

December 2020

Birding Observer



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

Status of Chapter-sponsored Events

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, Five Valleys Audubon Society has canceled all chapter-sponsored events indefinitely. Specifically:

- All Chapter-sponsored meetings at the University are cancelled. We will try to reschedule our planned speakers for a future program.
- In-person Board Meetings will also be cancelled, and we will conduct business via our email google group and Zoom meetings, as described below.
- Chapter-sponsored field trips are cancelled.
- If you want to go birding individually, great! Feel free to contact Larry or your other birding pals to see if he or they will be going birding—without carpooling—during this period.

FVAS Board Meetings Via Zoom

When: 1st Monday of the Month, from 7:00 to 9:00 PM

Where: Zoom Meeting

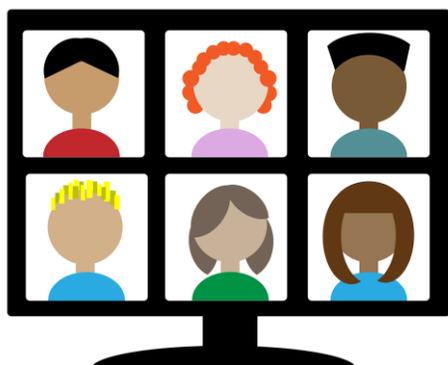
Cost: Free

Contact: Andrea Stierle

Email: andrea.stierle@mso.umt.edu

The Five Valleys Audubon Society Board of Directors Meeting is on the first Monday of the month, starting at 7:00 PM. Meetings are conducted over ZOOM and are free and open to the public, where Chapter business is discussed.

If you would like to join a meeting, please contact Andrea Stierle in advance.



Christmas Bird Count

The Missoula Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 19, 2020, unless the pandemic worsens, and the City County Health Department prohibits such activities.



The guidelines for this year's Christmas Bird Count will include:

- 1) Facial masks and social distancing will be required in the field,
- 2) Carpooling may only occur within family or social pod groups,
- 3) There will be no in-person compilation gatherings.

If you would like to participate in the field count or to be a feeder watcher, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 (540-3064 cell) or bwsgenea@gmail.com. The number of participants in the field will be limited due to the Covid-19 restrictions.

amazonsmile

You shop. Amazon gives.

Shop at smile.amazon.com
Choose Five Valleys Audubon Society

Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS) is a charity with Amazon Smile. If you shop through Amazon this holiday season, please use Amazon Smile, and choose Five Valleys Audubon Society. Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible purchases. Amazon does not need the 0.5% of your sale, FVAS does! We will put it to good use protecting birds and conserving their habitat.

Peeps from the Board: What did we accomplish this year during the Pandemic?

By Rose Leach

While we did not sponsor field trips or in-person Chapter meetings (we are looking at maybe doing a webinar in the future), for most of 2020, our Chapter still worked on a wide variety of issues.

Notably, Board members and long-time proposal analysts Jim Brown and Gerhard Knudsen spent well over 100 hours reviewing and commenting on a sizable crop of subdivisions for the year. Many had minimal concerns, but a few have been quite time-consuming and are still on-going. Our various local planning boards value our Chapter's input, due in large part to the thoughtful and timely assessments that Jim and Gerhard have provided for many years now.

The Chapter wrote comments of support and made a \$1,500 contribution toward the proposed C. Ben White Memorial Fishing Access Site on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River. This 100-acre jewel of gallery old growth Cottonwood Forest, willow shrubland, and adjacent upland Ponderosa Pine forest leverages adjacent protected habitats to form an important intact corridor for the area. Our support combined with other partners coordinated by the Bitter Root Land Trust, helped Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to successfully complete their environmental planning for this site, which it acquired in September 2020.

During 2020 our Chapter partnered with staff from the Five Valleys Land Trust and a local geographic information student to produce a new Grass Valley Important Bird Area map. We hope to have our new and improved map up on our website soon. It includes the many conservation easements that we have helped to acquire in the area and other land-use updates on the map.

We participated in on-going meetings dealing with the future of two important bird habitat areas in the valley—the former Smurfit Stone site, and the Knife River ponds (former gravel pit ponds), located west of Fort Missoula Park area. Stay tuned for updates on these projects.

Our Chapter has continued to support the placement and running of a night flight recorder near the Mount Dean Stone area, in cooperation with staff from the MPG Ranch near Florence. The data from the array of recorders in the area is helping us understand the importance of migration habitats for our native local and transient bird species. It turns out that this information has been crucial in

informing some of our comments related to local land use planning in the area.

We again partnered with Five Valleys Land Trust in supporting a funding opportunity in the Flint Creek area. We have conducted several field days of bird surveys, which have helped in their application for grant funds for a conservation easement in the area. Keep your fingers crossed for this as well as our many on-going conservation and education projects!

Announcements from Montana Audubon

Wildlife Grants Available

Montana Audubon will again make available small grants from the Audubon Wildlife Fund of Montana, a permanent endowment. The application deadline for the 2021 grant cycle is December 18, 2020. For information and a grant application, visit <https://mtaudubon.org/wildlifegrants/>.



Some projects funded through this program in 2020 included supporting Surveys of Mountain Plovers in Rosebud and Garfield Counties; the Jewel Basin Hawkwatch; and a 7th grade project on Osprey: A Watershed Health Parameter.

Wings Across The Bird Sky Bird Festival

MT Audubon is tentatively planning the 2021 Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival to be held in Lewistown June 4–6, 2021. In an effort to comply with health and safety guidelines, the format of the festival will likely look different, but rest assured that the safety of participants is their highest priority. Please stay tuned for more information in the coming months.

Dear Readers,

Our membership totals are down for the year, due to the pandemic and our current lack of in-person programming. But our work continues in the background, I can assure you. We were hoping that you could renew your membership soon, to help us in our mission of supporting conservation and bird habitat in our local area. I promise you will feel empowered when you do!

**With grateful thanks,
Your local Chapter Board.**

Reflections on Bird Photography

By Cynthia Swidler

By photographing Calliope Hummingbirds at a local state park, I observed them begin their mating displays within a span of the same three dates each year over the last five years. Bird photography enhances the understanding of the nature of birds, allows the capture of moments in nature as they happen, and increases appreciation of birds by converging observations with art. If you are interested in photographing birds, here are a few suggestions for shopping for cameras and lenses, digiscoping, tripod use and ethics. Please refer to the links at the end of this article for in-depth discussions of these topics.

The topic of equipment and its usage for bird photography is so extensive that it could be a book unto itself. No matter the choice of camera and lens, you will want to use the longest telephoto or zoom lens you can, not only to capture an optimal photo, but to distance yourself from the birds so as not to stress them. In general, a lens with a focal length of at least 300mm, and a camera capable of shutter speeds of 1/2000 second or faster can be less frustrating, especially when photographing birds in flight. A good autofocus system will also help, especially if it has a tracking mode. When hand holding, it is helpful to have a camera and lens with image stabilization features.

Three considerations I have found helpful when shopping for cameras and lenses are:

- Purpose: Are you photographing birds for identification, reference, or artistic reasons?
- Portability: Will you be walking or hiking with your camera, or will you primarily photograph from a stationary location such as your yard, blind or car?
- Price Point: What is your price point; is economy important to you?

My journey into photographing birds began with a point and shoot camera with built in super-zoom. I achieved helpful photos for adequate bird identification, as well as some artistic shots within the landscape; however, I could not achieve sharp photos with it. I subsequently upgraded to a DSLR and 100-400 mm zoom lens. This set-up was effective for sharp photos, but was excessively heavy for carrying during bird walks and hikes. I have since opted for lighter weight and portability with a mirrorless system of camera and lenses. Each change in gear reflects the three considerations of purpose, portability, and price point.

It is possible to digiscope with your spotting scope or binoculars, turning your camera or cell phone into an optical device for bird photography. Digiscoping requires an adapter to attach to your camera, scope or binoculars.

For lenses and scopes that are long and heavy, the use of a tripod or monopod may be desirable. The use of a tripod can improve image sharpness by reducing camera shake, muscular fatigue by prolonged camera and lens holding, and the chance of equipment damage from accidental dropping. However, I frequently photograph birds in flight and while hiking by hand holding my camera, which is another reason that I opted for a lighter set up.



There are countless books, articles, and online videos to refer to for camera and lens choices. Missoula has three wonderful sources for classes and coaching: Rocky Mountain School of Photography, Missoula Lifelong Learning Center, and Montana Natural History Center, with expert teachers in equipment considerations, photographic technique and craft, and photo editing.

Ethical considerations for bird photography are paramount. It is important to honor birds while photographing them, considering their behavior with empathy. Every bird has a buffer zone, and you should never intimidate or frighten birds, flush them, alter habitat, or encroach on nests. Please refer to Audubon's link for the ethics of bird photography. See link below.

Bird photography requires patience and practice. The more you photograph, the more you will learn technique and craft, while learning more about the birds. By sharing photos with non-birders, I have sparked their interest in birdwatching. By sharing photos with birders, bird identification and behavior have been clarified. Most of all, bird photography has provided joy and community in the shared appreciation of the beauty birds.

Cameras and Lenses:

- <https://www.worldbirds.org/bird-photography-camera/>
- <https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/photography/how-to-photograph-birds/best-cameras-bird-photography/>
- <https://www.worldbirds.org/bird-photography-lens/>

Digiscoping:

- <https://www.bhphotovideo.com/explora/photography/tips-and-solutions/guide-birding-and-digiscoping>

Ethics:

- <https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/audubons-guide-ethical-bird-photography>

Assessing the Needs of our Membership: Digital or Paper Newsletters?

By Andrea Stierle and Jacob Glass

The FVAS monthly newsletter is an important venue for interesting bird-related articles, announcements of upcoming events, field trip reports, and information about the happenings of the FVAS.

We know that many see it as an integral part of their membership experience. During our November virtual meeting, Board members revisited the possibility of transitioning from the *status quo*, which allows either a *paper or digital* copy of the newsletter, to a primarily *digital* format.



Arguments in favor of the digital format include reduction of paper waste, as well as the expense of printing and mailing a paper copy of the newsletter. In 2020, the cost of printing, handling, and mailing paper copies was \$2750, about 11% of our total expenditures. A digital format can also provide easier and more widespread access. However, we know that some of our members have limited internet availability, do not have email, or might simply prefer the paper format. Members who do not have internet access or email could still receive a paper copy as we will continue to print a small number of newsletters for distribution and promotion.

To best serve our members and understand your preferences, we are asking for your perspectives on the issue.



For those who currently receive paper copies of the newsletter, would you be willing – and able to – receive a digital copy instead?

We welcome your feedback and concerns, which should be addressed to Five Valleys Audubon Society, PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807 or info@fvaudubon.org.

History of the Christmas Bird Count: How it started, and how the data is used today.

Reprinted from www.audubon.org

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns— whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won.

Conservation was in its beginning stages in that era, and many observers and scientists became concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then-nascent Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them.

So began the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to the inspiration of Chapman and the enthusiasm of 27 dedicated birders, 25 Christmas Bird Counts were held that day. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove, California with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied around 90 species on all the counts combined.



CBC in the Modern Era

Each November, birders interesting in participating in the CBC can sign up and join in through the Audubon website. From December 14 through January 5 each year tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas brave snow, wind, or rain, and take part in the effort. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this long-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations, and to help guide conservation action.

How the CBC Helps Protect Species and Their Habitat

The data collected over the past century allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how bird populations have changed over the past hundred years.

The long-term perspective is vital. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well.

Welcome New Members

Ruth and Noel Treat	Amanda Smith
Gerry Blackman	Laurel Ann Curry
Marilyn Sewell	Richard Jenkins
Stephen Sprang	Warren Darne



Five Valleys Audubon greatly appreciates those who renewed their membership this past month. We generally encourage members to receive their newsletter via email (to conserve resources and our expenses), which is the default mailing option if provided by new members. If you want to change how your newsletter is delivered or have any changes to your mailing preferences, please contact the Membership Chair, Poody McLaughlin, at poodymc@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 only, includes newsletter sent via email. | \$ _____ Legacy Fund, creating and supporting local urban bird habitats for citizen enjoyment without leaving the city. |
| \$ _____ \$25 FVAS membership only, includes newsletter sent via USPS. | \$ _____ 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. |
| \$ _____ Phillip L. Wright Fund, small grants for student research. | |

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.

Five Valleys Audubon Society
PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807

SEASON'S GREETINGS



TO:

NON-PROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
MISSOULA, MT
59807
PERMIT NO. 490

Five Valleys Audubon Society
PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807
www.fvaudubon.org

OFFICERS:

President, 2018-2021	Rose Leach	721-0779	rleach-2@bresnan.net
Vice President, 2020-2023	Jeffrey Ipsen	493-2586	jeffaipen@gmail.com
Secretary, 2018-2021	Andrea Stierle	782-6419	andrea.stierle@mso.umt.edu
Treasurer, 2020-2023	Jean Duncan	396-1171	treasurer@fvaudubon.org

DIRECTORS:

2017-2020	Jim Brown	549-8052	brownjs2@bresnan.net
2018-2021	Larry Weeks	549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
2019-2022	Ed Monnig	549-0580	emonnig01@gmail.com
2019-2022	Rose Stoudt	880-8060	ras120656@yahoo.com
2020-2023	Jacob Glass		jacobpglass@gmail.com

COMMITTEES:

Archivist	Barbara Ross		bjmross@gmail.com
Audubon Adventures	Scott Kluever	(907)854-3192	sjkluever@gmail.com
Christmas Bird Count	Larry Weeks	549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
Conservation	Amy Cilimburg		amycili@gmail.com
Education	Larry Weeks	549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
Field Activities	Larry Weeks	549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
Habitat Protection	Jim Brown	549-8052	brownjs2@bresnan.net
Habitat Protection	Gerhard Knudsen	251-2765	gmk@bresnan.net
Member Promotion	Scott Kluever	(907)854-3192	sjkluever@gmail.com
Newsletter Circulation	Hedwig Vogel-Wright	549-7251	hedwigvw@fastmail.fm
Newsletter Editor	Bev Orth Geoghegan	750-0149	orthbev@hotmail.com
PL Wright Endowment	Andrea Stierle	782-6419	andrea.stierle@mso.umt.edu
Program	Susie Wall	274-0548	susiewall2@gmail.com
Publicity	Cathy Nolan		canolan4@outlook.com
Social Media	Thomas Kallmeyer		thomaskallmeyer@yahoo.com
University Liaison	Chad Bishop	243-4374	
Web Site	Pat Little	493-7115	roughleg@gmail.com

Montana Audubon
PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624
(406) 443-3949
www.mtaudubon.org

Larry Berrin, Executive Director
lberrin@mtaudubon.org

Kristin Sewart, Development Director
kristin@mtaudubon.org

Heather Bilden, Community Programs Lead
hbilden@mtaudubon.org

Cathie Erickson, Accounting Specialist
cerickson@mtaudubon.org

Robin Larson, Office Manager
info@mtaudubon.org

Amy Seaman, Director of Policy & Science
aseaman@mtaudubon.org

Gabi Morey, Center Director
gmorey@mtaudubon.org

Rachel Van Wingen, Board President