



the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

Volume 23

Number 9

December 1998

1998 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT APPROACHING

The 25th annual Bigfork Christmas Count will be held on Saturday, December 19th. Part of the 99th annual nation-wide 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. A total of 137 different species have been seen during Bigfork Christmas Counts since 1974!

Over the past ten years, our hardy observers have recorded an average of 12,286 individuals of 79 species on the Bigfork count. Our species count typically is the state high; we've had fewer than 80 species only twice since 1986. We also have the distinction of hosting the annual nation-wide high count for Wild Turkeys; we found 569 last year. Last year's count followed a mild fall, and we saw our first House Wren. We also set new high count totals for 9 other species, including 4 Double-crested Cormorants and 9 Killdeer. A detailed 10-year (and 24-yr) summary of species recorded on the Bigfork count will be available at the December meeting.

What about this year? Will the continuing Blue Jay explosion result in a new high count for that colorful species? Has enough snow fallen to push Pine Grosbeaks out into the count circle? Will all the Common and Hoary Redpolls reappear this winter? Will we finally add the Varied Thrush to our cumulative list? Come hear swami Dan's predictions at the meeting!

We are hoping to have about 40 people in about 15 groups afield for this year's count. Dan Casey, the compiler, will be calling

last year's participants to arrange area coverage. We will finalize arrangements at the December meeting, so plan to attend or give Dan a call at 857-3143 (evenings) or 751-4581 (days). There is a mandatory fee of \$5 per participant, to cover the editing and publishing costs of the annual CBC issue of American Birds. As in past years, there will be a potluck compilation dinner at the Bigfork Senior Center starting at 5:00 pm on the day of the count.

Please plan on taking part in Montana's number one Christmas Count! Birders of all skill levels are encouraged to join in, as are feeder-watchers and half-day helpers.



KALISPELL COUNT FOR THE NEW CENTURY!

For those of you who haven't had enough after participating in the Bigfork, Ninepipe, Upper Swan, Glacier and or Eureka Christmas counts, we're happy to announce plans to initiate a Kalispell count! Next year will be the 100th year of the Audubon Christmas count, and the first counts of the 21st century. To celebrate both events, Dan Casey would like to set up a new count circle at Kalispell. This would give our members and anyone else the chance to take part in the Bigfork count the first weekend of the count period each year, and the Kalispell count the final count weekend.

Continued on page 3...



CHICKADEE CHATTER

December is upon us, the final month of the year. December is a time of reflection of the year swiftly passing. Some years have many exciting events in them and others, like this one soon to be past, have many small events to reflect on. It is not hard to find the special things that make our lives so worthwhile, especially here in Montana. The whole natural world is before us, we only need to open our eyes and ears and we must remember to slow down a little.

I keep a journal, like my father before me. It is a pleasure to look back at the years' entries. Most of them concern some small event that was, in my eyes, noteworthy. The days last January and February I had flocks of Common Redpolls at my feeder, beautiful tiny birds I had never seen before. The hoots of Great Horned Owls in the woods behind the house early last spring and the insistent calls of the hungry baby owls later in the spring. In May, I found a wonderful little spider web complete with a tiny spider. The early morning sunlight had caught the web and turned it into a golden masterpiece. Perfect in every way.

The hummingbirds returned and in June one of them, a male Calliope Hummingbird flew into the open door of my porch. The diminutive bird was frantic but I rescued him. I took a quick glance at the amazing thing I held in my hand. What can one say about such a thing? It is simply Nature in all her glory.

The dragonflies and butterflies were very abundant this year and I marvel anew each time I see one. All summer long and into the generous Fall they flew. The butterflies were especially interesting, so many varieties. Tiny brilliant blue ones, sulfur yellow ones, the yellow and black Tiger Swallowtails, beautiful russet ones will eyes on their wings. As a child I would chase after them to get a better glimpse, to see them just a little longer. As an adult I must be content to watch them from afar and hope they will fly my way, the good news is sometimes they do.

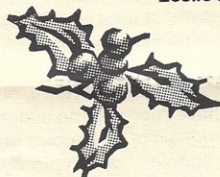
One of the great joys of this past summer was being able to watch the Osprey parents raised their young. And finally, the Fall came. I can't remember a more wonderful

Fall, abundant sunny days, the remarkable colors of the changing leaves on every bush and tree, the Western Larch put on another fabulous show. I had the chance to do a little hiking and added another bird to my Life List... a Black-backed Woodpecker. One day in the middle of October I got up at the crack of dawn, the sun was just coming over the mountains and there had been a heavy frost that night. The frozen world around me was unforgettable, everything had a layer of thick frost on it...every blade of grass, every branch, everything and as I stood and watched the frosty leaves on the Cottonwood tree started falling off one by one.

These are the small events that make my life wonderful and happy. Momentous events stay in our memories and change our lives but it is the small events that sustain us. They change us too but in more subtle ways.

And so I wish for all of you small events and many happy memories this holiday season. Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year!

Leslie Kehoe



DECEMBER MEETING

Monday, December 14, 7:30 PM
Fish, Wildlife & Parks Building
490 N. Meridian Rd., Kalispell

Business Meeting starts at 5:15 PM
Meeting starts at 7:30 PM

PROGRAM: A slide presentation by Dan Casey on birds that observers might expect to see on the local Christmas Counts this year. Included will be information on where these species they might be found, and tips on how to identify some of the more difficult ones. Also, information will be provided on the Christmas Bird Counts in the Flathead Audubon area and birders can sign up for the Bigfork or Ninepipe counts. Christmas cookies will be served. Please Note: Board members and Directors are asked to bring the refreshments.



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

We will conduct a mock count this year on Sunday, January 3rd to scout the new count circle and enjoy the balmy new year weather. The count circle will be centered at Reserve St. and Highway 93. It includes all of downtown Kalispell, and stretches from Happy Valley to the north to Shelter Valley in the south, nearly touching the Bigfork circle at Egan Slough. The Flathead River is included from above Pressentine Bar to below Foy's Bend, and numerous wetlands such as McWeneger Slough, Fairview Marsh and the Batavia Waterfowl Production Area are also in the circle. This should be a great count for Bohemian Waxwings and the Merlins and Sharp-shinned Hawks they attract, a wide variety of feeder birds, and Rough-legged Hawks in the West Valley.

If you would like to come out to do an informal count in this new area, contact Dan or come to the December meeting. Then become part of a new tradition for our chapter!

Dan Casey



MORE BIRD COUNTING!

The Ninepipe Christmas Bird Count will take place on Sunday December 20th. Those interested in more bird counting are asked to meet at the Ninepipe Lodge Restaurant (formerly Allentown) for count area assignment. If you would like more information you may call Jim Rogers at 883-3611.

Our sister Audubon group The Dancing Prairie Bird Club is planning to hold their Annual Christmas Bird Count on December 19th. The area covered encompasses a 7 1/2 mile radius around the town of Eureka. You may contact Lewis Young for more information at 889-3492 in the evenings.

BIRD WATCHING IN UNDISCOVERED MEXICO WITH PRONATURE VERACRUZ

This is a fun, safe, easy, inexpensive way to see Mexico and its' birds and help Mexico's best conservation group. Experienced, English-speaking guides will escort you through the state of Veracruz, home to 70 percent of all bird species in Mexico, with 14 habitat types from high

mountains down to the Gulf Coast.

(Pronatura Mexico is the conservation group that does the River of Raptors tour in the fall.)

The weather is great in February, the food terrific, the bugs few and it is the off season for tourism. Veracruz is primarily an area where the Mexicans vacation. All profits from the tour go to Pronatura's conservation and education efforts.

Terry and Carole Toppins will host a bird-watching trip to Veracruz for 8 to 12 people for 9 days and 8 nights in the 3rd or 4th week of February. The cost is \$1075 and includes all meals, lodging (double occupancy), tips, transportation (excluding airfare), entrance fees, taxes, guides and purified drinking water. Itineraries are available to interested parties. Please contact Carole Toppins at 406-549-6027 or e-mail at tertop@aol.com.

Carole and Terry Toppins have been active Audubon members since 1984. Carole is on the Board of Directors of Five Valleys Audubon and Terry has been running the Montana Birding Hotline for the past three years. Terry and Carole Toppins hired Pronatura Veracruz for 8 days last February and saw over 300 species of birds.

SUCCESSFUL BIRDSEED SALE THANKS TO ALL!

Flathead Audubon's Sunflower Chairperson, June Ash announced this year as the most successful sunflower seed sale in three years.

Thanks to the hard work of the area seed chairs and the loyalty of local seed feeders Flathead Audubon will earn over \$3500 for the chapter's education, research and conservation programs. This represents the profits from 515 sacks of sunflower seeds.

Flathead Audubon would like to thank the area sales workers: Bob and Gyda Newman, June and Rod Ash in Condon; Patti and Neal Brown in Bigfork; Terri and Dennis Divoky and John Ashley in Columbia Falls; Bill Breen, Linda Winnie, Dick Freitheim, Dan and Suzannah Casey, and Shannon Penney in Kalispell; Jill Fanning and Vi Starks in Whitefish; Sharon Bergman and Elaine Corrigan in Polson. Thanks especially to June Ash for all her hard work on the sale!



From The Board of Directors: Pattie Brown



I was raised and educated in California (GASP!), Neal in Colorado and we met in Alaska. Our first date was a 5:00 AM to go bird watching. We chose to put down roots on the Swan River, out of Bigfork, fourteen years ago. One of the first things Neal did was to pull a 20 foot larch tree out of the river. It was floating by during spring high water, and he saw an opportunity.

He topped it and limbed it and installed an Osprey pole at the confluence of Wolf Creek and the Swan River. We were so excited about the prospect of "our own Osprey nest". But nothing happened. Nothing happened for twelve years. We forgot about it. Then two summers ago a pair built a nest, sat on it and defended it for a month. Then this summer a pair mated and successfully fledged one offspring.

We watched the male catch fish for the setting female, defend their space from all intruders including a helicopter which was filling its water bucket for fire nearby. We watched the female take the heat of the mid-summer sun to provide shade for the chick. One evening we sat outside with company for dinner and watched the hen Mallard lead her small ducklings across the grass to the creek. AS WE WATCHED, an osprey swooped down and grabbed a duckling and took it to the nest. The real world is a harsh place for small young things.

We watched the adults force the BIG chick out of the nest and teach it to fly. They quit feeding it in the fall, and the cry of the fledgling had a mournful, piercing quality to it. Then they were gone and the skies were silent. It is a long way to Chile and Argentina and we wish them a safe journey.

Before the osprey left, my young nephew was visiting and said, "I don't like the Osprey; they are so noisy." Nothing stays the same, and now the silence is like a warm blanket. We have hardened off and welcome the winter and the slower pace, the quiet woods, the cold and stillness. Many life forms hibernate, or at least slow down. The most rapidly vanishing resources on Earth are peace, quiet and darkness. In winter we enjoy and appreciate this resource as the tourists are gone; the lawnmowers are in the garage; the jet skis and power boats are in storage; and the nights are long. I sleep more soundly when it is dark and cold.

But even now, when much of the natural world is quiet, slow or dormant, there is the sound of gunfire, planes, jake-brakes, snow-mobles, and the glare of artificial light. Our creation of noise and light deprives ourselves and others of peace, quiet and darkness. Whenever possible, support decisions that favor nonmotorized uses of public lands, skies and water. Put more time and energy into being quiet. Observe and experience Earth's winter wonders firsthand; walk, snowshoe, ski and whisper. Turn off the lights and enjoy the stars.

The earth needs time-out. And so do we.

Pattie Brown



Sparrows

The fall migration of White Crowned Sparrows was a great one this year, with larger numbers than I have seen for, perhaps, 10-15 years! Among the 20+ birds that came to my backyard, I always searched for the "odd" one. Not disappointed, a single White-throated Sparrow was among the birds. The eyebrow line is much whiter than the White-crowned birds, the large white bib (outlined with a thin line of black) is striking. And if he sits still long enough, the yellow spot at the end of the white stripe in the corner of the eye, is another assurance that this is indeed a White-throat and not a White-crowned Sparrow. Then looking them over with binoculars, sure enough, there is an immature White-throat, also. For several days the two species have congregated under the wild roses where the mixed bird-seed is scattered on the ground. (This year I have enough Doves--and a Bluejay to eat those large orange seeds that other birds shun.) Even though watching familiar birds, there is always something new to learn

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Sparrows Continued from Page 4

about them--and this year, I got the Stokes Field Guide to Birds to see if they had a good photo of an immature.. and I read this: "There are 2 Morphs of this species: the white and the tan, based on the color of their eyebrows. Females may have a less bold pattern on head, etc. and more streaking on the breast." Immatures are like the adult female. But then, I read further. . . Breeding pairs usually contains 1 bird from each morph, either a tan female and a white male or a white female and a tan male!!! So, if you are fortunate to have one or more of these lovely little sparrows, scratching and kicking with both feet among the leaves for the seed you place on the ground under a protective bush or tree, just guess, boy? girl? Or youngster??? The White-Crowned Sparrows have left my yard and garden now, but the White-throats are still here--and with conditions just pleasing to them, Mother Nature may allow them to remain here for the winter????

Jean Robocker

9 WOODWAYS TO WRAP A PRESENT

Wood use increases during the winter holiday season. We ship and receive gifts in cardboard boxes. We send holiday cards, wrap presents with paper and cellophane tape, and hang paper decorations, all of which end up in the trash when the festivities end. For a more forest -friendly holiday try these tips:

1. Use old newspapers as wrapping. Decorate the outside with reused greeting cards.
2. Wrap your package with an out-of-date road map.
3. Make a reusable gift bag by sewing scraps of fabric together.
4. Use pictures from old calendars, or pages from old magazines, especially colorful ones like gardening or travel magazines.

5. Save the wrapping paper from presents you receive. For big gifts, patch together the reusable sections to make a "wrapping paper quilt."

6. Stencil the blank side of old memos or fliers to make designs with non-toxic markers.

7. Cut open brown paper bags. Did cut potatoes into water-based paint to decorate the outside.

8. Give a gift that comes in it's own wrapping like a flowering plant, cookies in a reusable tin, or a photograph or drawing.

9. If you have some special project time: use those old newspapers to make a paper-mache box for your present (light weight gifts only!)

From Co-op America's NATIONAL GREEN PAGES & Ferne Cohen, Chair Quality of Life Committee



Important Bird Areas Program

Every year, more and more habitat for birds and other wildlife is lost as human activities and development spread out across the landscape. In an effort to help counteract this loss and the resulting decline in bird populations, the Important Bird Areas (IBA) project was launched in the US in 1995. Over the past three years a few states have started the IBA selection process. Through the work of MT Partners in Flight the program is now coming to Montana.

An IBA is a site which provides significant habitat for one or more species of birds and that on some basis can be distinguished from the surrounding habitat. IBA's may be large or small, from a few acres to thousands of acres; they may be publicly or privately owned; protected or unprotected. The primary goals of IBAs are to identify and protect key sites, establish priorities for managers, activate volunteer participation in bird conservation efforts, and provide public education and outreach opportunities. In the next month or so, nominations forms will be sent to all Audubon members and Partners in Flight participants in Montana. All interested birders and volunteers are invited and encouraged to participate in the IBA program. The first round of nominations for IBAs will be due to the IBA committee of MT Partners in Flight for review in February of 1999. For more information contact Susan Lenard at MT Audubon 406-443-3949; e-mail slenard@desktop.org



Flathead Audubon Presents A

FINE ART RAFFLE

BRETT THUMA'S "EVENING ON FLATHEAD LAKE"

A LIMITED EDITION PRINT OF HIS NEWEST CREATION
DONATED BY BRETT THUMA GALLERY

CUSTOM FRAMING DONATED BY
DEREK AND CHRISTINE VANDEBURG
OWNERS OF
FRAME OF REFERENCE

BOTH BUSINESSES ARE LOCATED ON ELECTRIC AVENUE IN DOWNTOWN BIGFORK

ONLY 250 TICKETS WILL BE SOLD

The proceeds will be used to fund The Owen Sowerine Natural Area
Tickets are only \$5 and may be purchased at the Flathead Audubon Monthly
Meetings. Get them while they last. "*Evening on Flathead Lake*" may be viewed
At each monthly meeting until all 250 tickets have been sold.
The raffle will be held at that time.

Quality of Life

What is quality of life? I don't believe I have ever seen a definition. It probably does not mean quite the same to everyone, but I'll bet most of us are in agreement.

So let's see. To me, it means the air we breathe and the water we drink and play in are pure; we don't have to put up with the stink of pulp mills, refineries, and the like; we can get across town, or to the next town, without encountering backed up traffic; we feel safe for ourselves and our families when venturing out at night; the view from our homes of the surrounding hills is unencumbered by buildings and there is a good chance of seeing wildlife; the places we have always relied upon to enjoy solitude, observe nature, and find peace are still there and secure; we can enjoy at least some of our favorite fishing spots without having to share them with strangers; and some of our hunting haunts are known to just a few of our favored partners. I am sure all of us can add to this listing.

So what is the point? It is simply that we are losing on all of the above and much more as our community, state, country and globe become more crowded. Population growth is the root cause of so many of our ills. We can do something about it if we have the will. **Bob Ballou**

Bob Ballou is a member of MT Audubon's Population and Habitat Committee and a Board of Directors delegate from Five Valley's Audubon. For more information about MT Audubon's Population and Habitat Campaign contact Amy Zarrett at 406-522-7743 or azarrett@in-tch.com.



Help Flathead Audubon Fund Education and Research In Northwest Montana

Your Contribution Will Make a Difference

Choose your amount:

☐ \$20 ☐ \$35 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 Other _____

Choose the project your contribution will support:

☐ **Scholarships**

\$20 from 5 people helps a local high school student attend a Glacier Institute summer class.

☐ **Audubon Adventures**

\$35 provides this monthly nature magazine to one 5th grade class in the Flathead for a full year

☐ **Book Purchase Award**

\$50 from 8 people will fund this annual award to a local school library for purchase of nature books

☐ **Research Grants**

\$100 from 10 people pays for a typical grant to support research on birds or bird habitat in NW Montana

Name _____

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Make check payable to Flathead Audubon Society.

Mail to: Bruce Tannehill, Treasurer,
Flathead Audubon, PO Box 9173, Kalispell, MT
59904

Your contribution is 100% tax deductible.



HOW TO PERSERVE YOUR ANKLES AND THE ENVIRONMENT AT THE SAME TIME

Christmas is the time for giving. The art of giving is being able to control where the money goes. Suppose you give money to your delinquent nephew. He spends it on a skate-board to mow down aging baby boomers. Being too slow to avoid a speeding

skate board; this is, in my opinion, a poor use of funds. If you give to Audubon, you can help to support the national, state or local cause and protect your ankles. If you make the wise choice of the local Audubon, you could support the following areas-

· Scholarships for local high school students to attend a Glacier Institute class.

· Audubon Adventures: provide this monthly nature magazine to 5th grade classes in the Flathead.

· Book Purchase Award given to a local school library to purchase nature books.

· Research Grants to support research on birds or bird habitat in NW Montana.

The Owen Sowerine is a 400+ acre plot of land that the local Audubon leases from the state. Flathead Audubon needs help to pay the lease and insurance involved. You can take a walk on the Owen Sowerine by driving south on Willow Glenn Drive and turning East on Treasure Lane. There is a sign and very small parking lot. It is wonderful river bottom habitat with a large island between the Stillwater and Flathead Rivers.

Now I realize that most of us are giving to children, a spouse or two, parents, grandparents, nephews and nieces, etc. and find it hard to add Audubon to your Christmas list. You will be happy to know that Audubon is kind enough to allow you to give at any time of the year, but I suggest there may be a real advantage in doing it before the end of the year. The advantage is that we are a non-profit organization; therefore, you can deduct the gift from your taxable income. Give more to Audubon now, give less to the government in April. If you are like me, you do not mind paying taxes toward clean water, police protection, and safe roads, but research into nerve gas is not on my list. Giving to Audubon is shifting your tax money to benefit education and the environment. This is taking control in the best sense. We offer you such a deal.

By the way, if any of you bought shares of a stock a while back and they have increased in value, Audubon can really help you. You can give us all or part of the shares and deduct today's value from your taxable income. Don't sell the stock and then make a contribution, or you will have to pay taxes on the capital gains.

Assuming that our editor does not cut me off after reading this article, I will fill in a lot of the details in the next few months on how Audubon gets its money, spends its money and what is the best way of giving money to organizations.

Bruce Tannehill, Flathead Audubon Treasurer



**Flathead Audubon Society Directory****OFFICERS**

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1997-2000
1998-1999
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1998-1999
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1998-2000
1998-2001

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727-7516

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 e-mail ljkehoe@digisys.net



P.O. Box 9173
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the **Pileated**
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Flathead Audubon Society

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Send this application and your check to:

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For Newsletter Only Send \$10 ☐
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