

April 2013

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

- **Monday, April 1st:** April Fools half-day field trip led by Terry Toppins. Meet in the Northwest corner of the UM Adams Center Parking Lot at 8:00am for carpooling - destination is a surprise, returning at noon. For more info call Terry Toppins 214-1194.
- **Monday, April 1st, 7pm:** The April board meeting will be held at Betsy's office: Axilon Law Group, 257 W Front St, Suite B in downtown Missoula.
- **Monday, April 8th, 7:30pm:** UM Professor Dr. Ken Dial will present on the ecology and evolution of baby birds at the April program meeting. Assemble at 7:30 p.m. in room 123 of the Gallagher Business Building on the UM campus.
- **April 11th, 18th, 25th & 27th:** Workshop for intermediate birders. To sign up, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or email him at bwsgene@onlinemt.com. See article on page 2 for details.
- **Monday, April 15th:** Submission deadline for the May edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, April 20th:** Warm Springs field trip led by Gary Swant. Meet in the middle of the UM Adams Center Parking Lot at 8AM for carpooling or at the I90 Conoco at the west end of Deer Lodge at 9:15AM. The group will return to Missoula around 4PM. Bring your lunch.
- **Saturday, April 20th:** Beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10AM-Noon. Meet the field trip leader, at the Refuge Visitor's Center.

The Ecology and Evolution of Baby Birds

The origin of flight has been a subject of intense scientific interest for centuries. Some scientists believe it started with animals running fast and flapping their arms to get a little lift; others believe that early flyers climbed a tree and leapt into the air, gliding gently to earth. These two camps are well-entrenched in their positions—with not much middle ground. But the speaker at our April meeting, **Dr. Ken Dial, of the University of Montana**, has developed another, competing, hypothesis. In his research, Ken has observed that some bird species, and especially the baby birds, use their wings and feet in ways that allow them to climb steep slopes. The way they flap their wings helps press their feet against the surface they are climbing, and so the birds can quickly get off the ground and into a tree to escape a predator. When Darwin proposed his theory of evolution, one question he was asked was “what use is half a wing?” Dr. Dial has shown that, for baby birds with their small, partially developed wings, half a wing is, in fact, really quite useful.

Dr. Dial will describe the ecology and evolution of baby birds. The meeting will be in the Gallagher Business Building, room 123, at 7:30pm on Monday April 8th.

Dr. Ken Dial is Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of Montana. He received his PhD in Zoology from Northern Arizona University, and then went on to a post-doctoral Fellowship at Harvard. He was instrumental in creating UM's Field Research Station at Fort Missoula, and making it one of the foremost bird research labs in the country. His work has appeared in the prestigious journals *Nature* and *Science*, and he has had over 60 papers published in other scientific journals. Ken hosted the show “All Bird TV” which ran for 29 episodes on Animal Planet. Last year he gave the keynote speech at the Society of Experimental Test Pilots' Symposium.



Peeps from the Board: Christmas Bird Count Data

by Larry Weeks

I have been the compiler for the Missoula Christmas Bird Count for the past 13 years. I decided to analyze this data for interesting observations and trends. Whenever I include a number in parenthesis, it will represent the 13-year average. The average number of bird species was (76). During the last two years, the Missoula Count has set consecutive records of 85 and 87 species. The total number of species counted over the 13-year period was 120. The total number of birds has averaged close to (8100). The ten most abundant birds were Bohemian waxwings (1290), mallards (640), Canada geese (542), house finches (492), black-capped chickadees (404), house sparrows (399), black-billed magpies (370), rock pigeons (354), red-breasted nuthatches (235), and red-winged blackbirds (226). Birds reported on only one Count during the 13-year period included tundra swan, trumpeter swan, snow goose, canvasback, ruddy duck, ferruginous hawk, peregrine falcon, boreal owl, Virginia rail, Anna's hummingbird, Lewis's woodpecker, gray catbird, varied thrush, Swainson's thrush, American pipit, hoary redpoll, gray-crowned rosy finch, and lesser goldfinch. The Missoula Count has had 14 duck species, but only the mallard, common goldeneye and common merganser have been reported on all 13 Counts. Green-winged teal was only missed on one Count. Red-tailed hawks and rough-legged hawks had the same average of (37) birds per Count. Other raptors that occurred on all Counts included bald eagle (34), sharp-shinned hawk (6), merlin (3), great horned owl (11), and long-eared owl (22).

The Blue Mountain fire occurred during the summer of 2003. Missoula's circle includes some of the burned area, and Terry Toppins had nine black-backed

woodpeckers in 2004 and one in 2005. These were the only black-backed woodpeckers reported in the 13-year period. The literature suggests that black-backs will use a burned area for up to five years, but our data indicates that the activity drops off much quicker.



Black-backed Woodpecker



Eurasian-collared dove

During the same period, the three-toed woodpeckers on Blue Mountain were 14, 4 and 1 for the years 2004, 2005 and 2006.

There were three birds that showed an increasing trend over the 13 years; wild turkey, northern flicker and Eurasian-collared dove. Although Audubon has reported that the population of northern flickers is decreasing, they are doing well in Missoula. The European-collared doves have shown a dramatic increase from zero up until 2007 to 251 during the 2012 Count. The 2012 Count had a Swainson's thrush, a varied thrush and a gray catbird which are indicators of milder winters in Missoula.

Workshop for Intermediate Birders

by Larry Weeks

The Five Valleys Audubon Society will offer a workshop for intermediate birders again this year. This workshop should appeal to birders who enjoy birding and want to improve their identification skills. It will consist of three classroom sessions and one field trip. The classroom sessions are scheduled for Thursday, April 11th, and Thursday, April 18th, and Thursday, April 25th. The field trip will be held on Saturday, April 27th at the Lee Metcalf NWR. The classroom sessions will be held at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Regional Office at 3201 Spurgin Road and will start at 7:00 PM and last until 9:30 PM. The program will include a full session on hawks, eagles and owls, and 30-minute to 60-minute sessions on waterfowl, woodpeckers, shorebirds, warblers, sparrows, and birding-by-ear.

There will be a \$35 charge for the workshop. To sign up, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or email him at bwsgene@onlinemt.com. The workshop will be limited to 30 participants.

April Rain Song

*Let the rain kiss you
Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops
Let the rain sing you a lullaby
The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk
The rain makes running pools in the gutter
The rain plays a little sleep song on our roof at night
And I love the rain.*

~ Langston Hughes

Board Update By Pat Little

The board has approved a 2013 contribution of \$1,100 from chapter funds toward the P.L. Wright Awards, which will be added to the \$1,524.53 coming from the P.L. Wright Endowment (half of the total income, as prescribed in our Bylaws) for a total of \$2,624.53 which will be available for grants to students this year.

The chapter now has liability insurance through a program designed for Audubon chapters and similar organizations. The annual policy premium is \$300.

At the Society's annual meeting we elected two new board members: Ed Monnig (Director) and Andrea Stierle (Secretary). Welcome aboard, Ed and Andrea!

Call for Award Nominations

Each year Montana Audubon recognizes individuals who work for the conservation and protection of birds and other wildlife. They are currently seeking nominations in the following categories:

- **Lifetime Achievement Award.** For a volunteer who has dedicated extraordinary effort, time and energy to shape the activities and successes of a local Audubon Chapter and/or Montana Audubon.
- **Educator of the Year.** For a person who has shown outstanding achievement in educating others about birds, other wildlife, and conservation of habitat.
- **Conservationist of the Year.** For an individual who has provided significant wildlife conservation achievement in Montana.
- **Citizen Scientist of the Year.** For a person contributing significantly to our knowledge and understanding of birds and their habitats through monitoring and observations.
- **Special Achievement Award.** For a person who has shown an extraordinary commitment to birds, other wildlife, and the conservation of habitat on a special project or through special activities.

Download a nomination form from MT Audubon's website at www.mtaudubon.org/about/awards.html. Nominations are due at the office by May 22, 2013. Award winners will be announced at the Bird Festival banquet in Lewistown on June 7th. Thanks for your help in our search for this year's award winners!

Website Update

Here are some recent changes to our website:

- Following on our theme of spring arrivals, the Bird of the Month for April is the Sandhill crane.
- In the gallery we have added photographs of the American bittern, Northern saw-whet owl, great grey owl (the one that's been hanging out at Maclay Flat), peregrine falcon, and American and Eurasian wigeons. Also we added a header image of a female wood duck.
- The calendar has been updated to include the Intermediate Birding Class, and details of upcoming field trips.



If you haven't already seen it, you may want to check out our website, www.fvaudubon.org. The site has been developed to keep you—our members and friends—up to date with our chapter activities, and also with other bird-related happenings in and around Missoula. It is designed to work on smart phones and tablets, as well as regular computers, so you can check on our upcoming events while you're on the go.

Some of the things you can find on the site are:

- **Recent bird sightings**, from eBird
- **Calendar of events** – field trips, member meetings, classes
- **What's that bird?** – a guide to identifying common birds in our area
- **Bird of the month** – an article each month about a bird, or bird-related subject
- Reports from recent **field trips** and **other events**
- **Birding hotspot maps** for Missoula and the Bitterroot Valley
- A **gallery** of beautiful bird photographs

This is a work in progress, so please let us know if there is something you would like to see on the site, or if you have suggestions for improvements. There are many places on the site where you can add comments directly, or you can email us at info@fvaudubon.org. We hope you enjoy the new website and find it useful.

**Montana Audubon Celebrates
Natural Diversity in the Heart of Montana
Lewistown's *Wings Across the Big Sky Festival*, June 7-9, 2013**



Few areas in Montana showcase bird habitats as rich and diverse as those found in the heart of our vast state, where the mountains meet the plains. Lewistown is a community located at the geographic center of Montana in the vast Judith Basin. Although mostly rolling prairie, farms and ranches, the Lewistown area features five beautiful mountain ranges, the Snowies, Judiths, Moccasins, Belts, and the Highwoods. Visitors will find spectacular examples of native prairie, forested coulees, river bottoms, and "breaks" badlands. Species such as Western Meadowlarks, Mountain Plovers, Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Prairie Falcons, Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse, and Bald Eagles call this area home.

This year, the Montana Audubon bird festival will be held in Lewistown, June 7–9, the very heart of Montana! As one of only ten cities nationwide selected to receive an Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds grant, Lewistown is gearing up to welcome hundreds of birders to the region. The Urban Bird Treaty program, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, brings together private citizens, as well as federal, state, and municipal agencies and non-governmental organizations to conserve migratory birds through education programs, participation in citizen science, conservation and habitat improvement efforts, and a reduction in hazards to birds in urban/suburban areas.

For its annual bird festival this year, Montana Audubon aims to capitalize on that rich diversity, and the abundance of species that comes with it, by basing the festival in Lewistown. Co-hosted by Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and the City of Lewistown, the festival is centered at the Yogo Inn in Lewistown, June 7-9.

This year's festival celebrates the area's ecological diversity and abundance of birdlife with 33 guided field trips to the area's shrub-steppes, grasslands, forest, and wetlands and riparian habitats on Saturday and Sunday. Led by ornithologists and local bird guides, the birding trips include tours of several national wildlife refuges in the area, among them Charles M. Russell, War Horse, Lake Mason, and Bowdoin National Refuges. Also featured will be trips to the American Prairie Reserve, Missouri Breaks Monument, the Judith Mountains, and many interesting destinations close to Lewistown.

This year's festival theme "Birding and Conservation in the Heart of Montana," will feature top-notch experts and speakers. Delivering this year's keynote address is Susan Bonfield, Director of Environment for the Americas, which coordinates the largest hemispheric celebration of migratory birds, International Migratory Bird Day. She is also the coordinator of the Western Hummingbird Partnership which brings together researchers and educators in efforts to conserve healthy populations of hummingbirds. Susan will be speaking on the fascinating world of these vibrant birds, what threatens their populations, and how you can help conserve them.

The festival also features four other authorities in their field who will share their expertise on topics such as Montana Audubon's current sage and grassland conservation and citizen science efforts, the Urban Bird Treaty project, the Long-billed Curlew Initiative in Montana, and the value and function of riparian areas for landowners.

This is a family-friendly event where both seasoned and beginning birders, including children, should find plenty to intrigue them.

For more information and to register for the event, visit www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival or contact the festival coordinator, Nat Forcier at (406) 443-3949 or Natalie@mtaudubon.org. Special room rates at the Yogo Inn have been arranged for attendees.

Welcome New Members:

Suzanne Aboufadi
Thomas Kallmeyer
Marty Onishuk
Barbara Walsh
Sally Woodruff

Florence Chessin
Jacqueline Kiner
David R. Pierce
Beth Warren

Erin Ellerbeck
Glenn Moffatt
Lee Rufus
Phyllis Wight



Go Green and Save !



Do you want to help Five Valleys Audubon Society save money, paper and volunteers' time? Please consider viewing your **Birding Observer** online. In addition your online copy will have 'color' content and you will receive your newsletter much earlier than the mailed hard copy!

If you can **Go Green** and wish to receive your **Birding Observer** only via email, just send us a request with your name to Vick Applegate at k7vk@arrl.net. You can also always find your current newsletter on the Five Valleys Audubon Society's website at: www.fvaudubon.org. Thanks!

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: _____

Please note: The newsletter will be delivered electronically unless requested otherwise.

\$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**

Join National Audubon Society & 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, and I may participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues are shared between NAS and my local Chapter.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please note: The newsletter will be delivered electronically unless requested otherwise.

\$20 for a 1-year individual or family membership

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Please make the check payable to National Audubon Society and mail to:

**National Audubon Society
PO Box 42250
Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250**



TO:

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