



the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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MARCH 2011

MEET OUR NEW CONSERVATION EDUCATOR

As we welcomed the month of February, we sadly said farewell to Nancy Zapotocki, who has been our incredibly innovative and successful conservation educator since spring 2007. Nancy will be moving to the east coast, where she will be closer to her family and step into a new job with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Nancy will be working at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown WV, where she will be a Training Specialist with Outdoor Recreation.

Nancy, we will miss you. Thank you for all that you have done to build Flathead Audubon Society's conservation education project into the thriving program that it is today. Our best wishes go with you on your journey and in your new job.

As we say goodbye to Nancy, Flathead Audubon is pleased to welcome our new Conservation Educator, Ashley Emerson Mason. Ashley is very excited to be part of the Audubon team. She is currently working with Nancy to learn as much as she can, so that



the transition is as smooth as possible.

Ashley Mason is a veteran educator. She will draw on nearly 20 years experience working in conservation and conservation education in Northwest Montana to continue the work that Nancy has started. Her experience includes work with Glacier National Park, Swan Ecosystem Center, Flathead Land Trust, Crown of the Continent Ecosystem Education Consortium, and The Glacier Institute.

Ashley lives in Kalispell with her husband, Doug, who teaches art at Glacier High School, and her daughters Annika (6) and Brynn (3), cat Simon and six chickens.

If you have questions for Ashley or are interested in helping in any part of Flathead Audubon Society's Conservation Education Program, Ashley would love to hear from you at AudubonAshley@gmail.com.

Welcome Ashley!



How are you doing on your New Years Resolutions?

Was one of your resolutions to sign up for the Electronic PILEATED POST?

Let us help you keep your resolve! Email lindawin@centurytel.net and say YES!

MARCH FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, March 14, 2011: Flathead Audubon General Meeting. 7 PM, Conference Room 3, The Summit. No recycling pickup this month. For program information, see page 3.

Monday, March 7, 2011: Flathead Audubon Board of Directors Meeting. 6 PM at 295 Third Ave. E.N. All are welcome.

Saturday, March 5, 2011: A Winter Morning of Snowshoeing in Glacier National Park. (see page 5)

Saturday and Sunday, March 26 and 27, 2011: FAS Freezout Lake Migration Field Trip. Details on page 5.)

Friday through Sunday, June 3—5, 2011: Wings over the Big Sky. Montana Audubon Bird Festival, Glasgow, MT (See pages 8-9 for details.)

BIRD OF THE MONTH

By Kathy Ross

SPRUCE GROUSE--A FOREST GUIDE

Imagine the shock of hearing an engine start up in the middle of a beautiful forest a long distance from road or apparent civilization. I know I was truly puzzled and a little disconcerted by this mechanical sound in the quiet of a peaceful woodland setting, only to discover it was an important



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aspect of the forest ecosystem. The "drumming", as it is referred to, of grouse in our mountain forests is actually the rapid wing beats of male grouse letting the ladies know he is available for the spring mating season. Although this "drumming" may be more associated with Rough Grouse populations, its cousin the Spruce Grouse also uses the wing beating to attract the females and adds an extra clapping of his wings above his back when displaying. This wing clapping has been described as sounding like a gunshot.

The Spruce Grouse is a medium size, dark, chicken-like bird found in coniferous forests of the northern U.S. and Canada. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology describes the male as "slate-gray overall with bold white spots on lower breast and belly and broken white line outlining a black throat." The back feathers are dark gray with blackish bars. A red comb above each eye is a distinctive identifying feature. The female of the species has strong barring, especially on the underside. The barring is set against an overall coloration of rufous to dark gray.

Of the two distinct subspecies of Spruce Grouse, the "Franklin's Grouse," *D.c. franklinii*, is most common in our area. It is distinguished by "an all black tail with small white spots on the feathers overlying it." Typically found in the northern part of Spruce Grouse range, the Taiga species, *D.c. canadensis*, is distinguished by rufous tips to the tail and no spots.

Unlike grassland species of grouse which during the mating season form leks of males in wild dance-like displays to attract females, Spruce Grouse males display singularly in their forested habitat. As in most Grouse species, the female may mate with more than one male and she then leaves the male display area for her protected ground nest, usually near the base of a tree, of needles, grass, and feathers. She will lay 4 to 7 eggs and raise her young alone. The downy-feathered young look much like their mother, blending unassumingly into the forest landscape.

Also unlike the grassland species, many of which are very much on the decline because of habitat loss, the Franklin's Grouse populations have a conservation status of "least concern." However their

populations sometimes change cyclically and fluctuate dramatically with disturbances in their forest habitat.

To feed, Spruce Grouse will forage in trees or on the ground for needles and buds of conifers and may even dine on berries, seeds or insects in the warmer summer season. An interesting fact about Spruce Grouse is that their digestive organs change with seasonal shifts in diet. Needing more food in the winter to maintain energy and mass, their gizzard grows by approximately 75% and other parts of the digestive tract might grow in length by 40%. Also they have a crop that "can store up to ten percent of the bird's weight in food, to be digested at night."

The Spruce Grouse is usually a quiet and well camouflaged little forest character. Because of its rather tame behavior around humans, it has been labeled "Fool's Hen." During hunting season its casual trail wanderings in the presence of humans become dangerous behavior. But when it flies, this usually quiet and inconspicuous bird can cause quite a commotion with its short powerful wings built for bursts of speed in the forest. Its sudden and unseen thrashing and flight when startled has left more than one hiker briefly responding -- Bear!, until a glimpse of wing reveals the real source of the disturbance.

I count myself fortunate when I encounter this beautiful bird on my forest wanderings and I am reminded of the respect shown grouse in Native American symbolism. For many tribes, experiencing the spiraling mating dance displays and "drumming" of grouse represents opening one's energy to the rhythms of life and cycles of nature, time, and self. "All human activity is a kind of dance and ritual."* And for native cultures, the drumming wing beats of grouse are symbolic of setting ones individual power loose on the wind, to become one with all of nature.

So when you have the privilege of the beautiful little Spruce Grouse leading you down a mountain path, consider it as the native people might have, not fool at all but your guide through its forest world.

References:
Cornell Lab of Ornithology, *All About Birds Website*
*ANIMAL SPEAKS by Ted Andrews
FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDS, by Don and Lillian Stokes
SIBLEY GUIDE TO BIRD LIFE AND BEHAVIOR
SIBLEY FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDS OF WESTERN
NORTH AMERICA, by David Allen Sibley
BIRD TRACKS AND SIGNS by Mark Elbroch with Eleanor Marks

March 2011 Program

A Photographical Trip over the Trails of Glacier National Park



For our FAS March General Meeting program, Brett Fisher will be presenting pictures of backpacking trips and hikes in Glacier National Park during 2010. Brett grew up in Columbia Falls and has always loved all that Glacier has to offer. He has been working on hiking every maintained trail in Glacier for about eight years and should be done by the end of this summer. Pictures will not be limited to birds but will include scenery and animals, as well. During this snowy/rainy/muddy time of the year, come and enjoy photos of Glacier National Park at its greenest and brightest.

Please join us in Room 3 of The Summit in Kalispell at 7 PM on March 14. The public is invited and treats and coffee are provided.

BOARD MEMBER CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

From Jan Wassink, Website Chair and Board Member

MULTI-FACETED MAGPIES



Simple black and white yet brilliant metallic iridescent plumage in certain light; readily visible yet eerily secretive; raucous but shy; common but fascinating; magpies are an enigma deserving much more attention from birders than they receive. Sometimes hated for their opportunistic taking of young of other birds, yet willing to do the dirty work of helping dispose of carrion, even their food habits are polarizing.

At the risk of being from here on and forever ostracized by the rest of the civilized birding world, I hereby declare that I like magpies. They are regular visitors at my suet feeders – actually they are more than visitors as they are the main consumers of the suet because of their ability to break off large chunks at a time. They also quickly disperse my daily offering of whole peanuts and dog food to the far reaches of our neighborhood, caching the tidbits in secretive places to be retrieved later – or not!

The nine or ten that frequent my backyard are avoided by the other birds at my feeders but I have never seen the magpies be even the slightest bit aggressive toward their cousins. Apparently their sheer size is enough of a factor to encourage the other birds to keep a respectful distance.

Last summer I was treated to behaviors that demonstrated I had a breeding pair somewhere nearby. In spite of my repeated attempts to locate the nest, the pair managed to keep that secret from me.

Those secretive habits vanished as soon as the six fledglings left the nest and the whole group descended on my backyard and immediately adopted it as their new home. For the next two weeks, I was observed as the youngsters watched me go about my yard work. At first it was only youthful innocence and limited flying ability that led them to stay put. But, long before they left, their flying skills were much improved as had their confidence that I was not a danger to them. Just before they moved on to explore other nearby habitats, the young birds merely observed me observing them, even when I sometimes approached within six feet of them to get just the right angle for a portrait.

Based on the slightly shorter tails of several of my current magpie visitors, I am guessing that at least a couple of those summer youngsters are still part of the entourage that visits my feeders each day. Unfortunately for my photographic endeavors, their fledgling innocence has been completely replaced by the extreme wariness normal for their species. At the first sign of movement in or around the backyard, they scatter to nearby observation perches until any intruders have disappeared.

So, ostracize me if you must, but I like and admire magpies. I find them fascinating as I observe their intriguing behavior. At times they appear more intelligent than some two legged creatures I know, this writer included.

Beauty of Birds

Spring is just around the corner, and so is our annual spring birding class! Brand new birder or seasoned expert, Beauty of Birds has something for you. The class offers hints on field marks, songs and calls, habitats, and local birding hotspots. Each class features a lesson, guest speaker, and local bird slideshow, with our final class culminating with practice in the field. Classes are Wednesday evenings in April from 6-8 PM in the Flathead High School large lecture room. The entire series is \$10. To sign up, call FHS at 751-3500. Hope to see you there!

Ansley Ford, Instructor



...to those below who have made special donations to Flathead Audubon from January 18 to February 18.

Kestrel

Linda & John Winnie
In Honor of Nancy Zapotocki,
Conservation Educator Extraordinaire



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:

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Please make checks payable to:

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P.O. Box 9173

Kalispell, MT 59904

Your gift is tax deductible.

Farewell to the Flathead

Nancy Zapotocki, Conservation Educator



Many of you heard that I am leaving to go back east. My heart calls me closer to family and I was offered a new job with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The job is at the National Conservation Training Center as a Training Specialist with Outdoor Recreation Planning. It allows me to continue the conservation education work that is a passion, in a nationwide context. It is bittersweet, as I will also truly miss all of you and Montana. I am helping to make the transition of the FAS education program to Ashley Mason as easy as possible. We built something wonderful together and I know it will continue to reach and teach people about the wonderful environment in their "backyard," in Ashley's capable and caring hands!

Best to all of you and thank you sooo very much to the FAS Board, the Sustainability Fund, NW Montana Educational Cooperative, FAS members, our agency partners and Flathead CORE, the teachers, students and the community for having the openness, vision and creativity to work together and create this broader education program. It has been an exceptional experience.

In gratitude, Nancy

"Come forth into the light of things. Let nature be your teacher." William Wordsworth

SCIENCE

Learning to Work Together

Symbiosis is a relationship between two different species from which they both benefit. In the book TROPICAL NATURE by Adrian Forsyth and Ken Miyata is a remarkable example of a symbiotic relationship between the Bullhorn Acacia plant and a species of ant in the tropics. The Acacia has simple needs. It needs water, nutrients, sunlight, and it needs to keep from being eaten. Many plants in the tropics keep herbivores away by producing a toxin. These toxins alter the chemical reactions

in the animal that eats it, often making it sick, hallucinate or even die. What the Acacia has done is "learned" to manipulate ants to accomplish the same end without having to expend the energy of producing a toxin. The thorns on the Acacia, being hollow, are a perfectly prepared home for this species of ant. The plant also supplies nectar at the base of the leaves that is designed specifically to keep these ants happy and healthy. The ants have everything they need. What does the plant gain? The ants patrol for insects and mammals that graze on the leaves. They remove insects and sting any mammal that attempts to eat the plant. Food and shelter is their payment for defense, but both ant and Acacia live better because of this relationship.

From Bruce Tannehill

TIDBIT

BIRDWATCHING OPPORTUNITIES COMING UP



Freezout Lake Snow Goose Migration: A Rite of Spring

The annual Flathead Audubon trip to witness the extraordinary concentration of Snow Geese at the Freezout Lake Wildlife Management Area south of Choteau is once again scheduled for the last weekend in March. Every year, the majority of the Pacific Flyway population of Snow Geese stops at this wonderful wetland complex and the surrounding barley fields to rest and refuel on their trip from their central California wintering grounds to arctic nesting areas (some as far away as Russia). Their daily comings and goings against the backdrop of the Rocky Mountain Front make for an incredible spectacle. In past years we have seen as many as 400,000 or more geese, and many years we see well over 100,000. Thousands of Tundra Swans, tens of thousands of Northern Pintails, American Wigeons, and a wide variety of other waterfowl add to the excitement, and often the first White Pelicans, shorebirds and Franklin's Gulls of the spring are also seen.

This year's trip is scheduled for Saturday—Sunday, March 26-27, and will be led by Dan Casey. Meet at the west end of the Super 1 parking lot on First Avenue East in downtown Kalispell Saturday at 10 AM, and we will caravan/carpool to Choteau, planning on being at Freezout in time for the afternoon "fly-out" of the geese. After dinner and a night in Choteau, we will head back out before daybreak to again watch the geese leave the lake, heading for home sometime shortly after noon, once the geese have flown back in from the fields. We should arrive back in Kalispell by 5 PM Sunday. Dan will provide a suggested schedule and route, and will lead the group, but attendees can choose to follow the geese as much or as little as the weather (cold and windy) and the birds allow. You will need to make your own arrangements for lodging. Options include the Bella Vista (466-5711), the Big Sky (466-5318), the Gunther (466-5444), or the Stage Stop (888-466-5900). Contact Dan if you have questions about the trip, at 857-3143 or danielcasey55@gmail.com.



FIELD TRIP!

Saturday, March 5, 2011: Join Flathead Audubon for **A Winter Morning of Snowshoeing in Glacier National Park**, weather permitting; join us for a 2-hour beginners' bird walk along the Boundary Trail. We may see Bald Ea-



gles, waterfowl, Jays, and a variety of animal signs, as we explore and learn some of the basics of birding. Meet at West Glacier Post Office parking lot at 9 AM. Please call Brooke Linford at 888-9885 to sign up.

SPECIAL INVITATION TO FAS CAMERA BUFFS



Ready, Aim, Shoot! Spring is about to meander into our lives any day now, and with it will come the welcome sights and sounds of our summer birds. For most of us, our first inclination is to grab the binoculars, and just after that, many of us grab the camera. *The Pileated Post's* new E-page has been so well received that we would like to make it a permanent occasional feature for all of our E-readers. We invite you to submit your photos for publishing on the E-page. You may email photos to Linda or Kay (addresses on last page), or send printed photos to

Linda to scan (she will return your original).

The only "rules" are: you have to be a member of FAS to submit, and the photo has to be bird-related (bird, nest, eggs, etc.). A couple of "tips": send in JPG format, and try to get lots of detail and contrast with a solid background. We hope to print plenty of good pictures of our local birds, as seen through the lens of your camera. Oh, and the ducks at Woodland Park don't count!

Your Co-Editors, Linda and Kay



A Different Kind of Birdwatching from our Friends to the South

Dear Local and Montana Members:

Yesterday at the Sandpiper Art Gallery on Main St. (Polson), we hung a new show. This is one of the two "open shows" we do each year, providing an opportunity for all artists to display their work, representing their interpretations of the show theme. The theme of this show is "The Birds and the Bees." As it turns out, most of the work is of or about birds. Not many bees, and next to no "other" interpretations of the theme. There are paintings in various media, sculpture, mixed-media, and photography. We got some very nice work, all high quality stuff. The show runs through 25 March.

Thanks and regards,
Jay Cross (Director, Sandpiper Art Gallery)



BIRDWATCHING OPPORTUNITIES ENJOYED

BIRD WARS AT THE CONRAD MANSION

By Mike Kofford



I had just finished up my day's work at the Conrad Mansion and decided to head out to enjoy some unexpected sunshine when I heard a series of light twitters coming from the edge of the three-acre grounds. I knew they weren't the familiar chickadees, and the sounds led me to a large flock of Bohemian Waxwings shuffling above our Mountain Ash berries. I realized that the rare, winter light offered a good opportunity for photos, and parked across the street near the juiciest berry clumps. I prepared my camera in anticipation, and nervously checked the settings.

It wasn't long before a few single birds multiplied into dancing groups, floating from a nearby Blue Spruce to greedily pluck at the orange clusters. They were cautious, and periodically flew into small cloud shapes before settling back to where they began. I enjoyed the spectacle and continued to click off photos as they grew more accustomed to my actions. It was quiet, and I was appreciating the incredible beauty of the waxwings as they passed through the frame of my lens when something changed.

I had just clicked off another photo when the flock exploded in all directions in response to some unknown signal. Then I saw it: a large hawk came diving out of the nearby trees and sailed in an arc through the middle of the Ash branches. It was too late, however, and the raptor was left looking casually side-to-side as the waxwings made haste beyond talons' reach.

Sitting in the car a bit stunned, I smiled at the moment. The hawk, which I believe was a Cooper's Hawk, sailed over my head and landed about ten feet above my car. As I wrenched my neck to get a better view, it looked down at me with fierce, hungry eyes, determined to continue the hunt. I snapped a few more photos, which it tolerated surprisingly well before moving on in pursuit of the flock. It was a moment that made all the careful bird-stalking worth the patience and dedication needed to observe something so pure. I was pleased, and headed home to see what I captured on film.



Northern Hawk Owl Puts on a Show



Dan Casey

One of the biggest finds during this winter's Kalispell Christmas Bird Count was a Northern Hawk Owl, found and photographed by Bill and Jeannie Marcure in their count section near Batavia. This was not only a first for our count, it was only the third ever reported on a Montana count. This species is one of the most sought-after by North American birders, and finding it often requires a trip to boreal Canada, or the infamous Sax-Zim bog of northern Minnesota. Over the past decade or two, they have been found to be breeding in Glacier National Park (and more recently, the Rocky Mountain Front), typically in recent forest fire areas. But even there, as many local birders know, they have been unpredictable at best, and "ticking" them off on one's list might come at the expense of sore legs, wet shoes and many mosquito bites. So to have one so close to town, right off of Highway 2, was quite the attraction.

The word went out, and soon birders from across the state, and visitors from elsewhere, were

enjoying views of this bird from the Rails to Trails section west of town. I even hosted a birder from Washington DC, for whom this was a "lifer." The bird seemed oblivious to observers (and, unfortunately, to traffic) and could be seen with rodent prey it had cached on telephone poles and trees in the area. Indeed, prey numbers must have been high (much as they are in the preferred nesting areas in Glacier), because locals said the bird had been present most of December, and it was still being enjoyed by birders as of the last week of January, never straying more than perhaps 300 yards from where it was first seen.

But trying to survive in such a small area, bisected by a busy highway, ended up sealing this bird's fate, perhaps predictably. A visiting birder from Lewistown found it dead on the roadside Jan. 28, apparently hit by a car. The specimen was not salvaged. A sad ending to the story, to be sure, but close encounters with this wondrous bird certainly enriched the lives of those who came to see it. From Dan Casey



REPORTS



Montana State Legislature

Montana Audubon's legislative team, Janet Ellis and Casey Perkins, are currently running from hearing to hearing at Helena's Capitol—testifying for smart wildlife policy and funding, the preservation of our bedrock environmental laws, and climate protections and smart energy. Sometimes they stop and breathe!

The Legislature is almost at the half-way point—so it is a good time for an update.

First, the good news: since the 2011 Montana Legislature is a mostly defensive session, most work is focused on killing bills. And there are some successes to report. The following bills are dead: allowing off-highway vehicles anywhere on public land to retrieve game (it would have even included Owen Sowerwine Natural Area); opening up 20% of Montana's Wildlife Management Areas to multiple use; a regulatory takings bill that would have stopped all land use

planning; and the worst energy/climate change bills (including bills that deny global warming or repeal Montana's Renewable Energy Standard).

There is also some bad news to report: many bad bills are still alive, including several bills that would gut the Montana Environmental Policy Act; a bill that would nullify the Endangered Species Act in Montana (yes, we're serious); several bills that would try to "take back" our federal lands; several bills that will prohibit state land purchase for either a short time or a long time; and more. Obviously, there is lots of work to do in the coming months!

Because the status of bills changes on almost a daily basis, the best way to find out the latest on legislation that Audubon is involved in is to visit our website at www.mtaudubon.org or contact Janet or Casey at mtmagpie@mtaudubon.org or (406) 443-3949.



Jewel Basin Hawk Watch 2010: The Totals are In.

Although we can predictably count on having our surveys cut short by bad weather in October, the third year of migrant raptor surveys in the Jewel Basin exceeded our expectations. With our final survey of the year on October 23,

we ended up counting 2,741 birds of 16 species this year, setting a number of records along the way. As reported previously, we recorded our biggest single-day flight (367 birds on Sept. 25), and our single biggest hour, when a remarkable 82 birds passed between 1 and 2 PM on Sept. 27! We counted a remarkable 1,541 Sharp-shinned Hawks over 40 days of surveys, nearly twice our previous season-long high, as well as a new high of 178 Red-tailed Hawks. The only species we did not see that we have seen in previous years was the Turkey Vulture, a rare migrant at this site. Our final totals follow:

Osprey - 6
Bald Eagle - 30
Northern Harrier - 36
Sharp-shinned Hawk - 1,541
Cooper's Hawk - 321
Northern Goshawk - 35
Accipiter, sp. - 66
Broad-winged Hawk - 6

Swainson's Hawk - 2
Red-tailed Hawk - 178
Rough-legged Hawk - 17
Ferruginous Hawk - 1
Buteo, sp. - 11
Golden Eagle - 390
American Kestrel - 38
Merlin - 24



Peregrine Falcon - 13
Prairie Falcon - 1
Falcon, sp. - 2
Eagle, sp. - 1
Raptor, sp. - 22
Total (16 spp): 2,741



Road closure issues this year did not offer as much opportunity for volunteers to visit the site, but Flathead Audubon members and others still provided more than 240 hours of donated time to the effort. These surveys have been coordinated by the American Bird Conservancy, and made possible in part by grants from the U.S. Forest Service and Flathead Audubon. For the second consecutive year Peter Motyka was the on-site technician responsible for most of the counts. He and all those who came to share in the effort deserve thanks. Our 2011 efforts will begin in late August, so mark your calendars! Direct questions to Dan Casey, American Bird Conservancy, 756-2681, dcasey@abcbirds.org



Montana Audubon's Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival
Save June 3–5 for your vacation in Northeast Montana!

Cottonwood Inn, Glasgow, MT
 Contact: Larissa Berry lberry@mtaudubon.org (406-443-3949)



If you're not yet in the mindset of planning for the upcoming bird festival in Glasgow June 3–5, take a look at what's in store. This year we are featuring two **Pre-Festival Friday Bird Ecology and Conservation Workshops**. Registration brochures will arrive in mail boxes in mid-March, and at that point you'll be able to sign up (first-come, first-served basis). These will be held Friday, June 3 (7 AM–3 PM). Act fast—we have room for only 20 participants in each workshop! The problem will be choosing which one:

Grassland Bird Conservation Workshop:

We will explore issues related to the conservation of grassland birds in the northern Great Plains. We will begin with grassland bird ecology, and then move into conservation and management, including potential conflicts, concerns, and solutions. All of these discussions will take place in the grasslands of north Valley County so you can see first-hand many of the issues and bird species we will be discussing.

Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Workshop:

Perhaps you have heard of this bird? With all the recent attention on this species, we thought it would be great to tour one of Montana's Greater Sage-Grouse Important Bird Areas located just south of Glasgow. We will spend the day immersed in the extensive sage habitats of southern Valley County, where we will learn about sage-grouse ecology and how recent advances in our knowledge of this bird can be used to improve or maintain habitats and populations.

Both workshops will include a series of talks by biologists with expertise in grasslands or sage-grouse and sage-steppe conservation. The format will incorporate numerous opportunities for questions and discussion. The cost for each of these unique workshops is only \$30, which includes transportation and a sack lunch.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

This year we welcome nationally renowned writer Gary Ferguson as our lunchtime keynote speaker. His talk, *Gifts from the Sky: How Birds Shaped American Conservation*, will be a mix of lore, history, and science—and celebrates our long-standing love affair with birds.

Gary Ferguson has written for a variety of national publications, from *Vanity Fair* to the *Los Angeles Times*, and is the author of 16 books on

nature and science. His book *The Great Divide* was an Audubon Magazine Editor's Choice selection, while *Hawks Rest: A Season in the Remote Heart of Yellowstone* was the first nonfiction work in history to win both the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Mountains and Plains Booksellers Award for Nonfiction. Gary is an engaging speaker and we are excited to have him as our keynote!

Field Trips

Finally, the field trips all birders look forward to . . . take a look at what we have to offer:



Saturday and Sunday, June 4 and 5:

Fort Peck – This trip will concentrate on the area around the town of Fort Peck and below Fort Peck Dam. Birds you could see include orioles—Baltimore, Bullock's, and Orchard—a diversity of migrant warblers, Grasshopper Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit, several species of gulls, Piping Plovers, White Pelicans and many other waterbirds (grebes, ducks, cormorants, herons), and Eastern Bluebirds.

North Valley County 1 & 2 – These field trips will explore the extensive, unique native grasslands of northern Valley County. Target birds include McCown's & Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Sprague's Pipits, Burrowing Owls, Long-billed Curlews, Baird's & Grasshopper Sparrows, Black Terns, and Wilson's Phalaropes.

South Valley County 1 & 2 – These tours will explore the sagebrush and Ponderosa Pine habitats of southern Valley County. Likely birds include Brewer's Sparrows, Ferruginous Hawks, Greater Sage-grouse, Mountain Plovers, McCown's Longspurs, and Mountain Bluebirds.

Missouri River Float/Canoe Trip – This canoe trip is ideal for the beginner canoeist and will allow birders to see up-close the birds and habitats of the Missouri River from a unique perspective. Common birds include American White Pelicans, Common Mergansers, Yellow-breasted Chats, Warbling Vireos, and Red-headed Woodpeckers.

Lots More Field Trips on Next Page ...



Montana Audubon's Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival

Save June 3–5 for your vacation in Northeast Montana!



Cottonwood Inn, Glasgow, MT

Contact: Larissa Berry lberry@mtaudubon.org (406-443-3949)

More Bird Festival Field Trips:

Bird Banding – This field trip will allow you to get up close and personal with a variety of birds associated with the Milk River riparian habitats. We will use fine mesh nets to catch and band birds, weather permitting. Participants will learn how to set up and take down nets, how to remove birds from mist nets, the banding, aging & sexing procedure, and importance of net placement.

Sunday only, June 5 :

Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge – This field trip will visit one of the jewels of the National Wildlife Refuge system (near Malta). You will enjoy a great abundance and diversity of waterbirds (from ducks & shorebirds to ibis & herons), Baird's Sparrows, Chestnut-collared Longspurs, warblers, and raptors.

Manning Lake Tribal Wildlife Refuge – The Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes invite you to join us in exploring the avian diversity of Manning Lake Wetlands, believed to be the first tribal wildlife refuge (and also one of 39 Important Bird Areas in Montana!). Target birds include Franklin's Gulls, American Avocets, White-faced Ibis, Long-billed Curlews, Marbled Godwits, Wilson's Phalaropes, American Bitterns, a great diversity of ducks & grebes, Grasshopper Sparrows, Sprague's Pipit, Upland Sandpipers, Wilson's Snipe, and Chestnut-collared Longspurs. A traditional tribal meal will be served for lunch!



Montana Audubon's Tours

Take your pick of birding adventures across Montana, Alaska, Texas, Africa, and Peru!

Montana Audubon is known for its annual tours to great birding destinations, and the 2011–12 tour season is packed with eight different adventures offered close to home or as far away as Africa.

You can explore the northeastern part of Montana by joining the Westby Birding tour (then consider traveling on to Glasgow for the 2011 Bird Festival!), or marvel at the abundance of species at Red Rocks Lakes in southwest Montana. New on our Montana tour list will be the Raptor Weekend where you can witness and participate in the banding of hawks and eagles. Our tours also take birders to exciting places across the world to experience the global diversity of birds, habitats, and human cultures. Imagine discovering the African Finfoot in Gambia, Africa, or the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock in Peru!

Save the 2011–12 Tour Dates

South Texas Birding: April 25–May 2, 2011
 Centennial Valley & Red Rock Lakes: May 27–29, 2011
 Westby Birding: May 30–June 2
 Alaska Denali/Kenai Peninsula: June 18–27, 2011
 Raptor Weekend: September 23–25, 2011
 Birding in The Gambia: October 28–November 11, 2011
 Birds & Wildlife of Peru: February 15–25, 2012



To make your reservations, contact Larissa Berry at the Montana Audubon office (406-443-3949). For more information see our website: www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/tours.

NEXRAD ORNITHOLOGY

By now most birders have heard about Nexrad (Next-Generation Radar) and how it can be used as a tool to view and track nocturnal bird migration. During spring and fall migration, I use Nexrad as an indicator of how “good” the birding might be the following morning in terms of numbers of individuals. However, keep in mind that a lack of Nexrad activity doesn't necessarily mean birding will be slow the next morning. Inclement weather may keep birds from migrating, so the woods might still be filled with neotropical migrants from the previous day.

Amateur and professional ornithologists use Nexrad to track migratory birds. Density estimations give ornithologists the ability to count the number of birds involved in migratory movements, specific direction routes, timing, speed, elevation, and correlation with weather patterns. Birds can detect storms by sight, smell, *NEXRAD ORNITHOLOGY, continued on page 11....*



Owen Sowerwine Monitoring Resumes Volunteers are Needed

From Linda Winnie, Co-Chair, Owen Sowerwine Committee
In March, our Volunteer Monitoring Program for the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area (OSNA) will begin its *fourth year* of operation. We are looking for volunteers to help out with this important part of Flathead Audubon's management activities at OSNA.

OSNA Volunteer Monitors are the eyes and ears of the Flathead Audubon management effort. They provide on-site information about management needs as they arise – a trail that needs to be cleared, for exam-

ple, or damage to the kiosk that needs to be repaired, a fence or gate that needs fixing, debris and impromptu structures that need to be removed, or the brochure box at the kiosk that needs to be restocked.

Volunteer Monitors also help us gather data on visitor use at OSNA, and as they encounter visitors or OSNA neighbors, they gather comments and suggestions that will help improve our management of OSNA. In addition, Volunteer Monitors provide information that helps us expand our growing knowledge of what bird species and other wildlife are present at OSNA, as well as what types of vegetation grow there.

And it is easy and fun.

The fun part is visiting OSNA and walking some of the trails. The easy part is using the Volunteer Monitoring form to give us feedback on your visit. The form provides spaces and check-off boxes for entering the various kinds of information we are seeking, so it guides you on what to look for and makes it easy for you to record your observations. Then mail it to Richard Kuhl using the address provided on the form.

The new 2011 OSNA Volunteer Monitoring form can be printed from the FAS website (www.flatheadaudubon.org), or you can pick up copies at one of the FAS meetings. A trail map is also provided (on the website or at the meetings) to help you locate the places referred to on the form.

We would like to schedule at least one monitoring visit each half-month, March through October, to get feedback on a regular basis. So we are looking for at least 18 volunteers, one (or more) for each of these half-month-long Monitoring Periods. A scheduled volunteer will make one Monitoring Visit during the half-month of his/her choice. Group monitoring visits are also welcome – get your friends together and sign up for your chosen Monitoring Period as a team!

If you can help with these scheduled Monitoring Visits, please contact me (755-1406 or lindawin@centurytel.net) or talk to me at the next Flathead Audubon meeting. Just let me know which month (March through October) you want to sign up for, and whether you want to cover the first half or the last half of that month. Remember, "cover" simply means make one monitoring visit during your chosen period. (You are allowed to make more than one visit, of course – but just one fulfills your obligation.) You will get a reminder call or email shortly before your scheduled Monitoring Period.

In addition to these scheduled visits, we ask Flathead Audubon members to help out **whenever you make a visit to OSNA**. Please take a copy of the form with you on your visit, and just fill out the parts that apply to the trails you walked and the things you saw. And remember, though our Volunteer Monitoring Program officially runs March through October, information gathered on a trip to Owen Sowerwine at *any* time of the year is valuable to us. If you happen to forget to take a form with you but find something on your visit that you think might be of interest to our Owen Sowerwine managers, just call or email Richard with your report.

Thanks to all of you who have served as Volunteer Monitors over that past three years. Your help has been essential and is greatly appreciated. We hope you will be able to help out again this year!



GIVE THOSE BIRDS A HAND!

It's that time of the year, when we are crunching numbers and filing our tax returns. This year, as you fill out your Montana tax form, consider that support for our non-game species (birds, frogs, squirrels, etc.) is under attack in Helena. If you possibly can, check the "Non-Game Wildlife" box near the bottom of your form, and support programs that help maintain our little critters.

KIDZ

ORNITHOLOGY

Let's Learn More About My Experience Building a Snow Shelter

By Ian K. Flynn, age 10, Waldorf Homeschooler

I love winter because I can go skiing and sledding, and play with my dog Seamus in the snow. Last winter when I was nine, I built a snow shelter with Brett Holmquist of Ravenwood Outdoor Learning Center. There were three dads and three boys. The dads did most of the shoveling, but we boys did some. We gathered a BIG pile of snow, and then let it sit awhile because it was sugary. It needed to be sticky to build with. The dads then dug into the pile to hollow out the shelter. They started at



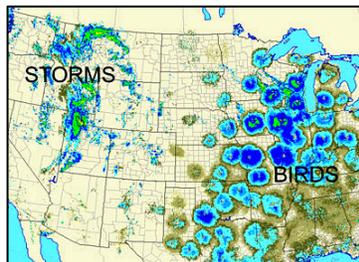
Left to Right: Ian K. Flynn, Ethan Cavender, Talon Holmquist

the small door opening. Brett then got in and scraped the walls until he could see the light through the walls. We boys stuck 10-inch sticks all over the pile to also help determine where to stop scraping the walls. After we finished the shelter, we built a fire and ate chili for dinner. The dads told stories around the fire. The full moon was yellow. It was so magnificent! When we went to bed in our shelter, it was squished but warm.

NEXRAD ORNITHOLOGY, continued from page 9 ...

sound, humidity, and pressure, and often attempt to fly around the storm cell, reverse direction, or are forced to land. All of this can be detected and viewed live on Nexrad. My favorite online Nexrad website is the National Center for Atmospheric Research/Research Applications Program - [Real-time Weather Data or NCAR/RAP](#).

To see live Nexrad maps, I change the "Product" to "Regional Reflectivity" and leave the "Background" set to the default "black" option. For a quick snapshot, I leave the "Loop Duration" set to "Single image." At this point you can either click on an individual radar station (three-letter codes across the states), or to see an entire map of US Nexrad data, select "Contiguous U.S." at the top.



[Click to view larger image.](#)

How do you tell the difference between migrating birds and storm systems on Nexrad? The precipitation density of a storm is higher, so they often appear as massive, spinning, amoeba-like shapes. Because of [how radar works](#), and the comparatively even distribution and lower density of flocks, birds show up as concentrated, circular donut shapes centered on a radar station. The gaps between the donuts are just an indicator of the Nexrad station's range for that density. Migratory birds are still present in those gaps.

Nexrad can be a fairly useful prognosticator of expectation when combined with phenological knowledge of arrivals and departures of birds. Spring migration is nearly upon us. Soon our backyards and local natural areas will be filled with the songs sung by colorful birds. Studying Nexrad maps doesn't really compare to the undiluted joy of birdwatching, but as an adjunct to the pastime, viewing actual bird migration on a macro scale certainly enhances one's appreciation of the phenomenon.

Contributed by Mike McDowell, an avid digiscoper, amateur naturalist, and Eagle Optics employee.



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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.

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: lindawin@centurytel.net**

Website: www.flatheadaudubon.org

FlockMaster - John Kyle: jkyle@fastmail.us

Conservation Educator - Ashley Mason: AudubonAshley@gmail.com

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FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

Membership
Individual or Family

- Basic Membership \$20
(Pays for newsletter and operating costs)
- Supporting Membership \$35
(Extra \$15 funds local projects such as grants, scholarships, meetings, and Christmas Bird Count)
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