



# the Flathead Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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## Flathead Audubon Xmas Bird Count Coming Up

The 23<sup>rd</sup> annual Bigfork Christmas Bird Count will be held on **Saturday, December 21**. Part of the 97<sup>th</sup> annual nationwide effort, the count comprises a one-day attempt to count all the birds within a 7.5 mile radius circle centered on the "Little Brown Church" north of Bigfork.

Inside the Bigfork circle is a wide variety of habitats, including Woods Bay, Bigfork, Somers, the Foothills Road area and the rich riparian regions of the Lower Flathead Valley. Last year the Bigfork Count recorded 82 species, which makes the eighth straight year that the Count has registered over 80 species and achieved the highest count in the state. Over its 22 year history, the Bigfork Count has tallied a total of 134 species, which is also a record for the state. In 8 of the last 10 years it has also achieved the national high in wild turkeys.

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is a nationwide tradition, begun in 1900. It was initiated by the Audubon Society as a social event. Since then, it has become the longest continuously running bird count in the nation, making it an important source of valuable information on bird population trends, nesting and migration habits. Last year, about 1700 different counts were sponsored by Audubon chapters throughout the country; 24 circles were covered in Montana.

Organizer Dan Casey would like to

put together at least 15 teams to cover the Bigfork circle. Birders of all skill levels are encouraged to participate. Beginners will be teamed up with skilled birders so can expect to learn a lot. There is a mandatory fee of \$5 per participant, to cover the editing and publishing costs of the annual Christmas Bird Count issue of *American Birds*. Sign up at the Flathead Audubon December meeting or contact Dan Casey at 857-3143.

Anyone who would like to participate, but can't devote a full day, is invited to join as a half-day helper or a feeder watcher. Make arrangements with Dan.

As in past years, there will be a potluck compilation dinner at the Bigfork Senior Center, starting at 5 p.m. on the day of the count. Baked ham will be provided; bring side dishes or dessert. Don't miss out on taking part in Montana's #1 Bird Count.

### Other Bird Counts Scheduled

**Ninepipe** → Sunday, 12/ 22  
Meet at Countryside Cafe, south of Ronan, 7:30 a.m. or contact Dan Casey, 857-3143

**Eureka** → Saturday, 12/28  
Contact Lois Young, 889-3492 or Ellen Sullivan, 889-3983

**Swan Valley** → Saturday, 1/4  
Contact Rod Ash, 754-2289

### In this issue —

Meeting Notice	Page 2
Project Feederwatch	Page 3
About the Population	Page 5



## The editor's spotting scope

Dear Mr. Ornithologist —

You made my day, my trip and my nook for favorite memories all in one fell swoop. Last September, when I boarded the cruise ship in Seattle, I had no idea our paths would cross.

As we headed out into Puget Sound on our Island Discoveries Cruise, the Cruise Coordinator identified the birds that were seen: "A Great Blue Heron at 10 o'clock." "A bunch of Surf Scoters at 3 o'clock." "There's a White-winged Scoter at 8 o'clock." "And look at those Harbor Seals!"

Where? Where? And then I got the hang of it after learning that the bow of the boat was the front and it was 12 o'clock for all intents and purposes. When I was on deck, my trusty binoculars were always at the ready, and there were lots of birds to be seen, including the Western Grebe, Western Seagull and Common Loon. We also saw Eagles, a Gray Jay and Stellar Jays on shore. Before long, I could spot the birds almost as soon as the crew did — but not always.

On the fourth day out, the Cruise Director announced we would dock at Port Townsend the next day and an ornithologist — you — would come on board. He said we were going to cruise around Protection Island, which is a bird sanctuary protected by the Federal Government.

The next morning you, Roger Risley, joined us, with your stocking cap pulled down around your ears and your gray beard fitting so well with that weather-worn face. You had to learn, as we did, about the "o'clocks" in relation to the boat and after we were all in sync with directions, the birding began in earnest.

You quickly pointed out the difference between the Pelagic Cormorants and the Double-crested variety, with the Pelagic being the smaller bird. There were large numbers of both species seen as we cruised around the island.

No one is allowed on the island now ... not even you, who serves as one of its protectors. There are a few abandoned cabins here and there, but as the original owners sign off (or die), the land reverts to the government and the birds. It is truly a bird sanctuary.

You pointed out the abundance of Heerman's Gulls in the area, along with an Eared Grebe, and on the shore, basking in the autumn sun, were gazillions of Harbor seals. A prominent bird

around the island is the Rhinoceros Auklet. A sea bird with a large beak and short, thick neck, I could never get the connection between the bird and its name until I researched it in my field guide. In its breeding plumage, there's a sort of rhinoceros-like growth on its beak.

As we headed back to Port Townsend, you mentioned that Fort Worden, which is nearby, is a great place to go birding at any time of the year. I made a mental note to return by car sometime in the future and explore this exciting birding area more thoroughly.

Cruising along toward Port Townsend, you calmly mentioned that some Heerman's Gulls, a Pacific Loon and a Red-throated Loon were after a small school of fish on the port side of the boat.

Where? Where? What time — 9 o'clock or 3 o'clock? I've never seen a Red-throated Loon! Tell me! Tell me!

It was too late. We were past the action. I'll just have to go back someday and look again. But you really made my day, Mr. Ornithologist. You and the birds made my day. **Sharon Bergman**

### Take note!

#### December General Meeting

Monday, December 9, 1996

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Bldg.

490 N. Meridian Rd, Kalispell

Meeting starts at 7:30 p.m.

**Program:** Dan Casey, wildlife biologist with Fish, Wildlife & Parks, will give a slide show presentation on "**Early Winter Birds of the Flathead.**" Casey, who is also an ornithology instructor at FVCC, will talk about and show the species seen in the Bigfork Christmas Bird Count over the last 22 years. He will also provide information on which birds can be seen where and give tips on some of the species difficult to identify.

*Happy Holidays*

*to*

*You and Yours*

*from the*

*Flathead Audubon Board of Directors  
and Committee Chairs*



## Hotline highlites ☎☎

There were more sightings of the **Great Egret** near the dike on Ninepipe Reservoir, along with **Tundra Swans**, **Sandhill Cranes** and **Double-crested Cormorants**. Also, look for the **Osprey** that is staying in the area.

Migrating gulls were seen at birding hot spots like the Polson Sewer Ponds. Look for **Thayer** and **Mew Gulls**, along with **Bonapartes** in their winter plumage.

**Blue jays** are still showing up at local feeders, and **Northern Shrikes** are appearing on telephone lines in place of Kestrels.

For more information on birding hotspots, or to report your sightings, call the Audubon Hotline at **756-5595**. **Liz Hill**



## Thanks to birdseed buyers & deliverers —

Flathead Audubon thanks all of you who bought sunflower seeds. Your support of this annual fund raiser enables the chapter to continue with the projects that help to enhance our environment and further our cause, and the birds appreciate it too.

Special thanks go out to those who braved the cold and helped deliver the goods in Whitefish, Columbia Falls, Kalispell, Bigfork, Condon and Polson. And while thanks are being distributed, let's add big ones for June and Rod Ash who negotiated with the Denton sunflower seed ranchers and processed the orders. \* \* \* \* \*

## Project Feederwatch

Begun in 1987, Project Feeder Watch is a winter survey of the birds that visit backyard feeders in North America. National Audubon recently joined Cornell Lab. of Ornithology and others in partnering the program. The information collected by backyard birdwatchers each year helps ornithologists track changes in the abundance and distribution of bird species that use feeders in the winter.

An information kit is available. It includes colorful posters of common backyard birds, a sample detailed species account compiled from data supplied by Project participants, a calendar of birdwatching days, record-keeping forms and a complete instruction booklet filled with additional tidbits of useful and interesting information.

Goals of the project include gathering long-term data on winter bird populations throughout North American, detecting significant population declines or expansions; tracking dynamic movements of nomadic species during the winter, and providing direct feedback about bird population trends.

Project Feeder Watch is primarily self-sustaining. Most of its budget comes from participant fees, which cover the costs of producing and mailing participant packets; editing, entering and analyzing data and publishing the results in newsletters. Corporate sponsors are also sought and welcomed.

**For more information:** *Contact Cornell Lab. of Ornithology Program Services, 159 Sapsucker Woods Rd, Ithaca, NY 14850-1999; phone: (607) 254-2425; email: <clomembership@cornell.edu>; >World Wide Web: <http://www.ornith.cornell.edu>.*



## ►► The President's Page ►►

I'll bet most of us who end up as National Audubon chapter presidents come to the job with meager credentials. Certainly I've never been "The President" of anything before. In fact, I've always preferred the backstage to the limelight. So when I took over as president of Flathead Audubon I was both apprehensive as well as very curious. What, I wondered, exactly was this job of being president.

Two and one-half years later I've drawn one conclusion. Being president of a volunteer organization is a lot like being the owner of your own business: you're the one who gets paid last. That is as it should be.

As a contractor (I own a home building & remodeling company) my business looks best when my employees feel successful and well-rewarded. When they are happy with their work and the homeowners think we've got the best crew in town, my business shines — even when I'm the one stuck in the office shuffling papers. And when the subcontractors are pleasant, accommodating and professional, my business walks on water — even if I don't know beans about plumbing or wiring. Simply said, the boss' job is keeping everybody else happy and productive. The reward is a busy company. When a little profit trickles down, that's pure frosting.

Of course, at Flathead Audubon none of us gets paid, but otherwise the rewards seem quite similar. For example, our chapter has been mentioned several times in the local papers lately and I've noticed in each case a different contact person is listed. And it has never been me! That's good. It reflects the diversity and involvement of our officers, directors and committee chairs and clearly show our chapter isn't just a one-man act, but a whole concert of like-minded people.

It almost goes without saying that we are very fortunate to have attracted a cadre of leaders who work so well together and who share a similar vision, and also truly like each other. That's rare in the business world, yet probably even more so in a volunteer organization where the good of the group is sometimes the only

reward. I see my job, then, as being the guy in the background (kind of like "the boss") who supports the productivity of everybody else.

To that end I think it is the president's responsibility to maintain our focus on the established goals in our mission statement. Over the years Flathead Audubon has evolved into, and found a reliable niche as, a middle-of-the-road conservation organization. That sounds like milk toast, I know.

We have been roundly criticized for not taking stronger positions on some issues, such as grizzly bear management. On the other hand, we've also been roundly criticized for taking any position at all on other issues, such as population control. Somewhere between the extremes we seem to have found our most productive territory, where we're not forever bogged down in controversy, spinning our wheels endlessly and wasting precious time, energy and money.

Actually, that middle ground where we've been most effective doesn't sound so bad on paper. Our environmental education outreach: through Audubon Adventures, the Family Forestry Expo, the "Songbird Blues Box", as well as other school programs, and our annual book purchase award; are all widely popular. We've turned some heads too in the timber/logging industry with our commitment to sustainable forestry. Working well within the system we've helped keep at least one wetland intact through concerted use of the "Section 404" permitting process.

Our newsletter is great, our meetings well-attended and our field trips are diverse. Hey, we must be doing something right! That reminds me, there is one other compensation for being the boss: sometimes, at least, you get to call the shots.

Considering how well we really are doing, my direction for Flathead Audubon in the coming year — and for the remainder of my watch: "Steady as she goes, and stay the course!"

**Leo Keane**



## About the population —

It is probably wise to emphasize it is most unlikely that anything will be done deliberately to stabilize or eventually reduce our country's human population without the concurrence of the majority of our citizens. We are a democracy and that is how things get done. In China, and perhaps elsewhere, coercion is used, but that won't do here.

That doesn't mean nothing can or will be done if the majority wants it. Demographers tell us that one of the most effective ways to stabilize our population in this country is to reduce the average fertility rate to two children per couple. It is now well over that.

How to do this? Certainly, education is critical. First, people must learn what is at stake; then, a better and more universal understanding on the use of contraceptives is needed. In many cases, teaching the advantages economically of small families and advocating concerted efforts to reduce teenage pregnancies is warranted.

Another approach would be through incentives. At present, we subsidize additional children through federal and state income taxes. Last year this amounted to \$2500 for each child as a federal exemption and \$1480 as a state exemption.

Suppose, again as a result of citizen support, exemptions were allowed for the first two children in the family, no exemption for the third child and penalties for any additional children. But only after a specified date, of course. With something like this, surely many couples would opt for smaller families.

Other incentives have been proposed, such as free sterilization to low income people who voluntarily choose it. The point here is that there are ways to reduce family size without jeopardizing people's freedom of choice.

As Vice President Gore has written, and I am paraphrasing: "Overpopulation is the most serious issue facing mankind today." It certainly jeopardizes everything we try to do in Audubon.

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

## Dedicated to Audubon

The following Flathead Audubon members have reached certain plateaus of membership. They are recognized for their continued dedication to the chapter and National Audubon and for their support of environmental issues.

**30 years & more:** James Jokerst, West Glacier, and Phyllis Falconer, Hot Springs.

**25 years +:** Jacqueline Brewer, Kalispell; Louise Abell, Whitefish; Loren & Mary Kreck, Columbia Falls; Ray Dimond, Kalispell, and Dennis Hester, Kalispell

**20 years +:** Ross Titus, Bigfork, Stephen Irwin, Polson; Fred McLaughlin, Whitefish; Rod & June Ash, Condon; Charles & Marci Bishop, Polson; Fred Keck, Bigfork; Jack & Rachel Potter, Columbia Falls; Mrs. Herbert Ingram, Kalispell; Dan Paschke, Kalispell; Rexford Webster, Baltimore, MD; Sharon Whisler, Kalispell; Rich & Nancy Trembath, Bigfork; Katherine Kendall, Columbia Falls; Sid Goodrich, Marion; Sharon Delong, Eureka, and Dr. M. Johnson, Kalispell.

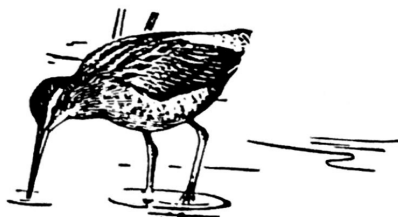
**Almost 20 years:** Gary Altram, Libby; Suzanne Cogliatte, Columbia Falls; Lorraine Holt, Kalispell; Leo Keane, Whitefish; Malcolm McLelland, Kalispell; Mrs. N.S. Sherman, Vermont; Clarence & Mabel Stilwell, Condon; Richard Thomason, Pittsburgh, PA; Richard Wernham, Libby, and Jack & Ursula Whitney, Bigfork.

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## A law "for the birds"

(The following is an excerpt from *The Christian Science Monitor*, 9/11/96.)

Tuscaloosa, Alabama handed cat owners a law that's for the birds. The legislation makes it illegal for house pets to stalk and kill wildlife. Owner(s) face a fine of up to \$500 if they don't keep Fluffy under control.





## Flathead Audubon Society Directory

### OFFICERS

President	Leo Keane, 514 Pine Place, Whitefish, MT 59937	862-5807
Vice President	Geoff Poole, 4755 Foothill Road, Bigfork, MT 59911	837-4645
Secretary	Gail Sullivan, 932 Columbia Avenue, Whitefish, MT 59937	862-5775
Treasurer	Susan Hitchcox, 4755 Foothill Road, Bigfork, 59911	837-4645
Past President	Brent Mitchell, 960 Kienas Rd, Kalispell, MT 59901	756-8130

### DIRECTORS

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
1996-99	Sonja Hartman, P.O. Box 1388, Columbia Falls, MT 59912	758-8516
1996-99	Jim Rogers, Polson, MT 59860	883-3611

### CHAIRS

Audubon Adventures	Kim Davis, 1230 Rhodes Draw, Kalispell, MT 59901	755-1311
Conservation	Geoff Poole, 4755 Foothill Road, Bigfork, MT 59911	837-4645
Field Trips	Betty Winzenburg, 1436 Rogers Lane, Kila, MT 59920	755-1697
Hospitality	Betty Winzenburg (see above)	
	Debby Rossi, 480 5th Ave. EN, Columbia Falls, MT 59912	892-1317
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
Publicity	Linda Winnie, P.O. Box 220, Kila, MT 59920	755-1406
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

OFFICE	Janet Ellis, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624	443-3949
PRESIDENT	Rod Ash, P.O. Box 1129, Condon, MT 59826	754-2289

**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. 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 Fax: 849-5486.



P.O. Box 9173  
Kalispell, MT 59904

## National Audubon Society Membership Application



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

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N54 7XCHA

Send this application and your check to:

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Chapter Membership Data Center  
P.O. Box 51001  
Boulder, CO 80322-1001

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