



the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

VOLUME 36

NUMBER 5

JANUARY 2012

FAS AWARDED PRUDENTIAL GRANT

abcounity.gov



Flathead Audubon has been awarded a \$1000 Prudential Challenge Grant in recognition of our volunteer efforts last fall on the Owen Sowerwine Work Day (Oct 2).

As in years past, our 2011 fall Owen Sowerwine Work Day was co-sponsored by Jane Lopp & Associates Prudential Office as part of Prudential's International Global Volunteer Day program.

By gathering more than 20 volunteers who worked several hours each to accomplish the Work Day goals, our Global Volunteer Day project became eligible for Prudential's Challenge Grant. Jane Lopp & Associates nominated Flathead Audubon for the grant shortly after our Work Day. The competition for these grants is pretty stiff, so we are very pleased to learn that again this year, a grant has been awarded to Flathead Audubon.

THANK YOU to all of the 40 workers who came to Owen Sowerwine October 2 to help clear trails, repair bridges, pull weeds, string fence and cut brush. Your efforts are what made this grant possible.

MANY THANKS also to



Jane Lopp & Associates for co-sponsoring this year's Work Day and nominating us for a Prudential Challenge Grant, and to **Jane and Bob Lopp** for their long-time support of Flathead Audubon and the Owen Sowerwine Natu-

Don't Forget ... Coming up on New Years Day!

Kalispell Christmas Bird Count, January 1, 2010
Meet at the Montana Club on Highway 93 S. to assign circle segments and set up teams. For info contact Dan Casey: 857-3143, danielcasey55gmail.com (home), or 756-2681, dcasey@abcbirds.org (office).



Linda Winnie

Bigfork CBC birders Barb Boorman & Gael Bissell

Sunny and Snowies on the Bigfork Count New Records Set!

From Dan Casey, Count Compiler

On a gorgeous day with partly sunny skies and highs in the 40's, observers on this year's Bigfork Christmas Bird Count found at least 88 species, **a new high for this Count.**

These included three Snowy Owls, only the fourth time the species has been seen on the count.

New high count totals were established for Horned Grebe (145), Tundra Swan (342), Cooper's Hawk (3), American Coot (5,070), Herring Gull (72), Eurasian Collared-Dove (18), Black-billed Magpie (182) and White-throated Sparrow (2). (Other new highs may be set once all data has been compiled.) Notably absent were Gray Partridges, Northern Pygmy-Owl, and Evening Grosbeaks, each seen on at least half of our previous 37 counts.

Thanks to all who participated!



JANUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, January 9, 2012: Flathead Audubon General Meeting. 7 PM at The Summit. Program will be: **Riding the Trails—A Look Back at Glacier's Dude Ranch Days** by Tom Nelesen. Details on page 3.

Monday, January 2, 2012: FAS Board of Directors Meeting. 6 PM at 295 3rd Ave. EN. All are welcome.
Winter Field Trips. Get out and spot our local birds! Schedule and details on page 5.



BIRD OF THE MONTH

By Dennis Hester

The American Crow: An Intelligent Survivor

Who has not seen a Crow? If a person can identify only a few birds, one of them no doubt will be the Crow. It is well known because it is large, black, ubiquitous and noisy. In fact, the American Crow probably ranks with *Turdus migratorus* and *Sturnus vulgaris*¹ as the most observed and identifiable birds in North America. But it is certainly not loved like *Turdus* (how odd to be loved with a name like this) and in fact is another of our bird species that seems to be unloved mainly because of its color, noisiness, and its propensity to congregate in large numbers. For example, every fall, as many as 100,000 American Crows choose to winter in Terra Haute, Indiana, leading that city to have established a Crow Patrol which uses pyrotechnics to disrupt roosting behavior and dilute concentrations of the birds. Crows are well known for pulling up and eating newly sprouted corn seeds thus engendering the hostility of farmers which has over the decades led to extensive control efforts leading to the killing of tens of thousands of birds.²

"Humans have tried to keep crows away since forever. They have used scare-crows to feign human presence. They have hung sulfur-dipped rags to remind crows of gunpowder. They have mounted dead crows on sticks. They have sent out hawks, banged pots, laid out strychnine, shot off guns, paid bounties. Still the crows come, as if to peck away at our sense of superiority... Crows are too intelligent to fall twice for most tricks."³ And so the American Crow has not only survived it has flourished.

So gimme the facts.

The American Crow is a large (17 1/2"), long-legged, thick-necked bird with a heavy, straight bill. It is all black, including legs and bill. In sun light its feathers take on a glossy sheen. It is found in small groups and occasionally large flocks in many habitats, including urban/suburban areas, parking lots and athletic fields, scrublands, open woods, roadways and refuse sites. The Crow's diet is extremely diverse. It is an omnivore who will eat most anything from insects, seeds, bird eggs, small animals, nuts, and fruit to carrion and garbage. It ejects pellets.⁴ Based on years of close personal observation I can say, with some authority, that it, like its relative the Common Raven, seems to prefer French fries, Cheetos, and the bottom of soft-serve ice cream cones - clear evidence of its adaptation to human activity and its ability to thrive around people.

In flight, the wings are fairly broad and rounded with the wingtip feathers spread like fingers. The short tail is fan-shaped. With steady rowing wing beats the Crow's flight is direct, thus the term "as the crow flies" to signify a straight line. It generally flies high, often in small loose groups.

H. Douglas Pratt.



Crows' nests are well made coarse structures of sticks, twigs and grasses usually built at a good height in conifers or other trees. Parents take excellent care of the young, defend them valiantly against enemies and feed them long after they are fledged. After leaving the nest, the young keep their parents busy for a long time, as the stomach of a young Crow, much like that of a teenage boy, seems to approximate a bottomless pit constantly requiring food.⁶

The Crow is a remarkably clever bird. In comparison to the common pigeon which has a similar body mass, the Crow's brain mass is nearly 5 times larger.⁷ They display a thieving propensity amounting to what would be considered kleptomania in human beings. And like other members of the family *Corvidae* (Ravens, Magpies and Jays) they seem to have a special passion for stealing and hiding anything of bright color or made of shiny metal.⁸

The PBS television show *Nature* featured an informative and intriguing program, *A Murder of Crows* (2010). A "murder" is the term for a flock of crows. The show presented the following facts based primarily on a study conducted at the University of Washington giving insight into Crows' intelligence:

- They are capable of individual human facial recognition after only one trial experience;
- They remember harmful/dangerous deeds done to them and retain this information for up to 2 years;
- They pass the information on to their offspring who have not actually experienced the harmful deeds;
- Scientists have identified 250 calls used by Crows;
- Additionally 2 distinct dialects have been identified – one for within the family unit, one for large groups;
- Crows rank at the top for intelligence even though they don't have the biggest brains; brain size relative to body weight is comparable to the great apes;
- The New Caledonia Crow not only fashions hooked tools from branches but also in an experiment obtained a tool and used it to get a 2nd tool to get a 3rd tool which it used to obtain food.

What is the difference between Crow and Raven?

Crows and Ravens, though in the same genus *Corvus*, are different birds. In general, the biggest black species, usually with shaggy throat feathers, are called Ravens; the smaller species are considered Crows. So think of the Crow as the little brother to the Raven. American Crows can be distinguished from Common Ravens by a couple of features. Ravens are as big as Red-tailed Hawks, and Crows are smaller and, well, crow sized. But size difference is only useful when there is another bird near-by for comparison.

CROW continued on p. 4.

January Program

RIDING THE TRAILS—A LOOK BACK AT GLACIER'S DUDE RANCH DAYS



At our January meeting, **Tom Nelesen** will be our guide and wrangler on a trail ride in Glacier National Park. Tom will take us back to the time when the Great Northern Railway was developing the "American Alps" as a wilderness playground.

Our virtual trail ride takes place in the summer of 1926. The "South Circle Trail Ride" takes five days and dudes ride 69 miles. While riding the South Circle, we will learn about the places the trail riders go, what they see en route, what they eat and how much it all costs them.

The story of the South Circle Trail Ride begins with tourists arriving by Great Northern Railway at East Glacier. From Glacier Park Lodge, visitors drive by "jammer" to St. Mary Chalet and then by boat to Sun Point Chalet. At Sun Point they saddle horses and begin the ride to Many Glacier Lodge, Granite Park Chalet, Lake McDonald Lodge, Sperry Chalet and then back to Sun Point.

Tom will describe chalets that no longer exist. With the introduction of the automobile and the construction of Going-to-the-Sun Road, the Great Northern built auto camps. Horseback riding and hiking as the only means of seeing Glacier National Park faded into history.

A student of the Park's history, Tom developed this program for the Fish Creek Campground summer amphitheater series. Tom and his wife Mary volunteer at the Apgar Visitor Center every Friday in the summer.

Please join us Monday, Jan. 9, 7 PM, the Community Room of The Summit, 205 Sunnyview Ln., Kalispell.

FAS MEMBERS AND BUSINESS SPONSORS HELP FUND EDUCATION PROGRAM

From Linda de Kort

A BIG *Thank You* to our many members who have graciously and generously responded to our holiday appeal for help in financing our conservation education program. The long list of recent



2012 *Wings Across the Big Sky* Field Trips and Keynote Speaker

From Larissa Berry, Montana Audubon

Already thinking about spring birding? This June you will have a great opportunity! Montana's biggest birding event of the year will be taking place right here in the beautiful Flathead Valley. Please join us for **Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, June 8–10 at the [Hilton Garden Inn](#) in Kalispell.**

Keynote speaker will be raptor expert **Peter Sherrington**. Peter is a geologist/paleontologist who in 1992 gave up a career in the oil industry to study Golden Eagle migration in Alberta's Rocky Mountains. He is founder and Research Director of the Rocky Mountain Eagle Research Foundation. Join us Saturday for Peter's lunchtime keynote, "Twenty Years of Golden Eagle Migration Studies in the Alberta Rockies: the Big Picture Begins to Emerge."



And 28 field trips are planned!

- 14 each on Saturday and Sunday - guided by local birders and naturalists familiar with the species and their habitats in the Flathead Valley, Glacier National Park and the surrounding area. More details see page 7.

For more information please contact Larissa Berry at lberry@mtaudubon.org or 406-443-3949, or any FAS Board Member.



donors on page 7 is an indication of how many members have already sent a donation.

In addition to the membership appeal and grant writing, we are also contacting local businesses to inform them of our program and to ask for their support. Many local businesses are already committed to helping other needy projects in the Valley so cannot contribute at this time; but they asked to be kept "in the loop" by receiving the electronic version of our newsletter.

We are especially thankful to the local businesses who share our philosophy of "no child left inside" and who have contributed to our outdoor education program.

You will find these Business Sponsors listed on page 7. *Please visit these businesses who share our vision; let them know how much their contribution is appreciated.*

If you are a local business, we encourage you to become a sponsor of the FAS education program. As a Business Sponsor your name and contact information will be listed in our monthly newsletter and on our website for a year.

To find out **how to become a Business Sponsor** of the FAS Conservation Education Program, or to let us know of **a local business you think might be interested in becoming a Sponsor**, please contact Linda de Kort, dekort@montanasky.com.





BOARD MEMBER CHIRPS & SQUAWKS



From Bob Lopp, FAS Vice President

Finally, I break away from the office, jump in my pickup, check that I have my binoculars and scope and head for the Somers boat launch area! Arriving at one of my favorite places, I scan the bay for birds and see a large flotilla of Coots, of course. A few other heads are bobbing in the mass so now it is time to set up the scope and get serious! Slowly the intensity of the office rolls off my back and I begin to enjoy being outside studying the environment around me.

Birding has been a life-long passion since I was a teenager. Ernie Birnel, our youth leader, introduced me to birding on a church weekend camping trip on Rogers Lake. We watched the Greyling spawn, identified birds by song, hiked the old roads together, adults and teenagers observing nature together.

The love of the outdoors and the understanding of the need to preserve our environment come from spending time in a meaningful way outdoors, preferably with a knowledgeable person. Every week

we hear how much time is spent by kids in front of the TV, playing video games and other electronic entertainment. How can we get them outdoors? That is why Flathead Audubon created the education program directed now by Ashley Mason. *Over 5000 kids* were exposed to nature, conservation and the great outdoors last year! That needs to be repeated every year because every year there is a new generation needing to be introduced to their environment!

Yes, \$20,000 per year is a lot for Flathead Audubon to raise but think of the alternative! Every year we receive stacks of requests for donations from many very worthy organizations. "Give a gift of conservation," "Protect nature," "Keep it wild" are slogans designed to encourage your gift. As you read the requests you get in the mail, think of the kids in the Flathead Valley who are being reached by Ashley and the FAS volunteers. Please help them with a donation so they can continue to teach the next generation of kids.

Increase your FAS ED IQ

From Ashley Mason, Flathead Audubon Society Conservation Educator

Did you know that the FAS Conservation Education Program ...

- ◆ employs a half-time conservation educator who provides programs on birds and conservation to classroom teachers, homeschool educators and community organizations – *free of charge*.
- ◆ has 11 amazing educational trunks that can be checked out – *free of charge*. These trunks include: Binoculars and Field Guides (with both standard sized binoculars *and* smaller ones for smaller people); Bird ID and Costume (elementary *and* preschool sized costumes), Common Birds of the Flathead, Cavity Nesters, Hummingbirds, Snowy Owls, Wetland and Riparian, Maggie the Magpie, Climate Change, and Indian Education for All-Gift of the Bitteroot.
- ◆ provides presentations on a variety of subjects which can be customized for ages pre-school through adult.
- ◆ works directly with classroom teachers to design programs supporting their curriculum or educational aims.
- ◆ provides educational booths and programs for community events like Earth Day and Family Forestry Expo.
- ◆ has as its educational mission: Promote a sense of wonder about natural places that surround us through interactive, hands-on programs; promote stewardship and provide information; and promote awareness and understanding of birds, habitat and conservation the Flathead Valley.
- ◆ has since January of 2011 reached 13 different local schools with 23 educational programs and that our programs have reached over *2,100 people* in our Valley.
- ◆ is funded strictly by grants and donations from local businesses and individuals.

For more information about any of these programs and services or to get involved please contact me at AudubonAshley@gmail.com or at 755-2773.



CROW *continued from p. 2.*

Ravens soar more than Crows so if you think you see a "crow" soaring for more than a few seconds, check it a second time. Crows are shorter necked in flight than Ravens. The tail is a good distinguishing characteristic. As Linda deKort helpfully points out - The shorter more squared-off tail of the Crow makes an easy to remember phrase: *Square-crow*.

If you get a good look at a perched bird, then the huge bill and shaggy throat of a Raven are diagnostic. While the upper and lower edges of the bill of the Crow

are parallel for most of their length, there is a downward curve in the bill of the Raven which starts about 2/3 of the way out for males, and about halfway for females. There are large Crows and small Crows. They all make the familiar "caw-caw" sound but also have a large repertoire of rattles, clicks, and even clear bell-like notes. But they never give anything resembling the most common call of the Raven — a deep, harsh, croaking or "gronk-gronk." Occasionally a Raven will make a call similar to a crow's "caw" but it is much deeper than the Crow's.

CROW *continued on p. 6.*



2012 *Wings Across the Big Sky* Field Trips

By Larissa Berry, Montana Audubon

Here is a brief sampling of some of the field trips planned for **Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, June 8–10 at the [Hilton Garden Inn](#) in Kalispell.**

- ◆ **Glacier National Park.** We'll focus on neotropicals and the spectacular Harlequin Duck, exploring various habitats on the west side of GNP from lush riparian areas to dense forest, from meadows to rushing streams. We'll walk along McDonald Creek looking and listening for warblers, vireos, flycatchers and ducks, Townsend's Warblers, Warbling Vireos and Pileated Woodpeckers.
- ◆ **Biking and Birding on the Rails to Trails to Somers.** Dan Casey, of the American Bird Conservancy, will lead a level 15-mile round trip from the conference hotel on the local Rails to Trails system. You'll encounter riparian shrublands, wetlands, grasslands, and forest, with target species including Clay-Colored Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, Nashville Warbler, Willow Flycatcher, Calliope Hummingbird and more. A pastry shop stop in Somers will refuel the return trip to Kalispell.
- ◆ **A Walk through the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area.** This trip will be a pleasant morning wander through this 442-acre undisturbed riparian forest habitat on the Flathead River managed by Flathead Audubon, where over 80 species of birds can be seen, including Red-eyed and Warbling Vireos, Bullock's Oriole, Vaux's Swift, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Calliope Hummingbird. Along the river we may see Wood Duck, Common Goldeneye, Spotted Sandpiper, Bank Swallow and Great Blue Heron.
- ◆ **Bison, Birds and Blooms of the National Bison Range.** This tour of grasslands, uplands, and streamside thickets of the Bison Range will reveal abundant wildflowers and a remarkable diversity of birds, from Bullock's Orioles to Golden Eagles, from Rock Wrens to Western Wood-Pewees, and from Lazuli Buntings to Lewis's Woodpeckers. We will also get to see bison calves frolicking in the meadows. We will walk along the trails in the picnic area and along the Jocko River. The panoramic view from the top of the Bison Range encompasses the Mission Valley to the north, the magnificent Mission Mountains to the east, and a long view of the Flathead River to the south.
- ◆ **Birding by Ear on the Way to Tally Lake.** Explore a wide variety of habitats on the way to Tally Lake, Montana's deepest lake. At the campground one can see every warbler species found in northwestern Montana. Neotropical migrants such as American Redstarts, Wilson's Warblers, Northern Waterthrush, and Fox Sparrows inhabit the streamside thickets. Townsend's Warblers and Western Tanagers sing in thick conifer stands nearby, and Common Loons and Bald Eagles breed along the shore. This trip will focus on both bird identification in the field and birding by ear.
- ◆ **Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge.** Formally a working ranch, being returned to its original habitat, it is one of the best places to see grassland and riparian birds up close. The road through the Refuge wanders along wet meadows where Wilson's Snipe, Brewer's Blackbirds, and Vesper Sparrows sit on fence posts next to the road. The abundant songs and calls of various warblers and flycatchers can be heard from roadside thickets. Dahl Lake, a large shallow lake on the Refuge, has breeding populations of Black Terns, Ruddy Ducks, Grebes—Red-necked, Pied-billed, Horned, and Eared—and Sandhill Cranes. Overhead we are likely to see Golden and Bald Eagles soaring on the wind as both species breed here.



Jeannie Marcure



CROW *continued from p. 4*

There is no sound as haunting as either bird's call reverberating through silent gray damp woods on a late fall day.

While Crows are present in NW Montana, Ravens have become more abundant. This trend is reflected in population studies in Glacier Park.⁹

The word "crow" appears in Old English before the 12th century but has no real taxonomic meaning. Interestingly, the name Crow was given to our Native American neighbors residing in Southeastern, Montana. According to their official website, the Crow Tribe was originally called "Apsáalooke" which means "children of the large-beaked bird." White men misinterpreted the word as "Crow."

Now that you know more about them, when you find and identify American Crows, closely observe their activities. Are they communicating with each

other or maybe even talking about you intruding into their space? Spend the time and enjoy what these intelligent birds have to offer.

References:

- 1 The American Robin and the European Starling.
- 2 Ehrlich, Dobkin & Wheye, *The Birder's Handbook*, Simon & Schuster Inc., 1988, p. 416.
- 3 New York Times, October 26, 2011, Dan Berry.
- 4 Ehrlich et. al., supra.
- 5 Sibley, David Allen, *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America*, A. Knopf, 2003, p. 308.
- 6 Forbush and May, *The Natural History of American Birds*, Bramhall House, 1955, pp 344-345.
- 7 Heinrich, Bernd, *The Mind of the Raven*, Harper-Collins, 2006, p.331.
- 8 Pearson, T. Gilbert, *Birds of America*, Doubleday, 1936, Part II p. 236.
- 9 Parratt, Lloyd P., *Birds of Glacier National Park*, Glacier Natural History Assoc., Reprint 1970, p. 44.



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The FAS activity which most interests me is:

- Education Programs
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JANUARY 2012



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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**

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FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY



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(Pays for newsletter and operating costs)

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