

April 2012

Birding Observer



Five Valleys Audubon Society, a Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Calendar

* **Monday, April 2nd, 7pm:** Pat Little will host the April board meeting.

* **Monday, April 9th, 7:30 pm:** Kristina Smucker, Assistant Director of the Avian Science Center at the University of Montana, will talk about birds of the Clark Fork River Superfund sites.

* **Sunday April 15th:** Submission deadline for the May edition of the *Birding Observer*.

* **Saturday, April 21st:** Beginning birdwalk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center. Learn basic skills for bird identification, including use of binoculars and field guides, key field marks, and much more. Families with children and birders of all levels are welcome!

* **Saturday, April 21st:** Full-day field trip to the Warm Springs Ponds led by Gary Swant. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 7:00 AM. PLEASE NOTE THE EARLIER START.

* **Saturday, May 5, 2012:** Full-day field trip to Brown's Lake led by Jim Brown. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 8:00 AM.

A Bird's-Eye View: Using a bird's perspective to inform and determine conservation approaches

Birds have a lot to tell us about how human activities affect the world we live in: different birds live in different habitats and need different resources to thrive. Birds also make great ambassadors - it's relatively easy for the general public to observe and learn about birds, and they can capture the imagination.



On **Monday, April 9th** Kristina Smucker, Assistant Director of the Avian Science Center

at the University of Montana, will describe an educational program developed by the Center in which birds help tell the story of the Upper Clark Fork River Superfund site. The goal of the program is to cultivate a conservation ethic by involving citizens in bird research within the Clark Fork Watershed. The meeting will be at 7:30 p.m. in the Gallagher Business Building, room L14 on the University of Montana campus.

Kristina earned a BA in biology from Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana where she was introduced to birds and a career via a Field Ornithology class. After graduating in 1996 she spent 5 years wandering the country as a field biologist, working on projects as diverse as conservation of Hawaiian Honeycreepers to conducting winter tracking surveys for Canada Lynx in the Seeley – Swan. Kristina received an MS in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana in 2003 and her thesis work focused on changes in bird communities after the 2000 wildfires in the Bitterroot.

Kristina Smucker has worked for the Avian Science Center at the University of Montana for 9 years, serving as the Assistant Director for the past 3 years. The Avian Science Center exists to promote ecological awareness and informed decision making through the collection, synthesis, and dissemination of science-based information on western birds. The center works with a variety of land management agencies to design and implement bird research and monitoring programs throughout the state. Kristina has a passion for outreach and education and has led the development of the Bird's Eye-view Education Program: involving children and citizens in bird research within the Clark Fork Superfund area. The program gives a bird's perspective on the health of our riparian areas, a critical habitat for so many birds that face so many threats.

For over thirty years, Five Valleys Audubon has been active in protecting valued bird habitat across the Missoula community. The Clark Fork River-Grass Valley Important Bird Area (IBA) exemplifies those efforts. Even though we have no regulatory authority upon which to base our actions, we have been successful in protecting critical habitat of the IBA and elsewhere.

Physical changes associated with land development have been an important focus of our resource protection efforts. Accordingly, we have taken steps to play an active role in the statutory subdivision review process. During the past several years, we have reviewed a number of proposed subdivisions that would affect important avian habitat. Invariably, our comments present the case for having adequate open space buffers between riparian habitats and adjoining land development activity. Lot size, location and configuration are frequently the focus of our comments. Human activity within riparian areas and adjoining lands are also commonly addressed. In the end, governing authorities have accepted our suggestions regarding several proposed subdivisions and required improved habitat protection measures as conditions of approval. Over time our role in the review process has evolved, and we are now among the parties invited to offer comment at the earliest stage of governmental review.

Although the subdivision review process can result in some resource protection, it is reactive. A proactive approach is far better and becomes possible because the people of Missoula and Missoula County have twice passed open space bonds totaling \$15 million. Geared at permanently protecting key community resources, these funds have led to the protection of considerable open space. This has largely been accomplished through outright property purchases or the creation of conservation easements that limit future use on valued lands.

Since the first open space bond was passed in 1995, Five Valleys Audubon has been engaged in Missoula's open space preservation effort. This has included seeing the IBA designated as a "cornerstone", an area of focus for Missoula's open space program. We frequently provide input to the process of selecting lands for which open space bond funds will be

expended. This includes identifying specific lands having important habitat values and providing bird survey data for the areas involved. In one instance, we demonstrated our commitment to permanent habitat protection by contributing to the funding used in acquiring a conservation easement.

With Missoula moving inexorably westward, our focus expanded to other resource protection efforts, particularly in the Mullan-Grass Valley area. In one such endeavor, we provided funding for an educational film promoting awareness of the need to protect our mountain valley grasslands. We also supported research on the nesting ecology of a small population of Swainson's hawks in grasslands west of Missoula. Our role in the study has been to provide funding as well as field research assistance. Information regarding this rare breeding population of hawks will help us guide future land development away from critical nesting and foraging sites. It will also serve to direct attention toward places needing open space protection.

In many respects, a mosaic of open space lands defines Missoula. Lands used for parks, trails and agriculture, as well as those that sustain our scenic backdrops, are all part of the blend. Critical bird habitat is an essential ingredient of the mix. Although defined by bird species, these lands are valuable gauges of biodiversity. The presence of a viable bird population assures there are conditions that support a range of other plant and animal species. Given the significance of avian habitat, it is important we continue to focus attention on protecting these resources and help preserve the open space heritage of our community.

Board Changes

At our annual meeting we elected two new Directors – Clancy Cone and Betsy Griffing – along with Kit Stevens (Treasurer) and Pat Little (President), all for three-year terms. The Vice President and the Secretary position are vacant. If you are interested in serving on the board, please contact Pat Little.

Many thanks to retiring board members Joyce Nave, Bill Boggs, Alex Taft, and Char Murray. You have served us well, and we are grateful for your time, your energy, and your passion for the birds.

Beginning Birding Field Trip Report

by Lynn Tennefoss

On **Saturday, February 18th**, eight hardy birders braved the cold for a lively and productive beginning field trip at the Lee Metcalf NWR with leaders Bob Danley, Refuge Education Specialist, and Lynn Tennefoss. The group had many excellent views of Rough-legged Hawks - perched, on the ground and in the air - and there were many species of ducks on the ponds adjacent to and across the road from the Refuge Headquarters, permitting lots of practice with field marks. Comparisons of Common and Barrow's Goldeneye are made easy when they are both seen in the same scope view! The group also spent time comparing several different spotting scope models, discussing the virtues of different field guides, and learning many aspects of the natural history of species seen. Altogether close to 20 species were spotted and hot chocolate at the end of the outing helped everyone warm up! The next monthly beginning birding trip will be at 10 am on Saturday, April 21st at the Lee Metcalf Refuge Headquarters, and birders of all levels are welcome to join us!

February Field Trip

by Terry McEneaney

February 25, 2012: Our birding field trip to the Mission Valley was a success, and everybody enjoyed themselves. We had a total of 16 people participate in the event, including ten people from Missoula and six people from Ronan/Polson. Even though it snowed the night before, we didn't let a little snow stop us from reaching the Mission Valley.

Our efforts paid off since we found ten Snowy Owls on the Polson Hills. Also we came across a very tame Merlin, and a very unusual leucistic American Coot hidden in a large flock of several thousand coots on the shores of Flathead Lake. The coots were tightly clustered and were being harassed by two Bald Eagles, which was very entertaining.

Other notable birds included: one female Sharp-shinned Hawk, over 140 buteos (Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks), one Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk, four Great Horned Owls, and a Northern Shrike. We also found Eurasian-collared Dove, Rock Pigeon, Barrow's and Common Goldeneye, Northern Shoveler, Lesser Scaup, American Wigeon, Bufflehead, Redhead, Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan, American Kestrel, Northern

Harrier, Red-winged Blackbird, European Starling, Cedar and Bohemian Waxwing, Ring-billed Gull, Northern Flicker, Common Raven and American Crow. It was a wonderful day in the field, with quality of observations overpowering quantity of birds.

March Field Trip

by Larry Weeks

Sunday, March 11,

2012: Brian Williams, at the request of Rebecca Sills, led a beginning birders field trip for Five Valleys Audubon at Maclay Flat. Over 35 people



attended and the majority were novice birders. Three young girls and a 6-week old baby were also in attendance. A Missoulian reporter and photographer joined the group and put together a front-page story for the Monday newspaper. We walked from the parking lot to the boat ramp and then upstream for about 500 yards. It took us 2 hours to cover that short distance because there were so many birds in that short distance. Brian started with a discussion about the red-breasted nuthatch which was followed by the sighting of an American robin and a small flock of red crossbills. There were some common mergansers in the river, a fly-over by a red-tailed hawk and a mature bald eagle that flew down the river and landed in a large cottonwood which allowed its viewing through 2 spotting scopes. As we progressed slowly upstream, avoiding the icy trails wherever possible, we encountered some very active downy woodpeckers, a large flock of black-capped chickadees, a couple of white-breasted nuthatches, and a pygmy nuthatch that was excavating a cavity near the top of a dead branch.

Since the pygmy nuthatch was staying in one position, we were able to provide scope views of the bird. Then, a great horned owl flushed and landed on a bare limb of a pine tree which allowed a scope view. A large flock of red crossbills appeared at the edge of the river and a female crossbill provided a super look as she foraged on debris at the edge of the river. Mixed in with the crossbills were several pine siskins. Other birds heard singing on the other side of the river included song sparrow, red-winged blackbird and northern flicker. We ended up with 17 species for the trip.

Meet The Board

Pat Little, Five Valleys Audubon Society President, grew up in England and came to the U.S.A. in 1980 pursuing a career in aeronautical engineering. One day he got tired of working for large companies, quit his job, and started volunteering at The Nature Conservancy. They hired him, and he worked for them, in Seattle, for eleven years. In 1994 he took a hawk ID class, which opened his eyes to the world of birds and changed his life. Pat



has spent many Falls since then sitting in cold drafty blinds on mountain ridges trying to trap and band hawks. This spring he is hoping that flickers will nest in a box in his backyard, if he can evict the squirrels.

Pat Little

Board Highlights:

- We are talking to folks in the Ninemile about ways to work together and help them conserve some of the land there.
- We are working with a number of groups, notably Five Valleys Land Trust and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, to see if we can protect land adjacent to the Frenchtown mill, for shorebird habitat and peregrine nest sites.
- The Bonner Development Group has asked us to help them with bird habitat planning for the new park there.
- We are working with Rebecca Sills, who has a TogetherGreen Fellowship, to find ways to engage young people in chapter activities and leadership (our new Facebook page is a result of this project). Five of our board members received Facebook training from Rebecca.
- We decided to put \$1,100 of our chapter's money into the P.L. Wright Memorial Research Awards this year, which will roughly double the amount generated by the endowment.
- We will have a table at the Earth Day celebrations at Caras Park April 22nd.

Wings Across the Big Sky

June 8–10, 2012, Kalispell, Montana

Spotlight on Flathead Audubon's Conservation Education Program

Flathead Audubon seeks to promote awareness and appreciation of the natural world through its Conservation Education Program. This program is the only staffed, locally independent program in the Flathead Valley that provides nature-based education free of charge. Close to five thousand children, youth and adults have been served during the past year through its community, family and school-related programs. And, it all happens with only one part-time, visionary education coordinator.

Flathead Audubon is striving to make the position of Conservation Education Coordinator sustainable for years to come. That's why Montana Audubon will be showing its support for this valuable program by sharing proceeds of the festival raffle, as well as dessert and live auctions at Saturday evening's banquet. And that's why we thank you for joining us in these lively fundraising events!

Professor Avian Guano, the world-renowned, eccentric German professor of ornithology will instruct and entertain us with his bird-brained slant on our neotropical avian friends. These "snowbirds" spend half their year in the tropics and half their year living with us in Montana. Professor Avian Guano will also share his legendary mimicry of bird songs and be one of three judges for our bird-calling contest. Come prepared to be the first to recognize the good professor's imitations as well as to demonstrate your own bird calling prowess! Prizes will be awarded on the spot for the most accurate AND the most "loony" songs.

Welcome New Members:

Lowell C. Anderson	Sandy Boehmler	Donna Bowne
Nina Cummer	Karin Dague	Gloria Doty
Mr. John Duffield	Ronni Flannery	Shan Guisinger
Miriam Hertz	Rebecca Holman	Karol Linclon
Gayanna Magcosta	Levi McKay	Emily Poirier
Zack Porter	Nancy Rice Fritz	Becky Richards
Renee Taaffe		



Thanks to our Returning Members:

Will & Coco Ballew	Tony Beltramo	Jeff Brooks	Jud Moore
Jami R. FitzGerald	Kathleen Foley	Kathy & John Gardner	Bob Rost
Denise Hamersley	James Harkins	Geoffrey Hill	Stan Nicholson
Roger & Linda Holtom	Tony & Michele Hoyt	Judith & Donald Kiely	
Bob & Marcie Kircher	Poody McLaughlin	Janet B. Mendez	
Miriam Morgan	Richard Petaja	Howard Reinhardt	

Hi Friends! Go Green!

Save paper and postage by **viewing your *Birding Observer* newsletter online**. Five Valleys Audubon Society now gives members two different options to view the newsletter electronically. We can email you once a month, letting you know when the latest edition is **available on our web site (www.fvamisoula.org)**, or we can **email the newsletter directly to you** – it’s your choice. Just send an email request with your name to Vick Applegate at k7vk@arrrl.net, and let us know you if you wish to be added to one of the lists. We do not share our email lists with others. Please keep us updated with your email address changes.

Join National Audubon Society and Five Valleys Audubon Society

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and my local Chapter. I will receive the *Audubon* magazine and the *Birding Observer*, as well as participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues are shared between NAS and my local Chapter.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

\$20 for a one-year membership for an individual or family

Please make the check payable to National Audubon Society and mail to: National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250. **C2Z N53 0Z**

Join Five Valleys Audubon Society

Please enroll me as a Chapter member of the Five Valleys Audubon Society. I will receive the *Birding Observer* and may participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues remain entirely with the Chapter.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email (optional): _____

\$15 is enclosed for Chapter-only membership

An additional sum of _____ is also included to support Chapter activities.

Please make check payable to the Five Valleys Audubon Society and mail to: Five Valleys Audubon Society, PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807.

Five Valleys Audubon Society

PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807

<http://www.fvamisoula.org>



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