



the Flatheaded Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

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SEPTEMBER, 2000

FLATHEAD AUDUBON RECEIVES LAND STEWARDSHIP AWARD

Select areas in Montana are precious because of their significant scenic, educational, scientific, and biological values. These pristine areas are of fundamental importance, and they should be protected as natural areas for the benefit of this and future generations. To protect such an area is a great service to birds, other wildlife, and the state of Montana.

For their tenacious concern for the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, Montana Audubon is proud to present this year's Land Stewardship Award to the Flathead Audubon Society.

Owen Sowerwine is made up of 442 Acres of school trust land that is, literally, within walking distance of Kalispell. Located at the confluence of the Stillwater and Flathead Rivers, this black cottonwood area is a haven for birds and other wildlife – over 50 species of birds are likely to breed there.

Owen Sowerwine has been recognized as unique for many years. As the first – and only – designated Natural Area protected under the *Montana Natural Areas Act of 1974*, it was initially leased by the Flathead County Parks Board. When the Parks Board considered giving up its lease in 1992, Flathead Audubon stepped in to assist by paying the lions share of the lease. This arrangement continued until February, 1997, when Flathead Audubon negotiated to take the lease over. The chapter used the area for field trips, a Breeding Bird Survey, and for school groups to use as an outdoor classroom.

And then the letter came. Just 18 months ago, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (who manage the property for the state of Montana) raised the lease amount from \$550 per year to **\$22,000 per year** – a raise of **4,000 per cent**.

After the initial shock of the proposal wore off, members of Flathead Audubon rolled up their sleeves and went to work to continue the protection of this critical riparian habitat.

A year and a half later, and with the assistance of Montana Audubon, Owen Sowerwine will soon be under long-term protection, at a financial cost not significantly higher the original lease. This magnificent area will continue to be used by area schools, Audubon members, and anyone who is interested in the natural world.

The story of Owen Sowerwine has a happy ending – a group of concerned citizens banding together to make their community a better place, and protect a critical area for wildlife. All of us, not just residents of the Flathead Valley, are indebted to the members of Flathead Audubon for the conservation of the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area. Chapter leaders Neal Brown, Leo Keane, Brent Mitchell, Bruce Tannehill, Dan Casey, and Linda Winnie deserve special mention for their efforts. Thank you.

By Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon



NEOTROPICAL MIGRATORY BIRD BILL BECOMES LAW

Great news! In an important victory for birds, President Clinton signed into law the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, the only bill in this Congress that directly helps songbirds. Signed on July 20, the new law establishes a fund to support partnership programs that will conserve and enhance habitat of neotropical migratory birds such as the Kirtland's Warbler, Hermit Thrush, Black-capped Vireo and Kentucky Warbler. At least 75% of the money will go to projects in the Caribbean and Latin America, where the birds spend their winters.

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CHICKADEE CHATTER

I am sitting here this evening listening to the calls of a hungry young Osprey and his parents. The hoards of Pine Siskins and House Finches have retired for the evening and the Kingfisher chatters as he takes one last flight over the River for the night. Late summer is here and it is time to be thinking about a new year with Flathead Audubon. As I listen to the Osprey I find it difficult to believe that another summer has nearly past.

There are so many stories to tell about the summer and I thought I might start with a tale about a journey in Utah. In early May I took a trip to southern Utah and spent a day at Capitol Reef National Park, and what follows is the tale of a morning spent in a truly wonderful place...

A thunderstorm and pouring rain, and I do mean pouring, literally boomed me out of bed at 6AM. Bed was comfortable but the red rocks of Capitol Reef awaited me. I am up and ready to go shortly. It was just after dawn and still raining lightly, several soggy Meadowlarks were singing their beautiful song and as I drove towards the Park, a Mountain Bluebird flashed his brilliant blue alongside the road. The towering cliffs of canyon country were in front of me, misty in the early morning light. The clouds lifted and bright, blue sky was peeking out between billowing white and gray clouds.

It has been many years since I have been to this amazing Park and I only had a few short hours to spend there in and amongst the towering canyon walls. I take the 25 mile scenic drive from the Visitors Center that makes its way from the Fremont River valley up onto the plateau and down the other side into one of the canyons. The air was fresh and cool because of the rain. The canyon walls and towering pillars of sandstone were wet, which turned the rock deep reds and intense oranges with dark lines streaking the rock from canyon rim to canyon floor. I stopped often to take in the grandeur of the place, it was very quiet and I had yet to meet another soul. You could hear the wind as it blew through the Pinyon Pine. There are birds here and there, you could hear them chirping in the bushes and trees beside the road but I didn't stop I wanted to get to the end of the road and go for a wander down one the narrow canyons of Capitol Gorge

A gravel road goes down into the canyon, called 'a wash', if I reached my arm out of the window I could just about touch the colorful walls of the canyon. Water has shaped these washes through the millenia, the top of the canyon was 100 feet and more above me. It is hard to keep my eyes on the road, there were desert wildflowers everywhere, reds and yellows, whites and oranges. Here there were penstemon and paintbrush and the fleeting but lovely evening primrose. Here, too, there was bird song around every corner.

At the end of the gravel road (which is impassable when it rains too much) is a trail, which

follows the old wagon trail through some of the most impassable and inhospitable country in the entire USA. You can walk for miles down into the canyon called Capitol Gorge. This is an enchanting place and quite magical in the early morning. The thrilling, haunting notes of Canyon Wrens greeted me as I got out of the car. These calls are the most wonderful of all and I hold my breath hoping to hear more. It is an elusive bird but if one waits long enough it will hop out onto a rock and pour out another song, enthralling one yet again.

I walked down the narrow canyon and wondered that cars used to drive here. A strong, cool wind is blowing but the white clouds are disappearing rapidly and the thin stripe of blue that is all you can see of the sky was simply indescribable against the reds, yellows and oranges of the sandstone walls of the wash. As I walked a Black-headed Grosbeak takes flight from his hiding place in a tree and I followed it down the wash until it landed on the branch of young cottonwood tree. I looked up just in time to see a flock of White-throated Swifts diving and flying in fine aerialist fashion high above me, I watched them until my neck got tired. What else could I have done? There were jet black Ravens flying majestically and Western Kingbirds chasing each other and a White-crowned Sparrow just sitting peacefully on a pine branch. It was so quiet and peaceful there on the canyon floor, only the wind and the song of birds. I wanted to stay longer but it was time to turn around.

It is astonishing to see so much bird and plant variety in the midst of the desert. This is what draws me back year after year to the SW corner of our country, that and the need to hear the Canyon Wren just one more time. I hope you have all had some very wonderful adventures this summer and I look forward to seeing you at the Audubon meetings this fall.

Leslie Kehoe



SEPTEMBER MEETING
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2000
MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks Bldg
490 W. Meridian Rd., Kalispell
Board Meeting at 5:30PM
General Meeting begins at 7:30PM

PROGRAM: "THE WILDLIFE DISCOVERIES OF LEWIS AND CLARK" Ben Long and his wife Karen Nichols have written a new book about Lewis and Clark. They will present a slide show and read from the book. This should be a fascinating look at one of the most famous expeditions of exploration in the history of the U. S., an epic journey of discovery from 1804 to 1806. Please join us for a wonderful evening.



NEOTROPICAL MIGRATORY BIRD BILL BECOMES LAW

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It authorizes \$5 million per year for five years and funds a maximum of 25% of the money for each project. The remainder will be raised or contributed by partners such as businesses, non-governmental organizations and foreign nations.

Approximately 5 billion birds of 500 species, including many endangered species, migrate to North America from wintering grounds in Latin America and the Caribbean annually. Many thanks to Senator Abraham (R-MI), who championed this legislation through the Senate, along with Senator Daschle (D-SD) and the late Senator Chafee (R-RI), the original co-sponsors. **Excepted from the Audubon Advisory**

BERRIES, INSECTS, MOTHS, SEEDS OR THANKSGIVING

The aspen leaves are looking thin and ragged. The cottonwoods in some areas are looking skeletal. What is wrong? The alder is covered with small tan moths in the evening and there is an abundance of white moths – everywhere, the vegetable garden included. And what a year for butterflies. Every possible color combination is out there in the flowers.

Then the first week of August the willows and alders in our meadow burst with activity. There was movement everywhere, the leaves were alive with motion. Within three days we counted over 25 species of birds just in the meadow as we watched. With the last of the serviceberries to be eaten and the baby birds off the nests, the activity was amazing.

A family of Western Tanagers and Cedar Waxwings, along with Evening Grosbeaks and chipmunks polished off the berries. American Redstarts in numbers, Townsend's Warblers, Tennessee and Nashville Warblers, Yellow Warblers, and Warbling and Red-eyed Vireos are cleaning leaves and eating WORMS. So are the Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Mountain and Black-capped Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches (their young), juncos, Pine Siskins (and their huge crop of young), and Least Flycatchers feasting on WORMS. The Red-naped Sapsucker, Downy, Hairy, and Pileated Woodpeckers are busy pecking and pecking. There are Steller's Jays and Cassin's Finches at the feeder with all the other regulars. The Rufous Hummers are finishing their juice. A Northern Harrier, a Gray

Jay, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk have been by to see what's going on.

They have all feasted. Sometimes it takes a minute or two to digest a worm. A Downy Woodpecker spent several minutes on one branch in one place... it has been a joy to see.

By June Ash

BIRD BOOKS FOR GUATEMALA

You can help to conserve birds on their wintering grounds in Central and South America!!! In order that our neotropical migratory birds survive the winter in parts south so they can return to us in the spring, their wintering habitats must be protected. Education is the first and most important step in achieving this goal. Understanding this, Partners in Flight has taken on a challenge to provide much needed field guides and reference books to assist our Mesoamerican partners in their conservation efforts. For this exchange, Montana has been linked with Guatemala. A variety of birds from the Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, and Orange-crowned Warbler, to the Burrowing Owl, Forster's Tern, and Eared Grebe will benefit from your contribution. Any amount you can give will be helpful to purchasing of a core set(s) of reference books that our Guatemalan partners can't afford. Your contribution should be sent to Dan Casey, American Bird Conservancy (ABC), 33 Second Street East, Kalispell, MT 59901 (It is best that donations be received by September 30th. Checks should be made out to ABC - please indicate the donation is for books for Guatemala). Thanks very much!

Fun and Wine Fest to benefit Glacier Institute's youth field science programs

The 18th Annual Fun and Wine Fest scheduled for Saturday, September 23 from 7:00 - 9:30 p.m. at the Outlaw Hotel in Kalispell will benefit the Glacier Institute's youth field science programs at the Big Creek Outdoor Education Center in the North Fork. Throughout the spring and fall, local schools send kindergarten through 12th-grade classes to study aquatics, biology, forestry, and other subjects at the Big Creek Outdoor Education Center. Proceeds from this year's Fun and Wine Fest will support equipment and facility upgrades at Big Creek that otherwise wouldn't be possible.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT



"I have thought about these things so many times alone that I hope you will excuse me if I remind you of this type of thought that I am sure many of you have had, which no one could ever have had in the past because people then didn't have the information we have about the world today."

From: The Value of Science, an essay by, Richard P. Feynman

A friend recently gave me a copy of "Conservation Biology" "The Journal of the Society for Conservation Biology." It is a collection of scientific and technical studies directed to 'the protection, maintenance and restoration of life on this planet-its' species, its' ecological and evolutionary processes and its particular and total environment.' Some of the papers presented have titles such as 'Analysis and Conservation Implications of Koala Genetics', and 'Regional Turnover and Fluctuation in Populations of Five Plants Confined to Serpentine Seeps' and 'Biodiversity and Disease Risk: the Case of Lyme Disease'. Pretty heady stuff. It was the last title, 'Biodiversity and Disease Risk: the Case of Lyme Disease' submitted by Richard S. Ostfeld and Felicia Keesing, both with the Institute of Ecosystem Studies out of Millbrook N.Y., that caught my eye. I recently had a discussion with a friend who is a health worker in Wisconsin where Lyme disease is a common health hazard. And I had recently read a letter to the editor that attacked biodiversity as a sham concept invented by environmentalists. Here, by chance, was a paper that tied both subjects together. The following is a short review of what I learned.

The term Biodiversity is used to describe two biological concepts.

One concept of biodiversity is ethical and aesthetic in nature, and refers to the need to keep the widest possible variety of native species in any given ecosystem, as a matter of moral responsibility. It was this concept of moral responsibility that so offended the author of the letter to the editor I referred to earlier.

The second concept of biodiversity is utilitarian and scientific in nature. This view sees that human beings rely on plants, animals and microbes for sustenance and as sources of pharmaceutical health. Under this scenario of biodiversity, both public health officials and scientists contend that the preservation of biodiversity is critical for the present and future human health. This argument for biodiversity usually points to the need for new medicines from sources we have yet to discover. Ostfeld and Keesing have taken a different tack. Their study points to biodiversity as having the beneficial effect of diluting the distribution of certain zoonotic diseases such as Lyme disease. Zoonotic diseases are those within natural communities of animals but which are occasionally transmitted to humans. As it turns out, the ticks that transmit Lyme disease to mammals have a four stage life cycle: Egg, larval, nymph, adult. Infected adults do not transmit the disease to the egg. Meaning the tick is not infected with Lyme disease when it starts its larval stage. It only becomes infected when it feeds on a mammal that is already carrying the disease. From that point of the tick's life cycle it is a carrier of the disease. We all know that the prime host of the adult wood tick is the white-tail deer. What most of us do not know is that the larval stage of the wood tick tends to host on small mammals and ground nesting birds. Again, this is the stage when the tick is first infected and becomes a carrier. What is really fascinating is that not all mammals are efficient carriers of Lyme disease, while some are very efficient carriers. White-footed mice are the most efficient, with eastern chipmunks and American Robins being moderately efficient carriers. Some vertebrates such as the western fence lizard actually produce a protein that kills the Lyme disease bacteria in the gut of the tick, creating a disease free tick. Good Grief! It is easy to see from this small amount of information, the value of biodiversity. In a natural habitat such as expansive woodlands with a full array of species, a wide variety of non-efficient carriers of Lyme disease exist, and the disease is diluted as the larval tick's host on species that do not efficiently transmit the bacteria that causes Lyme disease. But, in areas of low biodiversity, say in urban interfaces where small wood lots remain, there are few predators and limited numbers of inefficient carriers. The success of the white-footed mouse in those habitats can spike the incidence of Lyme disease.

So what does this have to do with Flathead Audubon??? First: I find it interesting that American Robins are fairly efficient carriers of Lyme disease. With their mobility, will we, here in western Montana be colonized by Lyme disease by our most common thrush? What a thought. Second: As a great deal of our landscape is transformed by the force of fire this summer a certain shift in biodiversity will take place. It is important to view the rebirth that will follow with the same awe that we view the destruction. Whole communities of life are being created as others are lost. Third: Ostfeld's and Keesing's study points not just to what they have learned about the dynamics of biodiversity. Their study also points equally to what we do not know and have yet to learn. We need to admit that we know little of our world. We need to walk softly and try to pass on a respect for the land and all that inhabit it with us.

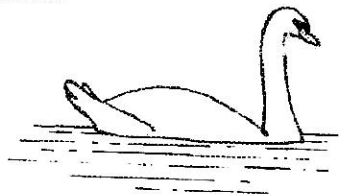
BY NEAL BROWN, PRESIDENT FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY



Fun and Wine Fest to benefit Glacier Institute's youth field science programs, continued from page 3

With the theme "Wines among the Pines", this year's festival will feature fine wines from around the world and great food from some of the Flathead's best restaurants and delis. Silent and live auctions of weekend get-aways, art, and merchandise will round out the evening. Casual and fancy attire are both welcome.

Tickets cost \$25 in advance and \$30 at the door. They can be purchased with a credit card over the phone by calling the Glacier Institute at (406)755-1211 or at a number of locations around the Flathead Valley beginning August 23, including: Kalispell: Books West, Wheeler Jewelry, Outlaw Hotel, Tidymans Whitefish: Bookworks Bigfork: Electric Avenue Books Columbia Falls: Cimarron Deli, Glacier Wallflower



THE FINANCES OF THE FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

The following is a statement of the amount budgeted for the year 2000 and the what we have spent up through August 3. It is important to know that our largest source of income and expenses take place in the fall. A new item was the Bird Festival held at Polson. Not only was it a great success in terms of education and fun but Audubon made about \$3000. Flathead Audubon's portion was \$737.

**Bruce Tannehill, Flathead Audubon
Treasurer**

FINANCES OF THE FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

	BUDGETED FOR	ACTUAL UP TO
	ALL OF 2000	3-Aug-00
INCOME		
DUES	\$2,121	\$1,431
NEWSLETTER	\$100	\$305
RAFFLE		\$60
DONATIONS AND BIRD FESTIVAL	\$3,046	\$1,617
BIRDATHON	\$1,000	\$601
GENERAL SALES	\$600	\$162
BIRD SEED SALES	\$7,000	\$1,212
TOTAL INCOME	\$13,867	\$5,388
EXPENSES		
OUR DONATIONS TO OTHERS		
EDUCATION	\$1,400	
GRANTS	\$500	\$200
NATIONAL AUDUBON	\$500	\$465
MT AUDUBON	\$1,000	
SCHOLARSHIPS	\$500	\$125
LIBRARY BOOKS	\$200	
TOTAL DONATIONS	\$4,100	\$790
FEES (Speakers, etc.)	\$355	\$165
INSURANCE	\$472	\$472
INVENTORY	\$500	
BIRD SEED	\$4,300	
OFFICE	\$340	\$378
NEWSLETTER	\$3,200	\$1,549
TRAVEL	\$500	\$174
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$13,767	\$3,528
ASSETS AS OF	1-JAN-00	3-AUG-00
GLACIER BANK	\$1,881	\$3,327
OPERATING FUND	\$9,419	\$9,546
BARB BAXTER ACTION FUND	\$11,734	\$11,398
CONSERVATION FUND	\$27,350	\$26,960
TOTAL OF ALL ASSETS	\$50,384	\$51,231

"Hold your hands out over the earth as over a flame...rest your spirit in her solitary places. For the gifts of life are the earth's and they are given to all." Quote by Henry Beston from the Outermost House, 1949



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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 lkehoe@digisys.net



the Pileated Post

Flathead Audubon Society

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