



the

Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

December 2020
VOLUME 45, NUMBER 4



Christmas Bird Counts Are Different This Year

Due to pandemic restrictions on safely gathering, this year's local Kalispell and Bigfork Christmas Bird Counts will not be taking volunteers. The coordinators will be relying on individuals who have conducted the counts in the past to conduct them this year. They will reach out to those individuals for assistance. If you're a regular contributor to a section of the sur-

vey area you can let the coordinator know you're willing to help out again. If anyone sees an unusual or rare bird during count week, you can also let the coordinators know. There will also not be a gathering at the end to tally results. We wanted to make sure the counts were still conducted correctly but also safely. Hopefully, next year we can all participate again!

Audubon 2020 Christmas Bird Counts of Northwest Montana

Many 2020 Counts will be structured differently this year to minimize transmission of the COVID-19 virus. To this end, many are enlisting only a small number of participants. Check with the organizer of your usual CBC to find out the plan for your Count.

Count	Date	Contact information
Eureka	Fri., Dec. 18	Ellen Sullivan, kesullivan@interbel.net , 406-889-3983
Bigfork	Sat., Dec. 19	Craig Hohenberger, asoleado2003@yahoo.com , 406-890-1629
Libby	Sat., Dec. 19	Gene Reckin, gnreckin@gmail.com , H 406-293-9344, C 406-291-8482
Upper Swan	Sat., Dec. 19	Rob Rich, rob@svconnections.org , O 406-754-3137, C 207-598-6649
Ninepipe	Sun., Dec. 20	Jim Oates, oates65@gmail.com , 406-270-7826
Glacier NP	Sun., Dec. 20	Lisa Bate, Lisa.Bate@nps.gov , 406-888-7833
Troy	Sat., Dec. 26	Donald Jones, don@donaldmjones.com , 406-295-4291
Kalispell	Sun., Jan. 3	Pete Fisher, fisherpete88@yahoo.com , 406-250-9624

Conservation Corner

by Carole Jorgensen

DEAD WOOD

Before you remove or burn those dead trees or brush piles, think about the critters that live there. Dead wood (standing and down dead trees and logs, bark, stumps and roots) creates a complex community storing carbon, moisture, invertebrates and fungi. Primary excavators such as woodpeckers, create cavi-

ties for nesting and feeding and dozens of other birds (and other wildlife) reuse the created cavities and dead wood (such as ducks, geese, warblers, Spotted Towhees, Dark-eyed Juncos, owls, nuthatches, sparrows and wrens).

Up to twenty thousand *species* of plants,
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DECEMBER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, December 7, 2020. 6 PM. FAS Board of Directors Meeting. If you're interested in attending the board meeting contact cory@flatheadaudubon.org

Monday, December 14. 7:00 PM. Flathead Audubon General Meeting will be held digitally. See page 3 for how to participate.

No formally scheduled field trips. See page 5 for alternatives.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

California Condor

by Taryn Bushey

2020 was a devastating year for California wildfires. This year summer I had the privilege of getting to help out on one of these fires for three weeks working as an equipment driver for the Forest Service on the Sequoia Complex fires. When I heard about the California Condors that were killed in the Dolan Fire west of me, it hit home, having personally witnessed wildlife struggling both within a burn and throughout the aftermath of a high intensity fire such as those that commonly occur in California. While wildfires are not a major threat to the condor population, the disappearance of nine condors and death of two draws great attention to the vulnerability of this already threatened species.

The California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) is the largest land bird in North America with a wing span of 9-10 feet, standing 3 to 3.5 feet high. Adults, both female and male, are known for their unique appearance, donning a bald head of brightly colored pink to orange (as during breeding season), to light blue skin, long, sharp beak, white underwing linings, and the look as if they were wearing a black feather boa. Juveniles keep their black feathered heads and have less prominent white on their wings until they mature at the age of 5 to 7 years. Breeding pairs will stay together for successive seasons, however, will find a new partner if one is lost. Eggs are aqua-colored and measure 4-5" long, hatching after two months, and the chick staying with the parents for up to two years.

Their current range is along the coastal mountains of southern California, however reintroduction is occurring north of the LA basin, Big Sur area, Grand Canyon and Baja, California. They nest in caves in the mountains and cliffs, but forage in the foothills and grasslands of the San Joaquin Valley. You may find a California Condor roosting in large snags or rocky outcrops. Some Condors have been recorded to fly over 150 miles in one day in search of carrion to feed on in just one day! Unique to other birds of North America, they rarely flap their wings, holding them in a horizontal position and relying on thermal updrafts to carry them across the landscape. Condors are playful, social birds, and have even been caught playing chase, tug-of-war, and fetch!

Historically, Condor distribution spanned from

coast to coast. With human settlement into the West, however, came too a reduction in food source, habitat disturbance, shooting and poisoning, and egg collecting. In more recent times, lead contamination from bullet fragments in carrion, collision with power lines, and environmental pollutants such as DDT have been a detriment to their remaining population, along with predation on eggs by ravens, which tend to follow growing human populations.

In 1967 the condor became a federally protected species, and by the 1970s only a few dozen wild condors remained. With the help

of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a book published in the early 60s that shed light on the indiscriminate use of pesticides, their effect on condors has been reduced, but pollutants still remain an issue to this day. It wasn't until 2007, however, that concerted efforts to address the lead contamination issue were put in place with the Ridley-Tree Condor Preservation Act. The purpose of the act was to create a "non-lead zone" throughout the condor's habitat and eventual lead ban throughout the state of California. Full implementation of this law was achieved in July, 2019.

Since the 1970's dire numbers, the condor has relied chiefly on the efforts of human intervention to rehabilitate the population. In the 1980's,

continued on page 6



December Program

Capturing Forest Birds in the Land of the Mayans

presented by Cory Davis



eBird

Golden-hooded Tanager

Cory Davis is a Research Associate at the University of Montana who spent many years studying birds throughout the western US and occasionally abroad. He will share stories and photos from a project he assisted with for the Smithsonian Institution in Belize several years ago.

How to Attend the December 14 FAS General Meeting

Time: December 14, 2020, 7:00 PM Mountain Time (US and Canada)
 Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89836584287>
 Meeting ID: 898 3658 4287
 Phone: +1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

If you have been hesitant to try Zoom, it is actually quite easy. For a brief tutorial contact cory@flatheadaudubon.org

FAS Programs Coming to the FAS Website

Flathead Audubon is starting to video-record the programs given at its monthly meetings.

The first recording is of our fantastic October program: Bret Tobalske, U of M, reporting on his research on "Biomechanics, Aerodynamics and Thermal Balance in the Flight of Hummingbirds" – a multimedia presentation complete with slow motion video of flying hummingbirds. You can view it at

www.flatheadaudubon.org. And coming next to the website will be our recent November program: David Manuwal on "Non-native Birds in Montana".

The plan is to make all of this year's programs available on the FAS website, and eventually develop a video archive of all the Flathead Audubon programs. Check the website to see these videos as they roll out, and let us know what you think.

CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

Highlights from the November 2, 2020 Board of Directors Meeting

- ◇ Gael Bissell will submit comments for Flathead Audubon related to the proposal to make modifications in Lawrence Park. She will also submit comments to FWP for the proposed purchase by Flathead Land Trust, for a Conservation Easement in Bad Rock Canyon.
- ◇ Joe Batts noted that Amy Seaman (Montana Audubon) is available to present their priorities for 2021 legislative session. The goal is to have this as part of the January program, and also posted on our YouTube site, so our membership can be informed about issues and bills.
- ◇ Denny Olson reported that filming will begin for the second video, and that his raptor silhouettes are on display in the rafters of Lone Pine as an identification challenge.
- ◇ Pam Willison offered the 2020 OSNA report, which was prepared in lieu of a fall meeting of the OSNA Committee, and is available on our website. She will submit a report and the invoices for weed control to Flathead Conservation District, so we can receive reimbursement from the grant we received from them.



Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

"Rivers do not drink their own water; trees do not eat their own fruit; the sun does not shine down on itself and flowers do not spread their fragrance for themselves. Living for others is a rule of nature. We are all born to help each other -- no matter how difficult it is ... Life is good when you are happy, but much better when others are happy because of you."

- Pope Francis

I have spent nearly my entire life trying to convince people that absolutely nothing in this world stands alone. Nature is interwoven with mind-boggling septillions of individual organisms, inanimate pieces, and especially, relationships. Some of us hold these truths to be self-evident: everything, without exception, is connected to everything else.

This "rule of nature" as Pope Francis has put it, is inherent in our social nature as Hominid primates. The present pandemic, with its stay-at-home, away-from-other-people, don't-touch, mask-your-facial-expressions *isolation* -- as deemed necessary for *survival* - runs counterintuitively to both the "rule" and our nature. We are helping others by temporarily severing critical pieces of relationships, like reassuring touch, and hugs, seeing smiles and hearing nuances in voice inflections, volume changes, hand gestures and especially, truth-revealing body language. We miss it dearly. Its absence downright hurts.

That isolation exposes our need to belong to something larger than us, like belonging to a team of some sort. Tight families are the classic example. Gatherings of like-minded people range from quiet Audubon meetings, political parties, service clubs or church worship to the regalia, costuming, face-painting and behavior at football games (I'm a lifelong Vikings fan I must shamefully admit). Sometimes, our need to "belong" taps into insecurities we have about



our own worth -- which is probably unhealthy -- but mostly, our sense of belonging comes from good places. At its worst, reason, facts, evidence, science, *reality itself* -- sometimes takes a back seat to loyalty to the team.

In the USA, and in most of Western civilization, some teams are partly founded on a philosophy of rugged individualism, fueled by our most basic instinct and the first in the hierarchy of needs. Namely, survival. Nothing wrong with that. It's the first order of business for every living being. When survival is at stake, everything else is "in the way". When survival (or the perception thereof) is at stake, it prevents looking broader, and farther ahead.

To some level, these observations apply to all of us. They are about the small picture (me and the team) clouding foresight toward the much bigger picture -- the condition and health of life on our planet. The Big Team. Ultimately, it's the only team that really matters.

Documented past (and carefully projected future) climate changes will present a paradox for us. Survival will demand belonging to the Big Team, and may fly in the face of our rugged individualism. It's a very difficult leap of faith from thinking our happiness and well-being depends entirely on selfishness, and the approval of our small team members. If we can begin to understand the depth of our connections to everything in Nature (by studying birds, as one small example), and if we can "get over ourselves" and understand that *"life is much better when others are happy because of us"* -- the "others" being not just humans, but our fellow passengers on this Planet -- then we have a real chance at surviving long-term, for generations. The key to survival for us is counterintuitive. It is not dressed-up selfishness. It is a giant, but fact-based, leap of faith -- *altruism*. And our altruism has to be toward all of the members of the Big Team. We survive by taking care of each other.

And with a nod toward reality, it probably has to start now.

Thanks To Those Who Have Renewed Their Membership

Thanks to all our loyal members who have renewed for this year! Flathead Audubon could not accomplish the important things we do without you. Most important, our education program would not exist without your support.

Note to those who have not yet renewed:

Normally you would not be receiving The Pileated Post this month without renewing but this year we are allowing an extra month because the renewal period was extended to November 15. Thanks again.

Mike Fanning, Membership Chair

Flathead Valley Bird Report

by Joshua Covill

Rare and Notables – November 2020

Incredibly, the **YELLOW-BILLED LOON** (immature) found on Dickey Lake by Nikki M. on July 5th was present until Oct. 21st at the latest (Lewis Y.) Unsure if it is still around.

10/19 – **Surf Scoter** found at the Creston wetland (Craig H.)

10/23 – **Mew Gull** spotted at the Lakeside Marina among other gulls (Dan C.)

10/28 – A **Short-eared Owl** was spotted flying near dusk over the West Valley ponds area (Cory D.)

10/30 – **3 Rusty Blackbirds** foraging at muddy margins on the pond on Clark Dr. (Josh C.)

11/04 – An **Iceland Gull** was spotted at the Flathead Co Landfill (Craig H.)

11/10 – One female **Rusty Blackbird** was found in the west valley at the pond on Clark Rd. (Josh C.)

11/12 – A female **Purple Finch** came into feeders in Somers, was also spotted 10/21 (Dan C.)

11/15 – **White-winged Scoter** present for 2

days on Rogers Lake near Kila (Tracy S. & Linda W.)

11/16 – **4 Rusty Blackbirds** continuing sporadically near Creston, along Riverside Rd (Craig H.)

What to Expect –December 2020

December, when true winter sets in, is when backyard birding can really take off. Winter finches like Pine Siskins, Evening Grosbeaks, and Common Redpolls can make surprise visits among the hoards of House Finches, American Goldfinches, and Dark-eyed Juncos. Chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers feed all day from feeders during the cold winters. Bohemian Waxwings wander in search of berries, and Merlins know to follow them. Pine Grosbeaks sometimes flow into town to feed on Mountain Ash berries. The open ag-land has both Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks hunting, and the occasional flock of Snow Buntings. Christmas Bird Counts in the Flathead usually turn up a lot of good species, which means there are still a lot of birds out there to see, even in the middle of winter!

WINTER FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU!

All Flathead Audubon field trips are free and open to the public and are geared for all ages and levels of field experience. They are led by area biologists, retired professionals, and some of the best birders in the region. Please read our field trip guidelines at www.FlatheadAudubon.org. For all Field Trips, dress for the weather, bring binoculars or spotting scope if you have them, wear sturdy footwear, and drive and pull off the road safely. All drivers must have their own vehicle insurance. For more information, contact the individual field trip leader listed below. Also, a free brochure, "Birding Hotspots of the Flathead" is available at the Flathead Audubon general meetings and on www.FlatheadAudubon.org. Check the FAS webpage at <https://www.flatheadaudubon.org/activities-and-field-trips/> for updated information on upcoming field trips.



Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic we are taking precautions to ensure safety for all participants. Masks and respect for others' personal space will be required, and we ask you to not share binoculars or spotting scopes. The number of participants allowed on trips will be limited as will carpooling.

While there are no formally scheduled trips in December there are still lots of possibilities for birding outings for those who have motivation to explore on their own.

Find lots of ideas on the Flathead Audubon website (www.flatheadaudubon.org). Under the header "Birds", there are Birding Hotspots, Bird ID Resources, and Birds of the Flathead Valley. Bro-

chures can be downloaded and printed out. There are also maps that show places to go. Nearby areas include Owen Sowerwine, Lawrence Park, Lone Pine State Park, the Whitefish trail system, Wayfarer's State Park in Bigfork and numerous wetland/riparian areas in the Lower Valley.

Dress for the weather and get out and enjoy what the Flathead Valley has to offer!



Online Auction to Benefit Birds and Conservation

By Constanza von der Pahlen, Flathead River to Lake Initiative and Flathead Lakers

A beautiful wooden boat restored by Greg McCormick, Polson, is for sale through an online auction to benefit the Bad Rock Canyon Conservation Project. The 1953 *Century Resorter*, an 18' boat, is ready to float Flathead Lake!



The Flathead Lakers, the Flathead Land Trust, and

other partners in the Flathead River to Lake Initiative, have committed to raise \$500,000 by August 2021 to help MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks purchase this amazing 800-acre property. Flathead Audubon is one of the partners. Check out the online auction and more details on this beautiful wooden boat on the Flathead Lakers website: www.flatheadlakers.org/news-announcements then click on Online Boat Auction to Benefit Conservation.

Dead Wood continued from page 1

animals and microbes can live in one dead log. Thomas (1987) in the Blue Mountains of Oregon found 57 percent of the of the 175 vertebrate species found there used dead wood. Bunnell and others (1997) found that that 25 percent of British Columbia vertebrates used cavities. Missoula ornithologist Erick Greene documented 9 species of birds using one dead tree at one time (House Wren, a bluebird, near the top there's an American Kestrel, a Tree Swallow, a Black-capped Chickadee, Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and White-breasted Nuthatch).

Dead wood not only provides housing, but also the grocery store. Those small brush piles also provide habitat for insects and food for our feathered friends (as well as other critters). Those woodpiles can provide cover in bad weather and protection from predators. In addition to vertebrates, dead wood is valuable to our native bees for nesting and overwintering. Recently the Flathead County landfill stopped recycling wood and brush. Creating a few dead wood patches in your yard or property can save you money, and provide some nice condominiums for our native

friends. The Montana Wildlife Gardener offers a few tips on how you can build your own biodiversity villages and store some carbon at the same time (<http://montanawildlifegardener.blogspot.com/2009/04/build-brush-pile-for-wildlife.html>)

Are you concerned that leaving dead wood and insects on your property is a risk? Not so much as it turns out. Check out (<http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/treetopics/2013/04/27/bugs-the-good-and-bad-dead-wood-revisited/>)

Most insects are not forest health risks. For example, in western Oregon, the Douglas-fir beetle (the "baddest" dead wood-inhabiting insect) only thrives in freshly dead or downed trees. Once the snag or downed wood has been dead for more than a year, it is no longer a target. Instead, it will become inhabited by the dozens of "good" bugs that feed the myriad of wildlife.

There needs to be a LOT of this fresh down wood to pose a forest health risk—like after a storm. According to Oregon Department of Forestry, a good rule of thumb is that fewer than 3 fresh down logs/acre does not present a hazard.

California Condor continued from page 2

radio collars were placed on condors' wings to gather vital information about the species. In April of 1987, the last remaining wild condor was captured, and the rehabilitation of the species relied entirely on human intervention by way of captive breeding programs. One interesting fact about the California Condor is that when an egg is removed from the nest, they will often lay a second, or even a third egg, a practice called "double clutching". This technique has been used to spur increased reproduction in captivity. After valiant reintroduction efforts, the first free-flying condor nest was found in 2006, ironically, in the burned-out cavity of a Redwood tree. The California Condor population now sits around roughly 440 birds, 160 of which are free flying, thanks to the dedication of their stewards. We can only hope that these numbers continue to increase as the awareness of the condor's plight results in action towards the inclusion of environmental protection and improvement.

You, too, can get involved in helping rebuild

the California Condor population! There are many ways to help. Here are just a few.

- Sign up for the Ventana Wildlife Society newsletter to get the latest updates on the Big Sur Sanctuary that burned in the Dolan Fire this summer. They are currently taking donations to rebuild the sanctuary, and a link for this can be found at the bottom of their web page www.ventanaws.org.
- Do your part by using non-lead ammunition for hunting, spread the word about lead contamination in condors and their habitat.
- Participate in litter cleanup projects to reduce the chances of ingestion.
- Do not use poison to control unwanted pests on your property.
- Visit the Cornell Lab website to watch the Pole Canyon California Condor Nest Cam and learn more about this rare bird!

Darcy Thomas is New Keeper of OSNA Bird List

When you observe a new species of bird at the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, i.e. one that is not already on the OSNA Bird List, report it to Darcy Thomas darcy@flatheadaudubon.org Darcy recently took over the maintenance of the Bird List from Shawn Richmond, who has kept the List for the last five years. **Thank You Darcy** for volunteering to take on this job, **and Thank You Shawn** for your service to Flathead Audubon and the OSNA.

The list currently records 155 species. It can

be viewed on the Flathead Audubon website: go to "Owen Sowerwine Natural Area" under the Conservation tab. All birders are encouraged to report to Darcy when they observe any species at Owen Sowerwine that is not on the List. If the species is rare in Montana, please provide documentation—a picture of the bird (preferred) or drawing or detailed description. **Thank you to all who have contributed species to the list – and to future contributors as well.**



Thank You!

...to those below who have made donations to Flathead Audubon through October 2020

Kestrel

Dee Blank
Steve & Marti George
Mr. Franklin E. Schroeter



Supporting Member + Donation

William Beyer
John & Kris Bruninga
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My Own Vision

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Don't Forget to Use Amazon Smile for Your Holiday Shopping

Amazon Smile <https://smile.amazon.com> donates to your selected charity for every purchase. You use the same email and password as regular Amazon. Once you sign in, click the 3 horizontal lines in the upper left and scroll all the way to the bottom where it says "Your Amazon Smile." That is where you choose the charity you want.



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+
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P.O. Box 9173

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Your gift is tax deductible.

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

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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 September through May. Meetings start at 7 PM and include a featured guest who presents a conservation or nature program. The Board of Directors meets 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. To become a member or to renew your membership, go to the FAS website or use the membership form below. **Deadline for newsletter copy is the 18th of each month. Contact newsletter editor at 755-1406; or lin-**

Check our website www.FlatheadAudubon.org for
Late breaking FAS news & announcements
Online FAS membership sign up or renewal
Newly scheduled field trips & events



THE PILEATED POST is delivered BY EMAIL!

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If you currently get a paper copy by mail please consider switching to email; send your request to linda@flatheadaudubon.org.
To report a change of address - postal or email - contact Mike at shrdlu@centurytel.net

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You will receive occasional short emails with last minute updates, reminders, and breaking FAS news.



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- Basic Membership —————\$25
Pays for newsletter and operating costs
- Supporting Membership —————\$40
Extra \$15 funds local projects such as
Conservation Education and
Owen Sowerwine Natural Area
- Additional Donation of \$ _____
To: Education Fund
 Owen Sowerwine Fund
 Wherever needed
Total \$ _____

New member? Renewal?

You may renew or join online on our website: <http://www.flatheadaudubon.org/>

If you wish to receive a paper copy by USPS, check this box.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

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Mail this form with your check to:
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Kalispell, MT 59904