



the Silent Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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UPDATE - SEARCH FOR THE IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER:

Ornithologists, bird watchers, and conservationists have been holding out hope that the last element in the recent search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker would shed some light, or rather sound, on the question of the species existence in a southern Louisiana swamp. Well the results are in and analysis of more than 4000 hours of digital data, captured by 12 acoustic recording units, have shown no indication of the woodpeckers presence.

From late January through mid-March, the acoustic units recorded sounds, natural and otherwise, from 12 different positions throughout the forests of the Pearl River drainage. At one point during the exploration, two different research teams independently heard loud double raps that sounded suspiciously like the distinctive display drum of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Sadly, analysis of the data proved that the sounds were distant gun shots, with reverberations that sounded to human ears like drumming on a hollow snag.

Ivory-billed Woodpeckers were known to be highly mobile, sometimes moving great distances as their principal resources (large, recently-dead trees) became available or aged beyond use. The bottomland hardwood forests of the lower Pearl River are extensive, and they are in better condition to support large woodpecker populations today than they have been for 100 or more years. "We do not view it as impossible that one to several pairs of Ivory-bills could be using portions of the Pearl River forests that were outside the geographic scope of our search," says John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and a leader of the expedition.

As a result of the expeditions, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology researchers are working with

others to draft recommendations on how best to manage the habitat for continued regeneration toward old-growth conditions. "Today's generation of Louisianans will never see bottomland forests of the stature that were occupied by Ivory-billed Woodpeckers. Nor will their children, nor their grandchildren," says Fitzpatrick. "Conditions in the Pearl River are steadily improving but they have a long way to go before they reach the age-classes and volumes of standing dead wood that were present when the Ivory-billed Woodpecker was active. And, these forests are still at our mercy. We need to treat them as such." For more information about the expedition, visit www.birds.cornell.edu or www.zeiss.com.



FAS CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 2002

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2002 THE FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY GENERAL MEETING will feature Bert Gildart, a Creston-based writer and photographer, who will present a slide show and talk about the Gwich'in people of the Alaskan Arctic and their dependence on the Porcupine Caribou Herd. The program begins 7:30PM at the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks building at 490 N. Meridian Road in Kalispell.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2002. FIELD TRIP ON THE LUBECK-AUTUMN CREEK TRAIL. Meet at Belton Train Station at 1:00 p.m. This is an easy to moderate 4 mile hike. Bring food and water and flashlight. We will look for fall migrants and listen for elk bugles. September 21 is a full moon, giving us an option of staying out after dusk. It is a beautiful time of year to appreciate this trail. Contact Neal and Pattie at 837-5018 or nealpatt@cyberport.net.



CHICKADEE CHATTER

The days of summer are drawing to a close and August will soon be but a memory. It has been a very busy summer here at the store and I have had very little time to watch the feathered wonders. The birds in the neighborhood have been enough, though. Even now as I sit here and think about the past few months the young ospreys are making a racket. They must not have been successful in the hunt today and are letting mom and dad know that they are hungry. They are also letting the entire neighborhood know.

This summer was one that was filled with babies. The magpies were finally successful in raising a brood in the spruce tree in the yard. Those little black and white fellows also make a lot of noise when they are hungry. The magpie parents are remarkable to watch, they are very attentive to the little ones needs. They are also very protective and chased the cats all over the yard several times when they got too close. It is quite a sight to see two large black and white birds standing on branches just above the cats fuzzy heads and basically 'yelling' at them.

The small magpies fledged in mid-July, they are very awkward creatures in the beginning and don't take to flying right away. They pretty much fall out of the nest and hop around on the ground and in the branches for the first few days. One of them landed on top of a sign post and wouldn't leave. Apparently, flying is a scary thing in the beginning and when you have a short tail and stubby wings it is not something that you undertake lightly. The young one sat on top of the post for the better part of a day, calling at the top of its lungs for dinner. During the next few days the young ones spent time in the service berry bushes beside the road and little by little they learned the joys of flight.

Baby swallows on the other hand take to flying like a duck to water. A pair of Violet-green Swallows nested again in the box under the eaves of my house and I enjoyed watching their graceful flights over the yard as they laid eggs and cared for the subsequent brood. The swallows are very good parents as well and after several weeks of parental nurturing the swallow babies one day simply flew out of the nest box. They were very accomplished fliers right from the start. However, two of the babies did not think much of the big wide world in the beginning and tried to fly back into the nest box. The parents did not think this was a good plan and after some amazing

flying and chattering convinced the young ones to fly off into the blue, blue morning sky in search of something yummy. The swallow family stayed around the area for several weeks and as always I enjoyed looking up into sky and watching their aerial antics.

The Song Sparrows had several broods this year, one in May and one in early July. One has to look at the sparrows carefully in order to find their young. They are very furtive and nest in the thick brush near the water. Their beautiful song is one I never tire of and they sang for many months this year. The young ones followed the parents around with plaintive cries on foot but were soon flying furtively to and fro in the bushes as adeptly as their parents.

I am also fortunate to have several American Robins that have made my yard their home. They are some of the earliest risers in the morning and the dawn chorus would not be the same without their lovely familiar song. They, also, had two broods this summer and what can be more fun than watching baby speckle breasted robins running about the yard in search of bugs. One of the young ones this year had some brilliant white feathers amongst its wing feathers, it was quite unique.

Western Tanagers were everywhere this year and a pair of them took up residence in the tall fir trees behind the house and I saw and heard them off and on for well over a month but I never did see any little ones.

The most wonderful bird in the yard is the Gray Catbird. They have failed to nest in my yard only once in the past twenty years. I wait impatiently in the spring for their arrival and am always sad when their familiar mewing is gone in the fall. I can hear one now as I sit here writing these notes. They also nest in the dense brush behind the house and I watched them chase each other madly through the branches in June.

The Black-capped Chickadees nested in a tiny nest box I put up several years ago. It is the first time it has been used and I watched for several weeks as they built the nest and raised their tiny babies. The chickadee parents would take turns flying into the box. They would land on a tree branch not far from the box and look around to see if there were any dangers about. If all was well they would fly quick as a wink into the box. If one of the cats or the magpies were about they would wait until the danger was past and then fly into the box. The magpies did find the nest box despite the chickadees precautions but never did figure out how to get into it and the chickadee nestlings fledged on the same day the young magpies fledged.





SEPTEMBER'S PROGRAM :

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Gwich'in, Caribou and Oil Drilling — A Dangerous Mix?

Bert Gildart, a Creston-based writer and photographer, will present a slide show and talk about the Gwich'in people of the Alaskan Arctic and their dependence on the Porcupine Caribou Herd at the September 9 meeting of Flathead Audubon. The meeting begins at 7:30 p.m.

Gwich'in means "people of the caribou," an apt name for a cultural group which relies heavily on this animal. The caribou herd is central to their existence, providing food, clothing and a critical link to their traditional ways.

Gildart, and his wife, Jane, have visited and lived in several different Gwich'in villages in and around the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge over the past 12 years. For four summers and one full winter, they taught school in several of the primitive, subsistence-based arctic villages. Last summer, the Wilderness Society sent the Gildarts to the Arctic to photograph, research and write about the area. Gildart has been to all 15 Gwich'in villages in Alaska and Canada that are dependent on the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

The Gwich'in people live in and adjacent to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which has been targeted for drilling by oil companies. Gildart and many conservationists are concerned that oil development in the area will threaten the caribou herds and the Gwich'in people who depend on caribou for the livelihoods. The Porcupine Caribou Herd calves in the same area in which oil companies want to drill. The Gildarts are committed to helping the Gwich'in preserve ancient cycles and their subsistence lifestyles.

Bert Gildart has written and photographed stories about the Gwich'in people for many publications, including the Christian Science Monitor, National Wildlife, Native People's Magazine and many others. Bert's photographic portfolio of the Gwich'in people illuminates his talent and his deep connection to these people. He recently secured a contract to write a children's book about the Gwich'in people and their subsistence lifestyle.

Bert Gildart has been a full-time writer and photographer since the mid 1970s and worked as a seasonal ranger in Glacier National Park in the 1960s and late 1970s. He was also a biology teacher in Bigfork and Troy.



2002 OWEN SOWERWINE BIRDATHON A SUCCESS

Flathead Audubon's annual spring Birdathon for 2002 was definitely a success. This year the birdathon was a little over a month long from May 16 through June 25. The "count" was the total number of species seen in that time period on the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area. 80 different species were seen by participants Dan Casey and Bruce Tannehill. 13 new species were observed and added to the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area Bird List. Aside from the money raised that will be used to support the natural area and its license, the goal was to introduce area residents to the Owen Sowerwine. Television and newspaper coverage of the event helped publicize the area and its importance as a riparian natural area. Three field trips for the public were held, and over 65 people participated. Pattie Brown is to be commended for her outstanding effort at getting pledges this year. \$2,000 was raised. The Board would like to thank all who participated and contributed.



HOTSPOTS IN THE FLATHEAD

Sandhill Cranes and Common Snipe at the Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge, Harlequin Ducks in Glacier National Park, Townsend's Warblers and Willow Flycatchers at Tally Lake Campground, Yellow Warblers in Lawrence Park, Gulls at the Polson Landfill, and over 80 species of birds can be seen in the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area. These are just a few of the tips for birding hotspots contained in the new birding guide for the Flathead Basin being published by Flathead Audubon. The guide also contains a checklist of birds based on the seventh edition of the AOU checklist.

Dan Casey compiled the checklist and list of hotspots; Dan, Bruce Tannehill and Leslie Kehoe wrote the location descriptions; Carolyn Beecher of Montana Maps constructed the map and map graphics; John Winnie, Jr. contributed the photograph of a Harlequin Duck; and Susan Lenard completed the design and layout of Hotspots. Several members proofed the draft copy and made valuable corrections and comments.

Funding assistance has come from Montana Audubon; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Region One; Flathead National Forest; and Glacier National Park. "Hotspots" is now in the hands of the printer and should be ready in time for the September meeting, just in time for the fall migrations!

BY BOB LOPP



FROM THE PRESIDENT



This summer I saw my first Albatross! Exciting stuff for someone who grew up in the cornfields of Iowa.

It was a Black-footed Albatross. It came swooping along the swells near our sailboat as we were crossing Queen Charlotte Sound, on our 32-hour trip from the northern part of Vancouver Island to the south part of the Queen Charlotte Islands.

The Queen Charlotte Islands are a tight cluster of roughly 150 islands that sits about 40 miles south of Alaska, and about 90 miles west of the British Columbia mainland coast. Some of the islands are pretty large – with a few modern towns, and many more abandoned Haida Indian village sites scattered over them. At many of the village sites you can still find the remains of old long houses and some decaying totem poles.

Other islands in the cluster are pretty small – just large rocks, really, with grass and perhaps a few trees at the top where the storm waves don't reach. These small islands are the ones most important to the nesting birds of the Islands. Of the 71 species of birds known to nest on the Islands, 22 of these are sea or shore birds. The sea birds include loons, albatross, shearwaters, storm-petrels, gulls, and alcids. Many of these nest on bare rocks, rock ledges, grass hummocks or in shallow burrows. The small rocky islands provide them a safe place to lay their eggs and care for their chicks until they fledge.

One of our goals in coming to the Queen Charlotte Islands was to see these sea birds up close. We arrived in the Islands on June 16 and spent over 2 months exploring its inlets and coves, circling round many of the small, rocky islands, and sailing off the western shores in search of whales and pelagic species.

We managed to see many more Black-footed albatrosses – each as exciting as the first. In the coves and inlets, our most common species was the Pigeon Guillemot, a small stocky bird that is a soft black color from bill to tail, except for its decorative white upperwing coverts. It does not spook easily, so we could get pretty close. If you get too close, however, it quickly dives – paddling furiously with its wings to get under the water, and up pop its bright red legs and feet as it slides down. Those red feet always make me smile.

In areas farther from shore we almost always encountered the shyer Rhinoceros Auklet. This is a heftier bird, with a little white "horn" at the base of its upper mandible in breeding season. The horn is usually hard to see. More visible are two white stripes that hang down to mid-neck, one starting from above the eye, the other from just back of the bill. From a distance, the combination of the horn and the stripes make the bird look like it has a pair of spectacles perched on its bill. To me it looks like an avian Ben Franklin.

The most spectacular site we explored in our search for sea birds was Cape St. James, which is at the very southern tip of the Queen Charlottes. The cape is named after St. James Island, where the southernmost light house and weather station of the Islands is located. Dribbling south from St. James Island for about 5 miles are the Kerouard Islands. St. James and the Kerouards are the ultimate bird rocks. Their sheer cliffs are pounded by some of the most powerful waves of the Pacific. Cape St. James has recorded the highest winds in all of Canada. Even the native Haida had trouble getting to these islands to gather eggs.

Fortunately on the day we were there, the winds and seas were calm, and we were able to spend more than an hour working our way slowly among these islands. The nutrients that rise up as the Pacific waters encounter the shallowing ocean bed around these towering rocks attract tremendous numbers of fish, and these, in turn, attract the fish eaters. Off of St. James Island we watched humpback whales feeding – slapping their flippers and tails, and sometimes jumping completely out of the water. On the lower portions of the rocky islands were hundreds of Steller's seal lions that apparently had finished their fishing and had their fill, and now were hauled out to bask in the sun. On the upper portions were Glaucous-winged Gulls and Brandts' Cormorants, staking out the bare rocks and cliffs. Overhead, Bald Eagles were chattering and gliding in the breezes. And in the water surrounding the islands were representatives of at least 12 different species of sea birds. Among these were several hundred puffins, coming up from their dives with mouthfuls of small silver fish, and skittering off when we they noticed us gawking at them. Most of these were Tufted Puffins, with long yellow tufts curling down the backs of their heads. Among the Tufteds, I also spotted a few Horned Puffins. The Horned looks very similar to the Atlantic Puffin, but is slightly larger and has a bright yellow base to its orange bill, in place of the Atlantic's slate blue base.

It has been a great birding summer. In addition to bird watching, we have also managed to fit in visits to some of the native villages, whale watching, fossil hunting, and some pretty successful fishing and crab trapping. Right now we are preparing to head back down to the southern part of the Islands, and from there on south to re-enter the United States.

As the end of summer approaches, we are anxious to return home to Montana. I look forward to seeing our Audubon friends once again and trading summer birding tales. See you soon!

BY LINDA WINNIE





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This is Flathead Audubon's primary fund raising project.

Proceeds support local conservation and educational programs such as:

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- **Educational materials for lectures by Audubon members to local classes
and civic groups**
- **Care and upkeep of local refuges, including the new Lost Trail NWR.**

Pick Up Locations: Please note on your calendar

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for arrangements

Kalispell: County Fairgrounds – North Lot

Saturday, Oct. 19, 12:30pm – 2:30pm

Columbia Falls: Glacier Bank

Saturday, Oct. 19, 10am – 12 noon

Whitefish: Train Depot Parking Lot

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The Flathead Audubon Society is affiliated with the National Audubon Society and meets on the second Monday of each month from September through May. The regular meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. and includes a featured guest who will present a conservation or nature program. The regular monthly meeting is preceded by the Executive Board meeting. Both meetings are open to all those interested.

THE PILEATED POST is published September through May and is sent to members of the Flathead Audubon Society as a membership benefit. Subscriptions for non-members are \$10.00 per year.

Deadline for newsletter copy: the 20th of each month. Newsletter e-mail ljkehoe@digisys.net

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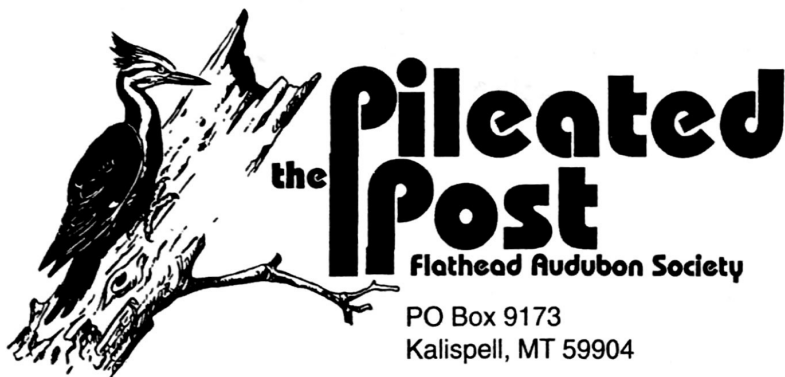
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