



the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

VOLUME 26

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SEPTEMBER, 2001

BIRDS AND TEACHERS AND THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Last Spring (March 31-April 1, 2001) 26 local teachers and 15 Audubon volunteers attended an Audubon sponsored teacher workshop led by Bob Petty, Education coordinator for Montana Audubon. The intent of the workshop was to inform teachers and volunteers about techniques and materials that can be used to teach bird units in the classroom. The teachers were also encouraged to develop lessons and field studies that would work for their unique situations and to enlist the help of volunteers to help them in any way. The following article is the first in a series about how teachers who attended this recent workshop are using the information in their classrooms.

The following article was written by Vonnie McDonald who teaches fourth grade at Ruder School in Columbia Falls.

I started teaching this unit in my 4th grade classroom at Ruder Elementary almost immediately after the Migratory Bird Workshop in March. From the start, my students were very interested in the topic and eager to learn more. Through teaching this unit on birds, I found my students to be much more interested because it was a topic that they were very unfamiliar with and, for the most part, had spent very little time thinking about. It was very fun to watch students' eyes open up to all the birds around them. As the unit progressed, we spent more and more time each day sharing stories of the birds that my students were seeing around their house and on the bird watching walks they started to go on. I used many of the ideas presented at the Migratory Bird Workshop in this unit. The Songbird Blues Kit was a very useful tool to use at the beginning of the unit.

Students enjoyed becoming the expert of their bird and teaching the rest of the class about

it. With the help of our Audubon volunteer (Linda de Kort) we also implemented Neal Brown's idea of making bird silhouettes. Each student chose from a list of Flathead Valley birds and worked with Linda to blow-up the bird on the overhead to actual size. They traced in on black paper, cut it out, and hung it up in the room along with the research that they had done on it. By the end of this project we had 25 silhouettes which were referred to often throughout the unit.

The binoculars and guidebooks provided by Audubon and available for check-out were very helpful. Our volunteers (Linda de Kort and Kathie Ackerly) took small groups of students out on the playground to practice focusing and using binoculars correctly. This is only one example of the many activities that would have been impossible for me to do with my 25 students without the help of knowledgeable volunteers. We also used the binoculars and guidebooks in the classroom to practice identifying birds on pictures around the room using binoculars and guidebooks. This became a fun contest for the students to see who could be the first to correctly identify the bird in the guidebook by carefully observing the field marks. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 3**

SEPTEMBER CALENDER

SEPTEMBER 10, 2001 BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING will be held at 5:30PM at the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks building at 490 N. Meridian Road in Kalispell. The public is welcome to attend.
SEPTEMBER 10, 2001 THE FLATHEAD AUDUBON GENERAL MEETING will be held at 7:30PM at the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks building. Wildlife consultant Brian Peck will present a slide show on grizzly bears.



CHICKADEE CHATTER

August is drawing to a close, in less than a month summer will be a memory and fall will come calling. It has been such a busy summer and I can hardly believe it has passed so swiftly. I have had so little time to watch the world these past few months but what I have seen and heard is enough. Another year of Flathead Audubon is about to begin and I hope you will all be able to attend a meeting or two and come explore the feathered world on a field trip with us.

I would like to share some of the special sights and sounds of my summer with you. These are the things that I will think about and remember in the days ahead (i.e. the short chilly days of winter).

I will think of the mornings in May and June when the world wakes up at 5:30AM and the beautiful songs of robins in the trees around the house and the harsh call of a Western Wood Peewee longing for a mate begin the morning chorus. And soon every bird in the mood for love in the area has joined in. It is simply wonderful to lie in bed and listen to all the different sounds.

I will think of a perfect morning in July when I got up before the crack of dawn and drove up the inside North Fork Road. The sky was as clear as a bell and the colors of dawn painted the horizon in muted shades of pink and coral. Soon a blazing ball of brilliant yellow rose above the mountain peaks, the rays of the sun slowly illuminating the valley floor. The road into the Park was still shaded by trees as I drove north and I could hear snippets of bird song through the window. The wildflowers were beautiful jewels bobbing alongside the road, the Indian paint brush was especially bright and prolific this year. There were butterflies fluttering everywhere, orange and yellow and blue. I stopped for a bit by a stream and wandered here and there watching and listening. There were Yellow Warblers and Common Yellowthroats singing and a Northern Waterthrush. Overhead flew White-throated Swifts and a Common Raven. A hummingbird flew back and forth under the bridge and Hairy Woodpeckers and Northern Flickers knocked on trees nearby. A Willow Flycatcher could be heard and seen darting after bugs. In the branches of the trees by the path several MacGillivray's Warblers were hopping here and there. And on the forest floor baby Brown-headed Cowbird was chasing after it's two tiny Yellow Warbler parents demanding breakfast. A majestic Red-tailed

Hawk sailed overhead several times, a silhouette against a brilliant blue sky. So much to see and hear. It was a peaceful and perfect morning.

I will think of the fluffy, perfect puffs of the seeds of the Fireweed as they waft away from their seed pods newly opened. What is more memorable than watching several dozen of them floating on a gentle breeze as in the sunlight? Each fragile tendril glowing and glistening in the afternoon sunlight.

I will think of early morning walks in the midst of August when the spider-webs of the night before float as gossamer threads from the bushes in the early morning light.

I will think of the strange chitter of bats at dusk as they fly in gravity defying swoops and circles and arcs in search of delicious bugs. I have stood in the yard in the evening just to watch their and sleek black bodies flying to and fro. Sometimes they fly so close you can almost reach out and touch them. They are marvelous creatures, just imagine a mammal that can fly.

I will think of sitting still by the River for long moments watching the water skippers stride across the water and listening to the call of a Gray Catbird in the bushes above me. The green leaves of willow and dogwood rustling softly in the evening breeze.

So many good moments. We are so very fortunate to live in this place and call it home. We are never very far from special experiences. I get to walk out of my front door and see and hear to most wonderful things. I never forget how fortunate I am and I am grateful every day.

Leslie Kehoe



SEPTEMBER GENERAL MEETING ALL ABOUT BEARS

Brian Peck, a wildlife consultant with the Great Bear Foundation and Sierra Club will present a slide show on grizzlies in the Northern Rockies. How are they doing, and what issues do they face on the way to recovery?

Please join Flathead Audubon as we begin a new season. The September Board meeting will be held at 5:30PM just before the general meeting and everyone is welcome to attend.



BIRDS AND TEACHERS AND THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

We also used many ideas and activities from Ranger Rick's NatureScope on birds.

My students wrote poems about birds and pourquoi tales about a Montana bird of their choice. This was a story that explained how a particular Montana bird got one of its distinguishing characteristics. Some examples of student titles were: How the Rufous Hummingbird Got Its Long Beak, How the Western Meadowlark Got Its Yellow Breast, Why the Bluebird is Blue, How the Great Blue Heron Got Its Long Neck, Why the Western Meadowlark Has a Beautiful Song, How the Crow Got Its Raspy Voice, and Why the Black-capped Chickadee Has a Black Cap. They also made 3-D bird art projects and bird mosaics.

As a culmination of this 3 week unit, I asked the students to make booklets describing in written or art form all the local birds that they knew without use of the guide books. I was hoping that each student would be able to list at least 7 local birds since Neal Brown had mentioned that if a student knows that many by fourth grade they will be more keyed into their natural world as adults. All of the students handed in booklets with no less than 20 birds which they could readily identify. Some students had as many as 35.

I must repeat that this unit would not have been as successful without the help of our Audubon naturalists. They assisted in many different ways like helping to plan the field trip, picking up and returning the bird-kit and binoculars, helping with the silhouettes, working with small groups of kids to learn to use binoculars, and attending the field trip. Our experts communicated very effectively with my students and developed a positive relationship with them.

This was definitely the highlight of taking this bird class and the key to the success of implementing it in the classroom.

Thanks to Vonnie McDonald and Linda deKort.

FAREWELL TO JAY SHEPERD

My wife Karen and I are moving back to north-central Idaho. I am going to work on a Ph. D. project investigating the effects of fragmentation of sage brush on sage grouse. Karen is working for Idaho Department of Fish and Game as a botanist and will continue to do so. We have enjoyed our affiliation with Flathead Audubon and Native Plant Societies. Both groups

came up as reasons to stay since they are so enjoyable to attend and be part of. We also loved the natural environment in and around the Flathead Valley. Professional reasons unfortunately overrode the reasons for staying.

We will come back and visit; attend FAS programs, field trips, and see our friends. I would like to thank Leslie Kehoe for working so hard on the Pileated Post as we enjoyed it and now will rely on it as our link to the group which we will stay members of. I would also like to thank FAS past-president Neal and Pattie Brown for getting me involved and on the board of directors, and their generous hospitality toward Karen and I. I believe Linda Winnie will continue that type of attitude and be a great president. I wish you all good luck. See you at a meeting, Jay Shepherd Jay's new address in Idaho is : P.O. Box 8623 Moscow, Idaho 83843, (208) 835-4535
Best of luck Jay and Karen!



THE 2001 BIRDATHON

In June of each year local Audubon organizations break into teams to compete in a "Big Day". Each team tries to identify as many different species of birds as possible. Each team gets pledges for the event. These pledges, usually in terms of 5 cents to a dollar a species, are used as a fund raiser. The money is split between the local and national Audubon. For many organizations this is the major source of income to fund their projects.

This year Flathead Audubon split into two groups, the Flathead Flamingoes and the Pterrible Ptarmigans. We divided the board of directors in half and wagered a dinner for the winners, to be served by the losers. The winner being the group the raised the most money. And the winner is "the Pterrible Ptarmigans" with 144 species which brought in \$982.53! We are expecting a 5 star meal. The total amount raised was \$1188 plus a little that is slow to come in. Last year we raised \$865. Next year, we are hoping to do better and have more fun with our spring Birdathon.

By Bruce Tannehill



FROM THE PRESIDENT



Welcome to the new Audubon year – which begins as usual with our September meeting. . I hope to see lots of familiar faces at this meeting, as well as some new ones. Mark your calendar and come help us kick-off what promises to be an exciting year

Of course, I am writing this column almost a month before you are reading it. Right now I am sitting on a bench in the fog at the north end of Vancouver Island. It will be three more weeks before we sail our boat into our home slip in Washington, and another week before we arrive back in Montana. So I still have a few more summer weeks to savor, and a few more west coast bird sightings to enjoy.

John and I have spent June and July exploring the west coast of Vancouver Island – poking into small coves, examining strange sea life in tide pools and on beaches, scrambling over old shell middens and the remains of native villages, floating still in the water as whales spout and dive around us – and, of course, watching birds.

One of my birding highlights this summer was the discovery of an island where Marbled Murrelets nest. These are small sea birds that only come to shore to breed. In summer they are mottled brown (“marbled”). They are squat little birds with stubby wings, so stumble clumsily across the water when they try to fly. Once airborne, they look like little flying footballs. Most murrelets make ground nests, but south of the Alaskan tundra, the Marbled Murrelet nests in the thick moss on the branches of old-growth coniferous trees. By the time we learned of the Marbled Murrelet nesting site, the young murrelets had already fledged. So we saw them swimming about in their immature plumage, looking like chunky little black and white floating footballs.

We were also fortunate to spend an evening in a small bay with several Red-throated Loons – one of our favorite west coast birds. This species of loon is smaller and more graceful than the Common Loon we are used to seeing in Montana, and it looks quite different – no coal black head or black and white necklace or checkered back. Instead, the Red-throat has a pale gray head atop a long, thin neck, with vertical black and white stripes running up the back of the neck and a red throat patch on the front. This is the only loon that can take off easily from the water – more like the quick take-off of a mallard than the awkward cross-water run of the Common Loon. What I enjoy most is listening to these birds. They quack, they shriek, they cackle – and when they join together for their evening yodel fest, they sound like a gull with a bad cold trying to imitate a loon. We managed to capture some of these sounds on tape this summer, so perhaps we can share them with you when we return.

Sometimes an exciting bird sighting makes a huge difference in the look of the day. Here is how that worked for me this summer.

The biggest challenge facing any boater traveling along the west coast of Vancouver Island is to get around Brooks Peninsula, a narrow, steep-sided collection of mountains that juts 10 miles into the Pacific from the otherwise northwest trending shoreline of the island. The first time we went around Brooks, we were hit by a gale – seas breaking over our heads and into the cockpit, winds howling and handily pushing us along even with our sails down. At one time this summer we sat at anchor in a cozy bay listening to reports of 60-knot winds at the tip of this peninsula. So I am always nervous when it comes time to round Brooks.

By late July this summer that time had come. I slept only fitfully the night before we were to leave, and hunkered down into the cockpit as we headed out into 6-foot ocean swells the next morning. The sky was gray, the wind was cold, and I was thinking of all the other places I’d rather be. Then, as the tall rocky island that marks the outermost tip of Brooks began to loom over us, John cried out, “Puffins!” I hopped up to look and, sure enough, saw three little Tufted Puffins flitting over the waves. Suddenly this was exactly where I wanted to be! As I looked around some more, I saw several more small groups of puffins flying about, as well as several Pigeon Guillemots with their cheery, bright red legs. A quick scan of the rocky island revealed hundreds of gulls (most likely Glaucous-winged) and Pelagic Cormorants crowded on the rocks, and a colony of sea lions. The sun came out (or at least it felt like it), and I was up on deck, binoculars in hand, ready for the rest of the day’s adventures.

Of course, in our trip around Vancouver Island, we also saw lots of familiar feathers. At almost every anchorage, little Rufous Hummingbirds flew out to buzz around our boat almost as soon as we dropped anchor. They would try to sip from the red stripes on our U.S. flag, or from the red plastic planer hanging from the end of one of our fishing rods. Sometimes they would then sit for a few minutes on the top of the rod, as though trying to figure out what was wrong, then finally head back to shore to search for some more familiar flower.

Everywhere we went we saw and heard Belted Kingfishers – swooping and diving in small coves where we anchored, flying from tree to tree along the shores of the creeks we explored, fishing from the dock pilings at the little fishing villages we visited. In all of these places, too, we were serenaded by Varied Thrushes. Their repeated, ragged whistle notes lulled us to sleep almost every night and woke us up early nearly every morning.

Even more pervasive was the high-pitched chatter of Bald Eagles. We are always amazed at the large number of Bald Eagles we see along the northwest coast. Of course, the coastal fisheries provide a reliable and abundant feast for these birds, so a huge population can be supported easily. We never tire of watching these birds – diving for fish, perched regally on a tree, soaring high overhead, tumbling through the air in lock-clawed pairs, sitting in the rain on a snag with sodden wings stretched out to dry. What always strikes me about these eagles is how often we hear them. They are constantly chattering at each other, or at harassing ravens, or sometimes, I think, at us. Why are the coastal eagles so much more vocal than our inland Montana eagles? If someone knows, please give me a call.

I am glad to still have a few more weeks of summer adventures to enjoy, but already we are getting anxious to get back to Montana. I look forward to the adventures and challenges that the new Audubon year is sure to bring. And I look forward to hearing your summer tales too. See you at the September meeting!

BY LINDA WINNIE





Flathead Audubon's Annual Sunflower Seed Sale

50 lb. Sack of Black Oil Sunflower Seeds -\$17 Highest Quality – Grown in Montana

Feed your feathered friends and support Audubon Projects too!

This is Flathead Audubon's primary fund raising project.

Proceeds support local conservation and educational programs such as:

- Distribution of Audubon Adventures to local 5th grade classes
- Book Purchase Award to local elementary schools for library books of natural history
- Scholarships for environmental education
- Research grants for field studies of birds and bird habitat
- Educational materials for lectures by Audubon members to local classes and civic groups
- Care and upkeep of local refuges, including the new Lost Trail NWR.



Pick Up Locations: Please note on your calendar

Call 862-8070 for more information (754-2289 for Condon)

Bigfork: IGA Parking Lot

Saturday, Oct. 13, 10am – 12 noon

Kalispell: County Fairgrounds – North Lot

Saturday, Oct. 13, 12:30 – 2:30 pm

Whitefish: Train Depot Parking Lot

Saturday, Oct. 13, 12:30 – 2:30 pm

Condon: Call June Ash, 754-2289

for arrangements

Columbia Falls: Glacier Bank

Saturday, Oct. 13, 10am – 12n

Polson: Super 1 Foods Parking Lot

Sunday Oct. 14, 12 – 2pm

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Flathead Audubon, c/o June Ash, PO Box 1129, Condon, MT 59826

Are you a member __ non-member __ Why not join? It's just \$20 (or \$15 for seniors)

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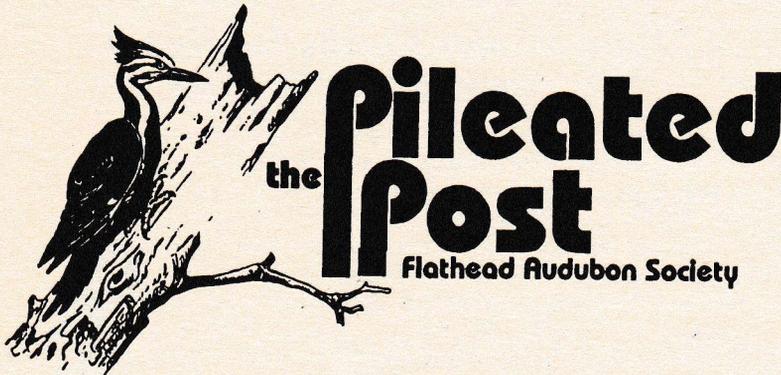
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The Flathead Audubon Society is affiliated with the National Audubon Society and meets on the second Monday of each month from September through May. The regular meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. and includes a featured guest who will present a conservation 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



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