



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

May 2020
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Black-necked stilt



Allaboutbirds.com

FAS CANCELLING MAY MEETING and POTLUCK, MAY FIELD TRIPS, SPRING BIRDING TRIP TO CENTRAL MT, and WARBLER WEEKEND. WE ARE RELEASING AWESOME BIRDS ROCK! VIDEO and OFFERING ONLINE BIRD QUIZZES, and OTHER ACTIVITIES. WE INVITE EVERYONE TO JOIN US ON MAY 5th DAY OF GIVING, See President's Column pg. 3, Conservation Educator's Niche pg. 5, and Field Trips pg. 6 for more details and check www.flatheadaudubon.org for other cancellations, events, and alternatives!



CREATING MORE BIRD SONG IN OUR WORLD, ONE GARDEN AT A TIME

by Kathy Ross



Spring is here and we are spending more time at home. Let's take these challenging times and turn them into a unique and productive opportunity to make a healthier world in our own landscapes for our birds, pollinators, wildlife and the environment.

Three very bird friendly and valuable things you can do in your own landscapes to help our birds and our environment, as well as save on personal resources:

- * Plant native plants.
- * Minimize use of herbicides, pesticides and chemical fertilizers.
- * Think less lawn. If you do have a lawn, mow less often or not at all.

PLANT NATIVE PLANTS

"From window boxes to the most spacious of landscapes, the plants you grow around you can make a difference for birds.

Mounting evidence shows that, native plants support more insect food than non-native plants. And by using native instead of non-native fruiting shrubs, you can give birds natural food without having them spread invasive species across the landscape. (Most noxious weeds started in some one's yard or garden. Locally buckthorn, hawkweed and knapweed come to mind.) Overall, we encourage people to reduce the amount of



grass and nonnative species planted in a yard." Cornell Lab of Ornithology

In NW Montana, we have the privilege of intact, healthy, native forests and park areas around us. We have the unique opportunity to improve our own landscapes make them more connected, native habitat corridors that our birds and wildlife need. Together, we can link our landscapes to a healthy, diverse protected ecosystem like Glacier National Park and **we can really make a difference.** Something to sing about, especially for the thrushes, chickadees, finches - and all our feathered friends that call our area home.

Once established, natives take less care, less water, and less or no chemicals. Remember the plants are there not just for decoration or a perfect unblemished look but as food for the insects that will feed the birds! Celebrate the bites out of leaves! If you

prefer more manicured plants, most native plants can be pruned just like any ornamental plant in a garden. Start by adding a few natives into existing gardens or design an entire landscape with the subtle colors, textures and toughness of native plants. If you have property with established natives, collect seed from your wild areas of native plants and make your own wildflower mix!

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THANKS AGAIN TO ALL OUR DONORS THIS YEAR!

MAY FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, May 4, 2020. 6 PM. FAS Board of Directors Meeting, will be held digitally. If you are planning on attending please contact Gael Bissell at gael@flatheadaudubon.org or 406-261-2255.

Monday, May 11, 2020. 7 PM. Flathead Audubon General Meeting, CANCELLED. See top of page. All field trips **cancel**ed through May. See page 6.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Boreal Owl

by Lisa Bate

Boreal Owls (*Aegolius funereus*) are one of the smaller owls found in Montana. Larger than a Northern Pygmy Owl, but smaller than a Barred Owl, they range in length from 8 to 11 inches (20 to 28 cm). Their wingspan ranges from 22 to 24 in (55 to 62 cm). They only weigh 3 to 7.5 oz (93-215 g). Like all raptor species, the females are larger than the males, yet Boreal Owls hold the distinction of the greatest sexually reversed dimorphism with the females significantly larger than the males.

Boreal Owls are a small brown owl with a large square head, yellow eyes, and a light-colored bill. They have a light-colored facial disc surrounded by a dark border. They are overall brown with underparts spotted or streaked with white. They have distinctly dark "eyebrows" and small white dots on their crown. Their legs and feet are completely feathered.

Boreal Owls are a circumpolar species, ranging across Canada and Alaska, and south into the northern parts of the U.S., and then westward into northern Siberia and Scandinavia. Their range extends in scattered pockets far south in the U.S. into subalpine forests of the Rocky and Cascade Mountains. When prey numbers are high, their home ranges are stable. If not, they are an irruptive species, moving to where prey numbers are greater.

Although Boreal Owls have been intensely studied in Scandinavia, where they are the most abundant forest owl, little is known about them in Montana. Here they are listed as a "Potential Species of Concern" because of concerns about their population size, and impacts of fire, disease, and timber harvest in the mature spruce/fir forests that they depend upon. Due to these concerns, Montana biologists have initiated statewide surveys

for Boreal Owls using playback calls and automatic recording units.

The Boreal Owl scientific name comes from the word *Aegolius*, which is Latin meaning 'bird of prey' and *funereus* meaning 'deadly' indicating their reputation as a small, but deadly predator. Boreal Owls hunt mainly at night, relying on their keen hearing to determine the exact location of small rodents on the forest floor or under the snow. Their ears on either side of their heads are at different heights aiding in their ability to know exactly where their prey lies. During the day, Boreal Owls roost in trees.

Although very unusual to visibly spot Boreal Owls in Montana, their songs are distinct and allow for confirmation of this owl's presence. Males will sing to attract a mate, singing a series of 8 to 20 low whistled toots ([https://](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Boreal_Owl/sounds)

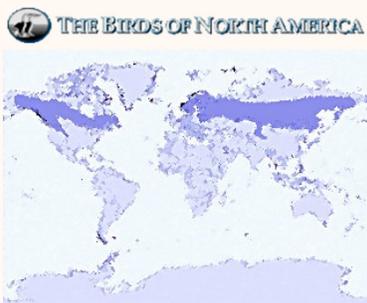
www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Boreal_Owl/sounds).

Once the female starts nesting, very little calling occurs. Getting out and listening in January through April is most ideal for hearing this otherwise secretive species.

Boreal Owls are cavity nesters relying mainly on abandoned nests made by Northern Flickers or Pileated Woodpeckers, or natural cavities. Prior to egg laying the female stays in the cavity day and night for an average of six days while the male brings her food. Boreal Owls begin nesting in late March or April, laying 2 to 6 eggs. Incubation lasts about 28 days, and the

young fledge after 30 days. Boreal Owls are monogamous for only one breeding season.

Boreal Owls are uncommon and infrequently detected. So, if by chance you are lucky enough to hear or see one, be certain to report your observation to a biologist so that this information can be added to the little we know of this species.



THANK YOU to FIELD TRIP LEADERS

During the past year there were numerous people who volunteered their time and expertise to lead field trips and FAS would like to thank them.

These include: Cory Davis, Steve Gniadek, Bruce Tannehill, Gail Cleveland, Paul Rossi, Beverly

Skinner, Laura Katzman, Jeanette Oliver, Jake Bramente, Lewis Young, Lisa Bate, Chris Hammond, Denny Olson, Kathy Ross, Craig Hohenberger, Bob Lee, and Leslie Kehoe.

THIS IS YOUR LAST PILEATED POST UNTIL SEPTEMBER

HELP SUSTAIN THE FLATHEAD AUDUBON WE ALL KNOW AND LOVE!
 PARTICIPATE IN FLATHEAD'S
DAY OF GIVING AND UNITY
MAY 5, 8 AM - MIDNIGHT

COVID-19 produced a double whammy for Flathead Audubon. To operate, we need students, adults, open natural spaces, community events and ability to gather 10-100 people. Under the COVID-19 orders, none of these is allowed. The coincidence of the pandemic with our primary months of fundraising has been a double hit. We have had to cancel our large annual auction, monthly program meetings, our spring/early summer field trips, including a 4-day paid guided bird watching trip in central MT. Our Conservation Educator cannot access school classes or give presentations at Arbor Day, Earth Day, Flathead Forestry Expo, or Road Scholars intergenerational (grandparents + grandchildren) programs in Glacier National Park.

However, we must continue to make payments to our contracted Conservation Educator and Hawk Watchers, pay premiums for our liability insurance, and pay expenses of our website and monthly newsletter printing and mailing costs. We are glad that we have been staying within budget this year, but to go forward, we need your help. Flathead

Audubon has joined the Flathead Day of Giving and Unity, a one day event specifically for Flathead non-profits who have been impacted by COVID-19. This fundraiser is online (or phone) only – no bells and whistles, speakers or booths to visit. You visit the sponsor's website,

www.WhitefishCommunityFoundation.org and click the Donate button. If you don't have a computer, you call 863-1781 and donate by phone. Payment is done by credit card. All donations designated for Flathead Audubon will be collected and tallied. If we raise \$2,000 or more, the Community Foundation will match it with an extra \$1,000 and then transfer it to us. Your deduction is tax deductible.

On May 5, please help Flathead Audubon through the Day of Giving and Unity.

by Kay Mitchell



PRESIDENTS COLUMN

FAS President Gael Bissell



CANCELLATIONS AND POSTPONEMENTS. As we continue coping with this unfortunate pandemic, our non-profit organization, like many others, will be following CDC and state/local regulations to minimize people-to-people exposure for a bit longer. As such, we are **cancelling** our **May Annual Meeting and Potluck** at the Whitefish Community Center. The annual business meeting, including **election of Officers and Board Directors**, is **postponed** until September or as soon as we can meet after that date. The terms of current Officers and Board Directors have been extended until that time.

In addition, the planned **Spring Birding Trip to Central MT, May field trips, and Warbler Weekend are cancelled.** We will keep you informed of new activities, alternatives, and all June activities on our website and through press releases. Thank You to all who have led FAS field trips this year.

OUTDOORS THROUGH INDOORS. The good news is that we will be offering many exciting online activities, our new **Birds Rock!** video, and virtual field trips for families and adults via our website and Facebook pages. See Denny's Conservation Educator's Niche for details. And we are collaborating with Lone Pine State Park to develop at least

two "virtual" bird and native plant field trips. Please check for these releases on our website at [www/flatheadaudubon.org](http://www.flatheadaudubon.org) and on Face Book www.facebook.com/FlatheadAudubon/ and follow Lone Pine State Park on www.facebook.com/LonePineStatePark for these and other upcoming natural history field trips. We appreciate your participation and feedback.

ESCAPE WITH BIRDS. Birding and nature walking ARE healthy and excellent ways to avoid too much screen and indoor time. We suggest getting out to: Owen Sowerwine Natural Area (bird list available on www.flatheadaudubon.org, please leave dog at home), Otter Island (off Anderson Lane or south of Old Steel Bridge Fishing Access Site), small isolated trails at Lone Pine and Herron Park, the river walk/trails along Whitefish River, trail at the base of Columbia Mountain, Somers Walk/Bike path, and the Wild Mile in Bigfork. Or, drive out to Tally Lake or through Smith or Mission Valleys looking for sandhill cranes, long-billed curlews, late spring waterfowl, migrating/nesting raptors and soon our songbirds! We have guidance on our website brochure "Birding in the Flathead" and birding checklists; also, check out e-birding in Montana (Cornell E-bird application) that has our latest local bird observations. Go to <https://ebird.org/mt/news/welcome-to-montana-ebird>.

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Conservation Corner

by Carole Jorgensen

While you are “hunkering” down at home, others are hard at work in Washington weakening federal rules or not moving important legislation through Congress. Please consider contacting your Congressional Representatives on these very important issues. *To send messages*, simply google websites for Congressman Gianforte and Senators Tester and Daines.

Bipartisan bills to provide **full, dedicated funding to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)**, as well as provide funding to the maintenance backlog on our federal public lands, have been introduced in the House (HR3195, The Land and Water Conservation Fund Permanent Funding Act), and in the Senate (S342, The Great American Outdoors Act). *Contact your Congressional representatives and ask them to support these bills and seek final legislative action.*

The Administration is moving forward to remove “incidental take” mitigation and fines in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act despite overwhelming concerns from the scientific community. The proposed changes to the MBTA are being administered by the USFWS, while several lawsuits are in progress to reverse those changes. In the interim, there is no enforcement of “incidental take” of migratory birds nor any enforcement of mitigation measures to reduce such take, and bird losses are occurring. Stay tuned.

The Environmental Protection Act will decrease regulations and monitoring of air and water pollution for an undisclosed period of time using the Covid-19 situation as the rationale for the reduction of regulations and monitoring. <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-03/documents/oecamemooncovid19implications.pdf>

Regarding local issues, Flathead Audubon provided comments on the following proposals. These letters can be viewed at www.flatheadaudubon.org; select Conservation Correspondence under the Conservation tab.

- ◆ Oil Safe Flathead (www.facebook.com/KeepitCleannotCrude/) to reduce the chances of adverse effects from oil spills by trains.
- ◆ General proposal for Montana State Parks to potentially acquire the Sliter family property in Somers, MT (<https://www.dailyinterlake.com/news/2020/apr/05/comment-period-extended-for-somers-beach-park-6/>).
- ◆ Scoping comments on potential conservation easement for commercial timberland adjacent to Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge (http://fwp.mt.gov/news/newsReleases/fishAndWildlife/nr_1322.html).

Flathead Valley Bird Report

by Joshua Covill

Rare and Notables – April 2020

- 03/12 – **Golden Eagle** flying over near Bigfork (Craig H.)
- 03/15 – **Northern Goshawk** seen around Apgar in Glacier NP (Dan D.)
- 03/22 – **5 Rusty Blackbirds** visiting the feeders at a private residence near Creston (Pete F.)
- 03/23 – **Mew Gull** seen on the north shore of Flathead Lake (Shawn R.)
- 04/04 – **Prairie Falcon** in the West Valley Ponds area (Cory D.)
- 04/09 – **Rusty Blackbirds** continue at private residence (Pete F.)
- 04/17 – **6 Ross’s Geese** in flock of 130 Snow Geese frequenting the West Valley Ponds area (Josh C.)
- 04/17 – **2 Black-necked Stilts** on the edge of the large pond on Clark Dr - West Valley Ponds (Josh C.)
- 04/17 – **20 American Avocets** at Smith Lake (Craig H.)

What to Expect – May 2020

May is the magical month when all our summer breeding birds arrive in force. All our warblers,

thrushes, sparrows, and hummingbirds will finally return. Hummingbirds show up at the beginning of the month, as well as sparrows. Warblers and Swainson’s Thrushes return mid-May, and our flycatchers will be here at the end of May. Yard birding can be really exciting this time of year, when tired migrants will stop at any birdbath or flowering tree or shrub. Watch for our first Yellow-rumped Warblers and listen for the loud and happy song of Ruby-crowned Kinglets. While practicing safe physical distancing measures, you can visit your local patch of forest and find a fresh arrival virtually every single day. Visiting different habitats throughout May can show you just how many birds are arriving every day. River bottoms at Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, conifer forests along the many hiking trails around the valley, and the fields in the West and Lower valley will eventually fill up with their respective breeding birds that call the Flathead Valley their home.

Two Save the Date Announcements for Fall 2020

- ◆ Birds of Prey Festival, Saturday, September 19
- ◆ OSNA Workday, Saturday, October 3





Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

My son (second-grade teacher-from-home) sent me a Facebook post -- not his own -- that summed up our present predicament in quarantine. "The spread of COVID-19 is determined by only two factors:

1. How dense the population is
2. How dense the population is

The lesson is clear. Expertise, and following expertise suggestions, will be critical. Stay away from other people (but not birds and the outdoors!), wear masks when you must encounter people (at more than 6 feet), and sanitize, sanitize, sanitize. We'll get through this.

And I'll try to help! On the Flathead Audubon Facebook page, I've already started to give readers a daily break from their COVID sequestration pastimes of home-schooling, day-drinking (hopefully not at the same time!), binge-watching, book-reading, walking-the-poor-dog-for-the-18th-time-today, etc., activities. Each day, from now until we are released from social distancing incarceration, I'll be posting a daily: "BIRD TRIVIA" to give you an educational challenge. Four things to check out:

(1) **NATURAL FACT:** something going on in the NW Montana wilds *this very day*.

(2) **BIRD TRIVIA QUIZ:** a question about birds that you may try to answer in the "comments" section below the post.

(3) **BIRD "SYNONYM"** question: I'll give you the synonym (or strong association) and you give me the North American bird name. An example would be "getting venison", and the answer would be "Killdeer"!

(4) a chance for you to gain extra credit by coming up with a **CREATIVE COLLECTIVE** (a noun for a collective group of a bird species, such as a "Murder of Crows" or a "Murmuration of Starlings") OR ... a **BIRD PUN**, such as "you quack me up" or "Toucan play that game". I'll give *extra, extra* credit for

really owlful puns (sorry).

There will be **PRIZES!** **First prize** (or punishment, depends on your perspective) will be a birding hike through Owen Sowerwine Natural Area in Kalispell with both Jake Bramante and myself (when this quarantine is all over). **Second prize** will be me treating you to lunch at Montana Coffee Traders, while I try to answer as many bird questions as you can cram in between bites. You can call that "revenge". **Third prize** will be a window bird feeder. Prizes will be awarded when the "curve" of infections is on its downward slope, and the State of Montana says it is OK to assemble again.

I will post these questions at exactly 8 AM every morning. The first correct answer in each category posted in the comments below will be awarded a point for each first and correct answer.

In some other news, I have just finished editing a 15-minute video -- narrated by the infamous Professor Avian Guano, Bir.D., and beautifully augmented with gorgeous bird video by BJ Worth's *Birds in Motion* -- about why birds matter. It is called "**BIRDS ROCK!**" and hopefully you will see it as a fun way to educate your non-believer friends about the incredible value of birds to us. In a few days, you will find it on both our flatheadaudubon.org website and our Flathead Audubon Facebook page. Share it, spread it around, please. People need to know!

If it turns out to be a successful educational tool, more entertaining videos will come, about (a) specific things we can do to give birds an assist, and (b) the intricate timing and relationships of plants, insects and birds.

Meanwhile, get outside by yourself, or with your sheltered-in-place family or roommate, and watch birds! It is socially-distanced, safe and fun!

The migrants are arriving!

Colorful Bands in the Flathead

No -- this is not about a local rock concert. It is about recent observations in the Valley of birds wearing colored neck collars inscribed with big letters and numbers that can be read from a distance.

In general, it is geese and swans that are banded with colored collars. Swans are usually marked at their summering areas. Red, green, and yellow collars are most often used for Trumpeters; gray, black and blue for Tundras. Correct reading of the alphanumeric code inscribed on the collar is usually needed to determine where the bird was banded. Mid-March this year a Trumpeter wearing a green collar with white letters and numbers was spotted at

Church Slough. The observer was able to read the code "R20" and found out that this bird was banded in 2017 at Grays Lake NWR in southeast Idaho, along with another Trumpeter "R21". The two were seen the next year on the Blackfoot River in Montana. Spring 2019, R20 headed back west; it was seen at Pioneer Reservoir in western Idaho, this time without R21. Then in fall 2019 it showed up in Montana again -- in September at Costich Lake east of Eureka, in October near Whitefish. And now we know that the following year, 2020, it appeared on Church Slough.

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FIELD TRIPS

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 health pandemic, Flathead Audubon is *cancelling* its scheduled May field trips. We will let you know through our Flathead Audubon website (flatheadaudubon.org), social media, or newspaper the status of future field trips in the summer months. The Birding Extravaganza to Central Montana scheduled for May 22-25 has been cancelled. We'll give it a try again next year and those who signed up this year will have first opportunity to go.

We hope to be able to hold field trips in June and July and these are listed below. It is possible, too, that other trips we had originally scheduled this spring might be rescheduled later. In addition, there may be some "virtual" field trips. Check the FAS website for updates.



SMITH LAKE BIKE AND BIRD TOUR, Saturday May 16, 9 AM-noon. Help Flathead Land Trust and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service celebrate adding 257 acres with valuable wetlands to the Smith Lake Waterfowl Production area. Bike and Bird about 8.5 miles around the Smith Lake Waterfowl Production area and view its new addition. We will be biking on both paved and dirt roads/trails. The route is mostly flat with some gently sloping up and down. Bring your own bike, layers, backpack, and binoculars. Space is limited so RSVP to Laura Katzman at Flathead Land Trust at 752-8293 or lkatzman@flatheadlandtrust.org. **At the current time, this trip is still scheduled, but may be cancelled.**

LOST TRAIL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, Sunday, June 14, 8:30 AM-2 PM. Join refuge wildlife biologist Beverly Skinner and tour the incredible wetlands and grasslands of this hidden jewel west of Kalispell. See nesting Trumpeter Swans and an abundance of shorebirds and waterfowl species associated with Palouse prairie, riparian/wetland, and larch/pine forest habitats of the 9,000 acre refuge, northwest of Marion, MT. We will drive and walk along some of the refuge's closed roads with short hikes on uneven ground for better viewing. Meet at the Lost Trail Refuge Headquarters (about 45 miles NW of Kalispell) between 8:15-8:30 AM. For location and more information about the refuge go to http://www.fws.gov/refuge/lost_trail. To sign up for the field trip or get more information about the trip, contact Beverly at 406-858-2286 or beverly_skinner@fws.gov.

SPRUNGER-WHITNEY NATURE TRAIL WALK with Anne Morley, Thursday June 18, 10 am. Anne, naturalist and botanist will guide this walk to identify plants, birds, trees and wildlife. The 2 mile loop trail meanders through a low elevation, old-growth forest with interpretive and plant identification signs along the route. Bring water, lunch and appropriate clothing for the weather. Please sign up with Anne at www.wildswan.org or 406-886-2242. Meet at the trailhead off Hwy. 83, approximately 7 miles south of Swan Lake. Turn right at the Point Pleasant and Sprunger-Whitney Nature Trail signs (1/2 mile south of mile marker 64 on Hwy. 83.)

GOING BATTY, Saturday July 18, 8:30-11pm. Join local bat experts for an entertaining and educational evening learning about our amazing Bats. For information and to sign up contact KR at mtkat67@gmail.com or 837-3837.

President's Column continued from page 3

THANK YOU! We appreciate your support of FAS this year and we hope you are staying healthy. Any support you can give us during May 5th Day of

Giving will help us maintain our incredible Conservation/Education and other programs through the summer. Please send us feedback on how you think we are doing at info@flatheadaudubon.org.

Some Resources for Native Plant Landscaping – for the birds

Montana Native Plant Society website www.mtnativeplants.org under the tab "Landscaping":

"Flathead Chapter" provides great information – but the nursery info is not updated.

"Missoula & West-Central Montana Native Plant Landscaping" offers the valuable brochure

"Landscaping with native Plants of West-Central Montana"

Center for Native Plants, Whitefish, MT 406-862-4226.

Cenex has native grass seed. Because native grass seed is in short supply, cultivars of native grass species can be used; they are more beneficial than grass seed not suitable for our climate.

National Audubon, www.Audubon.org/native-plants has great information -- but the plant database is incomplete for our area.

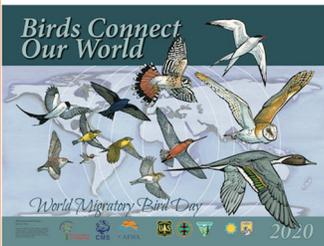
Bringing Nature Home and *Nature's Best Hope* by Doug Tallamy have a wealth of information about birds and the environment.

Reach out to local organic farmers, landscapers and gardeners who are knowledgeable about native plants.



Migration Miracles

Feathers, hollow bones, no more than air cloaked in brilliant hues. Our neotropical birds migrate at speeds up to 100 mph, at elevations as high as 15,000 feet, for up to 8 hours at a stretch or some never stopping for thousands of miles. To top off this feat, they know their way to Mexico or South America in the fall and back to North America



and Canada in the spring to breed. Migratory birds hatch with a road map in their brain. They orient via the sun, or the stars, or on a cloudy day some actually read the magnetic field of the earth to find their way.

World Migratory Bird Day is celebrated this year on May 9. The conservation theme focuses on the tracking technologies used to explore the routes of **migratory birds** across the globe, and how this knowledge is used to inform conservation. To learn more check out www.migratorybirdday.org/.

by Kathy Ross

Colorful Bands continued from page 5

In late March shortly after the Church Slough observation a Trumpeter with a green neck band and white letters/numbers was spotted on Ashley Creek just above Smith Lake. It was with 4 other Trumpeters, one adult and three immature; none of the others had collars. The observer was not able to read the code on the band. Maybe it was R20? Maybe there is another green collared Trumpeter in the area? Further observations are needed. Keep your eyes open for a green collared Trumpeter and check for its code.

All observations of banded birds, including those with neck collars, **should be reported to the USGS Bird Banding Lab at www.reportband.gov**. The Lab will send you information about your banded bird of the sort outlined above for R20.

For more information on banded swans visit www.trumpeterswasociety.org. The Trumpeter Swan Society keeps records on banded swans, and would like to get a copy of any report on a swan sighting made to the Bird Banding Lab. See the Society website for how to do this.

AND THAT IS NOT ALL. In April this year, a

Snow Goose wearing a red collar was spotted near Split Pond in the Lower Valley. The picture taken by Rick Mace at the left shows the collar. The majority of Snow Geese that visit Freezout have black collars, indicating a nesting ground in the western Canadian arctic. But some red collars also show up, marking birds that nest on Wrangel Island, Russia –west of Greenland. That tells us where the Split Pond bird has nested.



Photo by Rick Mace

So colorful neck bands are showing up in Flathead Valley. Keep your eyes out for them! When you see a bird with a collar - or any other type of band, be sure to record the code on the band and report your sighting to www.reportband.gov.

And we at Flathead Audubon would appreciate hearing about it too: info@flatheadaudubon.org.
by Linda Winnie

CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

Highlights from the April 6, 2020 Board meeting

- ◆ A motion was made and passed to cancel the May 2020 general annual meeting and the field trips, in order to comply with limitation on public gatherings and safety recommendations related to the coronavirus pandemic. A general meeting and field trips will be held at the earliest, feasible time.
- ◆ The Board passed several motions in order to maintain FAS as a legal and functioning organization. Carole Jorgensen was elected as the Co-chair of the Conservation Committee, and was elected to the Board for a one-year term. Joe Batts was elected as the Chair of the Hospitality Committee, and was elected to the Board for a one-year term. The terms of all Directors and Officers whose term would have expired in May 2020, were extended until the next general meeting can be held.
- ◆ An extensive discussion and brain-storming session was held to compile a list of ideas of ways to keep people engaged with FAS and birding through social media and virtual tours. Members can keep up to date on these offerings through the website and Facebook.
- ◆ Kay Mitchell reported that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Owen Sowerwine has been updated and that Gael Bissell will be working with Montana Audubon to finalize the details.
- ◆ Plans are proceeding for Great Fish, Birds of Prey Festival and OSNA work day, all in the fall; and possibly for a Birdathon (for fun only) in June.

Creating Bird Song continued from page 1

Below is a short list of local Flathead Valley plants useful for home gardens and available at our local native plant nursery, Center for Native Plants, in Whitefish.

- Chokecherry (Prunus virginiana)
- Serviceberry
- Thimbleberry (Rubus parviflorus)
- Blanket Flower (Gaillardia aristata)
- Bee Balm (Monarda fistulosa)
- Sulphur Buckwheat (Eriogonum umbellatum)
- Engelmann’s Aster (Eucephalus engelmannii)

For a list of some helpful native gardening resources, see the clippable box on page 6.

Nurseries and garden centers most often sell cultivars of a native species (nativars), which can be very different from the native species. Some can be fair substitutes for their native parent genotypes. But



native species support genetic diversity while native cultivars do not. Recent research is showing that if planting for wildlife and pollinators, cultivars that differ significantly

in color and morphology from native species should be used cautiously and suggests that hybrids should be avoided. Examples of significant morphology changes are green leaves cultured to be purple or flowers changed from single petaled to multi petaled. It can make a difference to the insect that has co-evolved with the native species. If you can’t find native species that meet your needs, ask your garden center to carry more plants that are native to your area. It helps if you can be specific.

If you want to grow wildflowers, be sure to ask businesses whether their “wildflower seed packets” contain only seed for plants native to our area. Often the answer is No! Along with a few natives, they usually contain weedy species from other areas. Check the labels too!

MINIMIZE USE OF PESTICIDE

Over 90% of our terrestrial birds need the nutrients and protein of insects to raise healthy chicks to maturity. It can take almost 5,000 caterpillars to feed one clutch of young chickadees. Recent research shows huge declines in insect populations—bees and butterflies are some of the most affected. In the US alone, it is estimated that in a year, over a billion pounds of agricultural chemicals are applied not only to crops but also to flower gardens, lawns (especially), fields and roadsides. Many of these pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizers, and their inert ingredients, persist in the environment where

they have harmful effects on our birds and the insects they depend on to feed their chicks. Millions of pounds of pesticides used each year target insects, aka bird food. They make no distinction between “bad” or beneficial, butterflies or mosquitos. Especially destructive to most of our pollinators, as well as birds, is the use of neonicotinoids, systemic pesticides, often used to grow the flowering plants and shrubs sold in nurseries. These pesticides affect the health and populations of pollinators especially, but also affect the birds who eat the insects that have eaten treated plants. If you are planting for birds and pollinators in your garden ask your garden centers if systemic pesticides have been used to grow the plants you want to purchase. It can make a difference. Toxic pesticides are not usually used in native plant nurseries.

THINK LESS LAWN

“For a bird searching for a nice place to raise a family, the classic suburban yard—a tidy bed of grass, one or two shade trees, and a row of leafy foundation plantings imported from China—must be like a foreclosed fixer-upper in a bad neighborhood. The accommodations are spare and all the local restaurants are dives.” Audubon

Lawns seem to be a part of our American way of life. And as our local communities expand into our own style of suburban sprawl we are seeing more and more of them. They serve a useful purpose for humans and pets but for birds and wildlife they are sorely lacking in food sources and shelter for raising young or for escaping predators. In addition, even a small lawn can take up to 10,000 gallons of water a year. And then there are the chemicals to keep it green and weed-free.

A few things you can do for birds and the environment are:

Make lawns smaller-- less care for you, less water used, and fewer lawn chemicals needed

Learn to appreciate a few “weeds”. Dandelions are a great source of early nectar for pollinators. Remember the grass in your lawn is not a native plant, and does not provide ecosystem services for birds or pollinators.

Let grass grow longer between mows. Saves time and resources for you, and for the birds it can create a food source (seeds) and somewhat safer habitat for foraging.

“Each patch of restored native habitat is just that—a patch in the frayed fabric of the ecosystem in which it lies. By landscaping with native plants, we can turn a patchwork of green spaces into a quilt of restored habitat. More native plants mean more choices of food and shelter for native birds and other wildlife. To survive, native birds need native plants and the insects that have co-evolved with them”. Audubon.



CASH REWARD! for Observations of MONTANA's LOONS *Banded and Unbanded*

The Montana Loon Society is offering **cash prizes** for 2020 observations of unique banded loons or confirmed unbanded breeding loons! This contest is generously funded by the Montana Loon Society.

Two \$100 awards will be decided by a random drawing from all individuals who submitted at least one observation. To encourage early observations, one drawing will occur in mid-June, the other in mid-July. Send band observations to Chris Hammond, MFWP: chammond@mt.gov or 406-751-4582. Qualified observations will be determined and counted solely by Chris.

The most useful band reports are the ones that are reported as soon as possible, so **send them in as you see the loon**, even if you are not 100% sure of your observation. See the Montana Loon Society website for information about how to observe and report loon bands: www.montanaloons.org, click where it says "Click here to see what you could win ..."

Winners will be announced at the summer meeting of the Montana Common Loon Working Group, July 28-29, 2020. (Federal and State government employees are not eligible for the cash reward.)

Loons are very sensitive. Please observe them at a distance.
by Linda Winnie

John
Winnie Sr



SPECIAL GIFTS

I wish to help make Flathead Audubon's vision a reality. Here is my contribution to the continued success of our chapter.



- Eagle Donation, \$1000+
- Osprey Donation, \$500+
- Snowy Owl Donation, \$250+
- Merlin Donation, \$100+
- Kestrel Donation, \$50+
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The FAS activity which most interests me is:

- Education Programs
- Owen Sowerwine Natural Area
- Scholarships and Grants
- Field Trips and Outdoor Events

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Update: 2020 Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival – Lewistown

Due to COVID-19 concerns, Montana Audubon has made the difficult decision to cancel this year's *Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival in Lewistown*. Though we are saddened by this development, the safety and health of our supporters, volunteers, and staff is of utmost importance during these unprecedented times.

We are, however, leaning forward and looking toward the future. We have booked this unique event for June 4th-6th of 2021 to be headquartered at The Yogo Inn in the City of Lewistown. Please mark your calendars and stay tuned for more information as it becomes available in the next year.

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Late breaking FAS news and announcements
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

The Flathead Audubon Society is affiliated with the National Audubon Society and Montana Audubon (www.MTAudubon.org). We meet on the second Monday of each month from September through May. Meetings start at 7 PM and include a featured guest who presents a conservation or nature program. The Board of Directors meet the Monday preceding the general meeting, at 6 PM. See page 1 for locations. Both meetings are open to all.

THE PILEATED POST is published September through May and is sent to members of Flathead Audubon Society as a membership benefit. For membership information or address change, please call Mike Fanning at 862-8070. To receive this newsletter electronically, email your request to: lin-da@flatheadaudubon.org. Deadline for newsletter copy is the 18th of each month. Contact newsletter editor at 755-1406; or lin-da@flatheadaudubon.org.

Website: www.FlatheadAudubon.org

Conservation Educator - Denny Olson: auduboneducator@gmail.com
FAS Rep on MT Audubon Board—Bob Lee bob@flatheadaudubon.org

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- Basic Membership —————\$25 Is this for a Renewal
Pays for newsletter and operating costs or New Member
 - Supporting Membership—\$40 Extra \$15 funds local projects such as Conservation Education and Owen Sowerwine Natural Area
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 wherever needed
- Total \$ _____**



You may renew or join online on our website:

<http://www.flatheadaudubon.org/>

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