



# the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

Volume 22

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## T's the Season to be Jolly & Count the Birds!

Four Christmas Bird Counts have been scheduled for the holiday season. This year the Bigfork Count will be held on Saturday, December 20. Sign-up will be held at the December meeting of Flathead Audubon. Those interested in participating can also contact Dan Casey at 857-3143.

The Ninepipe Count will be held on Sunday, December 21, with participants meeting at the Country Side Cafe (south of Ronan) at 7:30 a.m. or contact Dan Casey. The Swan Valley Count will be headed up by Rod Ash, with the date yet to be decided. Call Rod at 754-2289 for details. For those in the Eureka area, call Ellen Sullivan at 889-3983 for particulars as the date has not been finalized.

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is a nationwide tradition, begun in 1900. This year will be the 98<sup>th</sup> time that Audubon members and other interested birders have spread out over the country to search out and record all the species they can find in one day. 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. As such, it has become an important source of valuable information on bird population trends and nesting and migration habits.

Each count covers a circle 7 ½ miles in radius, with the same circle sampled every

year. Last year, about 1700 different counts were sponsored by Audubon chapters throughout the country; 24 circles were covered in Montana.

The annual Bigfork Count covers a circle centered at the Little Brown Church just north of Bigfork. The circle includes Woods Bay, Bigfork, Somers, the Foothills Road area and the rich riparian regions of the Lower Flathead Valley.

Organizer Dan Casey would like to put together at least 15 teams to cover the area. Birders of all skill levels are encouraged to participate. Beginners will be teamed with skilled birders, so can expect to learn a lot. You can sign up individually or as a team. There is a mandatory fee of \$5 per participant, to cover editing and publishing costs of the annual bird count issue of *American Birds*.

Anyone who would like to take part, 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 the past, Bigfork Count participants will gather for a potluck dinner at the Bigfork Senior Center, starting at 5 p.m. Bring a side dish or dessert.

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## The editor's spotting scope

Highway Birding can be a challenging test of your skills as a birder. Your birding experience and knowledge, or lack of it, is quite evident when you attempt to apply them as you hurtle down the highway at 70 miles an hour.

This was brought home to me recently on a hurried trip to California. There was no time to pull over and double check the sightings with binoculars, as we stopped only in rest areas, filling stations or for the night.

Leaving home and crossing the Polson bridge, a mass of floating birds was seen, which could not be positively identified, but I guessed they were American Coots. (As we all know, guesses don't count.) Further down the road there was a line of dark birds on a power line, which I figured to be Starlings, but figuring doesn't count either. I readily identified Ravens and Canada Geese, so my Trip List now included: a mass of floating birds, a line of dark birds on a power line, Ravens and Canada Geese.

In Idaho, there was a hawk on a fence post surveying the stubblefield and a line of small birds on a power line (sparrows?). Suddenly, flying across a field was a large, white bird going away. (Wait! Come back! I can probably identify you if you'll swing by this way one more time.)

In Utah, I couldn't miss the Magpies at the side of the road, getting their ration of gravel. There were ducks on a lake and more birds on a power line. Then a large flock of birds went swirling over the highway, flying in a group and yet each individually doing its own thing. Could they be terns? If so, what kind? That's a new one for my life list! But we were down the road and past them all too soon.

In Nevada, it was easy to identify the Crows floating over the desert, but not easy to determine what kind of hawk was riding the same air currents.

As we drove into California, a flock of unidentified small birds flew over, just to tease me, I'm sure. There were also Crows and Pigeons along the way. When we arrived at our

destination and I got out of the car, a song bird chirped a cheerful greeting. I haven't the faintest idea what kind of bird it was and it was added to the lengthy list of unidentifieds.

The birding on this trip may sound as though it left a lot to be desired, with so many unknowns. However, for me, it was just the opposite; the trip was enjoyable because of the birds. They were there to be seen and I was drawn to them, regardless of whether I recognized them. And that's one of the facets of birding — it enriches your experience, regardless of your knowledge or expertise. **Sharon Bergman**



## Hotline highlights ☎☎☎

An egret, a rare bird for the valley, was spotted north of Kalispell in the Costco area. We're reminded to contact Dan Casey (857-3143) when an unusual bird is sighted as Dan maintains the records on such sightings. An abundance of Eastern Blue Jays was seen around Bigfork, near Many Lakes. This is the time of year when Robins and Waxwings pig-out on the Mountain Ash berries, so be on the lookout when you see a Mountain Ash tree. In the waters around the valley, keep an eye out for Coots, Cormorants and Hooded Mergansers.

For up-to-date sightings, call the Flathead Audubon Hotline at 756-5595

### TAKE NOTE—

December General Meeting

Monday, December 8, 1997

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Bldg.

490 N. Meridian Rd, Kalispell

Meeting starts at 7:30 p.m.

Program: Dan Casey will present a slide show on "Early Winter Birds of the Flathead". He will feature species seen in the Bigfork Christmas Bird Count over the last 23 years. He will also provide information on which birds can be seen where, and give identification tips on some of the difficult species to identify.

Dan is Wildlife Biologist with FWP, Instructor of Bird Identification at FVCC and Audubon Field Notes Regional Christmas Bird Count Editor for Idaho and Montana.





## Population & Habitat

Two topics that will be addressed in this article are migration and international family planning. These are concerns of most of you folks and decidedly of the Montana Audubon Population and Habitat Committee, of which I am a new member.

**Migration.** Many animal species migrate mostly to find better habitat and for the availability of food. I've been migrating since I was six-years-old, as an offspring of a naval officer. Humans migrate for various reasons: better financial situations, better quality of living, to be closer to services, for more quietude and solace and to be closer to the wild primitive aspects of the earth.

One problem with the latter two is those migrating humans tend to settle in wildlife habitat. I recently noticed a house going up at the mouth of one of my favorite hiking drainages. Yikes! Barking dogs, ambient house and car noises — oh, my! There goes my escape from town!

The major problem with this unplanned building is the disrupting of habitat. The antelope used to gather in that drainage to get away from bad weather. I know there is a cougar family up in the drainage. I can just see an article in the paper in the near future about a cougar being shot because it got too close to the people.

Who is responsible for saving the house if it catches fire? Who is supposed to maintain the road to their home? Good planning by the city and county could have prevented this. The county always thinks it's going to bring in more money. Realtors and construction workers make the money.

We need to get on planning committees at the city and county levels or at least attend planning meetings and voice our concerns. Writing letters to the editor is also a good plan of action. The mission of the Montana Audubon Population and

Habitat Campaign is "to preserve our natural heritage for future generations by reducing the impact of human population growth on wildlife habitat and our quality of life".

### **International Family Planning.**

There are concerns about the Global Gag Rule of the Congressional FY98 spending bill. There is an amendment being discussed which restricts international population assistance programs if counseling on abortion is included. Such a restriction would reduce the effectiveness of international population assistance programs by placing unnecessary restrictions and costly bureaucratic reporting requirements on them.

As this is being written, there is a possibility that the amendment to the Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill (HR2159) could be tabled before Congress adjourns for the holidays. For further information on the action taken, call the Capital Switchboard at (888) 723-5246. **Debra Doerflinger of Pintlar Audubon; Member, Montana Audubon Population & Habitat Committee.**







## President's Page >>

*(Leo Keane got caught up with the demands of his job and was unable to write his column by press time. To fill the void, the following is a reprint of a column he wrote as editor for the January, 1989, issue. Eight years later, it is still appropriate.)*

It's dusk: the waning moments of this year's Christmas Bird Count. We've paddled a good twelve miles today on the Flathead River, from Egan Slough to here — a stone's throw upstream from Sportsman's Bridge where we will disembark.

We've seen hundreds of Geese, lots of ducks and a surprising number of Bald Eagles. We have not seen that Goshawk, that Snowy Owl, that one bird that makes your day, the one that leaves your heart pounding. But now on the left bank we drift toward an old-growth cottonwood/spruce forest, a classic river bottom woodland. Here, I decide, is our last chance to spot the biggie.

We plow up on shelf ice and Buck and I jump out on frozen mud. While Gail stands by the canoe, we slip into the forest. It is very still.

Deer tracks criss-cross everywhere in old frosty snow. Here, a Pileated Woodpecker has chiseled apart the base of a stump. There goes the trail of a snowshoe, off to a pocket of cattails. We turn toward a stand of dark spruce. I've got Goshawk on my mind, not rabbits!

Quickly though I am brought up short by something quite different. A survey stake, brightly painted and inscribed with surveyor's information. There's another. And another. I realize then what I hoped wouldn't be true — this is the site of the recently approved RV park near the Sportsman's Bridge.

I stand there a moment visualizing what is to come: roads, pump stations, camper pads cut into the heart of this old-

growth jungle. And I realize that by this time next year it will be gone. The dark and tangled forest urbanized. The deer, the woodpeckers, the hare chased out of their forest habitat.

Day by day we lose a bit of the Flathead this way. We take an acre here, an acre there to build our ranchettes, our golf course. Inch by inch we move our cities out onto the valley, as if there will always be more valley. This is a frontier mentality.

The time to plan is now. And Flathead Audubon must be there in every instance as a voice for the forest, the river bottom, wherever there are habitats and wild things threatened, we must be the voice to say, "Let's go slow."

Leo Keane



## 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 the 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 we're at it, thanks to June and Rod Ash who negotiated with the Denton sunflower seed ranchers and processed the orders.



*Happy Holidays*

*to*

*You and Yours*

*from the*

*Flathead Audubon Board of Directors  
and Committee Chairs*





## Grandma's bird adventure

*(Editor's Note: My sister spends the winter in California and related the following tale of misadventure.)*

One Saturday daughter Chris asked if I could run Tom to soccer practice at 10 a.m. then take Danny to have his baseball team picture taken at 10:30. No problem there.

Except — Tom called about 9:30 and said, "Grandma, there's a red-headed woodpecker on the front lawn with a broken wing, and Katrina is crying 'cause a cat or dog might get it. What shall I do?"

What do I know about broken wings? But always one with a ready answer, I said, "Tom, go out to the garage and get a large cardboard box, poke a few holes in the bottom and put it over the bird, with a rock on top, until I get there." "But Grandma, it keeps hopping away from me!" "Tom, if you're not faster than a bird with a broken wing, then you'd better get off that soccer team. Get Danny to herd the bird and just do it."

As I arrive, I see all three kids sitting on the lawn with a box with a rock on top. Tom is in his soccer uniform, Danny is in full baseball attire and Katrina is still in her pajamas. Also, parked nearby under a tree is a police car. Lord save me!

The police officer is just waiting for speeding vehicles. We ignore him and discuss the problem, deciding I would first take the boys where they had to be. Katrina ran in the house, got dressed and returned with a golf club in hand. She would stand guard while I took the boys around. The taking around took about 45 minutes.

Since Tom came home early because the game was cancelled, we left Danny to stand guard and Tom, Katrina and I drove to a local pet store for advice. The advice was: don't feed the bird and call the Glendale Humane Society.

The nice guy at the Humane Society said they would pick it up or we could take it to them. They already had an injured bird and had called the State Fish & Game, which has a person who cares for injured raptors. He said if I could get the bird to them within the hour, it could be cared for very quickly.

Now the problem is getting the box turned over with the bird inside without further injury. I deployed the kids to find a thin, but strong, piece of cardboard or plywood big enough to slide under the box. Then, with a boy on each side, they could very gently turn it over.

When we all trooped to the front yard again with a piece of bulletin board, we find the box and rock are gone. A little redhead was seen bobbing around in the parkway grass. Danny grumbled, "I'll bet that cop took the box away."

As we rushed down the sidewalk, I noticed Mrs. White, their 84-year-old neighbor, with the box and rock in hand. She was pale as a ghost. She had noticed the "trash" on the lawn and just picked it up. Her act of tidiness got the hell scared out of her as well as the woodpecker.

After another herding tactic, we got the bird back under the box. Then the boys, lying on their stomachs, got the board under the box and bird and turned right side up, very gently. All the while, Mrs. White was wringing her hands and apologizing for having fouled up our humane endeavors. The cop sat in his police car and just watched.

We secured the bird and piled into the car, making it to the Humane Society in record time. The two men there were so nice, showing us the other wounded bird and admiring ours, and then explained about the care the two birds would get.

As the kids walked out ahead of me, I swear they stood a little straighter so their halos wouldn't slip. Tom, 16, looked very pleased with himself; Danny, 14, no longer mumbled "it's just a bird" and Katrina, 11, with no more tears, skipped and hopped to the car.

I felt we all learned a wonderful lesson. For me, it was even in the fast-paced city there are people and places who care for "all creatures great and small". If each of us would just take the time.

Katrina found out that crying and wringing your hands doesn't cut it — she got the golf club and was prepared. Tom felt good because he didn't just sit there, but started the ball rolling. Danny, muttering all the while "it's just a bird" engineered the turning-over of the box. They all wiggled like puppies when the Humane Society man complimented them on their efforts.



When we returned home, the cop was still under the tree. As the kids ran into the house, I walked over to him. Grinning, I said, "I don't know about you, but my day so far has been just one crisis after another." He said, "I noticed that. Wish my day could have been as exciting. You should have seen that lady when she picked up the box!" It was truly a day to remember. **Mateel Wynne**





## 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

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1997-2000	William Breen, 335 Mountain Meadow Rd., Kalispell, MT 59901	755-2142
1997-98	Neal Brown, 560 Wolf Creek Dr, Bigfork, MT 59911	837-5018
1997-2000	Sharon DeLong, 2495 Grave Creek Rd., Eureka, MT 59917	
1996-99	Sonja Hartman, P.O. Box 1388, Columbia Falls, MT 59912	758-8516
1996-99	Jim Rogers, P.O. Box 984, Polson, MT 59860	883-3611
1997-2000	Bruce Tannehill, 239 Deer Trail, Whitefish, MT 59937	862-4548

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	Debbi Rossi, P.O. Box 1884, 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
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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.**

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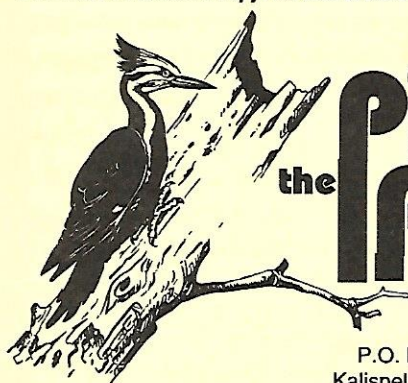
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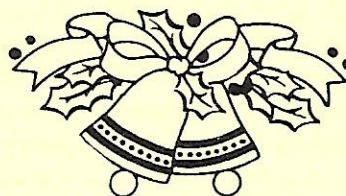
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