



# The Pileated Post

VOLUME 12

NUMBER 5

MAY 1988

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MAY 21 OR 22

**ANNUAL MAY POTLUCK**, Lone Pine Visitor's Center, 6:30 PM, Lone Pine State Park, Kalispell.

Bring something good to eat, as well as your own good mood, for this is a chance to meet your friends at Flathead Audubon in a relaxed setting. Be prepared for a beautiful, sunset view of the valley. We will close the evening with a National Audubon Society film special. These are always inspiring. Anyone is welcome. Please join us!

**FIELD TRIP:** Ruth White's Birthday Walk, Kootenai Gallery, Bigfork, 2:00 PM.

**FIELD TRIP:** The Rose Property, meet at Buttrey's parking lot, Hwy. 2 West, 7:30 AM.

**FIELD TRIP:** Wild Horse Island, call Gail Leonard at 862-5807 for reservations.

## EDITOR'S DESK

Leo Keane

Another season for Flathead Audubon flows under the bridge. And if you happen to be one of our active members you may likely be feeling the need for a vacation. This year we have been besieged with calls to action: Write your congressman! Express your opinion! Attend such and so meeting! You reach the point where you'd like to chuck it all and just go out and watch some birds, and to heck with politics. I agree. A day in the field is just what the doctor ordered. Out there suddenly life seems so simple: the world is beautiful and our time should be spent enjoying (in joy!). We long for the wildness of nature, the spontaneity, the freedom. Anyway the wind blows, that's where the birds go. Wouldn't you love to be so unscheduled?

I usually come back from a day afield restored in two ways. For one, I am my self again, at ease and relaxed. At the same time I always come around to thinking what if we were to lose this wildness? If the birds were gone, the fields all paved or built up, the river not shining in sunlight. This would be a disheartening world for humans. I think we are meant to share life, not obliterate it. But that's the road we're taking. The reports from around the world are unsettling and familiar: extinction of species, elimination of vast ecosystems (tropical rain forests), erosion of topsoil. With our constant press to overturn the habitats of wild animals, we are approaching the end of an era on the face of the earth.

So who speaks for nature? Only you. The few who take time from busy schedules to write a letter, make a phone call, go to a public hearing. Those of us, in short, who see something beyond the end of our noses. Our constituency will be the birds, the free-roaming mammals, the wild places which cannot speak for themselves in this very political world we've created.

Go ahead, take that vacation. You need it. But let's come back fighting.



## The Platte, the Sandhills and Audubon's Spring River Conference

I arrived at Kearney, Nebraska the afternoon of March 25 for the first trip to a blind to witness the evening arrival of sandhill cranes. Each spring the sandhills pour into the Platte River bottoms from their wintering grounds at Muleshoe Refuge in west Texas--and the annual Audubon Spring River Conference is timed to coincide with the sandhill migration.

As our names were called, by order of our assigned blind, we mounted the vans which would transport us to the river. Arriving on location we turned into a farmer's lane, parking at the first group of trees. We were cautioned to be quiet. We walked from there the half mile or so to the blind. We approached the blinds and slipped in, taking our assigned stations (upper or lower deck) in the big box. The blinds are built of plywood, eight feet by sixteen feet wide and double decked, with the upper deck standing about 17 feet high.

Carefully we unlatched our porthole, each peeking out in anticipation of what we might see. All seemed quiet on the western front: the Platte flowed by, a slow moving, braided river of rippling water with sandbars about a mile wide. We could see but a few ducks swimming and flying about. A pheasant flew in, landing eighty feet directly in front of us, strutting and bobbing his head their funny way, then stopping to feed. Suddenly someone said, "Sandhills!" All eyes focused on the distant sky. And yes it was full of birds, thousands of them in eight or ten huge flocks. Sandhill cranes to be sure. Most of them were heading to the right of us, but one group came in a little to the left, flying lower and lower till about a quarter mile away they set their wings, stalled and dropped straight down on their long legs, landing in six or eight inches of river water.

We settled down to watch the show of sandhills unfolding before us. As the sun lowered in the west, flights of thirty, fifty, hundreds flew toward the Platte River bottoms, landing in the water all around us. Moving in perfect, precise control, their beauty was captivating.

We learned there are about a half million sandhills here, and that they have been returning to these Platte River bottoms every year for millions of years. Sandhill crane fossil evidence has been found in sediments from the Eocene Period--that's some 55 million years ago! For at least the last ten million years they are known to have existed here in Nebraska. Can you imagine these millions of years the sandhills have been stopping on the Platte, heading north to their nesting areas in the Canadian tundra and Siberia? Yes, we have some thirty thousand communist birds feeding on the Platte! It is the only such phenomenon left like this in the world. Besides the sandhills, some nine to ten million other birds stop on the Platte in migration each year, including a million Canada geese as well as snow geese, mallards, teal and many other species of waterfowl and shorebirds.

In 1938 the Platte River bottom was six miles wide. Today with bridges, dikes, jetties, increased farm land and dams, the river bottom is scarcely a mile wide in most places. The roosting area which was once 150 miles long is now reduced to scattered sites, each a few miles long. Upstream dams have reduced the Platte's flow to the point where trees and bushes are taking over the sandbars, creating far fewer of the open, sandy shallows that the sandhills need. Should the flowage be further reduced (another dam--the Two Forks Dam--is proposed on the South





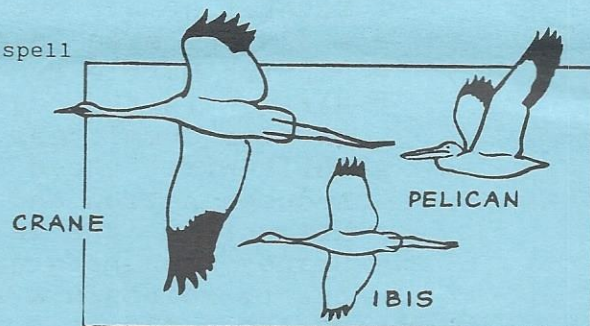
Platte in Colorado) this million year spectacle will come to a close. Man's greed would again eliminate another of nature's wonders.

More flights of cranes came in, flocks of thousands. They flew in front of us calling constantly as they approached and sat down. The volume and unique characteristic of their call is something we shall never forget. Soon it became dark. We quietly slipped away with the music of cranes in our ears.

During the remainder of the days the Audubon Spring River Conference proceeded. West Regional Vice President Ron Klataska conducted the meetings. He is a young, enthusiastic man full of vim and vigor, and he is a real character. His long time friend and cohort, Ed Pembleton, Audubon's water resources lobbyist in Washington D.C. was also present. Ed seems to be another enthusiastic man with common sense and savvy. A third most impressive man was Ken Strom who is the manager of Audubon's Lillian Annette Rowe Sanctuary at Kearney. This is one of the many sanctuaries Audubon manages in the area. Sites are being purchased (or accepted as gifts) by Audubon along the river and adjacent wetlands to preserve these staging areas for migrating sandhills and waterfowl. My observation is that Audubon is doing a good job, but desperately needs far more protected areas to really handle the millions of birds.

The meetings were loaded with good information with fine, young people in attendance. And it was the most spectacular birding trip this side of East Africa I have ever experienced--really a must for any good birder. Our Flathead Chapter ought to go to the Spring River Conference next year for a super special treat.

(Larry Schwedes is a Flathead Chapter member who lives in Kalispell and spends his retirement chasing birds and writing.)



### Bird Sightings:

Bob Riley of Lakeside sent us his season's firsts.  
 --first **loon** was April 3, Easter Sunday.  
 --the first **osprey** showed up on April 8.  
 --and the first **tree swallows** appeared April 10.

We heard several reports of possible **whooping crane** sightings in the Flathead Valley this spring, others have spoken of possible sightings in past years too. The skeptics among us remain doubtful, but then a whooper would seem to be hard to miss. We will most appreciate any other possible or confirmed sightings of whooping cranes in the Flathead Valley. Drop me a card: Leo Keane, 514 Pine Place, Whitefish, MT 59937 and we'll compare notes.

Of related interest, there is now a **Bird Watcher's Hotline** sponsored by Montana Audubon and the Missoula Chapter. That number is 721-2935. Call anytime for a recorded message about unusual bird sightings for the week all around Montana. This week **sandhill cranes** were reported at Brown's Lake near Ovando and at Ekalaka. Make the call, it's fun and interesting.



**Audubon Fund of Montana Update:** We're on our way! Our endowment fund now has about \$3,400 and I believe that within six months we may reach our \$20,000 start-up target. Fund raising efforts include a catered trip down the Missouri River with expert guides this July, an upcoming Art Auction, and publication of a guide for finding birds in Montana. We are in the process of forming a donor list for the Audubon Fund and have information on many types of tax-deductable donations. Anyone interested in donating or in receiving this information is asked to contact John Ormiston, NW 380 Blodgett Camp Road, Hamilton, MT 59840.

**Montana Audubon Spring Council Meeting:** It is very gratifying to participate in a meeting when so much is accomplished, and we did at the Spring Council Meeting in Missoula last weekend. Next years officers are: President, Margaret Adams of Great Falls; Vice-President, Jack Kirkly of Dillon; Treasurer, Mark Gorges of Miles City; and Secretary, Carol Toppins of Billings. The highlights include:

- The Montana Audubon Council office in Helena will hopefully open immediately following the next legislative session.
- Issues for which we will lobby include subdivision review, funding for Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks education and state parks programs, funding for the Montana Heritage program, pheasant habitat restoration, forestry practices and the Natural Areas program.
- Several of our members on the Nongame Advisory Committee reported a 33% increase in next year's funding for that program.
- Harriet Marble reported on the National Board of Directors. Harriet is the regional representative on the Board and serves on five committees.
- Chris Wille whose staff is responsible for Audubon Adventures, Audubon Action and the Audubon Wildlife Reports filled us in on his work in the New York office.
- Brandy Brandborg gave an excellent program on chapter challenge, how to maintain a strong, enthusiastic grass-roots organization.

Of course the field trip to Ninepipe and dinner at Allentown were a fitting end to this terrific weekend. These meetings are open to everyone and I hope that more of our members will attend the fall meeting in Bozeman.

**Last but not least, Summer well wishes:** This has been a busy, learning, growing year for your president. I took my first trip to Washington D.C. to lobby for the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. We had the satisfaction of seeing our growing budget spent to educate the children of NW Montana about the natural environment. Our chapter was active in support of wilderness. We now have a phosphate ban in Flathead and Lake counties. The development of Lawrence Park in Kalispell looks more and more likely. If our purpose is to have fun, to protect the environment and to educate, I would say we are succeeding.

Coordination of chapter activities could never be accomplished without all the hard working officers, board members and project volunteers. See you all on the summer field trips. Enjoy a wonderful summer.





# JUNE FIELD TRIP

5

**Saturday, June 18: Swan River Island.** On this trip led by Jack Whitney we will visit the unique Swan River Island Natural Area near Porcupine Creek. There should be many nesting birds including swifts, warblers, vireos and woodpeckers. This is also a noted rare plant area. Meet at the Lake Hills Shopping Center in Bigfork at 8:30 AM or at the Swan Chapel in Swan Lake at 9:00 AM. Jack recommends arriving a little early to visit the bakery at Lake Hills IGA. Good coffee too.

## Flathead Chapter's BIRDATHON '88, Saturday, June 4.



Our chapter is taking part in the National Audubon Society **BIRDATHON '88**. We need the support of all members, experienced birders or beginner, kids, grown-ups or families, to make it a success. Members count as many bird species as they can in one 24 hour period on June 4. Pledges then pay for each species sighted, thereby raising funds to be used for wildlife and conservation programs of the National Audubon Society and the Flathead Chapter. Won't you help? **Here's how:**

1. **Be a counter.** Recruit sponsors to pledge a sum of money (you might suggest ten cents as a minimum contribution) for each bird species you count during **BIRDATHON** on June 4.

2. **Be a sponsor.** Use the form to sponsor one of our chapter's birders. Or call the **BIRDATHON** coordinator, Jim Rogers at 883-3611, and he will line you up either as a counter or a sponsor.

\_\_\_ Count me to be a COUNTER in our chapter for **BIRDATHON**.

\_\_\_ Count me to be a SPONSOR in or chapter **BIRDATHON**. I pledge \_\_\_ cents/dollars per species. My maximum contribution would not exceed \$ \_\_\_\_.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Return this form to:  
Birdathon Coordinator,  
Jim Rogers  
Box 984  
Polson, MT 59860

Contributions to Audubon **BIRDATHON '88** are tax deductible and are split evenly between this chapter and the National Audubon Society's regional office to support our work to save birds and other wildlife and the habitat necessary for their survival.

*Don't forget: You may purchase FLATHEAD AUDUBON T-shirts and sweatshirts at the May Potluck for \$8 and \$13. Colors are teal and raspberry, silkscreened with our new logo - an osprey. These will make an especially nice gift for out-of-state friends.*





# 1988 FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

## National Audubon Society CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

### OFFICERS

President  
Vice-President  
Secretary  
Treasurer

Robin Magaddino, 2100 Swan Hwy, Bigfork, MT 59911 837-4294  
Jack White, 1235 Swan River Road, Bigfork, MT 59911 837-6157  
Barb Baxter, 255 Oldenburg Road, Somers, MT 59932 857-3738  
Tommie Clark, 231 Pine Needle Lane, Bigfork, MT 59911 837-6615

### DIRECTORS

Bob Ballou, Box 11881, Route 1, Charlo, MT 59825 644-2365  
Brent Mitchell, 960 Kienas Rd., Kalispell, MT 59901 257-8130  
Lynn Kelly, P.O. Box 2289, Polson MT 59860 883-5797  
Jim Rogers, Box 984, Polson, MT 59860 887-2492

### CHAIRS

Conservation  
Education  
Field Trips  
Hospitality  
Library  
Membership  
Newsletter  
Schools/Clubs

Rod Ash, Box 957, Condon, MT 59826 754-2289  
Jim Rogers, Box 984, Polson, MT 59860 883-3611  
Gail Leonard, 514 Pine Place, Whitefish, MT 59937 862-5807  
Susannah Casey, Box 2922, Kalispell, MT 59901 857-3143  
Nancy Trembath, 6065 MT Hwy 35, Bigfork, MT 59911 837-6298  
June Ash, Box 957, Condon, MT 59862 754-2289  
Leo Keane, 514 Pine Place, Whitefish, MT 59937 862-5807  
Jean Robocker, 1655 Montford Road, Kalispell, MT 59901 756-6344

Yes, I'd like to join. Local Chapter:

FLATHEAD AUDUBON N 54 7XCH8

Mail to: NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY  
Chapter Membership Data Center  
P.O. Box 51001  
Boulder, Colorado 80322-1001

## INTRODUCTORY MEMBERSHIP \$20

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery of your first issue.

7XCH8

THE FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY meets on the second Monday of each month from September through May. Regular monthly meetings are preceeded by an Executive Board meeting, the time and location of which are published in the preceeding newsletter. The business meeting (7:30) and program (8:00) are held in the downstairs meeting room of the Flathead Bank of Bigfork. These are all open meetings and all interested people are invited to attend. THE PILEATED POST is published nine times a year, September through May, and is sent to all members of the Flathead Audubon Society as one benefit of National Dues. For others who would like to recieve the newsletter, the cost is \$4.00 per year.

★ The May Porlock  
★ Sandhill Cranes  
★ More Field Trips



## FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

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MONTANA AUDUBON FIELD TRIPS FOR SUMMER 1988

All of the Special field trips are sponsored by one of Montana's Audubon Chapters to benefit the Montana Audubon Wildlife Fund. A donation of \$5.00 is requested from each participant to support this fund. You may give more! Please contact the designated person if you are planning to participate in their field trip. Campgrounds are found in the vicinity of all field trips. Binoculars, field guides, proper clothing, and perhaps a spotting scope are items to bring. Most of these trips require water and a lunch.

**May 21 or 22 WILDHORSE ISLAND:** sponsored by Flathead Audubon. Leave 8:30/9:30 am from Rainbow Landing at Big Arm (west shore). Spend the day viewing flowers and wildlife. Bring lunch, water, raingear. \$12 per person includes boat fare and donation. Children under 5 free. Send check to Flathead Audubon, % Gail Leonard, 514 Pine Place, Whitefish, MT 59937. Call 862-5807 after 5 pm.

**May 28 HEADWATER'S STATE PARK:** sponsored by Sacajawea Audubon. Meet at the Museum of the Rockies at 6:45 am or at the picnic area at Headwaters State Park by 7:30 am. This area offers unlimited viewing of birds and wildlife. Contact Jim Sparks, 677 Sunny Acres Dr., Bozeman, MT 59715 . 587-5824.

**June 18 LITTLE BELTS FLOWER TOUR:** sponsored by the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon. Leave at 9 am from Cub's Den Restaurant on U.S. 89 in Monarch. Leisurely walk with Gwen Mc Bride, flower expert. Contact Margaret Adams, P.O. Box 731, Great Falls, MT 59401. 761-8329.

**June 25 ST. MARY'S PEAK HIKE:** sponsored by Bitterroot Audubon. Leave Hamilton at 10 am from Safeway parking lot: at 10:30 am will pick up participants at Earth and Wood, north of Victor. Spectacular, easy 8 mile round trip hike to 9,200 ' to observe birds, alpine flowers and scenery. Contact Keith Boggs 926 Ponderosa, Hamilton, MT 59840. 363-6484.

**July 9 MADISON RIVER FLOAT:** sponsored by Sacajawea Audubon. Meet at the Museum of the Rockies at 7 am or at the parking area where state route 84, the cobblestone road to Three Forks, MT, and the Madison River intersect at 7:45 am. This is a gentle down river float lasting 3 to 4 hours. Fish, explore islands. You will need your own rubber raft, canoe, boat, innertube, etc. Contact Jim Sparks, 677 Sunny Acres Dr., Bozeman, MT 59715. 587-5924.

**July 15-17 RED ROCK LAKES WEEKEND:** sponsored by Pintlar Audubon. Meet at the Upper Lake Campground. Accommodations also available near headquarters by calling Keith Rush 276-3300. Plan to see the area including naturalist talk and graduate student talk on his hawk study. Contact Don Stoeker, 563-3113 or Jack Kirkly, 930 E. Reeder, Dillon, MT. 59725. 683-4729.

**August 13 FREEZEOUT LAKE-SHOREBIRD MIGRATION:** sponsored by Last Chance Audubon. Meet at 10 am at Freezeout Lake management area headquarters, 4 miles north of Fairfield on US 89. Hike for 3 to 5 miles on roads and dry lake bed. Expect 500,000 swans, geese, ducks, and shorebirds! Dave Ewer, expert on shorebird identification will be leader. Contact Daniel Sullivan, 472 Russell Lane, NO.4, Helena MT 443-4229 or Dave Dwer, 443-4599.

**August 18 and 19 BIRDING WITH BERLE :** Sponsored by Yellowstone Valley Audubon. Peter Berle, President of National Audubon will be in Billings to help YVAS celebrate their 35 th year. Contact Theodora Smith, 1020 Avenue F, Billings MT. 59102 259-7679.



