



Laura Katzman Flathead Land Trust receives Conservation Achievement Recognition

For years, I have been hearing from birders about the West Valley ponds, located about five miles northwest of Kalispell, which consist of a variety of pothole wetlands that support an amazing diversity of shorebirds, waterfowl, and other bird species. Thirty years ago, they were identified as potential mitigation wetlands for Kerr Dam. A decade ago, people started reporting and photographing hundreds of Sandhill Cranes congregating in this area each fall. More recently, as part of an interagency citizen science spring waterfowl project, observers documented thousands of spring migrants who depend on these melting ponds and open farmlands for food and rest and they move north to breed.

It took a while, but finally these ponds found a champion in Laura Katzman, Land Protection Specialist, with the Flathead Land Trust. Before moving to Kalispell nearly 10 years ago, Laura was the fisheries management biologist with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks on the Lower Clark Fork River working with Avista Corporation and other private/public partners to protect habitat for native fish. She was instrumental in protecting about 1,500 acres of the upper Bull River and shoreline of Bull Lake, an area that is now the Bull River Wildlife Management Area. Having grown up near the Horicon Marsh area in Wisconsin, Laura has a strong appreciation for wetlands and birds. She obtained her undergraduate degree in Resource Management from University of Wisconsin Stevens Point and Master's in Fish and Wildlife Management from



Montana State.

After starting work with the Flathead Land Trust in 2010, Laura worked with staff and partners to protect thousands of acres as part of the Flathead River to Lake Initiative. Five years ago, she discovered and clearly recognized the incredible habitat values of West Valley and reached out to the private landowners to see if they were interested in conservation. Gradually, through time and getting to know the long-term landowners who have raised their families on these farms for over 100 years, one family stepped forward to put a conservation easement on their 400 acres of farmland and wetlands.

Piecing together a project in this neighborhood of development and valuable commercial gravel resources was no easy task. While Laura researched and found a number of federal grants that would help with the purchase of conservation easements, she also had to find a significant amount of private funding. But the icing to this project would be to fulfill a need for a public viewing area. Fortunately, the landowners were willing to work with the Flathead Land Trust and other partners to donate a public viewing area overlooking one of the larger pothole wetlands.

To raise the private funding needed, Laura and other Flathead Land Trust folks reached out to foundations but also the local community, non-profit organizations, and other neighborhood groups and in two years raised over \$150,000 of private money needed to match to federal grants. Flathead

continued on page 7

OCTOBER FLATHEAD AUDUBON CALENDAR

Monday, October 1, 2018. 6 PM. FAS Board of Directors Meeting, Gateway Community Center, US Hwy 2 West, Kalispell. All welcome.

Monday, October 8, 2018. 7 PM Flathead Audubon General Meeting, Gateway Community Center, US Hwy 2 West, Kalispell. All welcome. See page 3.

Sunday October 14, 2018, Autumn Birding in the Mission Valley, 8 AM start. See page 6.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Cordilleran Flycatcher

by Gail Cleveland

Oh, no! The Bird of the Month is one of those small, gray-green flycatchers that no one can tell apart but the experts. Yes, it is one of the genus *Empidonax*, *Empidonax occidentalis* to be specific, but read on. You may be able to find the joy in identifying a Cordilleran Flycatcher next spring after reading about and listening to these little flycatchers that inhabit northwestern Montana.

The most comprehensive discussion of the *Empidonax* flycatchers that I have found is Ken Kaufman's 2011 version of Field Guide to Advanced Birding. Out of the 12 species of this genus, we are likely to see and hear Willow, Alder, Hammond's, Dusky, Least and Cordilleran in Northwest Montana during the breeding season. As Kaufman points out, visual identification of these little gray birds with eye rings and wing bars can be difficult. However, during the breeding season, their songs and vocalizations can be most helpful in identification. For their vocalizations, go to Cornell Lab of Ornithology's website: www.AllAboutBirds.org. Also, *iBird Pro* and the *Sibley eGuide to the Birds of North America* apps have easy to access vocalizations.

My interest in Cordilleran Flycatchers began when trying to find them for the Flathead Audubon Birdathon. They are harder to find in the area than three more common *Empidonax*: the Dusky, Hammond's and Willow. One of the spots that the area experts mention finding them each year is on the Columbia Mountain trail or up the small streams from the Badrock Canyon pullouts. This seems to be their preferred habitat: "riparian forests adjacent to conifers, conifer forests with dense understory of shrubs, and canyons or road cuts that provide cliffs with banks for nesting," according to Birds of Montana by Marks, Hendricks and Casey. One of the early specimens taken in the state was found near Columbia Falls by R. S. Williams in 1896.

One of my memorable early sightings was before 1989 along the Fisher River in a boggy roadside area in Lincoln County. At this time the Cordilleran Flycatcher was known as the Western Flycatcher. In 1989, the species was divided into two separate species: Pacific-slope and Cordilleran. The division was based on vocalization, ecology and DNA differences. However, recent studies suggest that interbreeding exists between the two. Whether they are two distinct species is still in question.

But how does one tell if it is a Cordilleran rather than another *Empidonax*? One of the most distinguishing features is the eye ring. It is quite bold with a distinctive teardrop shape at the back of the eye. A second feature is its head, which appears large and peaked with a large, broad bill that has a

yellow-orange lower mandible. Other features are a long, narrow tail and dingy white wing bars.

Behavior is similar to other small flycatchers. Tending to like shady perches, the Cordilleran flies out to catch insects, usually coming back to another branch before it flies out again. It can also glean insects from leaves or on the ground. Insects are its main diet; therefore, they fly south, wintering mostly in Mexico and returning in late March to early June.

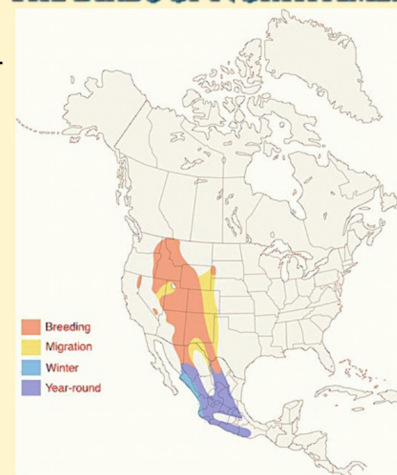
The distinctive features of the Cordilleran song include its squeaky, high-pitched sound and three distinct parts with pauses in between. One must really listen to the vocalizations. One of the problems of the *Empidonax* is trying to find the right letters and words to describe their sounds. To most birders, bird songs such as the Olive-sided Flycatcher's, whose song translates to "Quick, three beers," or the Willow Flycatcher's with its "Fitz-bew," are easier to remember and identify than the Cordilleran Flycatcher song. In order to identify its song in the field, you should listen to recordings of the Dusky, *continued on page 7*



Gail Cleveland



THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA



October Program

Backyard Bird Feeder Success!

Presented by Jake Bramante

Join us Monday, October 8, 7-9 PM at the Gateway West Community Room, US Highway 2 West, Kalispell to hear Flathead Audubon board



member Jake Bramante discuss strategies to increase your backyard birds. While getting out into nature to discover birds is extremely rewarding (and healthy), sometimes we want to observe birds from the comfort of our homes and patios. With a few simple adjustments to the way that you approach your bird feeders and backyard in general, you can greatly increase the quantity and variety of birds that come to visit. We'll discuss food and feeder selection as well as other factors including providing water, cover, and native plants.



Access to Owen Sowerwine Natural Area Is Now Year-round

In years past, there has been a conundrum regarding the field trip access to OSNA. The best birding is always in May and June, and that's when flooding keeps everyone except the ducks, frogs and fish out. When combined with the parking access limited to about 2 cars, school field trips have been nearly impossible in the spring. No more!

Civic-minded Terry Welder and his wife Sally, owners of the Kalispell Montessori Building and grounds, have struck a deal with us to offload public school buses and park FAS field trip vehicles in the Montessori parking lot (by pre-arrangement), and allowed us to build a substantial boardwalk across the barrier slough dividing their land from OSNA. Please thank them if you have a chance!



So, on September 5th, Carolan and Samantha from the Montana Conservation Corps staff, Pat Jaquith, Pam Willison, Rod Walette, Rick Mace and myself from FAS – built the "Bridge to Somewhere" well over the highest waterline we have encountered in years (see photo!)

Jim Watson, no slouch in civic-mindedness himself, supplied the 4-inch-thick larch planks with his sawmill, Western Building Center supplied two hundred dollars worth of the other lumber, and Brent and Kay Mitchell and myself supplied some extra materials for connectors and steps up the banks. September 25th is our date for building handrails and steps, to complete the project.

Bring on the kids!
by Denny Olson, Conservation Educator

Lower Lost Prairie Road Bluebird Trail

In late March, 2018 I took the initial steps toward establishing a bluebird trail at Lost Prairie, west of Marion, Montana. I built seven bluebird-specific boxes from a design provided by Dennis Olson. The original design came from Marty Fregerio. The houses were mounted on existing posts along the Lower Lost Prairie road which runs basically north - south. I attempted to orient each house so that the openings pointed north and south. Because I didn't have a good distance measuring device at the time of installation the houses were installed at least 200 feet and as much as 400 feet apart. I attempted to place them near existing bird houses which were being used primarily by swallows. The pairing of the bluebird-specific boxes and the original boxes allows the intra-species territorial behavior of both the bluebirds and swallows to protect each site. Bluebirds have been nesting in this area in pipes and under eaves for many years so I hoped to entice them to use these new houses. Swallows appear to commandeer most available standard-style houses on the Prairie.

Because the new houses were installed well into the bluebird nesting season, only two appeared to be used by bluebirds this year. The houses were built during the winter of 2017/2018 so the wood was relatively fresh and unweathered. This may have also contributed to vacancy. None of the new bluebird houses were used by swallows.

I was only able to make one visit to the site this summer so have no real data to provide on numbers of bluebirds in the area or observations of interaction with the houses. I do believe that some modification of placement is due. I suspect that houses placed too near a cross rail on the fence might have allowed a predator to crawl to the vicinity of some

houses. There was no sign of predation but the existence of possible access may have turned birds away. Some modification of spacing and orientation may also help. I built several standard bird houses to pair with the bluebird houses so that a swallow could use the standard houses, but many of my placements were paired with existing houses.

Work for the future should include closer monitoring of use, especially after the houses have gone through one winter, and a good survey of bluebird numbers and nesting pairs. An area further to the south along the Lower Lost Prairie Road might also provide for extension if numbers warrant. The fence uses steel posts in this area rather than the round wood posts I used, so some other method of mounting may be needed.

We hope that in the future bluebirds will occupy all of the new houses and give us a reason to extend the Lost Prairie bluebird trail.

by Mitch Linne, and Gail Linne



Public Invited to Participate in Glacier Park Fall Raptor Migration Study

In celebration of the Year of the Bird, Glacier National Park has launched a new Hawk Watch Program. Volunteers can choose specific dates in September and October to hike approximately 4.5 miles up the Mount Brown trail (roughly 4,000 feet in elevation gain) to collect data from 10 AM to 4 PM. A second site near Lake McDonald Lodge is accessible by road and will focus on counts of migrating golden eagles during October from 12 to 4 PM daily. If fire conditions do not allow access to these areas, alternate sites may be identified.

Each year, golden eagles migrate from north-

ern breeding grounds to warmer climates. One of the most important North American golden eagle migration routes passes directly through Glacier National Park along the Continental Divide. Large numbers of other raptors also use this migration corridor during the fall and spring months.

Glacier National Park Volunteer Associates, the Glacier National Park Conservancy donors provide support for this program. Contact GLAC_citizen_science@nps.gov or call (406) 888-7986 for more information or to sign up.

IT's MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME!
USE THE FORM ON THE LAST PAGE!

GET THE PILEATED POST BY EMAIL!
Save trees and money. See the note on the last page.



Conservation Educator's Niche

By Denny Olson

Well, it appears that the Birds of Prey Festival is getting to be a "thing". It's an odd colloquialism, because I always thought that things were, well, things. But, as I understand it, the modern meaning has an implied "significant" adjective before the word itself. (Don't get me started on the erosion of literacy in favor of sound-bites.)

This year, our number of participants at the Festival jumped from 600 to 800(!) – an ascending trend that has been going on for few years now. I



would like to think that it means that birds of prey are being more appreciated – and it surely does – but it is also a testament to the work of many planners and presenters, all of whom are unrecognized and under-appreciated.

Not by me! Here's the list, and evidence for the great work by a large team. First of all, no one would even know about the Festival without the publicity team of Paula Smith and Jan Metzmaker. Posters went up everywhere. Newspaper ads created by Robyn at Insty-Prints jumped out at people as they perused the dailies and weeklies. KGEZ, KOFI and KAJ were happy to report on us.

The venue and staff of our partners in crime, Lone Pine State Park – Brian Schwartz, Derrick Rathe, four wonderful Americorps naturalists, and vol-

unteers like mask-maker Sandi Vashro – managed the scene beautifully and designed some very fun activities for the kids.

The presenters – Denver Holt from the Owl Research Institute, Beth Watne from the Wild Wings Recovery Center and Audubon's Kathy Ross conducting Hawkwatch training – added a huge amount of credibility and interest to the day.

Beth and her amazing volunteers brought fourteen (14!) different species or color morphs of WWRC's education birds, mesmerizing participants. Teresa Wenum from Flathead National Forest brought "Sally Snag" and started many discussions on the habitat needs of raptors and other cavity nesters. Allison Batch and Mary Jo Gardner from Citizens for a Better Flathead dug in the dirt with kids and did activities about compost and recycling. Our own Audubon volunteers – Cory, Rod, Gael, Barbara Boorman – played with and educated families about raptors all through the event. And Audubon President Kay Mitchell was a great MC for the day.

All these are from my notoriously feeble memory, so I'm sure I forgot a few more, and apologize if I did. Nevertheless, thank you all!

As they say, a good (edu-taining) time was had by all, and I'm still grinning, thinking back on a wonderful day.



CHIRPS & SQUAWKS

Highlights from September 4, 2018 Board Meeting

- ◆ The September 4 board meeting was held on Bob Lopp's deck.
- ◆ Kathy Ross, Bob Lee, Mike Fanning, Bob Lopp, Gail Linne, and Gael Bissell were all approved for one year terms. Sadly, Barb Summer has resigned from the board but will continue to be involved.
- ◆ Currently Flathead Audubon has about 400 members.
- ◆ The upcoming Birds of Prey Festival and Hawk Watch training were discussed.
- ◆ Flathead Audubon received a \$500 grant from the Whitefish Credit Union and a \$1500 grant from the Maki Foundation to underwrite expenses. The Maki grant stipulated that there be a presence at the festival to allow people to receive information about the changes in the Migratory Bird Act.
- ◆ At the MT Wings Over the Big Sky Festival, Lewis Young received the Lifetime Achievement Award, Steve Gniadek received the Conservationist of the Year Award and Denny Olson was honored with the Educator of the Year Award.
- ◆ The festival dessert auction netted \$2600 for FAS. Thank you to all the volunteers who made the festival such a big success.

FALL FIELD TRIPS FOR YOU!

All Flathead Audubon field trips are free and open to the public (except those organized for the bird festival which require registration) 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 Kathy Ross at 837-3837 or Cory Davis at 257-3166, or 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.



AUTUMN BIRDING IN THE MISSION VALLEY, Sunday October 14, 8 AM start. Join Leslie Kehoe and Bob Lee for a great day of birding around Ninepipes and other bird abundant areas of the Mission Valley. It is a wonderful time to see raptors on the move and perhaps winter residents arriving. Depending on the weather, it will be interesting to see who lingers this time of year in this superb birding area. Meet at the White Oak Park'N'Ride at 8 AM. We will be out most of the day so bring optics, appropriate clothing and lunch/snacks. To sign up or for more information contact Bob Lee at rml3@centurytel.net and/or 270-0371. Carpooling is encouraged.

West Valley Bird Viewing Area—Grand Opening

Join Flathead Land Trust, Montana FWP, and Flathead Audubon to celebrate the completion of the West Valley Wetlands conservation project and grand opening of the bird viewing area for the public. **Saturday, Oct. 6 from 5-7:30 PM.** The celebration will include food, a program to thank supporters, and viewing of the sandhill cranes as they fly in to roost at sun-

set. Participants will be shuttled from West Valley School to the celebration; no parking space will be available at the celebration site. **Space is limited and filling fast! To get a seat on the shuttle please RSVP to Laura Katzman at lkatzman@flatheadlandtrust.org or 752-8293.**

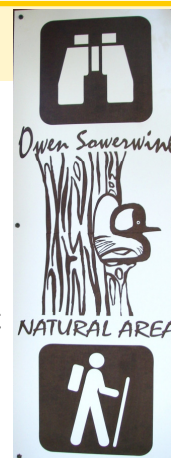
2018 OSNA Work Day

The long-awaited 2018 annual workday for the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area is almost here! Scheduled for Saturday, 29 September, we will gather at the Montessori School on Willow Glen Drive at 0900 ... doors open at 0830. From there, we'll carpool or take the new back trail to OSNA from Montessori and should be done by noon or so.

There are a few of the usual projects that need to be tackled – some trails cleared and mowed, some old fencing removed, and, of course, as always weeds to be addressed. In addition, we will work on the new trail from the Montessori School to OSNA and

installing some new weed identification signage. Many hands make light work, so please come. Bring work gloves and old clothes appropriate for the weather.

This should be a fun and quick day as well as sprucing up OSNA. If you have any questions or suggestions or directions, please contact Bob Lee at 270-0371 or RML3@centurytel.net or Linda Winnie at 253-7430 or lindawin626@gmail.com.



Education Committee News

The Flathead Audubon Education Committee will meet on Thursday, September 27, 2018, 4:00-5:30 PM at the small conference room, United Way. FAS members are always welcome to attend.

We are planning some exciting new activities for this fall, winter and spring. Information about these programs will be written in upcoming Pileated Posts.

by Gail Shay Linne, Education Chair



Thank You!

...to those below who have made donations to Flathead Audubon, May to August, 2018.

Eagle

Whitefish Community Foundation
The Educational Travel Institute
of America



Osprey

Whitefish Credit Union



Laura Katzman continued from page 1

Audubon's generous members provided \$15,000 of those dollars!

Laura is clearly one of those rare folks who is up to the task of successfully putting complex conservation projects together. In 2018, all the needed funding and approvals finally came together and the conservation easement is now in place on 400 acres. Additionally, the West Valley Pond Viewing Area will be dedicated and open for public use on October 6, 2018 (see page 6).

The Flathead Audubon Society thanks Laura for her commitment to local conservation of our important bird and wetland habitats and in developing the West Valley Ponds conservation project from its humble beginnings. We look forward to partnering on other bird habitat projects in the future.
by Gael Bissell

Cordilleran Flycatcher continued from page 2

Hammond's and Cordilleran flycatchers until you can recognize the difference. Sonograms can be helpful along with listening to recordings.

Last summer my husband and I saw and heard a Cordilleran Flycatcher at the Columbia Mountain sight as well as at Little Bitterroot Falls on the road from Highway 2 to Hot Springs. Our last sighting was a real surprise. On a trail above Little Therriault Lake in the Ten Lakes Scenic Area at 6400 feet, we heard an unusual call, which turned out to be a Cordilleran. It sat out in the open long enough for us to get a visual identification, using the eye-ring, the peaked head and the lower mandible as clues, along with the call. Amazingly, he sat still long enough for me to get a picture! It was one of those "Bird Moments" that makes us keep looking for birds, even the hard to identify ones like the *Empidonax* genus.

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+
- ☐ My Own Vision, amount of my choice

The FAS activity which most interests me is:

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

☐ I want my gift to recognize another:

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Please send a notification of this gift to:

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☐ Please do not acknowledge my gift in the Pileated Post

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Late breaking FAS news and announcements
Online FAS membership sign up or renewal
Latest eBird reports on species being observed in the Flathead area





Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

P.O. Box 9173
Kalispell, MT 59904-9173

October 2018



White-winged Crossbill

Allaboutbirds.com

Non-Profit Org.
US Postage Paid
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Kalispell, MT
59904-9173

The Flathead Audubon Society is affiliated with Montana Audubon and the National Audubon Society. Flathead Audubon meets 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 at Gateway Community Center, US Hwy 2 West, Kalispell. 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: lindawin626@gmail.com. Deadline for newsletter copy is the 18th of each month. Contact newsletter editor at 755-1406; email submissions to: lindawin626@gmail.com

Website: www.FlatheadAudubon.org

Conservation Educator - Denny Olson: auduboneducator@gmail.com

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY DIRECTORY

OFFICERS

President	Kay Mitchell	kbmitch@centurytel.net	756-8130
Vice-President	Gael Bissell	gbissell535@gmail.com	261-2255
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Conservation	Lewis Young	889-3492	Owen Sowerwine	Linda Winnie	755-1406
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	Cory Davis	257-3166	Refuges	Kathy Ross	837-3837
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	Jill Fanning	862-8070			
Nominations	Bob Lee	270-0371			

MONTANA AUDUBON

P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624 443-3949 www.MTAudubon.org
Executive Director: Larry Berrin lberrin@mtaudubon.org
Board Member representing FAS, Bob Lee rml3@centurytel.net 270-0371

FLATHEAD AUDUBON SOCIETY

Membership Individual or Family

☐ 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 \$ _____

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

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