



# Pileated the Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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DECEMBER, 2002

## CHRISTMAS COUNTS COMING UP

On Christmas Day, 1900, Frank Chapman and 27 other New York-area birdwatchers conducted the first 25 official Christmas Bird Counts. From that simple beginning has grown the longest running standardized volunteer bird survey effort in the world. Last year over 55,000 people participated in more than 1,900 counts in the U. S. and Canada, and many additional counts were conducted in Mexico, Central and South America, and even in the South Pacific (sounds good to me about now)! Our Flathead Chapter has its own lengthy CBC tradition; this year's count at Bigfork will be our 29<sup>th</sup>. This year will also mark the 4<sup>th</sup> official year for our newly established Kalispell count.

This year the Bigfork count will be on **Saturday, December 14<sup>th</sup>**. And true to our new tradition, the Kalispell count will be two weeks and a day later, on **Sunday, December 29<sup>th</sup>**. Other counts in our chapter area include Glacier National Park, Ninepipe, Eureka, Libby, and the Upper Swan Valley (Condon). See the list of dates for these counts elsewhere in this newsletter. As we get ready for our two valley counts, let's review a few highlights from last year...

The Bigfork count has a well-deserved reputation as one of Montana's best, regularly recording more than 80 species, usually the highest count in the state. Centered at Streeter's Corner north of Bigfork, our 15-mile diameter circle includes everything from the sheltered bays of Flathead Lake at Somers to the dense forests of the Jewel Basin Road, and from the Swan River to the open farmlands of the Lower Valley. Although no new species have been added to our cumulative list (139 spp), last year we were pleasantly surprised to find record numbers of American Robins, only our second Spotted Towhee in the history of the count, and new high counts for Pygmy Nuthatch, Townsend's Solitaire, and Cedar Waxwings, among the 82 species we found. Glaucous Gull and Red-naped Sapsucker were count-week firsts.

We've already seen 90 species over the short history of the Kalispell count, and last year we

counted 66 species for the second year in a row. This count circle is centered at Reserve and 93, and includes lots of riparian areas, West Valley and the Smith Valley, Evergreen and Foy's Canyon. Though we don't get the variety of waterbirds that we see at Bigfork, Blue Jays and Bohemian Waxwings abound, and we always get a great variety of raptors. Last year the waxwings really put on a show; our total of 11,059 Bohemian Waxwings was far and away the continental high, with Bozeman a distant second with less than 5,000. No doubt the 5 Merlins we counted were also pleased with these numbers! Our rarest birds were a Common Grackle and a Rusty Blackbird, neither of which we've ever counted at Bigfork! **CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**



## FAS CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR DECEMBER 2002

**Monday, December 9: THE FAS GENERAL MEETING** will feature Missoula biologist Diana Tombeck who will present a program on the relationship between the Clark's Nutcracker and the Whitebark Pine. The meeting will begin at 7:30PM at the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks building at 490 N. Meridian Rd in Kalispell. A FAS board of directors meeting will be held prior to the general meeting at 5:30PM. Everyone is welcome.

**Thursday, December 12: Early Winter Birds of the Flathead: A Christmas Count Primer** will be presented by Dan Casey from 7 to 9 pm at the library of Flathead Junior High School. Dan will present his popular slide show to help us identify the birds we might encounter during the Christmas Bird Count. Everyone is welcome.

**CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 5.**

**Saturday, Jan. 4, 2003: Ski Field Tri to the McDonald Creek Oxbow**

**Sunday, Jan. 12, 2003: Raptor Viewing in the Mission Valley. FOR MORE INFO ON THE FIELD TRIPS PLEASE SEE PAGE 3**





## CHICKADEE CHATTER

The snowy mountains are shining pink in the late afternoon sunshine, it has been another incomparable day here in paradise. The river is still unfrozen but they haven't lowered the water much yet and so the usual flocks of ducks and geese that gather in the bay are not here. Flocks of geese fly over on their way to the fields to the north and only occasionally land in the water. The resident family of mallards can be heard over by the far shoreline. The sun sets quickly this time of the year and the shining mountains only shine for a short time. Tonight the sky is clear and quiet, not a breeze stirs. As I stood by the waters edge drinking in the early November evening a large flying silhouette glides across the sky, a Great Blue Heron flew in to land near the ducks on the far shore. It is easy on a calm peaceful evening such as this to think about days gone by and that which is to come.

The final month of the year will soon be here with its short snowy days and long star-filled nights. December is a nice month, but I say that about every month they all have good points and bad. Some mornings in December one can wake to a white pristine world covered with snow, it may be 10F below zero but it is fantastic and I look forward to these snowy mornings. On these mornings the lines of familiar things are muted and flow gracefully one into the other. Beneath the birdfeeders are the tiny tracks of the early risers that come in search of sustenance after the long dark cold of the night just past. I will put on my coat and hat and boots before I get dressed on mornings such as these to brush the snow off of the feeders and from beneath them so the feathered ones can glean a few sunflower seeds and cracked corn for breakfast. It is exhilarating to walk out into that pristine world the cold air will wake me as nothing else can.

December, too, can have the most extraordinary nights; dark clear nights where you can see forever into the heavens. The stars on such nights are so very bright, the long path of the Milky Way clearly visible. The colder it is the more brightly the stars shine it seems to me. I am looking forward to those bright starry nights. If one is truly fortunate the hoot of an alert owl might be heard. There is a lot to be said about the snowy pristine days and nights of December. I can hardly wait.

It is the days gone by that are worth pondering during this last month of the year. Every year has its trials and tribulations, its joys and treasures. Time goes on whether we count the days or not and we humans like to count the days and months in a formal fashion, we like to have a



beginning and an end. It gives structure to our lives and at the end of a year it allows us to take a look at the past and be hopeful for the future.

There were some very notable things in the past year for me. I didn't have a chance to go birdwatching very much, sadly. The hours that I did spend in the field were very special. I would like to share a few of those experiences with you and encourage you to take a few moments this month to ponder the year that will soon be past.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February two Varied Thrushes showed up in the yard, the next day there were four and later in the week there were seven. They were very early this year and they could not go into the high country. They stayed in my yard for many weeks and they sang that thrilling song and I would get up early every morning just to hear them sing.

In early April I drove over to Freezeout Lake to witness the remarkable spectacle of the snow goose migration for the very first time. It was one of the most amazing things I have ever experienced in my life and will be one of my fondest memories until the end of my days. Dark skies to the east and a sun setting in the west set the stage. Thousands of Snow Geese flew high into the sky and as they flew higher formed into long skeins in the sky. There before me against the dark eastern sky were hundreds of skeins of white birds looking just like strands of pearls as they flew into the distance.

The end of May on a bright sunny day I found a pair of Western Tanagers bathing in a small puddle in my overgrown garden. The tanagers stayed around for many weeks and every now and again I would catch a brilliant flash of yellow and orange as they chased each other through the trees.

The month of October was especially beautiful this year and one day early in the month my sister and I drove to the Swan River NWR. It was a lovely, warm, sunny day and we walked on the Bog Road all the way to an oxbow of the Swan River without getting our feet wet. We found an old weathered log to sit on and basked in the late afternoon sunshine. There were dozens of beautiful dragonflies flitting over the water, wings sparkling in the sunshine. A kingfisher kept us company. The world seemed very far away. As we walked back to the car a warm breeze blew in our faces and the cattails rustled with a very satisfying sound. We saw very few birds that day but the memory of this day will linger into the cold days of winter.

We all must remember to live for the present, the past is but a memory and the future is a mystery. I wish for you good memories and a happy holiday.

Leslie Kehoe



## DECEMBER PROGRAM: THE CLARK'S NUTCRACKER-WHITEBARK PINE RELATIONSHIP: An uncertain future.

Colorado-based researcher Diana Tomback has long studied the relationship between whitebark pine and Clark's nutcrackers. At the December 9 meeting of Flathead Audubon, she will discuss the regeneration of whitebark pine as a result of Clark's nutcracker dispersal of the pine seeds as well as the current status of whitebark pine. As part of her graduate work, she became the first researcher to study the year-round behavior of the Clark's Nutcracker.

Tomback's discussion is jointly sponsored by Flathead Audubon and The Learning Center in Glacier National Park. The meeting begins at 7:30 p.m. December 9 in the meeting room of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks building in Kalispell.

Tomback, a professor of biology at University of Colorado at Denver, is currently on sabbatical leave and is working for four months at the Science Center in Glacier National Park. As part of her work, she is studying post-fire whitebark regeneration with Glacier Park research biologist Kate Kendall.

Whitebark pine is one of the five 'stone pines' that rely on birds to disperse their seeds. The whitebark pine seeds have evolved to be cached by nutcrackers and can remain dormant for several years before they germinate. Whitebark pine was historically common at high-elevations, but in the past several decades has been decimated by white pine blister rust, a fatal fungal disease introduced from Europe early in the 1900s.

The Clark's Nutcracker, which prefers whitebark and limber pine seeds over other foods, will be affected as blister rust continues to take its toll on five-needled pines like whitebark and limber pine.

Whitebark pine is well-recognized as an important wildlife food source and an important species in forest development after fire. The loss of whitebark pine means less fall food for bears, which eat the seeds prior to hibernation. The decline of whitebark pine also means less food for other birds and small mammals.

Tomback, a founder and current director of the non-profit Whitebark Pine Ecosystem Foundation based in Missoula, is an advocate of whitebark pine restoration efforts, which include

prescribed burning and planting of blister rust-resistant seedlings. The foundation helps to fund restoration projects and educate the public about the on-going losses of whitebark pine.

Tomback is the author of many scientific papers focusing Clark's nutcrackers and particularly the ecology of whitebark pine. She was the chief editor of 'Whitebark pine communities: Ecology and Restoration' published in 2001 by Island Press.



## FAS FIELD TRIPS

**Saturday, Jan. 4, 2003:** Join Sue and Jim Swab for a Glacier National Park ski fieldtrip. We will meet at the Apgar Visitor Center at 10:00 a.m. and hike in search of waterfowl to the Ox Bow area of lower McDonald Creek, then towards the Apgar Mountain Lookout Trailhead. Roundtrip: about 6 miles. Bring a lunch. For more information, contact Jim at 387-4299 [suejim@bigsky.net](mailto:suejim@bigsky.net).

**Sunday, Jan. 12, 2003:** Please join FAS for a field trip to the Mission Valley. We will be roaming the backroads in search of the raptors that frequent the valley in the midst of winter. We will focus on raptors such as Rough-legged Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, eagles and the occasional falcon. In years past we have seen Short-eared Owls, Snow Buntings, waterfowl of all kinds, Townsend's Solitaire and even a frosty American Robin or two. It is always an enjoyable trip, come spend a day watching some of the fascinating birds of winter. We will meet at 8:00AM at the Park and Ride across from the White Oak Lodge (formerly The Ramada Inn) on Highways 93 and 82 (the Somers cut across road) and return in the late afternoon. If you would like to attend the trip or for more information please call Leslie Kehoe at 837-4467.

**Saturday, Jan. 25, 2003:** Sue and Jim Swab will lead a ski fieldtrip to the Lake McDonald Ranger Station at the head of Lake McDonald, then continue towards Kelly Camp. We will meet at the gated area of the Going-To-The-Sun Road (above Lake McDonald Lodge) at 10:00 a.m. Roundtrip is about 8 miles. Bring a lunch. For more information, contact Jim at 387-4299 or [suejim@bigsky.net](mailto:suejim@bigsky.net).





## FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS: FERNE COHEN THINK RECYCLING!



Are you participating in the approximately 30% of our national trash being recycled at present? IF not, please join Flathead Audubon members by taking your recyclables to VALLEY RECYCLING, 1410 Hwy 2 West, Kalispell. Flathead Audubon, at your request, will receive credit for your aluminum cans, magazines, plastics-pete 1, (beverage bottles) and 2, (milk containers), newspapers, cardboard and mixed office paper, including junk mail. Please separate each category. We thank each contributor to this project for not only reducing the amount of waste for the landfill, but earning funds for our chapter.

We welcome David Prunty, new director of the Flathead County Solid Waste District (FCSWD). FCSWD is considered a model operation for the State of Montana. Flathead Audubon used our landfill, with compostable items from our Owensowerine cleanup. Your recent tax bill indicates the fees each landowner is assessed for operation of the district. Current funds available are planned to purchase suitable equipment to compost more efficiently. The landfill also accepts junk cars, minus anti-freeze, car batteries, most metals, used motor oil and appliances. The landfill also operate the only on site Household Hazardous Waste Collection Facility in the state. (Other sites usually collect annually.) Please call 758-5910 for an appointment and instructions to participate in the HHW collection process.

The District also operates six green box sites in the valley for trash / garbage. Two of these sites contain blue bins for recyclables. (We request such blue boxes at all sites). Depending on the market, recyclables earn funds for the District.

Remember one man's trash is another man's treasure. Do donate your usable discards for use by others. When you purchase products made of recycled materials, recycling works. You may also save money, and prolong the life of the landfill.

By Ferne Cohen



## CHRISTMAS COUNTS COMING UP CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

### How You can Be Involved (We Want You!)

Participating in a Christmas Count only requires that you're willing to spend at least part of the day outdoors with one or more other birders, counting all the birds in a designated part of our count circle. Or, if you live in the count circle, you can just count the birds at your feeder that day. We welcome all comers, and take care to pair less experienced folks with more skilled observers. Here's a chance to learn (or to teach) how to tell a Cedar Waxwing from a Bohemian, or a Red-tailed Hawk from a Rough-legged. Call the count compiler, Dan Casey, at 857-3143 (home) or 756-2681 (office) if you want to take part in the Bigfork or Kalispell counts, either in the field or as a feeder watcher. For the Bigfork count, all arrangements are made ahead of time (see below), and then we meet at the Bigfork Senior Center at 5:00 pm the day of the count for a potluck compilation dinner. For Kalispell, we finalize the teams over breakfast at Finnegan's restaurant the morning of the count (starting at 7:30). Please come and continue the tradition with us, and start a new tradition of your own!

By Dan Casey

## EARLY WINTER BIRDS OF THE FLATHEAD: A CHRISTMAS COUNT PRIMER

There's no better way to prepare for the upcoming counts than to come and enjoy Dan Casey's annual slide show. This 90-minute extravaganza always offers a whirlwind tour of the Flathead Audubon slide collection, with identification tips, CBC trivia, conservation and natural history tidbits, anecdotes and shameless predictions for this year's counts. It is also Dan's chance to hand out the last of the count packets and put together teams for the Bigfork count. This year we are having a special meeting for this purpose, two days before the count on the evening of December 12<sup>th</sup>, from 7 to 9 pm at the library of Kalispell Junior High School. To get to the library, turn off Meridian onto Parkway to enter the back (south entrance) Parking Lot. The path from the Lot goes to the door directly opposite the library. Don't miss it!





## CARE FOR A LITTLE MORE BIRDWATCHING? LOCAL BIRD COUNT INFORMATION

### EUREKA COUNT – Saturday, December 14<sup>th</sup>.

Over 50 species have been seen over the years on this count that is held by the Dancing Prairie Bird Club. Last year they found a number of Hoary Redpolls. Please contact Lewis Young for more information at 889-3492

### NINEPIPES COUNT – Sunday, December 15<sup>th</sup>.

Highlights include lots of raptors. This count often has the largest number of Rough-legged Hawks in the United States. Please contact Jim Rogers during the day at 883-6351, ext 247, evenings at 883-3611 or by email at [jrogers@polson.k12.mt.us](mailto:jrogers@polson.k12.mt.us)

### GLACIER NATIONAL PARK COUNT – Saturday, December 21<sup>st</sup>.

Last year, there were nine parties in the field plus two parties at feeders. Observers traveled mostly by ski, though some were out on foot and by car. Thirty-eight species were observed for a total of 698 birds. This resulted in a species high count for the past 12 years, the numbers of birds was just over half of what was seen in 2000. One of the highlights of the tally was a Harlequin Duck on upper McDonald Creek. For more information and to sign up please call Susan Sindt at 892-7406.

**SWAN VALLEY COUNT – Saturday, December 21<sup>st</sup>.** Please call Rod Ash at 754-2289 for more information on the annual counting of the birds in the Swan Valley.



## SONGBIRD COFFEE FACTS

- ☉ Traditional coffee varieties are shade loving understory plants and flourish under a canopy of diverse tree species. Birds and other animals also flourish in this same environment. It has only been in the past 30 years that new coffee hybrids have been developed that will grow in the sun.
- ☉ Sun grown coffee has a higher yield per acre but there is a high price to pay. The forests are cleared and fertilizer, herbicides and pesticides must be used in larger quantities.

- ☉ Shade-grown coffee plants live 24-30 years while sun grown coffee plants will only live 12-15 years.
- ☉ 70% of the world's coffee is grown by small farms using traditional methods
- ☉ Most experts agree that shade-grown coffee is less bitter and has a better flavor.
- ☉ The number of birds species found on a small shade grown plantation is approximately 150 while the number of bird species found on the sunny plantations is between 20 to 50.
- ☉ The number of mid-sized mammal species found on the shade grown coffee plantations is 24 while there are almost none found on the sunny plantations.
- ☉ There is greater Biodiversity on the shade grown plantations... plants, animals, insects, trees and shrubs
- ☉ The use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides is much lower on the shade grown plantations
- ☉ The traditional farmers also use less water for irrigation and there is much less erosion.
- ☉ One third of all the coffee produced in the world is consumed in the U.S.
- ☉ For more information you can access several great web sites:  
[www.seattleaudubon.org/ShadeGrown](http://www.seattleaudubon.org/ShadeGrown)  
[www.americanbirding.org](http://www.americanbirding.org)



## CHRISTMAS GIFT OFFER HELPS MIGRATORY BIRDS AND FLATHEAD AUDUBON

Here is a great way to do your remaining Christmas shopping, and at the same time support migratory birds and the local conservation and education projects of Flathead Audubon.

Flathead Audubon has teamed up with Montana Coffee Traders to offer a special Christmas gift package to FAS members and friends.

Order a standard Good Migrations coffee gift pack to be sent anywhere in the U.S. for the regular price of \$35, and Montana Coffee Traders will donate \$5 to Flathead Audubon.

Orders must be received by December 15 for your gift to arrive before Christmas at this price. Orders received by Coffee Traders after December 15 will require an additional amount for express shipping in order to arrive by Christmas.

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## CHRISTMAS GIFT OFFER

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Good Migrations is produced by Montana Coffee Traders from shade grown, organic coffee beans that provide a rich, full-bodied coffee flavor while protecting forest ecology and preserving migratory bird habitat. Good Migrations coffees also fair trade certified, which means farmers are protected from fluctuating global coffee prices, and middlemen are eliminated by direct trade agreements with small-farmer co-operatives. These farmers can then afford to continue to grow coffee in ways that promote healthy ecosystems and provide sanctuary for resident and migratory birds.

The gift pack contains three 12-ounce bags, each containing a distinctively different flavor and roast (your choice of whole beans or ground), along with one of Coffee Traders' trademark coffee bean chocolate bars and a colorful coffee-measuring scoop. Included also is a brochure explaining the benefits – to birds and humans – of buying and drinking shade grown, organic coffee and of the significance of fair trade certification. All are packaged in a decorative gift box, accompanied by a colorful gift card bearing your personal holiday message.

The coffee in the standard gift pack is regular. If you prefer to send decaf, add \$1 per gift pack.

The \$35 price (or \$36 for decaf) includes all shipping if the order is received before December 15. Just send Montana Coffee Traders the address to which you want your gift sent, along with the message you want on the card, and they will take it from there.

When you order, use the enclosed order form or be sure to specify that you are ordering for the Flathead Audubon promotion. This is what earmarks your purchase for the \$5 donation to Flathead Audubon.

Have you got a long Christmas list? This is a great way to purchase a special gift for each person on that list. Just attach your list of addresses along with the enclosed order form. Be sure to specify for each address whether you want whole beans or ground, regular or decaf, and what message should be on the gift card.

Your gift of a Good Migrations gift pack has several great one-time benefits, of course. You send a distinctive Christmas gift, you support a program that helps migratory birds and you provide a donation to Flathead Audubon.

It also has an even more important and substantial long-term benefit. When you send this gift, you are helping to spread the word about the

importance of purchasing shade grown coffee, and also making it possible for others to find out how delicious "bird friendly" coffee can be. If more and more people turn to using shade grown coffee, we could some make real progress toward preserving crucial wintering habitat for our migratory birds.

BY LINDA WINNIE



## TEACHERS' CORNER

This new column is initiated with this edition of Pileated Post. It grew out of a recent Flathead Audubon Education Committee meeting where we were discussing sending a periodic newsletter to each of the teachers who had participated in an Audubon workshop. It was pointed out that all of those teachers are now subscribers to the Pileated Post. So, classroom teachers and others interested in learning more and getting out the word on birds, stay tuned. The education committee with the help of Montana Audubon are planning a new workshop for the spring and will be creating new units. Watch this space.

There is a dynamic new resource now available on the web:

[www.birds.cornell.edu/schoolyard](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/schoolyard)

This site is intended to help any educator use bird studies with their classes. This educators guide to bird study is the culmination of several years of training educators and responding to intensive feedback. It is a treasure trove of tips and resources based on the experiences of hundreds of talented educators. The National Science Foundation and National Science Education Standards have mandated that students engage in extended inquiry modeled by the teacher and that research occur in the classroom. This web site provides the online resources and support that teachers need to implement these standards. And what better way to motivate students than getting them out and looking at the birds of the Flathead.

By Linda deKort



## RECENT BOARD ACTIVITIES

- \* Received and began distribution of **The Birding Hotspots** brochure, which was developed over the summer.
- \* Arranged the annual birdseed sale. Expected net revenue to FAS is \$2600.
- \* Arranged an Owen Sowerwine work project, proposed by Bob Lopp and sponsored through Prudential Insurance Agency on October 5. Results were improvements to Owen Sowerwine and \$1000 income for FAS.
- \* Discussed Owen Sowerwine summer activities. The Weed Plan needs to be redone The Master Plan is still coming along.
- \* Agreed to sign as supporter of Five Valleys Audubon grant application for purchasing conservation easements around the National Bison Range
- \* Approved \$500 grant application from Swan Ecosystem Center written by Rod Ash to restore and repair the Squeezer Creek Watchable Wildlife site.
- \* Scott Brant, from Montana Coffee Traders, gave a presentation on Good Migrations Coffee gift packs as a FAS fundraiser. FAS will be promoting these not just as a fundraiser, but also to help preserve winter migratory bird habitat.
- \* Heard report from Leslie Kehoe that The Big Fork Chamber of Commerce will pay Audubon to lead 10 field trips at the first annual Bigfork Bird Festival planned for the middle of June 03.
- \* Approved a MWA request for \$50.00 to assist with Terry Tempest Williams' fee for speaking in Kalispell on December 7, 02.
- \* Discussed possible new structure of membership, based on new National Audubon policies.
- \* Discussed the immediate need to find a new newsletter editor
- \* Heard report from Jane Adams on possible adverse changes to DNRC old growth management policy on State lands.



- \* Heard report from Patty and Neal Brown regarding possible threat to the FWP bear aversion program.

By Mike Fanning

## Project FeederWatch IS STARTING

Do you feed birds in your yard?  
Do you spend a few hours each month watching the birds at your feeders?  
Can you identify the birds at your feeders easily and reliably?  
Would you like to be part of a nationwide effort to gather data that will help birds?

If you answered "Yes" to all of these questions, then Project FeederWatch is for you!

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long bird survey carried out by people throughout the United States and Canada. Anyone with an interest in birds can participate.

Participants throughout the United States and Canada spend a few days each month keeping track of what birds visit feeders in backyards or at local community centers, school playgrounds, parks and other locales. They periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders, and then send their data to the Cornell Ornithology Lab. The Lab sorts and analyzes this data in order to determine trends in bird populations, changes in winter distributions, and spread of diseases, and to answer other questions important to bird conservation.

The Program is sponsored by the Cornell Lab, the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and the Canadian Nature Federation.

Anyone can participate.

How does it work? You pick a count site where food and/or water are provided for birds. For most people, this is the area where they have hung feeders in their own yard. Every two weeks (or even every week, if you wish) you spend some time during two consecutive days keeping track of which species visit your site, and record the highest number of individuals of each species that are all in view at the site at the same time. You may pick whatever days are convenient for you, and choose the amount of time you wish to spend counting. You just have to keep track of how much time you spend, and note that in your report. You will also be asked to note some information about the temperature and precipitation on the days you count.

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## The Sharp-tail Tale

By Dan Casey

When Susannah and I stopped at the "Split Pond" on North Somers Road on that cold clear Saturday (Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup>), the last thing we expected was a front page story. Bob Rost had reported an American Golden Plover there a few days earlier, and some other lingering shorebirds were around as well. But the pond was frozen solid from several days of near zero lows, and looked more like a prime skating area than a stage for minor birding spectacle. I set the scope up, and the first bird that came into view floored me. Knowing that I'm not supposed to blurt out the ID (or risk a drop in my domestic tranquility index), I barely masked my excitement while coaching Susannah to carefully describe the field marks for me as I wrote them down. For here was a state-first bird, a beautiful, buffy, cooperative Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. For a new bird to enter our official state list, it must be independently identified and reported by more than one observer.

Well, Susannah got the ID by carefully noting the yellow legs, rufous cap, buffy unstreaked breast, and fine eye ring. Then it was home to alert other birders! How long would it stay, at this frozen pothole? Well, stay it did, long enough to make the newspaper and oblige hoards of interested birders. This bird, a Siberian breeder that winters in Australia, but is known to wander occasionally throughout North America, also captured the imagination of non-birders, fascinated by this quirky yet compelling event. One friend of ours was so captivated she decided to start birding! Not a bad way to start your life list.

This bird apparently left on the 10<sup>th</sup>. If anyone doubts that birding is growing in popularity, or that it contributes to our economy, consider that during 9 days, over 80 people came specifically to see this one bird, driving over 9500 miles and in many cases staying in hotels and eating in local restaurants. People came from Billings, Fort Peck, Helena, Stevensville; even from Iowa (via Missoula). The other take-home message from this event was that even a small local wetland has value as stopover habitat for birds from many thousands of miles away. How fitting that this particular wetland has been put into a conservation easement by the owners, Steve and Sue Cummings, and that this value is therefore guaranteed into the future. Quite a tail, er, tale, all in all.

## FLATHEAD AUDUBON VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

**Welcome Packet Hostess or Host** Prepare packets of information for first-time visitors to the Flathead Audubon meetings, and present these packets to visitors at the meetings. Materials for the packets (Audubon magazine, Hotspots brochure, latest Pileated Post, and other informational brochures) are provided to you by FAS.

*Time required:* at most 1 hour a month plus attendance at the FAS meetings. FAS provides a substitute Hostess or host if you aren't able to attend a meeting.

**Community Seed Source** Serve as contact for people in your community who wish to buy birdseed from Flathead Audubon. You will keep several sacks of FAS birdseed at your home. Your phone number will be listed in the Pileated Post as a Seed Source, so that people can call you and arrange to pick up a sack from you at your convenience.

*Time required:* 1 or 2 hours a month.

**Donate old Audubon Magazines** These are used for the Welcome Packets that are presented to first-time visitors to the Flathead Audubon meetings. Bring magazines to the FAS meeting or get them to one of the FAS Board members.

**Newsletter Editor** This is an excellent opportunity for those of you who wish to exercise your creative side and serve Flathead Audubon. The newsletter is published nine times per year starting with the September issue and ending with the May issue. The editor makes content and style decisions and puts the newsletter together. The writing of an editors column is optional. Depending on the number of pages in the newsletter it can take anywhere from 6 to 10 hours per month. Please call Leslie Kehoe at 837-4467.

**Newsletter Committee** FAS is also looking for people to serve on a newsletter committee. This committee will assist the editor by writing articles, searching the internet and making recommendations on style and content. The time required can be as little an hour per month to several.







## Project FeederWatch IS STARTING

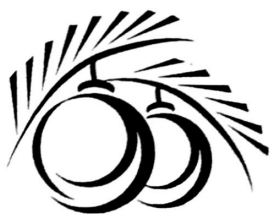
You then send your count report either by mail (on a form provided by the Cornell Lab) or via internet at the FeederWatch web site.

When you sign up with the Cornell Lab to become a FeederWatcher, you receive a Research Kit that contains detailed instructions as well as a colorful bird identification poster, a "Bird Watching Days" wall calendar, and other information related to feeding and identifying birds. You will also receive the Lab's quarterly newsletter, *Birdscope*, which contains reports on what is being discovered as a result of Project FeederWatch.

There is a \$15 annual participation fee (\$12 for members of the Cornell Lab) that covers your materials and newsletter subscription, and funds the staff support, web site, and data analysis associated with the program. Project FeederWatch is supported almost entirely by participation fees.

The FeederWatch season runs from early November through April. You may start participating at any time, but now is a great time to get started because the season is just beginning. To get further information about Project FeederWatch, or to sign up to participate, you may either go the FeederWatch web site at [www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw), or call 1-800-843-BIRD or write to FeederWatch, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Adapted from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website by Linda Winnie.



## BIRD SEED AVAILABLE

Do you need birdseed for your feeders? FAS is selling 50-pound sacks of black, oil sunflower seed. Sale of this birdseed is Flathead Audubon's primary fund raising project. Your purchase will help fund local conservation and educational programs. To purchase a sack call one of the following: Bigfork – Neal Brown, 837-5018; Columbia Falls – Jim Swab, 387-4299; Kalispell – Karen Nichols, 756-5763; Whitefish – Jill Fanning, 862-8070; the Swan Valley – June Ash, 754-2289.

## AMERICA'S MOST IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS MAPPED

The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) has published a new map depicting America's Globally Important Bird Areas (IBAs), marking the first time that the most important places for birds in the U.S. have been formally recognized.

Important bird areas are places that have concentrations of either endangered or declining birds, significant populations of birds with very small ranges, or large concentrations of migratory birds.

The Important Bird Areas project seeks to raise awareness of the need to conserve these precious natural resources and to ensure that the most important places for birds receive the full attention of conservation groups and agencies.

The Important Bird Area sites were identified by ABC in consultation with hundreds of biologists and wildlife managers across the country over a period of several years.

The map of the sites has been produced in conjunction with the National Geographic Society. It is available for \$7.50 through the America Birding Association Sales. To purchase the map to <http://americanbirding.org/abasales/ibamap.htm> or call 800-634-7736.

The complete list of sites can be seen on ABC's web site at [www.abcbirds.org/iba/ibalist.htm](http://www.abcbirds.org/iba/ibalist.htm).

The IBA project is funded in part by The Nature Conservancy and the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund, and has support from a variety of agencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Department of Defense, which manage many of the lands identified as IBAs.

Other partners in the IBA project include the American Birding Association, Partners in Flight, the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, and the National Audubon Society.

Excerpted from ABC's "Bird Calls," September, 2002

**THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF  
FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY WOULD  
LIKE TO SAY THANK YOU TO ALL OF  
OUR MEMBERS FOR YOUR GENEROUS  
CONTRIBUTIONS OF TIME AND MONEY  
THIS PAST YEAR. MANY THANKS! WE  
WISH YOU AND YOURS A VERY  
WONDERFUL HOLIDAY SEASON AND A  
JOYOUS NEW YEAR.**



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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 [lkehoe@digisys.net](mailto:lkehoe@digisys.net)

National Audubon Society  
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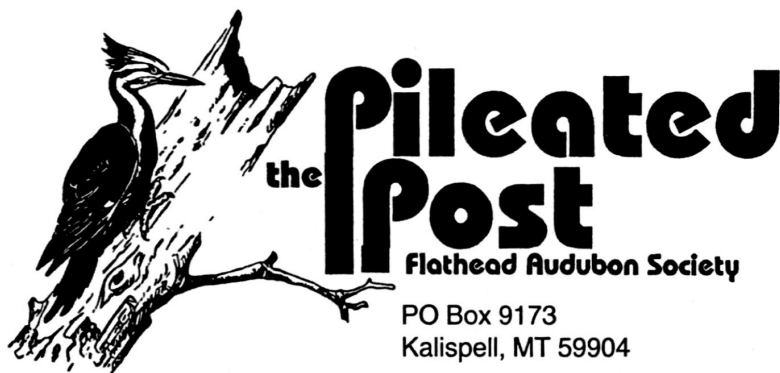
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