



Rogers Lake Loon Rescue

As briefly mentioned in the December Post, another Common Loon has been rescued from being frozen into the ice at Rogers Lake. Here's the full story.

Remember 15 years ago when a loon got trapped in a small patch of open water in December, and a boisterous bunch of neighbors ended up jumping up and down on an aluminum boat to break a path through the ice to rescue the trapped loon? That bird turned out to be an adult who probably was one of the pair that had nested at Rogers, and had never left because it had lost a big swath of flight feathers.



John Ashley

This time, the very low temperatures in November froze the lake quickly and produced a thicker layer of ice than in 1999. The rescuers were able to walk out on the ice to get near the hole of open water where the loon was swimming, then work their way carefully over the thin ice that surrounded the hole. And this time, the rescue operation was handled by experienced rescuers who wore serious dry suits in case the ice broke under them, and had a rescue sled nearby and long climbing ropes to pull them out if they did go in.

The point man was Jon Obst of FWP, who has substantial experience at rescuing people and animals who've fallen through the ice, and even teaches others how to do it. The first day, Jon lay spread-eagled next to the open patch, trying to snatch up the loon with a long-handled net. Backing him up in the rescue sled was Bob Lee of Flathead Search and Rescue, and ready to pull Bob to safety with a climbing rope was Gary Moses, recently retired from the Park Service. Just prior to retirement, Gary had worked in Glacier Park; before that, he was at Yellowstone, where he helped rescue people and dogs who had wandered out on the thin crust of a hot spring. A great rescue crew! Supporting the crew was Gael Bissell of FWP, who oversaw logistics and safety.

That first day, Jon discovered that the handle on his net was too short, and that every time the surface ice cracked under pressure of expansion, the thin platform he was lying on sank a few inches more into the water. The attempt was finally suspended.

The next morning, while the air was still cold, the crew returned to the ice. This time, Jon lay on one side of the hole and Bob lay on the other side, with a mist net spread between them, dipping into the water. They waited patiently, the boom of ice cracking the only sound. The loon popped up for air, then dove, then up again, then quickly back down. **Continued on page 5.**



John Ashley

JANUARY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, January 12, 2015. 7 PM. Flathead Audubon General Meeting, Gateway Community Center, US Hwy 2 West, Kalispell. See page 3.

Monday, January 5, 2015. 6 PM. FAS Board of Directors Meeting, 295 3rd Ave EN. All welcome.

Sunday, January 4, 2015. Kalispell Christmas Bird Count. See page 5.

Saturday & Sunday, January 10 thru March 22, 2015. Explore Glacier National Park on Snowshoes. See page 5.

Sunday, January 18, 2015. Mission Valley Birding Trip. See page 5.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

By Gael Bissell

The Red-tailed Hawk: A Flying, Feathered Velociraptor!

It's a quiet cold December day and as I drive into town... out of the corner of my eye I see a largish dark raptor perched on a power pole staring into the grassy-snowy ditch along the road. I slow down, but it's not safe to stop or take a good look. I turn the car around and cruise gently past the bird. I am delighted to see the determined concentration of a beautiful adult Red-tailed Hawk keeping its balance in the wind, and maintaining focus on something moving on the ground below. Although Redtails are one of our most common hawks here in both winter and summer, you may wonder why I smile when I see "just another Red-tailed Hawk"? Well, got a minute?



Silver Photos

Several decades ago, there were two zealous undergraduate zoology students (one of whom was Dr. Jack Kirkley, now a Biology professor at UM-Western in Dillon and active Audubon member) who were attending a small midwestern college. One day, these two students discovered the awe of "birds of prey" and decided to embark on a raptor research project. They decided to track down every pair of Red-tailed Hawks and Great-horned Owls within 15 miles of town, climb huge hardwood trees with ropes or use a mirror mounted atop a long, extendable pole to look into every nest, and set up a research blind high in an old oak tree overlooking a soon-to-be-occupied Red-tail nest. It wasn't long after they started this crazy project that these students shared their incredible and rare close-up hawk photos with me.

Before long, I was also out searching for nests, climbing up trees, and sitting in that blind for hours at a time. I felt like the luckiest person in the world as I watched two tiny fluffy white, clumsy chicks with oddly oversized feet hatch out. I can recall the various loud calls that the adults used to warn each other of intruders and then the more subtle calls that let each other know when they were returning to the nest with rodents or snakes. I watched in fascination as the adult female used those clawed feet to hold the carcass and then rip and tear the prey into innumerable bite-sized shreds but then ever so gently feed the tiny morsels to each chick. I watched wide-eyed as the chicks grew into awkward teenagers flapping

wings and jumping wildly around the nest and then becoming gorgeous young birds shedding the last of their down before finally flying off.

To a 19-year old inexperienced zoology undergrad, these birds were something else... more like flying, feathered, velociraptors with sharp beaks and yellow clawed feet living out a strange and foreign life in a tree only about a mile from my dorm room. It's been years since this formative experience but I am still enthusiastic and somewhat nostalgic about the Red-tailed Hawk.

The Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*, is one of the stockier North American buteos that hunt during the day in mostly open country. This bird-of-prey has the typical buteo shape with rounded wings that can stretch 4 feet across; they are about 19 inches long from head to tail. Like other hawks and eagles, female Redtails are larger than males and can weigh up to three lbs.

Redtails will hunt the most common prey available in open country (e.g., voles, mice, rabbits, ground squirrels, tree squirrels, grouse and snakes, etc.) and have adapted well to areas of human development, such as agricultural lands, parks, suburban areas, and transportation and energy corridors across North America.



The Red-tailed Hawk is a perfect generalist, an adaptive and versatile creature that many call the "jack of all trades." It has an uncanny ability to not only hunt from open perches (its primary mode of hunting) but also to soar, kite, and swoop to catch prey.

Once called "chicken hawks" and killed because of their tendency to hang around small farms, Redtail numbers have increased steadily since the 1960's. (In reality, Redtails rarely kill chickens, although they may take a chick or two; these birds are often highly beneficial to farmers because they prey on a variety of rodents.) Partners in Flight estimate that there are around 2.3 million Redtails in North America today.

As winter begins to recede, Redtails begin their spectacular aerial courtship displays. A pair may soar together in wide circles high up in the air.

Continued on page 4.



Distribution of Red-tailed Hawks in North America.

December Program

COEXISTENCE IS POSSIBLE: HUMANS, WILD ANIMALS AND NATURE

Elke Duerr is a bi-national filmmaker, conservationist, interspecies communicator, and founder and director of the nonprofit Web of Life Foundation W.O.L.F. Drawing on her experience with endangered Mexican Gray Wolves and wild American Bison, Elke will present a short video about successful coexistence between wolves and humans at our January meeting.



Elke will explore with us different ways of coexisting peacefully with wild animal species, and a new story of why we all belong in the web of life. She will tell stories about how to conduct ourselves in a healthy way when we live with large wild animals as our neighbors, understanding who wild animals really are, and how old stories and myths have shaped our current relationships based on fear of them and what each one of us can contribute to change those stories.



We will also view a video about the recent rescue of an ice-bound Common Loon on Rogers Lake made by nature photographer and Flathead Audubon member John Ashley.

Please join us at 7 PM on Monday, January 12, in the United Way Conference Room of the Gateway Community Center, Highway 2 West, Kalispell.

The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.
Mahatma Gandhi

THANK YOU, DAN and SUSANNAH CASEY

Dan and Susannah Casey are moving to Billings, where Dan has taken a new job as the Coordinator of the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture based in Billings, a unique collaborative of government and non-governmental organizations focused on priority bird conservation.



Bird Count, which now generally has over 35 participants each year.

Susannah has served as the Hospitality Chair for FAS meetings, and was Vice-President of the Chapter for two years. And it is Susannah who designed and made the beautiful turquoise FAS banner that is used to signal the FAS presence at many public

occasions, and currently is used to mark the place where the monthly FAS meetings are held. Susannah is also the person who designed and produced the aerial map of Owen Sowerwine Natural Area which is displayed on the OSNA kiosk, and used in a smaller version for the OSNA Visitors' Brochure.

Dan was an FAS Board member and Program Chair, and for 7 years served as Field Trip organizer. He's served on the Owen Sowerwine Committee, and has led numerous field trips to Owen Sowerwine, including for many years his popular Father's Day Canoe Trip to OSNA. He used these field trips plus other visits to assemble and update the OSNA Bird Species list. Since 1989, Dan has organized and compiled records for the Bigfork Christmas Bird Count, which is a highlight of the Christmas season for many FAS members. And in 1999, he began the Kalispell Christmas

Through the years, Dan and Susannah have often helped with FAS functions, and provided support for FAS projects. Those of you who were around when the Sunflower Seed Sale was the major FAS funding project will remember getting your sacks of seed loaded into your vehicle by Susannah or Dan, or watching Dan unload bird seed he'd hauled between sites.

THANK YOU, SUSANNAH AND DAN for all you have done for Flathead Audubon.

CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

Highlights from December 2014 Board Meeting:

- * agreed to send a letter of support to both MT senators for a bill currently in Congress which would increase the Duck Stamp fee to \$25
- * heard and discussed report on draft Strategic 5-Year Plan for the Conservation Education Program
- * took photos of board members for the FAS website
- * discussed and set up Conservation Achievement Recognition awardees for remainder of year and early next year

Red-tailed Hawk ... Continued from page 2.

Vocalizations (yes, the screeching calls you hear in nearly all Hollywood movies) are common, particularly in boundary disputes between territorial pairs. I heard this call only a few weeks ago as I watched a larger Redtail chase off a smaller intruder from her apparent "winter" territory.

Red-tailed Hawks are very acrobatic. To attract females, males may make steep dives and ascents and then may lock talons with the female and spiral toward the ground. Both male and female help build fairly large stick nests, usually near the trunks of the larger trees in woodlots or patches of trees where they can easily observe their surroundings. They may use the same nest year after

year. Often Great Horned Owls, one of the dreaded predators of Redtail young, takes over and uses Redtail nests. Redtails are most sensitive to disturbances during the incubation period of the nesting season and may abandon their nests if disturbed at that time.

Red-tailed Hawks vary widely in coloration across their range, with transitional color patterns occurring where subspecies' ranges converge. There are five distinct subspecies: Eastern, Southwestern, Western, Krider's, and Harlan's. All subspecies except for the Western's dark morph and the dark Harlan's have a light under-wing with a blackish mark on the lighter underside of the leading edge of the wing as well as a dark "comma" just beyond the "wrist" of the outer wing. Most adult Redtails have the striking rufous tail. In contrast, most juvenile Redtails are gener-



ally white or pale when viewed from below with brown-banded tails. Individuals of the Southwestern subspecies typically have darker backs and wings but are generally much paler underneath. The Western subspecies (typical of our area) tends to have darker streaking and a belly band (juvenile) with a rufous wash on the undersides (adult). But beware, about

20% of the Western subspecies includes a dark morph where the adult is entirely black on the back and belly and has a red tail while the dark morph juvenile has a pale tail.

To add to identity confusion, the rare Harlan's subspecies that breeds in Alaska and northwest Canada migrates and winters through the Flathead and Mission Valleys. The adult Harlan's is

completely dark on back, head, and belly but it has variable white streaks on its chest and a white tail (not red). The juvenile Harlan's is not readily distinguishable from the Western dark morph making positive identification of subspecies on the Christmas Bird Count an annual challenge.

With the advent of digital cameras, live streaming and "Nature" channels, anyone can watch and listen to these fascinating birds-of-prey during the nesting season. To experience hours of calm incubation punctuated by territorial defenses followed by the tearing and feeding frenzy that emits a "velociraptorial" feeling that I once had, visit the Cornell University campus webcam (URL) next spring (http://cams.allaboutbirds.org/channel/16/Red-tailed_Hawks).

DUCK STAMP PRICE INCREASE PASSES CONGRESS

The U.S. Congress has passed a bill to increase the price of the Duck Stamp from \$15 to \$25. It now awaits the President's signature. This is the first increase since 1991 and the increased revenue will enable wildlife professionals to better manage and conserve wetland habitats and the wildlife that depend on them.

New Portal to Solar Programs and Incentives

Audubon is assembling information and resources for actions that people can take at home, at work, and in their communities to mitigate the impacts of climate change. The first of these resources—[now available online](#)—is a portal to information on rooftop and community-based solar programs and incentives by state.

Field Trips, Reviews and Upcoming

All FAS field trips are free and open to the public and are geared for all ages and levels of field experience. They are led by area biologists, retired professionals, and some of the best birders in the region. For all Field Trips, dress for the weather, bring binoculars or spotting scope if you have them, wear sturdy footwear, and drive and pull off the road safely. All drivers must have their own vehicle insurance. For more information, contact Kathy Ross, 837-3738, or Gael Bissell, 261-2255, or the individual field trip leader listed below. Also, a free brochure, "Birding Hotspots of the Flathead" is available at the FAS general meetings and on www.FlatheadAudubon.org.



KALISPELL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT. Sunday, January 4, 2015. People participating in this count will meet at 7 AM at the Montana Club on the south side of Kalispell. Contact Pete Fisher for details and to sign up at 250-9624 or fisherpete888@yahoo.com.

EXPLORE GLACIER NATIONAL PARK ON SNOWSHOES. Saturday & Sunday, January 10 thru March 22, 2015. Enjoy a two-hour ranger-led snowshoe walk and take an intimate look at the park in winter. Search for signs of wildlife, discover the plants and animals of the park, and enjoy the solitude of winter during this unique experience. Not recommended for children under age 6. Meet at Apgar Visitor Center. Trips leave at 10:30 AM & 2:00 PM. Participants may use their own snowshoes or rent snowshoes for a nominal fee at the Visitor Center. Snowshoe rentals are also available elsewhere in the Flathead Valley. If you have questions regarding this offering, please call 406-888-7800.

WINTER TRAILS DAY. Saturday January 10, 2015. A snowshoe walk on the Flathead National Forest, hosted by the Swan Lake Ranger District and Flathead Audubon, will be at the Blacktail Mountain cross-country ski trails near Lakeside, January 10 from 10 AM-Noon. Participants may bring snowshoes, or a limited number of children and adult shoes will be available by reservation. Please meet at the upper trailhead parking area. Reservations are not required. For more information or to reserve snowshoes, please contact the Swan Lake Ranger District at 837-7500.

MISSION VALLEY BIRDING TRIP. Sunday, January 18, 2015. Flathead Audubon starts the New Year by inviting you on our annual Mission Valley field trip to look for hawks, waterfowl and other winter residents. **Please Sign Up Early!** We encourage carpooling and will limit space to 6-7 vehicles. Meet Leslie Kehoe and Bob Lee at Somers Park-N-Ride at 8 AM to bird along Flathead Lake, through Polson and south in the Mission Valley. If folks from the Polson or Mission Valley area would like to join us, meet at the Polson McDonald's, but please call for the meeting time. Bring lunch, warm clothes, optics, and New Year's cheer! We'll return in late afternoon. To sign up, call Leslie or Bob at 406-837-4467 after 5 PM. All ages and birding abilities are welcome!

Loon Rescue continued from page 1.

Gradually the bird settled down, and swam and dove more calmly. It began to swim closer to the net, diving alongside it – until finally, it dove right into the mist net. Jon and Bob jerked up on the net, and the bird was entangled! As they pulled the bird away from the hole, they wrapped it more securely in the net, and Bob was then able to carry it back to a waiting pet carrier on the rescue sled. By now, big smiles



John Ashley

covered all faces – except the loon's. The rescued loon turned out to be a juvenile who apparently had paused to feed at the lake during its migration. (Rogers Lake had no chicks survive this year). Right after the rescue, Gael and Jon took the bird to a veterinarian to be checked out. An x-ray showed no broken bones, but

the vet found serious damage at the wrist of one wing – clearly the reason why it hadn't been able to fly away as the ice froze. The vet thought it would heal with time, so the bird was released into Flathead Lake.

Before it was released, the bird was banded -

- see the December *Post* for band colors. A loon with these bands has already been spotted several times at the north end of Flathead Lake. If you see a loon on Flathead this winter, please check for bands, and let Gael know what you see, and when and where you saw it. Her contact info is on the last page of this newsletter.



John Ashley

By Linda Winnie

Conservation Ed Corner

I wish to thank everyone for the warm welcome I have received. I couldn't ask to work for a nicer bunch of people! So far, I have been trying to familiarize myself with all the materials we have in our alcove at the Northwest Montana Education Cooperative. Our current Education Strategic Plan expires at the end of 2014, so the Education Committee has been reviewing and updating that document to reflect our goals, especially with regard to evaluating the effectiveness of our programs and materials

Events scheduled for January include the Winter Trails Day snowshoe walk at Blacktail Cross-country Ski Trails on the 10th from 10-Noon. Some snow shoes are available for free by reservation from

the Flathead National Forest Swan Ranger District. This is a family event and we hope for good weather! For more information, see page 5.

On January 17th the O'Shaughnessy Center will be hosting a wildlife friendly gathering sponsored by Children's House Montessori. Audubon will once again provide interactive display materials from 4-5, followed by a concert by famed natural science song and dance man, Billy B. If you have never seen Billy B, you should check it out. He uses songs and dances to teach children *of all ages* about the wonders of natural science, ecology and the environment.

From Patti Mason

West Valley Naturalists January Meeting

Private Forest Land Management will be the topic of the January 8 program. Angel Rosario from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Rick Moore from the Montana Department of Natural Resources will discuss state and federal programs and incentives to help private citizens who are managing their own forest property. The program will be held in the science lab at West Valley School (2290 Farm to Market Road) at 7 pm. Free and open to all. For more information contact Linda de Kort (755-3704).

Roy S. Dimond Exhibit of Game Bird Feather Mounts

An exhibit of mounted and framed game bird tail feathers that were done by the late Roy S. Dimond are now on exhibit at the Museum at Central School. The exhibit is in the main entrance hallway and will be up until March 2015. There is no admittance fee to see the Roy Dimond exhibit, however, a tour of the full

Museum does require a fee.

Roy was a long time member of the Flathead Audubon Society as well as many local hiking groups. Upon his death, Roy left much of his memorabilia to the Museum at Central School.

Montana Audubon State Birding Festival

Last Chance Audubon Society, has been busy planning a spectacular event for June 5-7, 2015! Janice Miller and Jo Lace, the LCAS festival co-chairs, have surprises lined up for all attendees and we certainly hope you're planning to join us.

Our visits to the Red Lion Colonial Inn have resulted in securing wonderful space for our meetings, meals and speaker events. The open space and easy access to major roads will enhance our festival and field trip experiences. The LCAS Chapter has hinted at fabulous birding tours—possibly river floats, as well as non-birding trips such as a historical tour of Helena and a trip to a local arts center.

Each month we will continue to feature developing news on the 2015 Bird Festival. Stay tuned as next month we'll tantalize you with a glimpse of some birding field trip destinations! For more information contact Montana Audubon's Bird Festival Coordinator, Cathie Erickson: cerickson@mtaudubon.org.



FLATHEAD AUDUBON MISSION STATEMENT

THE FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY IS A LOCAL CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY.



- ⇒ OUR MISSION IS TO CONSERVE BIRDS, WILDLIFE HABITAT, AND ECOSYSTEM DIVERSITY.
- ⇒ WE PROMOTE AWARENESS AND APPRECIATION OF THE NATURAL WORLD THROUGH EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND ADVOCACY PROGRAMS.
- ⇒ WE WORK WITH DIVERSE GROUPS AND AGENCIES TO ACHIEVE SOUND DECISIONS ON NATURAL RESOURCE ISSUES.
- ⇒ WHILE FOCUSING OUR EFFORTS IN NORTHWEST MONTANA, WE BELIEVE IN THE PROTECTION OF THE EARTH AND ALL OF ITS INHABITANTS.



Thank You!

...to those below who have made donations to Flathead Audubon through December 18, 2014

Eagle

Tom and Teresa Quinn Foundation
Whitefish Community Foundation



Snowy Owl

William and Carol Jensen



Merlin

Richard and Sarah Thomason



Supporting Member + donation

Brett Thuma



Flathead Audubon is the grateful recipient of significant donations from two local foundations, the Whitefish Community Foundation and the Tom and Teresa Quinn Foundation. Their donations of \$1000 each will help support Flathead Audubon's Conservation Education Program in getting our local kids outdoors and learning about nature. Many thanks to these two long-time FAS supporters!

STAGGERING BIRD DECLINES IN EUROPE

In a November 3, 2014, article the Washington Post reports that a group of scientists from the U.K. and the Czech Republic have documented a stunning decline in the number of Europe's birds since 1980. The birds vanishing are actually members of the most common species -- including sparrows, starlings, and skylarks. The researchers calculate that there are now 421 million fewer birds across 25 European countries than there were at the start of the 1980s -- a change the study attributes to human-caused environmental degradation.

The scale of decline, in the words of the study just out in the journal *Ecology Letters*, is "alarming." The research finds that out of the 144 most common species, there were about 2.06 billion birds in Europe in 1980, and just 1.64 billion in 2009 (the last year considered in the study). Thus, more than a 20 percent decrease.

"90 percent of that decline can be attributed to the 36 most common species," says lead study author Richard Inger. According to Inger, the top five species experiencing stark declines are the house sparrow, common starling, Eurasian skylark, willow warbler, and Eurasian tree sparrow. The research builds on thousands of bird surveys that have been carried out by volunteers going back to 1980. The study also notes that precisely because these declines are in common species, they are more likely to be indicators of environmental degradation. Inger says that he suspects that expansion of agriculture represents a key cause of the decline, but so does urbanization. More farmland and more houses and roads means less habitat for birds, and also habitat fragmentation.

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



* * * *

The FAS activity which most interests me is:

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

* * * *

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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 PM and include a featured guest who presents a conservation or nature program. The Board of Directors meet the Monday preceding the general meeting, at 6 PM 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

Conservation Educator - Patti Mason: auduboneducator@gmail.com

Have to leave this area open for address label

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

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FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

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 (Extra \$15 funds local projects such as Conservation Education and Owen Sowerwine Natural Area)

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