



Steve Gniadek Receives Conservation Achievement Recognition

We are excited to present our first 2017 Conservation Achievement Recognition to Steve Gniadek who is clearly one of the most dedicated conservation-minded people in the Flathead. Steve, who has assimilated extensive and diverse wildlife experiences throughout his career, is now a happily retired wildlife biologist living in the Flathead Valley. But Steve is no ordinary retiree, he is one of those passionate and committed individuals who believes that his fortunate and exciting life of public service requires that he continue to give back his time and energy to the local community.

Steve G. (as many of us call him) grew up in Illinois and became a budding birder in high school.



Photo courtesy Steve Gniadek

He graduated from college in 1970 with his B.S. in Wildlife & Forestry from the University of Michigan where he was an invited member of Xi Sigma Pi, the National Forestry Honor Society. Always drawn to the field, Steve then joined the Peace Corps and traveled to Colombia, South America where he began the first bird inventory for a newly created National Park. His species list was

the first for that area; can you imagine learning all the birds of the Colombian highlands before there were hardly any field guides?

The following years, Steve worked a diversity of field positions in Montana and across the U.S. such *continued on page 10*

West Valley Wetlands Project Fundraising Success!

We did it! As the Pileated Post goes to press, Flathead Audubon has just passed the \$10,000 mark for our fundraising pledge to the Flathead Land Trust for the West Valley Wetlands Project. Thank you, everyone, for donating money or sale items, passing the word, supporting, and cheering each other on! With the addition of an anonymous pledge matching our donations 1:2, we will exceed our original pledge and help establish the conservation easement to protect ponds in the West Valley, home to hundreds of bird and animal species and staging grounds for the Flathead's Sandhill Cranes. This was a huge leap, to "put our money where our mouths are," but for what better cause? Thank you, thank you, for showing how much you value our local birds and their habitat!

Kay Mitchell, FAS President



MARCH FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, March 13, 2017. 7 PM. Flathead Audubon General Meeting, Gateway Community Center, US Hwy 2 West, Kalispell, See page 3.

Monday, March 6, 2017. 6 PM. FAS Board of Directors Meeting, 295 3rd Ave EN. All welcome.

Saturdays & Sundays, January 9 thru March 19, 2017. Explore Glacier National Park on Snowshoes. See page 4.

Saturday, March 4, 2017, Wings, Tails, Tracks and Trails in Late Winter. See page 4.

Sunday, March 12, 2017. Welcome Back Spring, Early Waterfowl and Other Migrants in the East Valley. See page 4.

Saturday & Sunday, March 25-26, 2017. Freezout Lake and the Snow Geese Migration. See page 8.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER—A NOVEL VOICE OF THE BOREAL FOREST

By Kathy Ross

It was an early spring morning in Glacier Park backcountry. Along with a group of researchers, I stood mesmerized by the drama we were witnessing. In the tall, grassy, wet meadow below us, a gray wolf unrelentingly chased a distraught cow moose. The intense scene was suddenly lightened by the capricious “quick-three-beers” song of an Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*) perched on the snag beside our viewing point. This was my first introduction to this unusual flycatcher song imprinting it forever in my memory.

The Olive-sided Flycatcher is an unfamiliar bird to many folks but once you pick up on the distinctive song, even without an intense experience with which to relate, the emphatic demand for “quick-three-beers” can stick with you. Listen for it as you wander the edges of wet meadows, forest openings or rivers running throughout boreal forests. Also, it is linked closely with fire and other natural disturbances, as long as enough snags and trees are left to provide singing and hunting perches. “It is one of a suite of species that occur at higher densities in burned rather than unburned areas...”(1)

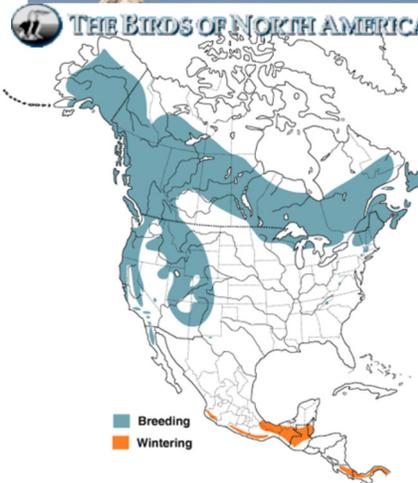
This congener of the pewees is one of the larger flycatchers at around 7.5". It is large-billed, deep olive-brown with dark sides on breast and flanks, separated by a white patch down the center of the breast. The tail is broad and prominently notched. Like most flycatcher species, it feeds almost entirely on flying insects, with bees, wasps and ants thought to be preferred fare. In typical flycatcher fashion, it makes dashing aerial attacks to catch prey in the air. The Olive-sided uses high exposed perches, mostly snags, returning to the same perch with captured meal. “It is the only North American flycatcher to use this method of hunting exclusively.”(2)

The Olive-sided Flycatcher is one of the latest nesters of all breeding birds in North America. Nesting can occur mid-May to mid-June and even into July. It breeds from Alaska all the way across the northern boreal zone to eastern Canada and northern New

England. In the western mountains, it can also be found breeding in Central California, Arizona and New Mexico, with scattered populations turning up in Baja California, southern Nevada mountains, Texas and the eastern mountain ranges.



©Brian L. Sullivan



Females do all of the two-week long incubation of eggs, with males providing food during this time. Together the pair defends the nest aggressively in the event that a hapless squirrel or another intruder might get too close to the nest. Of the 3-4 young of a productive but sometimes later season nest, the fledglings may leave the nest as late as early September. It should be noted, “overall annual productivity of this species is among the lowest of any North American songbird.”(3) An Oregon study found highest nesting success in burn areas and lowest productivity in forest edge nests. Look for nests on the outer ends of the highest conifer branches in clusters of twigs and needles.

The short breeding season coupled with fluctuating climate changes is probably partially responsible for this low productivity. Along with loss of forested habitat in Central and South America, there is a noted decline in this flycatcher species. This significant decline has brought about a conservation status of “near threatened” for this species.

The Olive-sided Flycatcher is one the amazing group of long distance avian migrators. They leave the Boreal forest breeding grounds of Canada or the northern tier US as early as late July, if nesting is unsuccessful, and all have departed by October. According to Skaar’s latest Montana bird distribution map, September is the latest recorded sighting of this flycatcher species in our area or state. The migrating populations usually travel along the western mountains of North America and Mexico. The majority of Olive-sided Flycatchers may winter in Panama or northern Andes of Venezuela but may travel as far south as the forested regions of western Bolivia. The highest densities have been found enjoying the tropical warmth of Columbia.

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March Program

Denny's Favorite Oddball Bird Stories

Presented By Denny Olson

Denny Olson, Flathead Audubon Conservation Educator, will present the Monday, March 13 program. Using "bet you didn't know this!" stories about his distant feathered relatives, Denny will "edutain" us with audience participation, surprise, humor and some very interesting lore about birds. He will also attempt to convince us of the incredible value of birds to our life support system and the need to keep their part of the system healthy and diverse. Denny is a well-traveled biologist and naturalist who has been using humor and theater to teach natural history for over 40

years. Denny will also bring along the new "Riparian Wetlands: Birds and the River" educational trunk for a short description and your inspection.

Join us for an evening of fun and learning. You'll be able to impress your friends at your next party with Denny's stories!

The program will be at 7 PM in the Gateway Community Center, US Hwy 2 West. The event is free and open to the public. For more information go to: www.flatheadaudubon.org.

Tom Ulrich Remembered

At our last general meeting, our president Kay Mitchell led us in a moment of silence for a dear friend to Flathead Audubon, Tom Ulrich.

Tom died of a very aggressive form of leukemia on Friday, February 10th at the Siteman Cancer Center in St. Louis, Missouri. The love of his life, Linda Martin, was by his side. Linda can be reached via Facebook or email (wmailhtml:ismartin@siu.edu) or USPS (511 E Board Street, Elkhartville IL 62932). His friend and fellow photographer, Bert Gildart, states on his re-



Tom Ulrich photos.com

cent blog: "Tom was a nationally renowned photographer, profoundly individualistic man, and genuinely good person. His demise has created a void for his many friends." We share those sentiments. Thank you, Tom, for the wonders of this planet (from the smallest hummer to opera singing hippos) you have shared with our community. According to Linda Martin's facebook page a memorial service for Thomas Joseph Ulrich is being planned in Montana for late spring or early summer. *By Linda de Kort*

Original Members at 40th Celebration

At our February 13 meeting, as part of our ongoing celebration of Flathead Audubon's 40th birthday, the chapter honored its original members – those who were members in February 1977. Pictured here are the original members who were present at the meeting. From left to right, Bob Lopp, Ely Jones, Barbara Boorman, Jack Potter, Rick Trembath, Nancy Trembath, and Lex Blood. The full list of original members was published in the January Pileated Post.



Photo by Jake Bramante

WINTER/SPRING FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU!

All Flathead Audubon 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 at 837-3837 or Cory Davis at 257-3166, or the individual field trip leader listed below. Also, a free brochure, "Birding Hotspots of the Flathead" is available at the Flathead Audubon general meetings and on www.FlatheadAudubon.org.



EXPLORE GLACIER NATIONAL PARK ON SNOWSHOES. SATURDAYS & SUNDAYS, January 8 thru March 19, 2017. 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 of the park and enjoy the solitude of winter. Not recommended for children under 6. Meet at Apgar Visitor Center. Trips leave at 10:30 AM and 2 PM. You may use your own snowshoes, or rent snowshoes for \$2 at the Visitors Center. This rental only is available for the 2 hour ranger led trips. Snowshoe rentals are also available elsewhere in the Flathead Valley. For more information, please call 406-888-7800.

WINGS, TAILS, TRACKS AND TRAILS IN LATE WINTER, Saturday, March 4, 2017, 9 AM-about 3:30 PM, co-sponsored by Montana Wilderness Association, FAS, and Montana Audubon. Join us for a hands on, boots (or snowshoes) on the ground field study of this unique wetland habitat, the Owen-Sowerwine Natural Area! We will focus on late-winter birds, including raptors, waterfowl, woodpeckers, and songbirds. We will also study the tracks and trails of birds and mammals that leave their imprints for us to decipher. Expect some off trail travel, mud, and brush. Please come prepared with lunch, water, binoculars, spotting scopes, cameras and smiles! Meet at the Montessori School parking lot off of Willow Glen Road near Kalispell. Leaders will be Brian Baxter and Greta Gansauer of MWA. Group size is limited to 15. For more information or to sign up contact Brian Baxter at b_baxter53@yahoo.com or 406-291-2154.

WELCOME BACK SPRING, EARLY WATERFOWL AND OTHER MIGRANTS IN THE EAST VALLEY. Sunday, March 12. 10:30 AM-1:30 PM. Once again explore wetland areas of Creston and East Valley with premiere birder Craig Hohenberger. This is the peak time for migrating Tundra Swans and a large number of duck species heading north to breeding grounds. Early sightings of shorebirds and first of season migrant songbirds can always add to the intrigue and excitement of birding this time of year with Craig and Flathead Audubon. Meet at the Creston Elementary School, located one block north of Highway 35 on Creston Rd north of the Creston Fire Hall. Bring lunch, foul weather gear and plan to carpool. Please sign up by contacting Cory Davis at 406-257-3166, or piranga99@gmail.com.

FREEZOUT LAKE AND THE SNOW GEESE MIGRATION, March 25-26, 2017. See page 8 for details.

SPRING WATERFOWL AT THE WEST VALLEY WETLANDS, April 2, 2017. Visit the West Valley Wetlands during the waterfowl migration with Flathead Audubon and Flathead Land Trust. We should see many of the Valley's waterfowl and shorebirds during the trip. The tour will also include a stop at the current Flathead Land Trust project conserving one of these wetlands. We will meet at the West Valley School (West Reserve Dr. and Farm to Market Rd.) at 9 AM and carpool from there. We will return to the school by 12:30 PM. Be prepared for any kind of weather, its spring time in Montana! Bring binoculars and a spotting scope if you have one. If you have any questions please contact Cory Davis at 406-257-3166, or piranga99@gmail.com.

Aquatic Invasive Species

As well described at the February FAS program, Montana's waters are at high risk from aquatic invasive species such as the non-native mussels found last summer in eastern Montana. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has proposed amendments to rules that outline new regulations needed in the battle to contain, detect and prevent the risk of spreading invasive mussels and other aquatic invasive species to other state waters. Comments on the proposed rules must be submitted by March 17 via email to [\[ics@mt.gov\]\(mailto:ics@mt.gov\); or mailed to: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Fisheries Division, P.O. Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701.](mailto:fwpxot-</p>
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Legislators in Helena are currently considering what, if any, legislation and funding to pass to support the effort to protect Montana's waters. Montana Audubon is lobbying in support of legislation and funding support but direct contact with the legislators is always helpful. Please consider contacting your legislators on this issue.

wings across the big sky

June 9-11, 2017 Great Falls, Montana

Come join us for Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, this year co-hosted by the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon, June 9-11, 2017, at the Best Western Plus Heritage Inn in Great Falls. All festival activities will take place Friday through Sunday at the Heritage Inn, including registration, field trip departures, guest speaker presentations, meals, banquet festivities, our 40th Anniversary barbecue, and much more. The Heritage Inn is easily accessible from any exit to 10th Avenue South and provides easy access to all our birding activities and field trips.

Currently we have rooms blocked for festival-goers Friday and Saturday nights. Be sure to tell them you're with the Montana Audubon Bird Festival group to get the special rate! If you're planning to arrive early or late to take in the pre- and post-trips sponsored by the local chapter, the hotel will try to accommodate you at our contracted rate outside the block. We suggest you make your reservations soon by calling 406-761-1900 or 1-800-548-8256.

Our Festival Registration Brochure is scheduled to be mailed early March, with an online registration system active soon after. Use either system to register. The brochure is full of information on the festival events and all the field trips that will be available. If you are a volunteer or field trip leader with UMBA, be sure to get the special registration form from Nora or Kay to fill out and mail in.

Here's a Sneak Peak at Some of our Scheduled Events for the Festival:

Keynote speaker - David Ringer from National Audubon – "Protecting Birds and the Places they Need, Today and Tomorrow."

Friday evening – Barbecue and celebration of Montana Audubon's 40 years!

Saturday afternoon – Montana Audubon staff will present information about their programs and work to conserve birds and their habitats, and to educate all ages on the importance of our conservation efforts.

Saturday and Sunday mornings - Educational field trips in and around Great Falls.

Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon has decided that they are unable to manage a Silent Auction this year, so the only items for bid will be the custom tours arranged by Montana Audubon. There will be a BIG raffle this year plus our fun basket raffles. Fun for All!

Stay tuned for more information on other special happenings at or around this festival event.

2017 OSNA Volunteer Monitoring Season Starts this Month CAN YOU HELP?

Flathead Audubon's OSNA Volunteer Monitoring Program starts its 11th year in March.

This Program provides the on-site information that underpins our management of the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area.

Reports from Volunteer Monitors keep our OSNA On-the-Ground Manager up to date on maintenance needs at Owen Sowerwine, and add to our records on the bird and wildlife and native vegetation species present at Owen Sowerwine. In addition, Volunteer Monitors relay feedback from OSNA visitors and neighbors that helps us improve our management of the Area.

YOU CAN HELP by becoming an OSNA VOLUNTEER MONITOR.

Just take an OSNA Volunteer Monitoring Form with you when you visit OSNA, and use it to tell us what you observe. The fill-in-the-blank and checklist parts of the Form give guidance on what to look for, and there is also space for recording additional information and writing comments. The filled-out form is sent to Rick Mace (address on form).

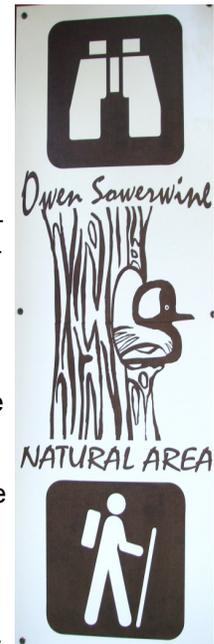
We also need volunteers to do scheduled

monitoring visits, to insure regular flow of information. To sign up for a scheduled monitoring visit, let me know your preferred monitoring period - month and first or last half. For more information see the OSNA section of the FAS website (under CONSERVATION), or contact me: Linda Winnie, 755-1406 or lindawin@centurytel.net.

The Monitoring Form can be printed from the OSNA section of the website, along with an OSNA trail map. These will also be available at FAS meetings, or contact me to have them mailed to you.

THANK YOU to all who have served as Volunteer Monitors over the years. Your help has been invaluable! Please let me know if you are able to help again this year.

From Linda Winnie, Co-Chair, Owen Sowerwine Committee.



Conservation Educator's Corner

Secrets Under The Snow

By Denny Olson

It happens with regularity every year. In the early winter, before the winter rains can crust that early puffy snow, I stop to listen to the incredible silence, and then spot something that makes me remember. The snow under my snowshoes is alive.

This year it was an ongoing drama left behind in the surface snow – a polaroid snapshot of a classic predation story. An owl had left behind a body print with a wingspan as large as mine. “Great gray,” I guessed to myself. The hole punched by its talons went to the ground through knee-deep snow. At the bottom I could even pick out the clear impression of a talon – two toes in front and two in back – which confirmed “owl”. The outside “zygodactyl” front toe had swiveled around to the rear for more efficient prey-snatching. And, a tiny spot of blood there confirmed what every owl knows by sound alone. The snow masks secrets.

In addition to the fact that it is opaque, snow is nearly perfect as a masking agent. The upper layers weave together like goose down, and that's precisely why the lower layers are so interesting and alive. Even though it is frozen, snow is a great insulator. It can be thirty degrees below zero air temperature, and thirty *above* at ground level. Snow traps the earth's body heat (“geothermal”), and melts the bottom layers into a lattice-work of caverns called the “depth hoare”. Among the Inuit and Inupiak people's fifty-some words for different kinds of snow, this layer is called “pukak”. It is mostly empty space – and a playground for furry little “secrets”.

Most of those secrets are small and nocturnal enough to be nearly as secret in the warmer months. The smallest is the pygmy shrew, an insectivore two inches long in body-only length, and weighing as much as a penny. It may be the smallest mammal in the world. Masked shrews are only slightly larger, and, contrary to the usually descriptive and practical nomenclature of small mammals, has no mask. Biologists have increasingly called it the cinereus shrew after its species name.

Vagrant shrews, despite their name, do no more wandering than most other shrews. Perhaps they earned their name by having large food caches in scattered spots. They are almost twice the size of the two smallest shrews. Montane shrews are similar to the vagrant, slightly larger, and prefer higher elevation habitats.

Water shrews will more likely be under the

ice along moving water – even in the high alpine. They dive for their insects, insulated by thousands of tiny air bubbles in their fur, and propelling themselves with large hairy feet. They have to work to stay submerged because of all that floatation they carry.



clipartpanda



water shrew

© QA INTERNATIONAL

Shrews have never adopted hibernation as a cold-weather strategy so they are universally ravenous. They need somewhere between 1.5 and 3 times their body weight in food every day! (That would translate to one large elk per day for me.) They burn their candles at both ends – 103 body temperature, 600 heartbeats per minute, 300 breaths per minute and an average lifespan of six months! They are the original type-A personalities.

Most of our shrews also have an unusual habitat requirement. They need a minimum of 65 percent humidity in their air, or their overactive lungs will dry up and hemorrhage.

So, the pukak layer suits a shrew's needs perfectly, moist air, easy travel, and other animals to eat. It is not out of the question for a voracious shrew to eat animals even larger than themselves.

In general, of the denizens of the pukak layer, shrews have pointy, sensitive noses, tiny eyes, and no visible ears. Voles have large ears and *short* tails, and mice have large ears and long tails. Meadow voles live in meadows, bog voles (lemmings) live in bogs and wet sedge fens, red-backed voles have a reddish back and live in old growth forests, and water voles live near running water in the alpine. Woodland deer mice look the color of a whitetail deer and live in the woods. White-footed mice have bright white feet and live up to the lower elevations of the east side Rocky Mountain Front. *continued on page 10*



clipartpanda

Montana Audubon Legislative Update

By Amy Seaman, Conservation Program Manager, Montana Audubon

The legislature is moving ahead at a rapid pace. We have already testified on 24 bills (supporting 13 and opposing 11), held one citizen lobby day and as you may have heard, contributed to a highly successful public lands rally: on January 30th, the capital was packed with well over 1,000 Montanans supporting public lands! Governor Bullock gave a rousing speech in their defense, vowing that no transfer will occur on his watch (if you missed it, you can still view it on our Facebook page).

Public Lands Fortunately, no land transfer bills have surfaced yet in Helena, but we expect a resolution by Rep. Kerry White (R-Bozeman) to be introduced soon that would negatively impact Montana's wilderness study areas. Montana contains 44 federally-managed wilderness study areas, spanning close to a million acres that provide important habitat for native wildlife and provide world-class recreation opportunities. Many deserve permanent protection and we will actively oppose any attempts to undermine wilderness values in Montana.

Sage-grouse and wildlife funding The most important bill affecting Greater Sage-grouse conservation, House Bill 228, passed its first committee and is making its way through the House. The bill places \$1.6 million in the Sage-grouse stewardship account, generating funds for voluntary conservation of sagebrush habitat, and provides \$400,000 to the Department of Natural Resources for program staffing needs. We are also working hard to ensure that Habitat Montana emerges fully intact and fully funded, with authority for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to conserve vital habitat through land acquisitions and conservation easements in coming years.

Wildlife management We are also tracking a number of bills that would make minor adjustments to wildlife management. For example, we are opposing a bill that would legalize pet foxes in Montana and we are supporting one that would improve protections for the spotted skunk. As one of the only groups advocating for non-game wildlife at the capitol, we make sure all of Montana's wildlife has a voice.

Renewable Energy Unfortunately, clean energy is under attack again this legislative session. We supported House Bill 34, which would have increased the net-metering cap for certain government facilities and provided a clear path to increased solar investment in Montana, but this bill failed in committee. Meanwhile, a number of bills seeking to reduce incentives for renewable energy are moving forward.

Environmental Protections Some extremely bad anti-regulation bills are also circulating in Helena, the worst of which may be Senate Bill 98. This

"regulatory takings" bill would require local governments and state agencies to compensate private property owners every time a law, rule, policy, or permit condition was alleged to reduce the market value of even a portion of their property by *any* amount. Essentially, this bill would be the end of land-use planning and zoning in Montana, and could seriously undermine many environmental protections. It has been proven that responsibly implemented regulations are good for our air and water quality, preserve vital wildlife habitat, and help our native birds and wildlife thrive, and we are actively working to defeat this bill, as well as any other attempts to undermine our bedrock environmental laws.

Clean Water and Wetlands Two bills with huge implications on water and wetlands have also been progressing, although Montana Audubon and our conservation advocates are working hard to stop them. House Bill 339 by Rep. Carl Glimm (R-Kila) would give developers the right to put in wells for new subdivisions without permitting or consultation with those who are legally entitled to use that water first. It's bad policy based on bad science and will deplete streamflows, undermine senior water rights, increase sprawl, and spark conflict among water users. Also, Senate Bill 48, a bill to take over the federal program that regulates wetlands (Section 404 of the Clean Water Act), is advancing, through the first chamber albeit with bipartisan opposition. State management of this permit program does not make sense for many reasons, so we are lobbying to maintain federal control of the program.

There is much more to come, and as we push ahead we will stay focused on our top priorities:

- Securing funding for Habitat Montana and the Greater Sage-grouse Stewardship Act
- Defending clean water and our state's bedrock environmental laws
- Defeating extreme anti-regulation measures
- Keeping our public lands in public hands

There are many ways to help:

Contact your Legislators and Join Us in Helena.

We will continue sending "Action Alerts" asking you to contact your Representative or Senator on key bills. It's *amazing* the difference that constituent calls can make. So when you see an Action Alert be sure to click open! Have your friends join too. It's easy – just visit mtaudubon.org, scroll to the bottom and enter your name and email address. As always, you are welcome in Helena *anytime* – come see the action in person.

Olive-sided Flycatcher continued from page 2

With the steady decline of this interesting and unique forest songbird, be aware of its presence in our forests. Listen for its distinct song and watch for it on snags, especially near forest edges and wetlands. Encourage the protection of forested habitats, especially on its tropical wintering grounds, to ensure that

this distinctive voice of the Boreal forest always remains part of our forest experience.

Sources: (1)Boreal Songbird Initiative, Guide to Boreal Birds, (2)Cornell Lab of Ornithology, All About Birds, (3) Montana Bird Distribution, 7th Edition

2017 Freezout Lake Annual Excursion

Despite the still wintry weather we're having now, the Snow Geese and other waterfowl are beginning to move from their southern California wintering grounds to their arctic nesting areas. There is nothing like Snow Geese and the Rocky Mountains at the same time and place. The place is Freezout Lake near Choteau; the time is the annual Flathead Audubon field trip.

This year's trip is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, March 25 and 26. We will meet at the K-Mart parking lot on the corner of Highways 2 and 35 in Kalispell on Saturday, 25 March at 10 AM, and caravan/carpool over the Divide to Choteau, arriving in time for the afternoon "fly-out." After a night in Choteau, we will head out just before



daybreak to watch the "mass ascension" of geese from the ponds of Freezout WMA. After the morning's birding, we, too, will head home in the early afternoon arriving in Kalispell around 5 PM on Sunday.

Bob Lee will provide a suggested schedule and route, and will be in the front of the group. Participants may choose to pursue the geese on their own as much or as little as they, the weather and the birds allow. Please make your own arrangements for lodging; primitive camping is available at Freezout Wildlife Management Area. Motel options include the Stage Stop (406-466-5900), Gunther (406-466-5444) and Big Sky (406-466-5318). For more information, contact Bob Lee at 270-0371 or RML3@centurytel.net.

NOMINATIONS – ALREADY!!

With one political race, another - more civil - election is soon upon us: that for the FAS Board! At the May potluck, FAS will elect a President, Vice President and some Director positions. It is time to start thinking about the people that you would like to see guide FAS for the near future. The person sitting next to you at the last meeting is a good choice, and the person sitting in your seat is also a good choice! If you

know of someone who would be a good leader, please contact Bob Lee (270-0371 or RML3@centurytel.net); someone from the Nominations Committee will talk with them about roles and responsibilities and get them on the ballot. And anyone that would like to serve on the Nominations Committee should also contact Bob.

FAMILY FORESTRY EXPO

The 28th annual Family Forestry Expo will take place at Stoltze Lumber's Ron Buntmeyer Educational Forest located to the north of Kalispell along Trumbull Creek on Saturday, 6 May, from 9 AM — 3 PM. This is a free family event that offers hands-on understanding of the role that local forests play in our everyday lives. Expo visitors explore how the different parts of a forest are connected to make up a dynamic system, how people and all parts of the environment are dependent on one another, and how each affects the other.

There is a free "loggers lunch," demonstrations, exhibits, and a forest walk with many education-

al stops, including one run by Flathead Audubon Society. FAS has maintained a booth at the Expo for many years and are always looking for volunteers to help engage visitors. If you enjoy being outdoors on a spring day while talking to people of all ages about forests, and especially birds, please contact Denny Olson, the FAS Conservation Educator, at auduboneducator@gmail.com. Or you can grab him at the general meeting. Whether you are a volunteer, participant or just want to enjoy a day in the woods, everyone is welcome to come on out on Saturday, 6 May.

by Bob Lee

Nongame Wildlife Tax Check-off

When filling out your Montana tax form this year, think "wildlife" by donating to the Nongame Wildlife Program, found on line 18a (short EZ form) or 69a



fcps.edu

(long form). If your taxes are prepared, tell your accountant that you want to donate to wildlife! Your contri-

butions are tax deductible on next year's return. Look for the soaring Bald Eagle in the instruction booklet.

Montana has more than 500 species of "nongame" animals that benefit from public support each year at tax time. Since 1983, the check-off has contributed over \$27,000 annually to this important wildlife program.



liveanimals.tv

Free Weed Management Workshop

March 4, 6:30-9:00 PM. FVCC Arts and Technology Building. It is a collaborative program with people from MSU Extension, Glacier National Park, Montana Department of Agriculture, CHS, Flathead Conservation District, Flathead National Forest, and the Flathead County Weed Department.

Mission Mountain Audubon Presentation

Thursday, 30 March: "Birds of the Mission Valley Wetlands" by Pat Jamieson- retired education specialist from the National Bison Range. Polson Library Meeting Room, 7 PM.

Program for Flathead Chapter of the Montana Native Plant Society

Montana Mushrooms: from Morels to Remediation

with Larry Evans

Join Missoula-based Mycologist Larry Evans as he gives a summary treatment of common local edibles. A broader discussion of the role of fungi in our ecosystem will follow, including recycling and mining nutrients as well as feeding insects, small mammals, and ungulates. He will explain how fungi digest their substrate, which can even include oil and toxic chemicals.

Evans has studied, worked with and taught about mushrooms for over 30 years. He has travelled extensively worldwide working, studying, ad-



vising on and promoting fungi. Evans has also written extensively on subjects such as non-timber forest products, morels, mushroom taste tests, mushroom ecology and forest restoration. Please come to the program and find out why "fungi are crucial parts of our past and they will prove pivotal to our future."

This will take place on **Wednesday, March 15, 7:00 PM in the North Valley Community Hall located at 235 Nucleus Ave, in Columbia Falls.**

The program is free and open to the public.

Beauty of Birds Coming in April

It will be Wednesday evenings in April at Flathead High School. Watch for more details in the April Pileated Post or check our website at: www.FlatheadAudubon.org.

CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

Highlights from February 2017 Board Meeting

The February Board Meeting was cancelled due to the major snow storm. Two items were circulated via email for discussion after the cancellation.

- ◆ What action if any should be taken to get the landfill reopened to birders?
- ◆ To what extent should meeting notices for other non-profits be included in the Pileated Post?

Steve Gniadek continued from page 1

as being a seasonal interpreter in Yellowstone National Park, wildlife biologist undertaking bird surveys for the BLM in central Montana and doing similar work on refuges for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in Texas and Maryland. In the mid-1980s, Steve earned his M.S. from the University of Montana working with Drs. Jack Lyon and Bart O’Gara on elk and cattle interactions in the Gravelly Mountains. While in school, Steve worked as an Ornithology teaching assistant for Dr. Hutto and at Yellow Bay Biological Station and after graduation as a biologist in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness Area mapping potential grizzly bear habitat. Steve, a Certified Wildlife Biologist, has been an active member of the Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society since 1979 and has only missed one annual meeting in 38 years since becoming a member.

In 1987, Steve finally got the call that he most wanted from Glacier National Park. After moving to Glacier, Steve worked on an incredible number of projects until retiring in 2009. Highlights of Steve’s work included surveys for Common Loons, Harlequin Ducks, Bald and Golden Eagles, cliff-nesting raptors, nocturnal owls, Northern Hawk Owls, and songbirds. Steve supervised trail-side bird inventories and systematically reported observations of bears, mountain goats, and general wildlife through the park’s Wildlife Observation Report system. Steve also initiated and coordinated research on Canada lynx, wolverine, pikas, bighorn sheep, Harlequin Ducks, and Brewer’s (timberline) Sparrows. And, of course, Steve represented Glacier National Park on numerous interagency wildlife working groups including forest carnivores, Bald Eagles, Common Loons, bats, grizzly bears, and the Montana Bird Conservation Partnership (formerly Partners In Flight). He represented the National Park Service on the national Canada Lynx Biology Team (1998-2008) and shared in the team award from the U.S. Forest Service.

Steve worked closely with Dr. Riley McClell-

land who became his mentor and told us that, “Riley believed that the protection of the natural resources came first, not worrying about your career path.” Steve clearly carried on that mantra as he participated in and reviewed numerous Glacier Park proposals for general management, road and parking improvements, and other public uses. Putting it in Steve G.’s words, “I steadfastly believe that doing what is right for the wildlife and habitat is our highest priority and is consistent with the purpose of the National Park Service even if it sometimes puts me at odds with other resources or Park staff.”

Steve accomplished much during his 22-year tenure as a Biologist at Glacier, especially for birds, including sustaining surveys for Loons, Black Swifts, and Harlequin Ducks, organizing the Glacier Christmas Bird Count, and leading countless Flathead Audubon field trips. He also started two Breeding Bird Survey routes in the Park, plus continuing one in British Columbia, one on the Blackfoot Reservation, and one in the Missouri River Breaks, that he still completes every year. He is coming up on his 100th Montana BBS survey!

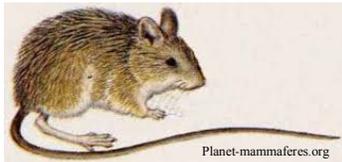
As we mentioned above, Steve now “works” full-time as a volunteer. He continues to dedicate his time and energy to the Montana and local community serving on the editorial board of the Intermountain Journal of Sciences; participating in the Conservation Round Table; leading field trips for Flathead Audubon; helping with numerous Bio-blitzes, the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch, and other surveys; and serving on the boards of non-profit organizations such as the Montana Loon Society and the North Fork Preservation Association. He is past co-chair of Flathead Audubon’s Conservation Committee and one of our past board members. Steve, we congratulate you on your consistent life’s work to protect our rare and incredible natural resources and for being the voice for wildlife. See you in the field! *By Gael Bissell and Cory Davis*

Secrets in the Snow, continued from page 6

The only mouse hibernator we have is the Western Jumping mouse (which looks like a mini kangaroo and can leap up to 20 times its body length – go figure).

All of the others above have to scrape out a living beneath the snow, in the depth hoar. Many, probably most, don’t make it. Owls eat them. Hawks eat them. Weasels eat them. Martens and mink eat them. Shrews eat them – and each other. Cold freezes them. Starvation shrivels them. It’s not an easy life as a small mammal, and it’s usually a short one.

There really is only one way to cope effectively. Whoever said “be fruitful and multiply” must have been observing small mammals. Some have as many



as ten litters every year. The strategy is a familiar one to us. Every hour or so, another McMeadow vole franchise opens up, and hangs a sign “Over 500 trillion produced ...”

So if you want to be privy to the secrets beneath the snow, watch for those little tracks crossing compacted ski and snowshoe trails (where they have to climb over their collapsed cavern system) and dig down to the pukak for trails and an occasional dropping or two – a subway system on a scale you never imagined. And as you walk calmly on the upper layers of snow, remember the chaos below your feet. With a layer of snow, “more than meets the eye” is *much* more.

Thank You!

...to those below who have made donations to Flathead Audubon in the period mid-January 2017 through mid-February 2017.

Donations to West Valley Wetlands Project

- Anonymous (matches other donations 1:2)
- Barbara Lutz
- Billy Ann Burch
- Carin Cross
- Pamela Haglund
- Patricia Jaquith
- Joyce Schaub
- J. A. Graham
- Christopher/Elliott Clark
- K.M. Meyers
- Brett Thuma Gallery
- Luann Moriarty
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- K. Fisher Larson
- Eileen Carney
- Gail Steele
- Linda and John Winnie
- Leslie Kehoe
- Joe and Lana Batts



SPECIAL GIFTS

Flathead Audubon has committed to raising \$10,000 to support the West Valley Wetlands Project. Until that goal is reached, all donations will go to that project.

Donor's Name _____

Address _____

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Please do not acknowledge my gift in the Pileated Post

I want my gift to recognize another:
In memory of _____
In honor of _____

Please send a notification of this gift to:

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Please make checks payable to:
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Kalispell, MT 59904
Your gift is tax deductible.

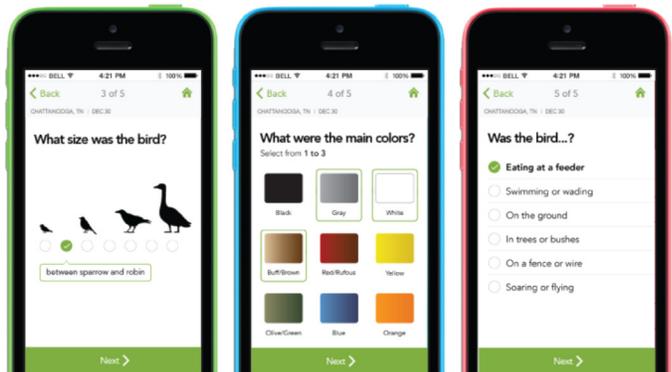
Special Gifts

Donation to Education Activities, Eagle Level

Tom and Teresa Quinn Fund

Merlin Bird ID

What is Merlin Bird ID? From Cornell Lab of Ornithology, it's a free app for your phone designed for beginning and intermediate birders that helps identify birds based on your observed details or a photo. Answer five simple questions about a bird you are trying to identify and Merlin will come up with a list of possible matches. Or use a photo. Snap a photo of a bird, or pull one in from your camera, and Merlin Photo ID will offer a short list of possible matches offline so you can even identify birds in the photos you take when you are far from cell service. Merlin draws upon more than 370 million observations from the eBird citizen-science project. It customizes your list to the species you are most likely to have seen at your location and time of year. Browse more than 2,000 stunning images taken by top photographers. Merlin also includes more than 1,000 audio recordings from the Macaulay Library, identification tips from experts, and range maps from the Birds of North America Online. Find out how to get Merlin at: <http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>.



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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.

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 - Denny Olson: auduboneducator@gmail.com

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

OFFICERS

Table with 4 columns: Position, Name, Email, Phone. Includes President Kay Mitchell, Vice-President Gael Bissell, Secretary Marylane Pannell, Treasurer Joe Batts, Past-President Bob Lopp.

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Table with 4 columns: Committee, Name, Email, Phone. Includes Conservation Lewis Young, Education Vacant, Field Trips Kathy Ross, Finance Mike Fanning, Donations Mary Nelesen, Hospitality Lois Drobish, Membership Mike Fanning.

Table with 4 columns: Role, Name, Email, Phone. Includes Newsletter Linda Winnie, Nominations Bob Lee, Publicity Jan Metzmaker, Sales Jill Fanning, Refuges Kathy Ross, Website Jake Bramante.

DIRECTORS

Table with 4 columns: Term, Name, Address, Phone. Lists directors from 2015-2018 to 2016-2017 including Lewis Young, Doug MacCarter, Jan Metzmaker, Jake Bramante, Cory Davis, Barbara Summer, Bob Lee, Kathy Ross, Jill Fanning, Mike Fanning.

Owen Sowerwine Linda Winnie 755-1406
Natural Area Bob Lee 270-0371



MONTANA AUDUBON

P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624 443-3949 www.MTAudubon.org
Interim Executive Director: Norane Freistadt norane@mtaudubon.org
Board Member representing FAS Bob Lee rml3@centurytel.net 270-0371



FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY Membership Individual or Family

- Basic Membership \$25 Pays for newsletter and operating costs
Supporting Membership \$40 Extra \$15 funds local projects such as Conservation Education and Owen Sowerwine Natural Area
Additional Donation of \$
To: Education Fund, Owen Sowerwine Fund, Wherever needed

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