

April 2022

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

- **Saturday, April 2nd:** Five-hour late day field trip to the Ninepipes area to look for Short-eared Owls. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 4PM. This will be a driving field trip. Please wear a mask if you carpool with people other than your household members and practice social distancing in the field.
- **Monday, April 4th, 6:00-8:00pm:** Please join us in the Blackfoot Room of the Missoula Public Library, for the Five Valleys Audubon Society Board Meeting.
- **Monday, April 11th, 7:00pm:** Attend our monthly chapter meeting to hear Erick Greene's presentation on Ospreys. We will meet in Room 110 of the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building (ISB) at UM.
- **Saturday, April 16th:** Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR from 10AM to 1PM. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center. This trip will include a mile of level hiking. Note, we will continue to practice social distancing. There is an outdoor toilet at the Visitor's Center.
- **Saturday, April 30th:** All-day field trip to Brown's Lake. Meet at 8AM in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot. This will be a driving trip.

April Program Meeting: Ospreys as Environmental Sentinels

Please join us at the chapter meeting on Monday, April 11, 2022, at 7PM to hear our speaker, Dr. Erick Greene present his talk: Ospreys as Environmental Sentinels. As an extra special treat, Rob Domenech, Director of Raptor View Research Institute, will also be joining us.

We are lucky that Ospreys are so abundant here in western Montana – who doesn't love to see an Osprey dive into the water and emerge with a big fish! Dr. Greene will talk about some fascinating and



important aspects of Osprey biology – how long they live, how they spend their winters, and some of our local favorite birds. He will discuss what Ospreys can tell us about the health of our streams, rivers, and lakes. Ospreys are at the top of the food chain; they eat large fish, which eat smaller fish, and so on. This means that if there are contaminants in the water, they get concentrated up the food chain. In conjunction with the clean-up of the Clark Fork River Superfund Site, Dr. Greene has been studying Ospreys during the past 15 years. He and his colleagues take blood and feather samples from Osprey chicks and analyze them for heavy metals and other contaminants. In general, the Superfund Clean-up has been going well, but there have been some worrying trends during the last few years. In some places along the Clark Fork River, Osprey populations have declined by over 50%.

Erick Greene is a professor in the Division of Biological Sciences and in the Wildlife Biology Program at the University of Montana. Erick dropped out of high school and lived for a year in the Galapagos Islands, assisting with studies on Darwin's Finches. He then worked on seabirds 800 miles north of the Arctic Circle with the Canadian Wildlife Service. His PhD is from Princeton University. He has been able to come full circle and return to studying Ospreys in Montana.

The meeting will be held in Room 110 in the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building (ISB) on the University of Montana campus. The building lies on the south end of campus on Beckwith Avenue between Maurice and Mansfield avenues. Currently, masks are encouraged but not required by the University. Because our membership is composed of many older adults, we encourage attendees to continue to wear masks at our in-person meetings. Because in-person attendance has been low during the pandemic, there should be plenty of room in ISB 110 to socially distance yourself from others, so that you feel comfortable attending. You also have the option of watching the meeting over the zoom link. Zoom link details are on page 4.

**Peeps from The Board:
Our IBA and Challenges to Protecting Birds
By Jim Brown**

I'm sure you have noticed how the realty market has soared in the Missoula area and beyond. Not surprisingly, subdivisions this past year are popping up throughout the area. This has kept our conservation team, Jim Brown and Gerhard Knudsen, busy trying to assess the impacts to birds and their habitat from proposed new developments. One area of the greater Missoula Valley that we are particularly concerned about is the Clark Fork River-Grass Valley Important Bird Area where 80 percent of the land is privately owned. IBA's are part of an international effort managed by the National Audubon Society in the United States that is aimed at identifying critically important bird habitats and promoting conservation measures to sustain those habitats. We interact with landowners and County officials to explain the significance of important bird areas and suggest how landowners and developers can enact conservation measures that minimize bird impacts.

Our IBA was formally recognized in 2006 and identified as having continental significance due to the occurrence of Lewis's Woodpecker, other significant species of conservation concern and a high diversity of breeding and migrant birds. Fortunately, this IBA has a lot of public access for people to enjoy the many bird species that use the area.

Shortly after the IBA was established we began visiting with County planners and landowners to tell them about the important bird resource. The County planners soon recognized us as being a helpful source of knowledge about the potential impacts of land development on bird occurrence and breeding bird activity. They ask us to review all subdivision proposals in Missoula County, which led to us being recognized as a "reviewer agency". Since 2008, when we began reviewing subdivisions, we have reviewed 125 subdivision proposals and submitted comments on almost all of them. Since January 1, this year we have reviewed seven proposals with a couple more awaiting our attention. Most subdivision proposals have minor impacts and are easily handled. On these we often suggest how landowners can improve the habitat on their new property.

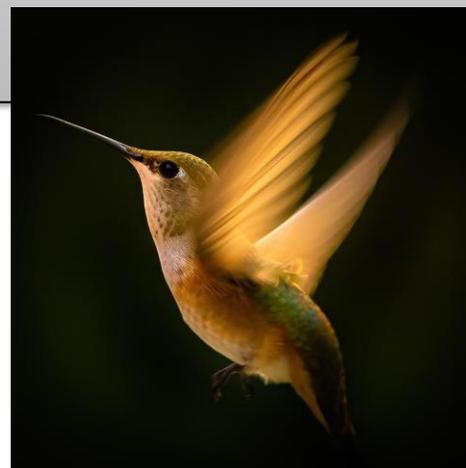
Some proposals become contentious and result in County Commissioner hearings where we offer testimony about bird impacts and suggest ways to reduce or mitigate impacts. For example, recently we opposed a subdivision that would have put five home sites on lower north side of McCauley Butte. After three hearings, the County Commissioners rejected the subdivision. That decision by the County was challenged in court as being arbitrary. But

the court turned the appeal down because our Chapter had offered substantial data and evidence to support the Commissioners' decision. We are currently arguing a case with the developer and County that a proposed development leaves too little non disturbance buffer to be acceptable. The solution will require fewer home sites or redesigning the size and shape of the proposed 10 lots. We'll see what happens.

Missoula recently acquired the old gravel quarry known as the Knife River ponds now called the Fort Missoula ponds. These ponds are in the IBA along the Bitterroot River and have become an incredible stopover for migrant waterfowl. We have joined with the Clark Fork Coalition, Montana Natural History Center, and representatives from University of Montana to encourage managing the ponds area as a natural area. The City of Missoula will hold a public hearing probably late this fall to decide on uses for the ponds. We will need your help then to promote managing the ponds as a natural area for the public to access and enjoy the many bird species that occur there. Stay tuned to Five Valleys Audubon news to hear more about this developing opportunity.

Women Celebrate Birds, Art Show

Women Celebrate Birds, a show of avian art, will be exhibited at the Zootown Arts Community Center (ZACC), located at 216 W. Main St., in Missoula, April 8-May 2, 2022. There will be an opening reception on Second Friday, April 8th, 5-8PM. Twelve artists celebrate their love of birds and art in this show of varied mediums, including: photography, painting, woodcut prints, etchings, and ceramics. Artists exhibiting are: Jean Albus, Uschi Carpenter, Kate Davis, Claire Emery, Sally Friou, Stephanie Frostad, Diane Olhoeft, Karen Savory, Cynthia Swidler, Gail Trenfield and Cathy Weber.



**Hummingbird
photo by
Uschi Carpenter**

Mission Valley Field Trip Summaries February 26, 2026

Summary #1 by Larry Weeks

The February field trip was to the Mission Valley to look for raptors. This was the 3rd field trip to the Mission Valley in the last 3 months because the winter raptors are so plentiful. When the group assembled at the Cenex gas station in Ronan, there were 24 people and 10 cars. Therefore, we split up again and Alex Kearney led one group and I led the other. My group started at Moiese and did the regular field trip in reverse. We got a response from a Virginia Rail along Mission Creek and there were about 1000 Mallards in the Foust Slough. We then encountered a flock of Common Redpolls that flew when I drove by but Thomas Kallmeyer watched them land and provided scoped views for most of the participants. Moiese Valley Road had mostly Red-tailed Hawks and a few Bald Eagles. When we moved to Valley View Road, we had 2 pairs of Great Horned Owls on consecutive homesteads. There were more Red-tails, Bald Eagles and a few Rough-legged Hawks. A side trip by Thomas produced 2 Long-eared Owls which were the birds of the trip. There was also an American Kestrel on that side trip. As we birded from Polson to Round Butte Road, we had more Red-tails including 2 Harlan's, 2 more Great Horned Owls and some American Tree Sparrows. We ended up with 24 bird species and the breakdown of the raptors included 37 Red-tails, 9 Rough-legged, 16 bald Eagles, 6 Great Horned Owls, 2 Long-eared Owls and 1 American Kestrel.



Long-eared Owl

Summary 32 by Alex Kearney

The February field trip to view raptors in the Mission Valley went really well. Both weather and birds cooperated, with Larry asking me to lead half of the group because of the large turn-out, again. All went very smoothly, with Golden Eagles, Bald Eagles, Red Tail Hawks, Rough-legged Hawks, Prairie Falcon, and Owls (and I can't forget a Northern Shrike) all seemingly eager for our viewing. Words are difficult to describe the Mission Mountains on a bright sunny day, they were perfectly imposing throughout the day and added an excellent reminder to us all of how lucky we are to make time to view birds. I had taken some time to put together a "planned route", but my plan did not include viewing 62 Red Tail Hawks or 32 Rough-legged Hawks, or several Short-eared and Great Horned Owls, the birding was interfering with my timing but sometimes too many birds can be a great distraction from the time of day (and distance to cover). Multiple times we were distracted

by Horned Larks, Tree Sparrows, and a Merlin. It was especially nice to get everyone in our group to view a pair of Great Horned Owls that remained perched close by without setting up a scope, but regretfully shutting everyone onwards to continue on the planned route (with me unsure if we would be leaving the Mission Valley with the sun still shining). The drive south on Moiese Valley Road had a lot of raptors and our timing to drive through was perfect, based upon witnessing the bird's appetite. All counted there were 31 species observed that included 149 raptors and 1 Northern Shrike.



Northern Shrike

Workshop for Beginning & Intermediate Birders By Larry Weeks

The Five Valleys Audubon Society will offer a workshop for beginning and intermediate birders. This workshop should appeal to birders just getting started and to birders who want to improve their identification skills. It will consist of four classroom sessions and one field trip. The classroom sessions are scheduled for Thursdays on March 31st, April 7th, 14th and 21st at 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm and will be held at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Office at 3201 Spurgin Road. The program will include a full session on hawks, eagles and owls, and 30 – 60-minute sessions on bird anatomy, migration, waterfowl, woodpeckers, shorebirds, warblers, sparrows, and birding-by-ear. The field trip will be held on April 23rd or 24th. There will be a \$35 charge for the workshop or \$10 per session. To sign up, call Larry Weeks at 406-549-5632 (home) or 406-540-3064 (cell), or you can email him at bwsgene@gmail.com.

Board Update

The Chapter held its Annual Meeting on March 14th, and we elected a slate of new and returning Board Members to 3-year terms. Welcome new Board Member Ser Anderson and returning Members Rose Stoudt and Edward Monnig. In addition, Poody McLaughlin has agreed to chair the Conservation standing committee. We run on volunteer power, and we could not achieve our conservation and education goals without our dedicated Board of Directors and standing committees. Thanks everyone for serving!

New: Town Bound Birding Series

By Jacob Glass

FVAS is excited to announce its upcoming *Town Bound Birding Series*. Once a month from April to September, we will host a bird watching event at a local hotspot. Our goal is to have a good time exploring the wildlife at these easy to access sites, all of which are in the Missoula Valley. Extra points if you walk, bike, or take the bus to get there! Knowledgeable guides will be on hand to point out the different species and answer questions. All are welcome! Participants are encouraged to meet for fun conversation afterwards at a nearby coffee shop.



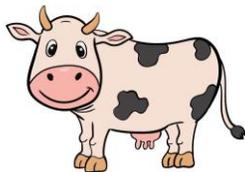
Greenough Park Sunday April 10th 8-10am

- Meet at the southernmost parking lot on Monroe Street. We will walk along the paved and unpaved trails looking for American Dippers, Pileated Woodpeckers, Bohemian Waxwings & more.
- Apres-bird hangout at Bernice's Bakery (190 S 3rd St W)



Kelly Island Sunday May 15th 8-10am

- Meet at the Kelly Island Fishing Access Parking lot (4854 Spurgin Rd). We will traverse the unpaved paths through the forests and riverbanks in search of Wood Ducks, Ospreys, Kingfishers, & more.
- Apres-bird hangout at The Trough (2106 Clements Rd)



Fort Missoula & Quarry Sunday June 12th 8-10am

- Meet at SW parking lot where Guardsman Lane & Green Guidon meet. We will search the Bitterroot River, Quarry, woods, and fields for Bald Eagles, various Grebes, Great Blue Herons, & more
- Apres-bird hangout at The Trough (2106 Clements Rd)



River trail Sunday July 17th 7:30-9pm

- Meet outside of Bernice's Bakery (190 S 3rd St W). We will walk along the paved Milwaukee Trail. The highlight of this midsummer evening outing will be watching dozens of Common Nighthawks hunting insects overhead! We can also hope to see Common Mergansers, Osprey, and other riparian birds.
- Impromptu apres-bird hangout



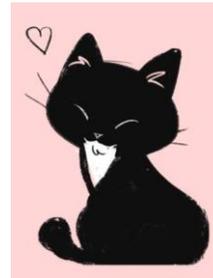
Maclay Flat Nature Trail Sunday August 14th 8-10am

- Meet in the parking lot (Forest Rd 19155). We will walk the unpaved trails, in search of White-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creepers, Northern Shovelers & more.
- Apres-bird hangout at The Trough (2106 Clements Rd)



Council Grove Saturday September 10th 8-10am

- Meet in the parking lot (11249 Mullan Rd, Missoula, MT 59808). We will walk on unpaved trails in search of Cedar Waxwings, Western Wood-Pewees, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, & more.
- Apres-bird hangout at Black Cat Bake Shop (2000 W Broadway)



April 11, 2022, Program Meeting

To attend the April 11th meeting virtually and hear Erick Greene's talk on Ospreys, note the Zoom details below.

Join Zoom Meeting at 7pm

<https://umontana.zoom.us/j/91498599106?pwd=aXBHNVhPMlZyT2hVMnQwaXNtYTU5QT09>

Meeting ID: 924 0110 0963

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Find your local number:

<https://umontana.zoom.us/j/ahD4yv7oS>

A Warm Welcome to our New Members

Georgiann Braaten
Alison Christopher
Jim Egelston
Christiane Holmquist
Elizabeth Marshall
Karl Roesch
Ray Willms

Claudia S. Brown
Michaeleen D. Crosier
Pam Hillygus
Michelle Lower
Christian F. Miller
Fred J. Stout



Please sign up for emailed newsletters!

If you subscribed to Audubon through National Audubon, we may not have your email address. To receive our newsletter and other bird news by email, saving trees and reducing FVAS newsletter expenses, please send your email address to Treasurer, Jean Duncan at treasurer@FVAudubon.org or Membership Promotion Chair, Scott Kluever at sjkluever@gmail.com.

Five Valleys Audubon Society Membership Application

Please support Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS). There are several ways to donate. Any method ensures that you will receive our *Birding Observer* newsletter and may participate in all chapter activities. *Please help us reduce our \$3,700 annual newsletter cost by signing up for email delivery. FVAS is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit.

Make checks out to Five Valleys Audubon Society and mail to: PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807

Or donate on our website: fvaudubon.org/join

\$ _____ \$15 FVAS membership, includes newsletter sent via email.

\$ _____ Phillip L. Wright Fund, small grants for student research.

\$ _____ \$25 FVAS membership, includes newsletter sent via USPS.

\$ _____ Legacy Fund, creating and supporting local urban bird habitats for citizen enjoyment without leaving the city.

\$ _____ Free for students, includes FVAS newsletter, sent via email.

\$ _____ Total contribution

\$ _____ General Fund, use as needed for conservation, field trips, education and outreach.

_____ Volunteer - Please contact me. I would like to know more about how I may help birds and FVAS.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: (Required to receive the newsletter and birding alerts via email.) _____

Please note: FVAS does not share email addresses with anyone except Montana Audubon. Your email address is safe with us!

Please be aware that membership in Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS) alone does not confer membership in the National Audubon Society (NAS). FVAS and NAS are separate 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations. To become a new member of NAS and receive Audubon magazine (or to renew a current or lapsed membership) visit the website: fvaudubon.org/nas. Using this website will ensure that FVAS receives a \$20 one-time credit for your NAS membership. All NAS members become members of FVAS. A third organization, Montana Audubon (MTA), is also an independent organization and receives no financial support from NAS. MTA handles statewide issues and is responsible for its own fundraising. To assist in this important statewide work, you may contact MTA through their website: <http://mtaudubon.org/>. Please give generously to each organization. Although independent, we work together to protect what we all love.

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