

**RENEW YOUR
MEMBERSHIP NOW!!**

Help Wanted September 28 – Owen Sowerwine Work Day

This year's annual OSNA Work Day is Saturday, September 28, from 9 AM to noon. Meet at Montessori School on Willow Glen Drive for a short orientation at 9 AM sharp. We will tackle several types of projects: maintenance on our new Accessible Trail, weed seed gathering, brushing, mowing and old deer stand removal. A group will also do 12 vegetative plot surveys to determine trends in vegetation growth. Bring heavy work gloves, wear sturdy shoes and dress for the weather – we will work rain or shine. Hand clippers are useful, so bring them if you can. The rest of the necessary tools will be provided.



Work Day is a terrific opportunity to spend a Saturday morning outdoors with a great bunch of people and to help with Flathead Audubon's management of OSNA. Refreshments at the close of the work session are always delicious. Jane Lopp & Associates will submit an application on behalf of Flathead Audubon for a \$1000 Prudential Global Volunteer Day grant in recognition of our efforts on this work day. We need 30 participants on September 28 in order to qualify for this grant. Please plan on coming to help and bring a friend.

Richard Kuhl, OSNA Co-Chair



Taking Flight Together

National Audubon Convention 2013

By Mary Nelesen



This past July, my good friend, Karen Etter Hale from Wisconsin, and I had the opportunity and good fortune to attend National Audubon Society's 2013 convention in Stevenson, WA, held at the beautiful Sakmania Lodge.

The setting chosen for this convention was truly magnificent. The lodge is located on the Columbia River Gorge, with breath-taking views of the Columbia River and surrounding mountains and bluffs. The extensive grounds were home to a wide array of birds. The White-crowned Sparrow greeted us every morning, and the Rufus Hummingbirds were always nearby. The Pacific Wren sang as we walked the grounds on early morning bird walks, as did Western Tanagers, Western Wood Pewees, and Red-breasted Sapsuckers. During my five-day stay, I saw many birds, even a few "lifers," but the best part was the convention itself.

David Yarnold, President and CEO of NAS opened the convention with the message "What's

good for birds, is good for people," and there were people from all of the four major flyways represented. Our own Steve Hoffman and Janet Ellis represented Montana.

The convention agenda was filled with numerous opportunities to not only explore the beautiful surroundings through various field trips, it also offered over a dozen workshops from which to choose, including: Saving Important Bird Areas; Shaping a Healthy Climate and Clean Energy Future; Creating Bird Friendly Communities; Making Connections through Art and Science; Land Management and Conservation; Fundraising; Communications and Technology; and Citizen Science, to name a few. I attended the following workshops: Birds, Native Plants and Insects, The Joy of Bird-Watching, The Lost Bird Project, A Fundraising Roundtables Planning Session, and Creating Bird Friendly Communities.

The most impressive of these was The Lost
(Taking Flight, continued on page 5 ...)

OCTOBER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, October 14, 2013: Flathead Audubon General Meeting. Gateway Community Center, United Way Conference Room. Dale Becker presents program on Trumpeter Swans. See page 3!

Monday, October 7, 2013: FAS Board of Directors Meeting. 6 PM at 295 3rd Ave. EN. All welcome.

Saturday, September 28, 2013: Owen Sowerwine Work Day. See details above.

Sunday, October 6, 2013: Second Annual Fall Hawk Watch at Bad Rock Canyon. See page 5.

Tuesday October 15, 2013: MPG Ranch Field Trip, Swan Valley near Condon. See page 5.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

By Ben Long

The Dusky (or Kamikaze) Grouse

The official name of Montana's "Blue Grouse" is now the "Dusky Grouse." But I always think of them as Kamikaze Grouse. Here's why.

My family was driving a mountain road one May when we spied a male Dusky Grouse doing its spring mating dance along the barrow pit. The handsome fellow's tail was fanned and a red, white-rimmed spot throbbled on its neck and eyebrow. Karen stepped out of the passenger side with telephoto lens, intending to photograph the bird from a respectful distance.

Turns out it wasn't respectful enough. The bird puffed up its feathers, fanned out its wings, and charged like an angry wind-up toy. Karen switched to a wide angle, and took some point-blank portraits of the bird as it pecked at its reflection in the lens.

When she lifted the camera, the bird went for her ankles, pecking furiously as if wishing to unravel her socks. Karen hopped and danced around the car. Aidan, about 3 at the time, laughed hysterically at Mom's "chicken dance." I tried to maintain a face of polite concern, but it was not easy. Karen jumped back in the car, nearly beheading the bird with the slam of the door as it tried to follow her inside. The grouse chased the car on the wing as I stomped the gas and fled.

That's the Dusky Grouse — handsome, big and a bit dim.

The Dusky Grouse are kin to the chicken, pheasant and partridge. (Though to my tastes, the grouse tastes better than any of the three.)

It is the largest of Montana's forest grouse, weighing about two pounds. That's 25-50 percent larger than the Ruffed and Spruce grouse, although not quite as big as the Sage Grouse of the high desert.

The Dusky Grouse is frequently found at high altitudes. In Northwestern Montana it seems particularly fond of high ridges with big, open Douglas fir. I've



seen many above timberline amid subalpine fir, but also amid lodgepole pine up the valley floor of the North Fork.

It is a hardy breed. Many times I have been forced off autumn ridges by early blizzards, only to see Dusky Grouse out and about, as if oblivious to the foul weather. They are marvelously adapted for mountain storms, with their downy

breasts, feathered legs and feather-covered nostrils.

Dusky grouse are a popular game bird for human hunters. Wild predators of adult and fledgling birds include goshawks and foxes. Dusky Grouse nest on the ground and are vulnerable to nest-raiders such as members of the weasel family.

When Dusky Grouse do flush, they are powerful fliers, but generally jump into a high bough of a fir tree and eyeball their pursuer. If they decide to flee, they lock their wings and soar downhill, sometimes dropping several hundred vertical feet.

Dusky Grouse peck and scratch for beetles, ants, and grasshoppers, also eating buds, young forbs and berries in season. In winter they eat evergreen needles, twigs and small cones.

You don't see Dusky Grouse every day because they tend to live in remote terrain. One reliable place to see one is the top of the high knob above Herron Park on the Foy's To Blacktail Trail.

When I grew up, we called Dusky Grouse "Blue Grouse." In 2006, the American Ornithological Society split the "Blue" into two distinct species "Dusky" and "Sooty." Dusky Grouse range the Rocky Mountains from the Yukon to New Mexico, including western Montana. The Sooty Grouse inhabits the Sierra Nevada and Cascade ranges.

No matter what you call them, Dusky Grouse are good to have around.



Not Just a Game: Olivia Boulder Continues to Support Bird Conservation

Many of you will remember Olivia Boulder, a 13 year-old naturalist and artist who raised \$200,000 for Audubon to help save birds after the 2010 Gulf Oil Spill. The Gryphon Design Collective asked Olivia to design a board game that would empower other children to take action within their community. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology provided the game's fun bird facts, and a portion of sale profits will support the organization's research and advocacy. To purchase any of Gryphon's items at a discount, use promo code "keystone50" at <http://bit.ly/11aDpRH> or email Michele Slobin Aprille at mslobindesign@me.com.



October Program



TRUMPETER SWANS RETURN TO THE FLATHEAD INDIAN RESERVATION

Dale Becker has been Tribal Wildlife Program Manager for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes for the past 24 years. At our October 14 meeting, Dale will describe efforts to return Trumpeter Swans to the Flathead Indian Reservation.

The Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) was a documented breeding species on the Flathead Indian Reservation during the 1800's, but was extirpated from the region around the turn of the 20th century. The CSKT and many partners began efforts to reintroduce nesting Trumpeter Swans in 1996.

Dale grew up on a farm in western Iowa. He began his career as a zoologist and animal caretaker with the Omaha Zoological Society. He and his wife Marilyn moved to Montana in 1977. He received a BS and an MS in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana. He was the recipient of the Wildlife Bi-

ologist of the Year Award from the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society in 2004. Dale has worked professionally for the Forest Service, the Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Montana and for private environmental consulting firms. His areas of expertise are raptor ecology and management, hydroelectric mitigation and highway mitigation planning, species reintroductions, and wildlife management program administration. He served as President of The Trumpeter Swan Society from 2005 to 2010. Dale lives in Polson.

Please join Flathead Audubon for this fascinating program at 7 PM, October 14, in the Community Room of the Gateway Community Center, Highway 2 West, Kalispell. Access is from the west parking lot. Look for the FAS Banner!



TRIBAL WILDLIFE BIOLOGISTS REQUEST INFORMATION ON NESTING TRUMPETER SWANS

Wildlife Biologists with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes began a project to restore Trumpeter Swans as a resident species on the Flathead Indian Reservation in the mid-1990s. Subsequent efforts resulted in the release of 239 captive bred Trumpeter Swans on the Reservation since 2002, which has resulted in at least 87 successful nesting attempts that produced 146 fledgling cygnets since that time.

Most of the nesting success has occurred on the Flathead Indian Reservation, but nesting swans that originated from the restoration project have also nested near Eureka, and others that likely originated from the project have nested at Glacier National Park

and at the Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge.

As the released swans reach maturity at the age of three, they begin pairing and producing cygnets (baby swans). In an effort to better document the expansion of Trumpeter Swans in northwestern Montana, the Tribal Wildlife Management Program annually surveys wetlands on the Reservation to record nesting attempts and production.

The Program staff requests observations from the public of Trumpeter Swan nesting or adult swans with cygnets in northwestern Montana. Please contact Dale Becker, Tribal Wildlife Program Manager at (406) 883-2888, extension 7278, or at daleb@cskt.org.

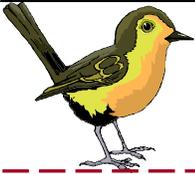
RENEW YOUR AUDUBON MEMBERSHIP NOW!

West Valley Naturalists are Taking Flight

Beginning in October, West Valley Naturalists will host a meeting in the West Valley School library at 2290 Farm to Market Road. Programs will begin at 7 PM on the first Thursday of every month through the school year. We hope that these monthly gatherings will foster interest and encourage attendees to share information about the natural history of West Valley, including geology, archeology, plants, animals, natural resources and art centered on nature.

On October 3, we will feature two gems that volunteers have developed on the West Valley Campus. One is a Native Plant Garden that is currently being completed, thanks to a National Forest Service grant to Flathead Audubon. Another is an insectary for root weevils that are being raised by students and volunteers to be released on National Forest Service lands to reduce the invasion of spotted knapweed. Alison Godfrey and Tris Hoffman, with the aid of students from West Valley School, will give a tour of these features; a discussion will follow in the library about how to prepare native plant gardens and what is needed to prevent the spread of spotted knapweed. Everyone is welcome to attend free of charge. For more information, please contact Linda de Kort at 755-3704.





CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

From

Kay Mitchell for the Flathead Audubon Board



Highlights from September 2013 Board Meeting:

- ◆ Appointed Marylane Pannell as Board Secretary for a one-year term.
- ◆ Appointed Field Trip Co-Chair Kathy Ross to one-year term as a Board member.
- ◆ Heard reports on various topics, including Conservation Education, budget, membership, MT Audubon fall meeting, birdathon results, Flathead Lake North Shore, local conservation issues, and liability insurance.
- ◆ Voted to donate a total of \$2142 for 2013-14 year to support Jewel Basin Hawk Watch, with contingencies.

Full minutes of every Flathead Audubon Board meeting are printed on Flathead Audubon's website, www.flatheadaudubon.org, after they are officially accepted at the following month's meeting. Click on "About Us," then "Board Meeting Minute Archives." Take a look!

Flathead Audubon's June Birdathon was a Huge Success! To date, donations total \$8756. We gratefully thank the 201 donors who pledged in support of Tannehill's Tanagers and John's Jays. Of those donors, 110 were community members and 91 were Flathead Audubon members. All donations support maintenance of the Owen Sowewine Natural Area and Flathead Audubon's ongoing Conservation Education Program!



Raptor Day A Grand Success!

Despite competition from the Dragon Boat Races and forecast for poor weather, Raptor Day 2013 had the highest attendance since its inception 6 years ago! 265 people came to Lone Pine State Park on Saturday, September 7, to enjoy perfect weather, celebrate conservation and hear about our state's amazing migrating raptors.

The indomitable June Ash and her son Gordon kicked the day off with an inspirational speech about June and her late husband Rod Ash's contributions to conservation in Montana. Afterwards, our own Bob Lopp provided a warm and inspirational welcome from Flathead Audubon Society. Kate Davis of Raptors of the Rockies lit up the room with her energy-filled program featuring a pygmy owl, great horned owl, Peregrine falcon and a golden eagle! The final event was a fascinating talk by Rob Domenech of The Raptor View Research Institute on the work they are doing in tracking of eagles and osprey. Rob explained how they are using GPS transmitters to track the movement and migration of eagles and osprey.

Outside the Center were educational booths that included Beth Benjamin and crew of Montana Wild Recovery with their five live Raptor ambassadors.

Thanks to everyone who came and everyone who helped make this a successful event. Special thanks go to our partners at Lone Pine State Park, who are a dream to work with. We couldn't put Raptor Day on without them!

From Ashley Mason, FAS Conservation Educator

Calling All Bird Lovers! Project FeederWatch is Beginning!

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, parks, and other areas around North America, and is operated by Cornell Lab of Ornithologist and Bird Studies Canada. FeederWatchers periodically count birds they see at feeders from November through early April and send in their counts to help scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Anyone with an interest in birds may participate. To sign up, go to <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw>. You will receive instructions, a bird ID poster, a wall calendar, and lots of pictures and information about winter birds. This is a great activity for school kids, retirees and families! It's also an excellent way to practice your binocular skills on close-up views. So get signed up and become a citizen scientist. Remember, with Project FeederWatch, YOU COUNT!





FALL FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU!

Second Annual Fall Hawk Watch at Bad Rock Canyon: Sunday, October 6

From the comfort of your lawn chair and with experienced guides and quality spotting scopes, you can enjoy the annual eagle and hawk migration at Bad Rock Canyon, Sunday, October 6. Join Kathy Ross and others at the House of Mystery Fishing Access Site along Highway 2, just west of Bad Rock Canyon between noon and 4 PM. At this time of year, we may see Golden Eagles, Bald Eagles, hawks, accipiters, and possibly a migrating or resident Peregrine Falcon. This is the second annual FAS simultaneous count for Hawk Watch at both the Bad Rock Canyon and Jewel Basin Hawk Watch sites. If weather permits, we will compare our observations in real time. Bring binoculars, scopes, chairs, and appropriate clothing. Contact Kathy Ross, 837-3837, for more information.

You may also volunteer with the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch any day in September or October by contacting Dan Casey, dcasey@abcbirds.org or 756-2681 (see related article). If neither of these options works for you, stop by the House of Mystery Fishing Access Site any time on your own and you will likely see Golden Eagles and other raptors cross Bad Rock Canyon throughout the month of October. We hope you will be able to enjoy this incredible experience!

MPG Ranch, Swan Valley near Condon, Tuesday October 15

Come see fall migrants and learn how a private landowner is restoring native habitats on the MPG Ranch in the gorgeous Swan Valley on Tuesday, October 15. Flathead Valley folks, meet Kathy Ross at 9 AM at Swan Hall, on Hwy 83, just across from Echo Lake Cafe and Swan River School; plan to return around 3 PM. The group will also stop at the Forest Service/Swan Ecosystem office in Condon around 10 AM to meet any interested local folks from the Swan Valley area. The field trip will go to a private property where the MPG ranch landowner is undertaking forest and wetland restoration that began a few years ago. FAS will be looking at the variety of forest and wetland habitat types, consider opportunities to work with the landowner for monitoring projects focusing on birds, mammals, and native flora, and tracking how species and numbers change as the habitat changes and matures over time. There will be light hiking for a mile or two in forested terrain as we explore various aspects of the property. Beau Larkin oversees the project for the landowner and will be joining us to explain the long term goals of the project and answer questions. This is a great opportunity to explore volunteer possibilities with professionals in many fields of restoration and research work or just enjoy being in the beautiful Swan Range with fellow birders. To sign up for the field trip, call Kathy at 837-3837.

... *Taking Flight Together*, continued from page 1 ... Bird Project presented by Todd McGrain and Andy Stern. It is a film that tells the story of Todd McGrain's two year attempt and final success in placing his bronze sculptures at the last known locations of five North American extinct species: the Great Auk, extinct 1844, sculpture placed on Fogo Island, Newfoundland; the Labrador Duck, extinct 1878, sculpture placed in Elmira, NY; the Passenger Pigeon, extinct 1914, sculpture placed in Columbus, OH; the Carolina Parakeet, extinct 1918, sculpture placed in Okeechobee, FL; and the Heath Hen, extinct 1932, sculpture placed in Martha's Vineyard, MA.

The book *Hope Is the Thing with Feathers*, by Chris Cokins, inspired Todd. He states of his sculp-

tures, "They compel us to recognize the finality of our loss, they ask us not to forget them and they remind us of our duty to prevent further extinction." The Lost Bird Project Film has been shown on PBS and is available for purchase from www.lostbirdfilm.org.

Between the outdoor fieldtrips, indoor workshops, inspiring guest speaker, and renowned photographer, Paul Bannick, who provided the moving presentation, "Tracking Owls through the Seasons," the 5 days ended much too soon. I took home a sense of being connected to an organization filled with a diverse mix of people from all over North America who care deeply about our natural world and the birds, plants and animals that surround us.

From *Canadian Bird Studies* newsletter, 15 August 2013: **Colour Marked Shorebirds on the Move**

Here in the Northern Hemisphere, southbound shorebird migration is well under way. Many shorebird species that nest in the Arctic have already begun their journeys to wintering grounds in Central and South America. Over the last two decades, researchers have used colour marking techniques to help them obtain reports on birds such as Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones, Sanderlings, and Semipalmated Sandpipers as they travel to other areas, and to gain insight into migratory routes. If you encounter shorebirds as part of your bird-watching activities in the weeks to come, you may want to keep your eyes peeled for colour bands and/or colour flags on their legs. Visit the [Environment Canada website](http://www.environment.ca.gov) to learn more about the Pan American Shorebird Program and the flag colours used by various countries, and for instructions on how to report sightings of colour banded shorebirds.





A Testimonial from an Electronic Convert By John Hughes, FAS Board of Directors

Let me confess that my purpose in writing this testimonial is to encourage all who receive *The Pileated Post* through “snail” mail and who **can** receive it electronically to make the switch. I certainly understand the desire to hold a hard copy of the *Post* in your hands as you read the interesting articles. However, by receiving my copy electronically, I am saving Flathead Audubon money and sparing a few trees. FAS spends about \$348 **per monthly edition** mailing copies to members. This does not include the 20 volunteer hours necessary for transportation and to prepare the mailing. Each member who switches to an electronic copy will save our local chapter time and money. Any savings will go to helping with the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, our educational endeavors, or other worthwhile projects our chapter supports.

My wife prefers a hard copy, while I like reading from a computer screen. The solution is easy enough. I print a copy for my wife. She has a hard copy with full color, including extra pictures, and she gets it as soon as I do. I know – so much for sparing a few trees. Next is to convince my wife to become an electronic convert.

Please consider making the switch to an electronic copy if you have the capacity to do so. For all who receive the *Post* by mail because you have no other choice, thank you so much for your continued support.

NEW! ELECTRONICS RECYCLING – YEAR ROUND!

The Flathead Valley finally has a year-round location for recycling home and business electronic gear. Computer systems, cell phones, etc., are loaded with rare metals that are expensive and becoming more and more difficult to obtain. These same metals can do significant damage if dumped into a landfill and allowed to leach into our soil and ground water.



Enter Pacific Steel & Recycling's new Electronics Recycling program. You can deliver nearly any electronic device to their drive-in location on Highway 2 East, across from Office Max. Hours are Monday through Friday, 8 AM – 5 PM. The valuable metals will be extracted and put back into production, maybe in time for you to enjoy your new computer or smartphone. PS&R charges a very small fee to accept a couple of items (big old CRTs, for example) and for some electronics, they will even pay you!

From Kay Mitchell



TARGET YOUR LOCAL TARGET!

Kalispell's Target store continues to be our only location for recycling glass. If you have been there recently and didn't see the usual recycling bins near the Customer Service desk, it's because they have moved their recycling to the back door of the store. It's really rather handy, because now you can drive right up to the bins, without having to park in the front customer lot and lug your bags of glass into the store.

REMEMBERING JACK AND RUTH WHITE

Sometimes we fail to fully appreciate the quiet people until they're gone, and sometimes the memories they leave us tell even more about them. Such is the case with Jack and Ruth White. Together, they continue to remind us of Flathead Audubon's long and significant history.

Jack White, a forester, was a member of the original Bigfork Bird Club and was instrumental in helping the club become a National Audubon affiliated chapter in 1974. He served on the original Board of Directors until 1990, offering advice, guidance and stable support to the new chapter.

Ruth was a quieter, behind-the-scenes presence. A quilter, crafter and weaver, she began making wall hangings from recycled and found materials, one every Earth Day, for FAS to raffle as a fundraiser. Later, she added a couple of other holidays to her weaving contributions. I feel incredibly fortunate to own 5 of Ruth's special weavings, which I rotate

through the seasons on the walls of my house. Flathead Audubon honored Ruth for many years with the annual “Ruth White Birthday Walk,” the second weekend in May, on the trail that runs along the Swan River in Bigfork.

When Flathead Audubon members voted to move FAS meetings to Kalispell, Jack and Ruth came to fewer meetings, as darkness and snowy roads made their trip difficult. Eventually, they moved into Buffalo Terrace in Kalispell and we were happy to have them back with us.

Both Jack and Ruth have passed away now, but many of us continue to remember them with smiles and fond memories. They left a part of their life savings to Flathead Audubon's care, and for that we are very grateful. But more than that, we continue to admire the wonderful example they set of quiet commitment to the cause of birds and to the people who love our feathered friends.

Kay Mitchell

Spring Waterfowl Migration Project – There's more to this than a sign of spring! From Gael Bissell, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

My thermos is filled with hot coffee. I peek out the window and see glints of red and gold rising over the Swan Mountains. It's a cold mid-March morning with snow still on the ground but I'm itching to go, as today is one of our weekly Migratory Waterfowl Survey Days. I and a dozen other colleagues are headed out to count ducks, geese, and swans in the Flathead and Smith Valleys during their annual spring migration. We are thrilled that these hefty and noisy migrants are back and that spring is just around the corner but we are not just bird watching. We are contributing to a growing body of knowledge about migratory bird use in this region.



Flock of Canada Geese, Mallards, Northern Pintails, and American Wigeon feeding on waste grain along the north shore of Flathead Lake in March 2012.

The waterfowl world has primarily focused on identifying and protecting wintering and breeding habitats; while those habitats are clearly the highest priorities for managing continental waterfowl populations, migratory ducks, geese, and swans also need access to productive and secure stopover resting and feeding areas on their way north so that they arrive on breeding grounds in good, or better yet, excellent condition. Identifying these stopover areas and the specific habitats where these birds forage and rest are also important objectives of North American waterfowl management plans.

We know that thousands of ducks, geese, and swans come through our valleys each year. But what percent of the total migratory bird population does that represent? How long do these flocks stay? Where do they forage? How do they use our landscape? If our landscape changes, how would that affect these species? If this region is important for migration, what habitats or lands should be conserved? This Spring Waterfowl Migration project was designed to answer some of these questions.

Working together with local birders, agencies, and other volunteers, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks initiated standardized spring waterfowl counts in 2010. We decided our best approach would be to simultaneously count waterfowl across the valley on one day of each week during March and April. However, to give the project statistical validity, we divided the valley up into one square-mile sampling units and then randomly selected about 50 of them to survey at the same time each week. On survey days, about 10-12 observers count and map by species all waterfowl seen within about 5-7 of these square mile units while others monitor key staging areas. When possible, we coordinate these ground surveys with a helicopter count to correct for missed observations. The project is slated to end after the spring in 2014.



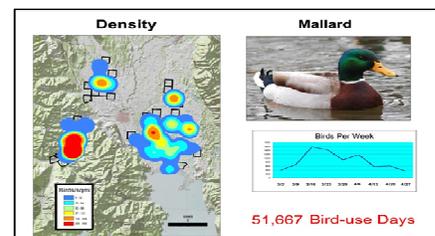
Distribution of waterfowl observation points across the Smith and Flathead Valleys based on data collected through a standardized sampling protocol.

Members of Flathead Audubon, who are also some of the best birders in our region, have contributed generously to this project. In addition, students from Bigfork High School and now Flathead Valley Community College are helping to enter the data into standardized GIS databases; not only is this great real world experience for these students, it is a huge help to the waterfowl researchers.

To date, the results show that about 20 waterfowl species migrate through the Flathead each year and that we typically have tens of thousands of birds scattered across the valley on a daily basis from late February through April and into early May.

Where they go in the valley seems to vary in response to snow cover, snow melt, ice-out, flooding, inclement weather and other conditions. We have found that some species/flocks seem to take advantage of flooded croplands and flooded fields and burned wheat stubble once the snow melts. All species appear to depend on our natural wetlands for both food

and rest including all the river sloughs, large and small ponds, and bigger marshes. Few species use canola stubble but geese will use the green up in the spring. And, it is clear that certain lakes, including the north shore area of Flathead Lake and Smith Lake are key areas for both resting and foraging. The outcome from this project will be the development of habitat use models by species that predict/describe waterfowl uses of both wetlands and uplands during this time of year. From these models we will be able to determine what important factors affect waterfowl usage of certain habitats or areas. *(Spring Migration, continued on page 8)*



Example of Mallard density map for sample locations and total Mallard bird-use days from first year of data collection (prepared by Bigfork High School GIS class)

(Spring Migration, continued from page 7 ...) We will have estimates of waterfowl-use days by species that will help us assess the value of our entire study area to Pacific Flyway populations. These and other results will give us some measure of the importance of this area to migratory waterfowl, provide a priority of habitats that should be considered for conservation, and contribute to the overall scientifically-based conservation efforts of the Intermountain West Joint Venture, a collaborative of agency and public partnerships across the Rocky Mountain states and Canada. Stay tuned for more results in the coming years. If you are interested in helping identify and count migratory birds in the spring, contact Gael Bissell 406-751-4580.



Reasons to Love the New Migratory Bird Stamp

At just \$15, it's hard to pass up this piece of "art." Its official name is the "2013-2014 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp," but many people know it as the "Federal Duck Stamp." Buying a Migratory Bird Stamp is a simple and direct way for people to contribute to grassland and wetland conservation.

The first stamp was issued in 1934 and cost \$1. By now, stamp sales have surpassed \$850 million and helped protect 5.5 million acres of wetland and grassland habitat. The Migratory Bird Stamp is a beautiful collectible and a great artistic tradition.

Since 1949, the design has been chosen in an open art contest. This year's stamp, showing a Common Goldeneye, is by Robert Steiner, who also won the 1998-1999 contest with an image of a Barrow's Goldeneye – a stamp that sold 1,627,521 copies and raised more than \$24 million on its own. Ninety-eight



cents of each dollar spent on a stamp goes directly to land acquisition for national wildlife refuges.

Although required by waterfowl hunters, the funds benefit many other birds, butterflies, fish, reptiles, amphibians, and native plants that share the habitat. Stamp revenues have been used to protect 3 million acres of "waterfowl production areas" in the critical Prairie Pothole area since 1958. It also protects declining prairie-nesting birds and grassland specialists. And it is a free pass to refuges that charge for admission.

This \$15 purchase is perhaps the single and simplest thing you can do to support a legacy of wetland and grassland conservation for birds. The Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp is a direct aid to conservation – you can buy the stamp at many US Post Offices, National Wildlife Refuges, and sporting goods stores. What are you waiting for?

Jewel Basin Hawk Watch enters its Sixth Full Season

Starting Sunday, August 25, the sixth full season of fall raptor migration monitoring got underway at the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch. Over the past five years, volunteers and paid observers have counted more than 12,000 hawks, eagles and falcons from this scenic mountaintop site northeast of Bigfork. The survey effort has been a partnership between American Bird Conservancy, Flathead National Forest, Flathead Audubon and the Plum Creek Foundation. But one important element of the effort is that volunteers donate hundreds of hours every year to help spot birds traveling south along the ridge to their wintering grounds. Due to their (your!) efforts, more than 5,500 Sharp-shinned Hawks and 2,000 Golden Eagles, along with 16 other species, have been counted passing the site.

The best days are typically warm with southwest winds, with the peak in migration typically falling during the second half of September. The early part of the season is mostly Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, and eagles dominate the flight in October. But it is not uncommon to see dozens (or hundreds!) of birds of 10 species or more on a good day. A visit to the site involves a hike of just over 2 miles, climbing from the Jewel Basin parking lot to the ridgeline site at 7,100' on the flanks of Mt. Aeneas. If you would like to participate, or have questions, you can contact Dan Casey at 406-270-5941 or 406-857-3143. Dan also maintains a Yahoo Group site for this effort, where observers can coordinate their visits, see regular updates of survey results, check on predicted weather at the site, and see project reports and photos. To sign up, visit: [http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/Jewel Basin Hawk Watch/](http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/Jewel_Basin_Hawk_Watch/)

We will be expanding our efforts at Badrock Canyon this year, as well. In addition to the planned field trip in October, Craig Hohenberger will conduct periodic surveys there to complement the ridgetop counts.

Though the site does not offer the intimate looks we get in the Jewel, it offers a valuable, easily-accessed opportunity to enjoy the spectacle that is raptor migration in the Flathead Valley. These counts will also be coordinated in part through the Jewel Basin Yahoo site.

We hope you will plan on joining one or more surveys this fall. Huckleberries, colorful foliage, scenic views and close-up looks at passing hawks make for a wonderful way to spend a day!

From Dan Casey





Thank You!

...to those below who have made donations to Flathead Audubon from May 18 through September 18, 2013

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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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