGFORK CBC: Warm, Rainy & Foggy

By Dan Casey

Thirty-three volunteers participated in the annual Bigfork Christmas Bird Count, Saturday December 19, 2009. On a day with temperatures more than 50 degrees warmer than last year's count, our total of 12,285 individuals of all species counted was above our recent average. But for just the sixth time since 1987, we failed to find at least 80 species. The 74 species recorded this year is our lowest since 1996.

We did find a Yellow-headed Blackbird in the Lower Valley, just the second time we have had this common summer bird on the count. Wild Turkey numbers rebounded somewhat from their recent downward trend, with 444 counted. We recorded new high counts for Horned Grebe (67), Gadwall (10), Brown Creeper (18), and Bohemian Waxwing (3949), and had more total gulls than ever before (489).

This was the first time since 1982, and only the third time in 36 years that we counted no American Coots, most likely a result of the early fall deep freeze which sent them further south on Flathead Lake. We also missed Gray Partridge, Clark's Nutcracker, Pine Grosbeak and Evening Grosbeak. Single Double-crested Cormorant, Wilson's Snipe, Marsh Wren and White-winged Crossbill sightings helped round out the list. We had four additional species count week but not on count day (Canvasback, Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel, Prairie Falcon).



UPPER SWAN VALLEY CBC: Wet & Icy

By Jody Wolff



Our 17th annual CBC was held Saturday December 19, 2009. Seven people participated in the field and several others contributed as feeder watchers. It was a mild day with temps ranging from 33-37 degrees, but very wet and rainy with icy conditions.

Only 27 species (none new) were counted, including a count week great-grey owl, belted kingfisher, magpie and golden eagle. It was our lowest tally ever at only 340 individual birds seen. Highlights of the day were a rough-legged hawk, only the second time one has been seen on count day, and high counts for wild turkeys (28) and winter wrens (3). The most common birds counted were mountain chickadees (53), bohemian waxwings (50), ravens (49), and black-capped chickadees (40). I think the weather was a major factor in the low numbers this year.

TROY CBC: Goldfinch Captured

By Donald Jones



We had our Troy CBC on Sunday, December 20, 2009. Weather almost made it up to "poor," as the temps varied widely between 34 and 36 degrees with a non-stop drizzle. Eleven participants braved the elements and came up with 42 species.

We did not find any really notable species, though we did pick up Gadwall, Kestrel and Snipe. Redpolls and Pine Grosbeaks were absent this year, as well as Northern Shrikes and Townsend's Solitaires. Also absent were Rock Dove and European Starling, and we actually had to search for a House Sparrow.

A particularly interesting observation was made by my wife. She spotted (and photographed) a Northern Pygmy Owl with an American Goldfinch in its talons -- a two-for-one on the count.



NINEPIPE CBC: Bewick's Wren Returns

By Jim Rogers

Twenty-three participants observed 63 species and counted 20,317 individual birds during the Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge CBC on Sunday December 20, 2009. High counts were established for the following 6 species: Bald eagle (50); Blue grouse (2); Turkey (103); Mourning dove (154); Eurasian-collared dove (38); and Blue jay (2).

The count highlight was a Bewick's Wren at the intersection of Post Creek with McDonald Lake Road (about 1 mile east from Hwy 93). Interestingly, a Bewick's wren was found at the same location on the 2003 count and another a few miles away along the same creek during the 2006 count.

A count first was a possible White-crowned sparrow, pending rare bird documentation. Thanks to everyone for a great effort in less than ideal birding conditions - foggy and rainy all day.



*A wonderful bird is a pelican; his bill will hold more than his belican.
- Dixon Lanire Merritt*

LOCAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT SUMMARIES (continued...)

(Full count data is available on the FAS website: www.FlatheadAudubon.org)

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK CBC: Where Were the Finches?

By Steve Gniadek



Eighteen observers participated in the Glacier NP CBC on Sunday, December 20, 2009, recording 226 individual birds of 30 species along the 10 survey routes and at one feeder. The number of birds was about half those counted last year, and well below the long-term average. The species count was more than the 26 recorded last year, though about average since 1974, but below the average since 2000. Rain throughout the day and difficult travel conditions, with about 6-18 inches of wet snow cover, hampered survey efforts, and likely influenced count results.

Chickadees were the most abundant birds, with 20 Black-capped, 2 Mountain and 61 chickadees not identified to species. Forty-three Common Goldeneye and 15 Common Ravens were the only other species in double figures. One new species was added to the count list; a single Gadwall was seen with a pair of Mallards on lower McDonald Creek.

Eight Trumpeter Swans was a new high count, one more than last year. Despite near-average numbers of Common Goldeneye, overall waterfowl numbers were below average, especially for Canada Goose and Mallard. The shallower waters, like the oxbows on lower McDonald Creek, were mostly frozen, perhaps explaining the lower numbers of Mallards and Canada Geese. Only 5 Bald Eagles were documented, fewer than the 17 from last year and the lowest count since 2000.

Besides the Gadwall, other lucky finds, though not count firsts, included a Northern Pygmy Owl, a Clark's Nutcracker, a Brown Creeper, and 3 Pine Grosbeaks. No waxwings were seen this year, after a count high of 230 Bohemian Waxwings last year. Noteworthy by their absence were the finches. There were no Red Crossbills, Common Redpolls, nor Evening Grosbeaks, and only 2 Pine Siskins.

Four species were seen count week but not on count day: Horned Grebe, Ruffed Grouse, House Finch and White-throated Sparrow. The sparrow was at a feeder in West Glacier until the day before the count, and hasn't been seen since!

Once again, the Crown of the Continent Research Learning Center provided a warm and dry meeting place, stocked with warm drinks and snacks to refuel the hearty observers who braved the rain and difficult snow conditions. Thanks to all participants.



Jeff Lemons Photo

KALISPELL CHRISTMAS (NEW YEAR'S) BIRD COUNT: High Totals for 19 Species

By Dan Casey



Marianne diAntonio

The Kalispell CBC on Sunday January 3, 2010, had a record turnout of 52 people, and cooperative weather led to a nice total of 70 species found on this year's (11th annual) Kalispell count. We had our third-highest count with 19,328 individuals.

Although we did not add any new species to our cumulative list of 109 species seen over the 11 years of this count, we did tie or set new high totals for a remarkable 19 species! These included Great Blue Heron (9), Canada Goose (3211), Bufflehead (38), Hooded Merganser (12), and Bald Eagle (86). Among our new high count of 42 Red-tailed Hawks were 11 "Harlan's" Hawks, also a new high. They were joined by a record high number of Rough-legged Hawks (52), Wild Turkeys (232), Wilson's Snipe (4), Rock Pigeons (817) and Eurasian Collared-Doves (26), as well as 2 Northern Pygmy-Owls, 16 Hairy Woodpeckers, 304 Northern Flickers, 438 Black-billed Magpies, 228 Mountain Chickadees, 769 European Starlings, 5 Western Meadowlarks, and 1,498 House Sparrows.

This was the first time in 11 years that no American Tree Sparrows were found on the count, and following our remarkable year for rare gulls last year, we had only Herring and Ring-billed Gulls this year. Another four species (Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, Northern Harrier, and Evening Grosbeak) were seen count week, but not on count day.

Thanks to all who participated in what has proven to be a rewarding and fun "new" Flathead Valley count.



Dennis Ashjorn Photo

FREEZOUT WHITEOUT!

Dan Casey will lead the field trip again this year to Freezout Lake near Choteau, on March 27-28. Look for full details in your March *Pileated Post!*



Jim Arnold Photo

Thanks!

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

Eagle \$1000+
Art Ortenberg



Merlin \$100+
Paula Smith
Brent & Kay Mitchell
In memory of Ferne Cohen



My Own Vision \$25+
Wayne & Rosemarie Worthington
D.L. Blank



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

* * * *

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SCIENCE TIDBIT

VOCAL COPYING BY PINE SISKINS

Source: Google Search for **Sibley Guide Pine Siskin**



On this excellent website, David Sibley discusses the ability of Pine Siskins to copy other birds' vocalizations. By listening to Pine Siskins in his own backyard, Sibley was able to identify vocalizations of 14 other species, including American Robin (flight squeal), Eastern Phoebe (song phrase) and Ruby-crowned Kinglet (whistled song phrase). The fact that this ability is not commonly known is an indicator of how much we do **not** know about bird song. Of special interest to Montana birders is his update about the Pine Siskins at the Pine Butte Guest Ranch. He was able to hear copying from 7 other species, including Common Redpoll, Evening Grosbeak and Western Tanager.

Sibley also proposes an interesting new tool. The other bird vocalizations that are included in a Pine Siskin's repertoire are an indication of where it has been. My goal is to find a Montana Pine Siskin singing copies of a Siberian bird.

(Lewis's Woodpecker, continued from page 2)

... of feeding, the family joins flocks of other woodpeckers until winter, when individuals and pairs maintain their own food supplies.

The population and habitat status of Lewis's woodpecker is of concern. Based on data from the Breeding Bird Survey and the Christmas Bird Counts, the population may have declined by more than half between the mid-

1960's and 2005. The Lewis's woodpecker is on Audubon's Watchlist, listed as "Imperiled" in British Columbia, Canada, and of "Special Concern" in several western states. A close association with open-canopy forests (ponderosa pine and cottonwoods along rivers) has made Lewis's Woodpecker susceptible to habitat loss and degradation.

Although Lewis's woodpeckers are not common in northwest Montana in the spring and summer, persistent searching in areas with numerous large cottonwoods near open fields or meadows can pay off with a good look at these strikingly colored birds and a chance to see their unusual flycatching behavior.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR and MAKE YOUR PLANS!

Montana Audubon's annual Bird Festival

Wings Across the Big Sky

Join us! June 4 - 6, 2010 in Missoula

Montana Audubon is working with the Five Valleys and Bitterroot Audubon Chapters to plan another fantastic festival June 4 - 6. We have 15 field trips planned for Saturday that range from the local Clark Fork River Grass Valley Important Bird Area, where Sora Rail and Lewis's woodpecker may be observed, to a 750-acre working cattle ranch west of Frenchtown. All field trips have been planned so that everyone can make it back to enjoy lunch speaker, Kate Stone. Saturday evening will be filled with a social hour, banquet, silent auction, and fabulous raffle items. We will also host our dessert auction. Sunday has 15 exciting field trips that range from a beautiful drive to Upsata Lake to longer field trips like the 6-mile hike through Douglas Fir and Ponderosa Pine forests. Information about conservation, habitat, and research projects will be shared. With 15 planned field trips on Saturday and Sunday, there will be something to meet everyone's fitness level and birding interest. More information about field trips, speakers, lodging, registration and other highlights will be posted in early March at <http://mtaudubon.org>. Until then, **save the date** and plan to be in Missoula in early June! *Group sizes will be limited so register early!*



What: **Bigfork Bird Club**

When: Tuesday, February 2, 7PM

Where: Harvest Foods Coffee Shop

History: In 1974, several area residents organized Bigfork's first Christmas Bird Count. This created a lot of enthusiasm for additional birding activities such as field trips and programs. Thus formed the Lower Flathead Valley Bird Club, which became the Bigfork Bird Club. By 1977, the Bigfork Bird Club became Flathead Audubon Society, a chapter of National Audubon. In 1994, Flathead Audubon moved its meeting place from Bigfork to Kalispell.

While I remain an active, supportive member of Flathead Audubon, it is my hope that restarting the Bigfork Bird Club will give those in the Bigfork area a close meeting place, where we can learn and expand our knowledge of our local birds.



It would be nice to find out more of the early history of the Bigfork Bird Club. If anyone has historical information or stories to tell, please come to the February meeting and share. Some of the early members of the Bigfork Bird Club were Barb Baxter, Elmer Sprunger, Jack Whitney, Dan Sullivan, Dave Shaner, Jean Robocker, Elly Jones, Bob Lopp.

Please join Pattie and Neal Brown (837-5018), February 2, 2010, 7PM, at Harvest Foods Coffee Shop.



Beauty of Birds 2010



Flathead Audubon's very popular spring bird class, Beauty of Birds, will again be offered April 7, 14, 21, and 28. Taught by Ansley Ford, FAS Education Chair and Montana Environmental Educator of the Year for 2008, this class is a must for anyone, novice or expert, who wants to learn about and enjoy local birds.

Sandhill Crane Migration Focus of 40th Annual Rivers and Wildlife Celebration

by Kevin Poague, Audubon Nebraska

The 40th annual Rivers and Wildlife Celebration will be held March 18-21, 2010, in Kearney, Nebraska. Organized by Audubon Nebraska and the Nebraska Bird Partnership, the conference gathers nature enthusiasts from across the country to witness the migration of over half a million sandhill cranes and millions of waterfowl and other birds through central Nebraska. Events include guided field trips, workshops, a family fun room, and daily visits to river blinds operated by Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary for up-close views of cranes roosting on the Platte River.

Local and national speakers will present information on a variety of wildlife and conservation topics. Main speakers are Scott Weidensaul, author of more than two dozen natural history books, including *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with*

Migratory Birds, a Pulitzer Prize finalist; Mike Forsberg, nature photographer and author of *Great Plains: America's Lingering Wild*; Ron Klataske, executive director of Audubon of Kansas; and Chris Wood, eBird Project Leader, Cornell Lab of Ornithology. More than twenty local environmental organizations will have information booths and hands-on activities on Saturday.

The celebration is open to the general public. Register at www.nebraska.audubon.org. Or contact Audubon Nebraska to be put on the mailing list: Nebraska@audubon.org; 402/797-2301. Rowe Sanctuary has information about viewing the sandhill crane migration, www.rowsanctuary.org. Or call 308/468-5282.



KIDZ



Let's Learn More About Birds in Winter Staying Cozy and Warm!

By Mariah Silverman, 8th Grade, Kalispell Middle School, Ms. Garlie's Class

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Have you ever looked out the window on a winter day and noticed the fluttering movement of birds? Have you ever wondered how birds can possibly stay active in freezing weather? You may know that some birds migrate, making a long journey to a warmer climate in order to continue finding food sources.

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Other birds, however, have physical and behavioral adaptations which allow them to survive in a changing environment. You can even help in making your yard more winter-friendly for birds!

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First, all birds have three major physical adaptations, which include feathers, legs and feet, and fat reserves. Birds' feathers give them wonderful protection from the winter's cold. Some birds even grow extra feathers for a late fall molt to give them a thicker winter coat. Also special oils on the bird's feathers give them more protection from the cold and also make them waterproof. The legs and feet of birds have scales that help minimize the loss of heat. Lastly, birds build up fat reserves for insulation and energy during the fall when food is most abundant.

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Next, the five main behavioral adaptations are fluffing, tucking, sunning, shivering, and roosting. Fluffing makes an air pocket that gives birds protection from the cold weather. Tucking is an unusual way for birds to shield themselves from the cold. They stand on one leg and crouch down until their feathers are covering their legs. Sunning is when a bird uses the sun's solar heat to warm its body. Birds raise their feathers slightly, which allows the sun's heat to warm the bird's skin and feathers. Shivering allows birds to raise their body heat. Shivering is only used in the extreme cold, due to the fact that it uses much-needed calories. Lastly, roosting happens when several small birds like the bluebird, titmice, and chickadees

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all come together in a large flock at night. They do this to help share body heat to keep them all warm. They will usually do this at the bottom of a tree trunk or close to any dark surface. If you are interested in learning even more about bird adaptations, go to the website <http://birding.about.com/od/birdingbasics>.

Four ways you can help keep birds warm are: offer nutritious food, keep feeders full, offer liquid water, and provide shelter. Some food that winter birds will enjoy are a selection of seeds, suet, scraps, and other food items that are high in calories and fat which will help them be able to make more body heat. Keep feeders full! This will help birds replenish their energy after a long cold day or night. Offer liquid water. This will help birds save energy. They can melt snow but it causes them to use energy that they will need to survive. Provide a shelter if possible. This will help them find a place to stay when it is too cold out. A brush pile would be a good start. Just find some old tree or bush branches and pile them up.

The next time you look out your window in the winter and see birds, remember that they have many ways to stay warm, but you can help! Make a brush pile, offer fresh water, and provide feed. Now your yard will be a little more bird friendly! One activity for helping winter birds replenish their fat reserves is to make a bird feeder from a pinecone. Just fill the pinecone with peanut butter, roll it in seeds, tie a string around the cone and then hang it from a tree. This birdfeeder idea is one of many at <http://www.ehow.com/how/10858-make-suet-bird.html> or www.creativekidsathome.com. Be sure to keep binoculars and a bird book handy so that you can identify the visitors to your homemade bird feeder!



A FIELD TRIP FOR YOU!

Sunday, February 21, 2010: A 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. There is always a surprise or two. Meet at Park 'n Ride at the intersection of Hwys 93 and 83 near Somers at 8:00AM. Bring lunch and winter weather gear. Please contact Leslie Kehoe to sign up for the trip at 837-4467, in the evening.





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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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