



# Pileated the Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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## Habitat Relationship Monitored

*(From Partners in Flight December Report)*

Three years of data have now been collected by Montana FWP which describe the bird community response to logging and fire at habitat enhancement areas in north-western Montana. Reports synthesizing their results will be available later in the year.

Monitoring (point counts and habitat) was also initiated at 10 sites along the Yellowstone River in cottonwood habitat. Bird surveys were conducted as well by the NBS at cottonwood regeneration study sites along the Missouri River.

Grassland/shrubland monitoring projects included the second year of point counts in native and reclaimed habitats on coal mine lands in the southeast corner of the state. The USFWS has been conducting point counts on the 20 WPA's and the Benton Lake Refuge. Many have rimrock native habitats, unlike typical duck management areas, and support such high priority species as Sprague's Pipit, Baird's Sparrow and Burrowing Owl.

Eight Baird's Sparrows were found at Benton Lake Refuge; they were common in CRP lands near the Sweetgrass Hills and were the most abundant bird on point counts at Medicine Lake Refuge in native prairie. This species continues to receive increased attention in the monitoring efforts of land management agencies in the eastern part of the state, though finding nests continues to be a significant challenge.

Radar monitoring was begun at the Rice Ridge wind power site north of Ennis Lake in

south central Montana and has indicated that most passerine migration at the site is at higher altitudes. The monitoring is being used in combination with nesting and migration counts of diurnal raptors, waterfowl counts and point counts to assess the avian vulnerability to the wind towers.

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes continue to be very active. They will be conducting forest point counts during the year to complement their 2 MAPS stations and BBS routes in the Mission Valley. Forest owl transects in 1995 located several Flammulated Owls, previously a poorly documented species now being shown to be quite widespread in western Montana.



Landbird research projects across the state include landscape-level analysis of forest management; productivity in grassland, riparian and old-growth habitats; bird response to fire; use of CRP lands and species-specific research (e.g. Lazuli Bunting).



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## The Editor's Spotting Scope

We bird watchers frequently go to extremes for the opportunity to observe bird species in their natural habitats. I, for one, have trudged through bitter cold on more than one bird count and, conversely, in the summer have withstood an onslaught of hungry mosquitoes in an effort to spot shore birds doing their natural thing. I've weathered storms, fallen in mud and hiked under a desert sun just to spot an elusive species for my life list.

When the birds come to you, other than at the bird feeder, it sort of balances the scale and under the right circumstances can be considered *ideal bird watching*.

About this time of year, Bohemian Waxwings come into my little corner of the world and briefly make life much more interesting. More than once I have blessed the former owners of this property for planting Mountain Ash trees. In December, the leafless trees with their bounty of red berries act as magnets to the Waxwings and the stage is set for my ideal bird watching.

Sitting by the window, I am suddenly aware of a flurry of activity. Glancing outside I see a flock of a zillion birds, flying here and there as one unit, undulating, and finally settling with a fluttering of wings on the smaller Mountain Ash. Rather quickly the berries are cleaned out and just as quickly, the birds are gone.

A few days later they return and this time land in the older tree. (The same flock? Who knows?) As long as the berries hold out, these colorful visitors return time and again, and are always a welcome sight in the woodlot.

Bird watching from the window definitely has its advantages and can be viewed as a sort of reward for those uncomfortable times so willingly spent in the field.

Sharon Bergman

## Comments From West Glacier —

".....Contrary to your recommendation in the (December) column, young raptors found on the ground or on low branches, should as a general rule be left where they are found. No one should remove a young raptor from the wild, even to convey it to a rehabilitation facility, simply because it is not in its nest. Young raptors frequently "branch out" from the nest or occasionally fall from the nest prior to being capable of sustained flight. The fall does not produce a life-threatening injury. Capture and transport can easily produce more serious injury than the bird had at the time of discovery. The fact that raptor parents are not seen at the moment does not indicate that the parents have abandoned their offspring.

The law does not sanction possession of a raptor for any purpose, without a permit. With eagles (according to the Montana Bald Eagle Working Group Plan), if there is a question about a young eagle's welfare, a warden (Montana FWP) or a federal agent should be contacted before any intervention is attempted."

*Pat McClelland,*

*Thanks for the information, Pat. Many of us who see a crying child wandering in a mall or a chirping chick thrashing in the dirt have a tendency to want to find a parent and make everything all right again. Now we know: in the case of raptors, don't get involved and let nature take its course.* SB

## Take Note

### ✓ January General Meeting

Monday, January 8, 1996

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Bldg.

490 N. Meridian Rd, Kalispell

Mtg: 7:30 pm - Program: 8:15 pm

**Program:** Ray Washtak, refuge manager of the Swan River Refuge, as well as the NW Montana Wetland District, will give a presentation on "General Birdlife: Gulf Coast of Texas and So. Central Nebraska". Washtak obtained his Bachelor of Science degree from the Univ. of Nebraska in Wildlife Management.



## Bigfork Xmas Bird Count Report

Mild weather and large numbers of waterfowl contributed to the excellent count totals obtained by 37 observers in 14 field parties on the annual Christmas Bird Count. The total number of species seen was 82 (plus one noted during count week) and the individuals totalled 17,620. The count of 4,107 Canada Geese was our third highest count in 22 years and 6,047 Mallards was our second highest count ever.

A Peregrine Falcon, our first, brought the 22-year cumulative list to 134 species. New high count totals were tied or broken for 13 species (underlined below). Our string of eight national high count totals for Wild Turkeys was broken, as almost 300 less than last year were recorded, with a count of 473 — our lowest since 1988.

|                         |      |                               |      |
|-------------------------|------|-------------------------------|------|
| Horned Grebe            | 3    | Steller's Jay                 | 3    |
| Red-necked Grebe        | 3    | Blue Jay                      | 3    |
| Great Blue Heron        | 9    | Black-billed Magpie           | 109  |
| Tundra Swan             | 156  | American Crow                 | 42   |
| Canada Goose            | 4107 | Common Raven                  | 180  |
| Mallard                 | 6047 | Black-capped Chickadee        | 419  |
| Northern Pintail        | 1    | Mountain Chickadee            | 70   |
| American Wigeon         | 36   | Chestnut-backed Chickadee     | 4    |
| Canvasback              | 110  | Chickadee, species            | 3    |
| Redhead                 | 417  | Red-breasted Nuthatch         | 233  |
| Ring-necked Duck        | 28   | White-breasted Nuthatch       | 4    |
| Greater Scaup           | 263  | Pygmy Nuthatch                | 8    |
| Lesser Scaup            | 11   | Brown Creeper                 | 3    |
| Common Goldeneye        | 291  | <u>Winter Wren</u>            | 2    |
| Barrow's Goldeneye      | 31   | Marsh Wren                    | 1    |
| Bufflehead              | 47   | American Dipper               | 6    |
| Hooded Merganser        | 13   | <u>Golden-crowned Kinglet</u> | 165  |
| Common Merganser        | 80   | Townsend's Solitaire          | 5    |
| Red-breasted Merganser  | 11   | American Robin                | cw   |
| Bald Eagle              | 36   | <u>Bohemian Waxwing</u>       | 1271 |
| Northern Harrier        | 4    | Cedar Waxwing                 | 59   |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk      | 1    | Northern Shrike               | 9    |
| Red-tailed Hawk         | 3    | European Starling             | 58   |
| Rough-legged Hawk       | 27   | American Tree Sparrow         | 71   |
| Buteo species           | 2    | Song Sparrow                  | 17   |
| <u>Peregrine Falcon</u> | 1    | White-throated Sparrow        | 1    |
| <u>Merlin</u>           | 4    | <u>Dark-eyed Junco</u>        | 156  |
| Ring-necked Pheasant    | 62   | Red-winged Blackbird          | 33   |
| Ruffed Grouse           | 2    | Brewer's Blackbird            | 50   |
| Wild Turkey             | 473  | Blackbird, species            | 3    |
| American Coot           | 354  | Pine Grosbeak                 | 1    |
| <u>Common Snipe</u>     | 1    | <u>Cassin's Finch</u>         | 63   |
| Ring-billed Gull        | 6    | House Finch                   | 119  |
| California Gull         | 5    | Red Crossbill                 | 153  |
| Herring Gull            | 15   | White-winged Crossbill        | 7    |
| Gull, species           | 10   | <u>Common Redpoll</u>         | 569  |
| <u>Rock Dove</u>        | 182  | Pine Siskin                   | 296  |
| Mourning Dove           | 52   | American Goldfinch            | 38   |
| Great Horned Owl        | 1    | Finch, species                | 40   |
| Northern Pygmy-Owl      | 1    | Evening Grosbeak              | 276  |
| <u>Long-eared Owl</u>   | 1    | House Sparrow                 | 34   |
| Belted Kingfisher       | 11   | Downy Woodpecker              | 18   |
| Hairy Woodpecker        | 18   | Hairy Woodpecker              | 10   |
| <u>Northern Flicker</u> | 65   | Pileated Woodpecker           | 15   |
| <u>Gray Jay</u>         | 10   |                               |      |



Prepared by Dan Casey





## President's Page ➤➤

What would you do with a million dollars? Let me guess. You'd pay off the house mortgage, buy a new car (say "rig" if you're in Montana), send the kids off to college and still have enough to go skiing for a day. All right, all right. If we're going to get serious with this game, we'll have to sweeten the pot. What would you do with a million dollars per year to spend at your discretion? Now we're dreaming!

I play this game all the time on my way around western Montana. When I see these new "trophy" homes adorning our mountain sides, when I see pleasure boats big enough to house a family of ten plying Flathead Lake, or the new breed of "land yachts" so popular these days with rich vacationers, I think to myself — these people have way more money than I do. And much different priorities. I know darn well what I'd do. Once I got the bungalow paid off and a new set of tires for the rig, I'd buy land.

Forest land, grass land, swamp land. I'd buy inaccessible islands, murky spruce bogs, groves of ancient cottonwoods along the river. The last stands of ponderosa pine that grace our valley would be a prime acquisition. I'd select a rolling field of wheat embracing a jewel-like lake rimmed with bullrushes. My mountain-sides would be home for trophy elk, roaming griz and wandering lion. And I'd want some places for warblers to rest in May.

Okay, I've assembled the best of the last, now what? I'd arrange the coup de grace — conservation easements on everything, securing forever the beauty and integrity of this irreplaceable real estate.

Nice dream, isn't it. But in all reality, some of our own members (bless their hearts) have done just that: secured a conservation easement with the Flathead Land Trust, the Montana Land Reliance or The Nature Conservancy. Be they large or small parcels, farm or ranch, timber land, creek bottom or bog, the conservation easement sets aside the land in its natural condition or present state forever. It's a beautiful idea. And an honor to have such far-sighted and selfless members as these.

The very good news is that we can all participate in this dream, regardless of our financial capability or property ownership. The money, you see, is in the bank.

In 1988, the Bonneville Power Administration, in cooperation with the Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, established the Wildlife Mitigation Trust Fund for the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat and to offset the loss of habitat from Hungry Horse and Libby Dams. The Trust Fund is now complete and it's time to spend the money — to the tune of over a million dollars per year for the next 30 years! So dream on!

Fish, Wildlife and Parks is kicking off this exciting effort with an acquisition vitually in our backyard. There is an untouched island in the Flathead River a stone's throw from Kalispell; in fact, just across the channel from the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area. I've walked the island and it is absolutely beautiful — as pristine as it might have been in the days of the Salish/Kootenai. And it is a wildlife haven.

The owner of this 73-acre island, The Flathead Land Trust, (which acquired the property from the Coriell family of Polson at a bargain sale), is offering it to Fish, Wildlife and Parks for \$22,000, about one-quarter of the island's appraised value.

It's a steal (thank you, Flathead Land Trust) and the perfect opportunity to initiate the mitigation effort. What do you say? There will be a public hearing at 7 pm on **January 18, 1996 at the Outlaw Inn, Kalispell.** If you're unable to attend the meeting, you can direct your written comments to

Gael Bissel  
Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
490 N. Meridian Road  
Kalispell, MT 59901

I hope to see you there.

Leo Keane





## About the Population —

*(The following appeared in the December newsletter of the Five Valleys Audubon Society. It referred to the passage in the November election of a \$5 million open space bond that will be paid off over the next 20 years. Missoula citizens voted by a wide margin to tax themselves in order to preserve open space for their enjoyment and use in the future.)*

The open space bond has passed. The city has taken a big step to help assure its quality future.

Over the next few years conservation easements and fee titles will be acquired to retain many of the scenic views we cherish. Some critical wildlife habitats will be secured. Trails and recreation areas will be developed to serve all of us in this town. There is much cause for celebration. But, let's not be smug. Five million dollars can only do so much.

The city is going to keep on growing. It may very well double in population over the next few decades, and surrounding communities in our county will also be growing apace.

Favorite birding spots will continue to disappear. Increased human disturbance will move wildlife back from the city. Our prime fishing holes will become even more crowded. Homes and businesses will continue to usurp prime vistas and fields of wildflowers and stately pines. Floating the Blackfoot will become a contest for parking places and turns at the boat ramp. Frustration from traffic to and from our places for relaxation and spiritual restoration will partially nullify what we are seeking.

We can let it happen or we can act to lessen the impact. More bonds in the future, perhaps. Paying full costs of what we do, certainly. Manage growth, by all means.

But until the American people face the overwhelming reality of our exploding population, we will not be able to stem the tide and its consequences.

**Bob Ballou**, Quality of Life Committee,  
Montana Audubon Council



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| President      | Leo Keane, 514 Pine Place, Whitefish, MT 59937     | 862-5807 |
| Vice President | Susannah Casey, P.O. Box 7922, Kalispell, MT 59904 | 857-3143 |
| Secretary      | Kent Miller, 781 1st Ave. EN, Kalispell, MT 59901  | 257-4100 |
| Treasurer      | Susan Hitchcox, 510 S. 5th W., Missoula, MT 59801  | 549-5692 |
| Past President | Brent Mitchell, 960 Kienas Rd, Kalispell, MT 59901 | 756-8130 |

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| 1993-96 | Elaine Corrigan, 7405 Valley View Rd, Polson, MT 59860 | 883-6895 |
| 1993-96 | Carol Purchase, 781 1st Ave. EN, Kalispell, MT 59901   | 257-4100 |
| 1994-97 | Sharon Bergman, 354 LaBella Ln, Big Arm, MT 59910      | 849-5286 |
| 1994-97 | Neal Brown, 560 Wolf Creek, Dr, Bigfork, MT 59911      | 837-5018 |
| 1994-97 | Dan Casey, P.O. Box 7922, Kalispell, MT 59904          | 857-3143 |
| 1994-97 | Ferne Cohen, P.O. Box 1782, Whitefish, MT 59937        | 862-2028 |

### CHAIRS

|                    |   |          |
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| Audubon Adventures | Kim Davis, 1230 Rhodes Draw, Kalispell, MT 59901    | 755-1311 |
| Field Trips        | Dan Casey, P.O. Box 7922, Kalispell, MT 59904       | 857-3143 |
| Hostess            | Carla Prach, 110 Goat Trail, Whitefish, MT 59937    | 862-1350 |
| Librarian          | Gail Leonard, 514 Pine Place, Whitefish, MT 59937   | 862-5807 |
| Membership         | June Ash, P.O. Box 1129, Condon, MT 59826           | 754-2289 |
| Newsletter         | Sharon Bergman, 354 LaBella Lane, Big Arm, MT 59910 | 849-5286 |
| Program            | Ed Prach, 110 Goat Trail, Whitefish, MT 59937       | 862-1350 |
| Refuge Projects    | Lynn Kelly, 6525 Rocky Point Road, Polson, MT 59860 | 883-5797 |
| Wetlands/Waterfowl | Neal Brown, 560 Wolf Creek Drive, Bigfork, MT 59911 | 837-5018 |

## Montana Audubon Council

### OFFICE

Janet Ellis, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624 443-3949

**BIRDING HOTLINE: 756-5595**

The Flathead Audubon Society is affiliated with the National Audubon Society and meets on the second Monday of each month from September through May. A business meeting is held at 7:30 p.m. followed by a special program at 8:15 p.m. 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.**

## National Audubon Society Membership Application



Enjoy full National Audubon Society benefits and AUDUBON magazine, as well as PILEATED POST newsletter.

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