

# NINEMILE WILDLIFE WORKGROUP

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May 2014

Edited by Kylie Paul

PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE AND STEWARDSHIP OF LOCAL WILDLIFE AND HABITATS WITHIN THE COMMUNITIES AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE NINEMILE, HUSON, AND ALBERTON REGION.

a genuine powder horn and possibles bag. Visit our website or talk to one of our board members for details.

## EVENTS

Please check out our website [www.ninemilewildlife.org](http://www.ninemilewildlife.org) or join our email list (email us at [ninemilewildlife@gmail.com](mailto:ninemilewildlife@gmail.com)) for event updates.

### Adopt-a-Highway Pickup—June 28

Meet us at 9 am at 29221 Old Highway 10. Dale Chik is coordinating this annual clean-up of our adopted section of road. It's a great way to make some new friends (or see some old ones), help wildlife, and get some exercise. Remember to bring gloves and water.

### Black Powder Rifle Raffle

Buy a ticket for \$10 and get a chance to win a black powder muzzleloader with accessories. Only 250 tickets will be sold and the drawing will be held at the Ninemile Wildlife Celebration on July 19th, 2014. The winner will take home a Lyman Great Plains .54 cal rifle made in Italy. It is a fully finished percussion black powder muzzleloader that includes

### Wildlife Celebration and Raffle Drawing—July 19

Join the board, friends, and fellow neighbors our potluck celebration on July 19th. We are still working out the details but will have some special guests, a silent auction, and will be drawing the winner of our black powder rifle. It will be at the Ninemile Community Center. Be on the lookout for additional information. This event is always really a lot of fun!

**There will be no 'Not Just Cake' Auction this year - we'll hold off until next year!**

### Website Update

We have been working on making changes to our website as we no longer were able to easily update it. With the help of some of our board members, we are utilizing the services of Irestone Web Design, and of Margo Mitchell who volunteered to update the calendar of events. The converted website should be complete by the time you read this, so give it a visit.

### Facebook

Board member Rickie van Berkum has been maintaining our presence on Facebook. So if you want to see what we're up to through that medium, visit the Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup on Facebook.



The raffle rifle.  
Michael Albans

## DID I SEE A GHOST? THE MYSTERY OF THE ODDLY WHITE ANIMALS

BY PAT SWEENEY

Leucism shows up occasionally if you keep an eye out for it. At our home in the Nine Mile, we've had an American goldfinch at our feeder for several weeks this winter with a white crown. We've also seen a few other birds over the years with a patch of white on their wing or some other place where normal coloration is replaced with a white patch. Just a few days ago, a very pale colored yearling white tailed-deer showed up with its mom who had normal coloration. There was a similarly colored deer seen in the Six Mile not long ago. So why do these animals look different from the general population? Usually it is because of a genetic mutation that results in *leucism*, or cells lacking the ability to make pigment. Leucism comes in two main varieties: *paleness*, an equal reduction of pigment in all feathers or fur; and *pied*, an absence of pigment resulting in white patches. *Albinism* differs from leucism, which also results from a genetic mutation that prevents only melanin production which usually results in an all-white individual animal. Another characteristic of albinos is that they have red eyes, which is because their blood vessels show through with no pigment to obscure it.

The yearling deer on the right in the photo is pale overall, with normally colored dark eyes. This type of leucism is less common than individuals with white patches, such as the American goldfinch we nicknamed "Whitetop."

Leucism is relatively rare. Project FeederWatch, a citizen-science program, collected data about plumage variations. In 2 years, 1,605 Unusual Bird Forms were submitted, reporting a variety of plumage oddities in birds. Given that FeederWatchers report about 5.5 million birds each winter, this means a very small fraction of birds seen by FeederWatch participants have any kind of plumage variation. Meanwhile, birds with these abnormally colored plumages can provide an extra challenge to birders trying to identify them, but seeing leucistic animals is a thrill in itself. So keep an eye out for them!



Leucistic white-tailed deer. Pat Sweeney



by Kylie Paul

## WOODPECKER DAMAGE: A SIMPLE SOLUTION TO A COMMON PROBLEM

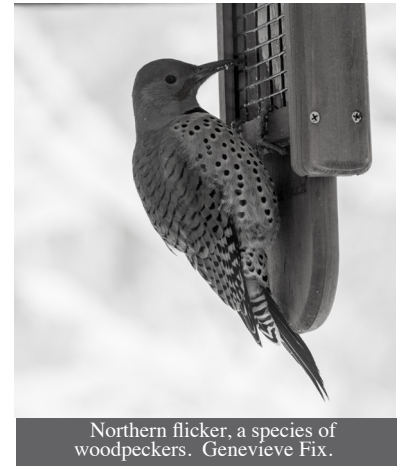
RAATATATATATT!

Each spring, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) wildlife biologist Kristi Dubois receives numerous calls of homeowners complaining of woodpeckers damaging their homes or structures. We've adapted this article from sources by MFWP and by Clifford Shackelford of Texas Parks and Wildlife to inform on what to do in this situation!

If you live in or near a wooded area you may be familiar with the rhythmic drumming of the woodpecker as it pounds its beak into the bark of a tree. This drumming is unique to the woodpecker and a welcome sign of springtime. Montana is home to 7 species of woodpeckers (Red-headed, Downy, Hairy, Three-toed, Black-backed, Pileated and Lewis'); the Yellowbellied and Red-bellied Sapsuckers; and the Northern Flicker. All of these bird species are in the Family Picidae and can be collectively called woodpeckers. These birds are beneficial since they eat quantities of insects.

Several of these species occur near human settings and have become a problem by making holes in man-made structures. Problems can arise in places you wouldn't normally expect them, like heavily wooded areas where these birds appear to have an adequate supply of trees and snags (standing dead trees). These birds are simply searching for a place to call home and you can help provide them.

Woodpeckers hammer or peck on wood or metal for three distinct reasons. The first has to do with foraging, and is the most commonly (yet incorrectly) used explanation for all the noise and damage created. The second reason for hammering is called drumming whereby the male announces his claim to a territory by tapping in rapid succession on resonating wood or metal. This is usually done before or during the breeding season, usually February through July, and serves a similar function as singing in songbirds. Drumming is loud, but it is typically short-lived and shouldn't be considered as an endless or destructive problem. The third form of hammering is destructive — and the word “nuisance” fits into the equation. It is called excavating (or chiseling) whereby either males or females construct a nest or roost hole with a chamber typically in trees. This is the most common cause of damage. Like most birds, woodpeckers breed in the spring, but they roost in holes (one bird per cavity) each and every night of the year. The cavity produced is an upside down L-shaped chamber with an entrance tunnel that angles down at 90 degrees to the chamber where the bird sleeps or rears its young. Unfortunately, some woodpeckers try to place such a cavity in the side of a house, barn, utility pole, fence post, or other man-made structure.



Northern flicker, a species of woodpeckers. Genevieve Fix.



Woodpecker box placed at problem area. Problem solved!

Over the years, there have been many solutions proposed for this problem. Most have come from “product-driven” companies trying to make a sale without identifying the actual cause of the problem. There are many expensive products: from pepper sprays to special paint additives that supposedly deter woodpeckers. These products usually do not work since woodpeckers are actively chiseling away wood and they do not ingest or taste what they are excavating. Woodpeckers even chisel away at creosote-soaked utility poles with no harmful effects to the bird.

When aggressive woodpeckers are a problem, all one has to do is provide a man-made nest box directly at the site that is being damaged. If you don't have a woodpecker problem, feel free to put up a woodpecker nest box anyway! People often put up bluebird boxes to attract that species; this is basically the same thing, but more to accommodate the woodpecker.

Determine which species of woodpecker you're dealing with, as their size differences will influence the size of the nest box. There are instructions on the internet to make your own nest box- just look up ‘woodpecker nest box.’ They are easy and inexpensive and can be used on any structure that's being damaged by woodpeckers. Should you choose not to construct your own box, there are several places that sell them. Simply run a search on the internet, or visit your local bird supply store (Naturalist's Mercantile in Missoula is one such place!). Good luck in satisfying both you and the woodpecker; it can be done and it certainly makes a great conversational piece!

Sandhill crane. Kylie Paul



Bald eagles in a snowstorm. Kylie Paul



Red squirrel. Kylie Paul



## LOCAL OUTDOOR ADVENTURE - POINT OF ROCKS TRAIL

By Pat Sweeney, photos by Pat

With warmer sunny days arriving, many of us are looking for an excuse to get out and enjoy the day. A hike would be nice. How about one that is close to home and snow free in early spring? Montana Department of Transportation has a trail that meets those needs. As a bonus, it has interpretative signs that bring the past alive with visions of early days along the Mullan Road and the Milwaukee Railroad. It's also is a great place to see wildlife. Interested?

If so, drive the north frontage road west of the I-90 exit (#75) for about two miles. The pavement ends and you pass through a couple of old railroad bridge piers. Turn left just past these piers and continue down a gravel road that follows the old railroad grade. You'll pass an osprey nest on the way and after one mile there will be a gate across the road with a parking area on the right. Park there, walk through the entry down the old railroad grade a short distance, and the Mullan road takes off to the right at an interpretive sign.



When hiked in late March, the area was snow free but some ephemeral pools were on the roadbed that needed to be navigated around.

Soon after starting out we were greeted by the unmistakable cascading call of the canyon wren. Along the way we saw lots of spotted towhees, Townsend's solitaires and western bluebirds. Signs along the way give you insight from the time of glacial Lake Missoula to the 2005 fire that burned across much of the landscape. Most of the signs explain the development of transportation corridors and their role in affecting history. You'll learn about an old homesite and probably find several artifacts like we did as we hiked along.



The Mullan Road trail ends near a fence that delineates private property. This is where we surprised a herd of deer, and where you'll head down to return along the railroad grade back to your car. Along the way are more interpretive signs. After you pass around Tunnel 18, if you look across the river, you'll have an excellent view of a bald eagle nest. Once back at your car you'll have walked about 2 and one-half miles, gained a bit of local history and enjoyed seeing wildlife. If you'd like to learn more about the Mullan Road, visit <http://www.mineralcounty.info/BlazingTheMullanRoad.htm>

## WANT YOUR PHOTOS IN THE NWW NEWSLETTER?

One really fun way to relate with wildlife is to head out with your camera and try to find the opportunity to get relatively near in order to take some neat shots - whether of uncommon species or species you see every day! Sometimes this works best from a car, surprisingly. Many animals such as deer and hawks get accustomed to cars driving by, more so than people walking along. So have your camera at the ready next time you're driving through the area! Of course, hiking quietly can also offer chances at wildlife photos too, as well as sitting in one place you think wildlife will turn up at. Of course, make sure you're not too quiet if you're in bear country (which is pretty much everywhere around here!). Hopefully you'll take some wildlife photographs that you can send our way! We'll be sure to include your name with the photo in the newsletter. Thanks in advance!



Deer with frostbitten ears. Bobbe Almer

Young moose. Kylie Paul



White-tailed deer. Kylie Paul



Covote. Kylie Paul

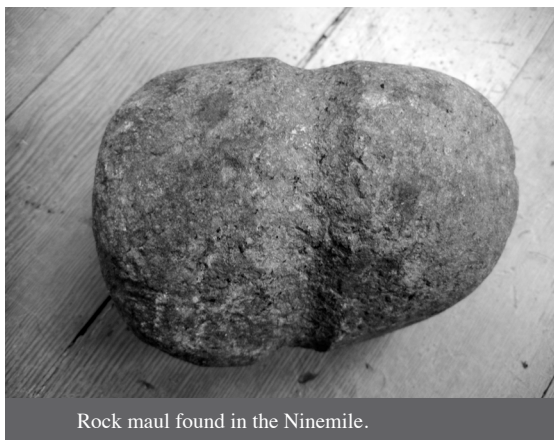


## HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD? HISTORY OF THE NINEMILE

by Pat Sweeney

The mission of the NWW is to strive for connected landscapes and connected communities. Our history has and continues to influence our landscape and habitats. On February 22, the board of the Nine Mile Community Center hosted a potluck lunch and discussion about the history of our area which connected our community in a positive and lively way. About 45 people came to share food and stories and to learn about our area from Milo McLeod and Janene Caywood. Milo worked for 34 years as the Lolo National Forest Archeologist, and Janene, a cultural resource specialist, has researched and documented the homesteading history of the Thisted Ranch. Many in the audience had stories to share and all of us left with a bit more knowledge about the valley we call home. It was appropriate for the gathering to be held in the Stark Schoolhouse, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Milo discussed the prehistory of the area - the time period prior to written record. The Salish, the Pend d' Orielle, the Spokane and the Kootenai were tribes that occupied this area. The Ninemile valley bottom was occupied year round. One site found on the Demin Ranch near Butler Creek has evidence of camas roasting pits. Carolyn Demin brought in some artifacts found on the ranch; a grooved maul (picture below), used for breaking large animal bones to access the marrow; and a pestle or grinding stone, used to prepare food from camas bulbs and other vegetation.



Rock maul found in the Ninemile.

Upslope from the valley bottom were more ephemeral sites. Many of these were discovered after the 2000 fires that cleared off much of the vegetation. Vision quest sites, an area where Native Americans found spiritual guidance and purpose, were found on both the Ninemile and the Reservation Divides. These were identified by rock monuments constructed at the sites.

A quarry of silicified shale in the Prichard Formation, was found near Little Blue Creek. This material was suitable to make spear or arrowhead points and stone tools as it is fractured in a predictable way when pressure was applied or the stone

was struck by an experienced knapper. Points created from this source rock have been found from Plains to Drummond highlighting the importance of this site. Shirley Hager brought in some core rocks of this material that had evidence of flaking that were found on her ranch downstream from the quarry.

The discussion moved to the historical period, beginning a little over 200 years ago through the well-known journals from the Lewis and Clark expedition. The next excursion of note was the exploration and construction of the Mullan Road, led by army engineer John Mullan in the mid 1800s. The road's purpose was to get military supplies to Fort Walla Walla from Fort Benton to avoid a longer, more dangerous route around the tip of South America and up the Columbia River. Remnants of the original road, still in good condition, can still be seen west of Alberton.

The Ninemile became a hub of activity in the 1870s with the arrival of miners searching for gold and other minerals. Claims were established primarily along tributaries of Nine Mile Creek. There is evidence of Chinese miners reworking the area as artifacts from their culture have been found. There were two additional mining periods of merit at the turn of the century and during the great depression of the 1930s.

Anaconda Company actively logged throughout the valley and built a railroad up the valley with several spurs up some of the tributaries. Jim Gouaux mentioned there is still evidence of the railroad along Josephine Creek where you can find an occasional spike. During this developmental period three towns were established: Stark, Martina, and Montreal (also known as Old Town). They are now gone with traces known only to archeologists and historians along with a few of our long term residents.

Another development, still active today, is the Nine Mile Remount Depot. This was established in the 1930s to manage pack teams to supply Forest Service crews fighting fires. This facility was constructed in part by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Their camp, one of the largest in the nation, was located not too far above the Ranger Station. Buildings from that camp were moved by the military to support work on the Alcan Highway to Alaska, but other signs of the camp can still be seen. Besides working on the Remount Depot, CCC enrollees built lookouts and trails, planted trees and fought fires.

CONTINUED ON OTHER PAGE!

Evening grosbeaks. Genevieve Fix



Bald eagle. Kylie Paul.



Eagle nest. Pat Sweeney



## A SAFER PLACE FOR BEARS AND PEOPLE by Pat Sweeney

You may recall the article in our last newsletter about a grant we received to reduce bear conflicts. Well, the last of the bear-resistant cans purchased from that grant are now doing their job. The project that started last June was recently completed with the help of multiple partners at a cost of over \$30,000. We now have 108 bear-resistant carts distributed in most of the Six Mile drainage and in some problem areas of the Nine Mile drainage. This project is the NWW's most ambitious and one of several that we have done to reduce potential human/bear conflicts in the important wildlife corridor that many of us call home.

Most of the money came from a Forest Service Resource Advisory Committee grant with help from several partners that included the U.S. Forest Service, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Ninemile Wildlife Workgroup. One of the major partners who contributed lots of money, time and expertise is Republic Services, especially Max Bauer. Without their support, this project would not have happened and they deserve our thanks for helping to make our community safer for both bears and people.

Our project was recognized by an article in the Missoulian and by a news story on KPAX television. This leveraged our project's visibility by spreading the message about living safely in bear country to a much larger audience. If you'd like to view the KPAX video, you can go to the following link:  
<http://www.kpax.com/news/nine-mile-residents-aim-to-can-bear-problems/>

Remember, the bears are getting active again - please safely store all potential bear attractants and promote bear safety.



## HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.....CONTINUED from other page.....

Janene displayed maps and documents generated by the research she did for Ralph and Betty Thisted on their Burnt Fork property, which resulted in listing the property, the Guy Ressler Homestead, on the National Register of Historic Places. During her presentation she gave us insight into how research is done and some resources you can use to research our past. Some details about the homestead: Guy and his mother, Elizabeth Ressler, homesteaded on adjacent parcels totaling 320 acres in the early 1900's; Guy worked the land more than his mother who was busy running a boarding house in Missoula; Guy raised chickens and grew hay and vegetables before receiving ownership and ultimately selling the land, a common practice for homesteaders. Guy's cabin was saved by the Forest Service during the 2000 fires but Elizabeth's cabin burned down.

*If you'd like more information on the history of the area, you may want to check out the following websites:*

- A good article on the mining history of Nine Mile, <http://www.deq.mt.gov/abandoned-mines/linkdocs/146tech.mcp>
- History and folklore on the Mullan Road near here, <http://www.mineralcounty.info/BlazingTheMullanRoad.htm>
- Search Bureau of Land Management Government Land Office records at <http://www.glore-cords.blm.gov/search/default.aspx>



Leucistic white-tailed deer. Genevieve Fix

# NINEMILE WILDLIFE WORKGROUP

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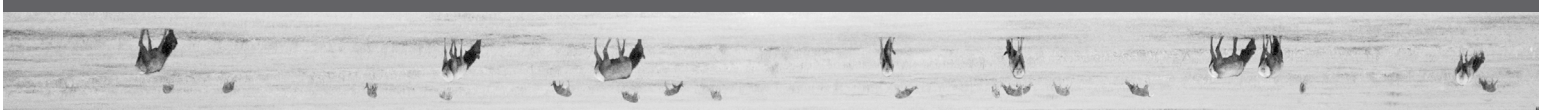
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