

February 2022

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

- **Monday, February 7th, 6:00-8:00 pm:** Please join us in the Blackfoot Room of the Missoula Public Library, for the Five Valleys Audubon Society Board Meeting.
- **Monday, February 14th, 7:00pm:** Attend our monthly chapter meeting to hear Maggie Hirschauer discuss vultures of Africa. We will meet in Room 110 of the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building (ISB) at UM.
- **Saturday, February 19th:** Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR from 10AM to 1PM. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center. Due to the on-going pandemic, please wear a mask if you carpool with people other than your household members and practice social distancing in the field.
- **Saturday, February 26th:** All-day field trip to the Mission Valley to look for raptors. Meet in the northwest of the Adams Center parking lot at 8AM or at the Cenex in Ronan at 9AM. This is a driving field trip with frequent stops to look at birds. We will spend some time outside the car so be prepared for cold temperatures, wind and snow or rain.

Vultures & Valentines! A perfect match for bird lovers!

Join us Monday, February 14th at 7:00 PM to hear our speaker, Maggie Hirschauer, present her fascinating talk on the Magnificent Vultures of Africa.

Vultures deserve our gratitude. They curtail the spread of disease through rapidly ridding the environment of decaying carcasses. Their demise may have catastrophic results for humans and the environment. Of the nine vulture species on

the African continent, seven have declined by 80% in recent years. Conservation of these long-lived and often wide-ranging species is complicated as they face numerous threats that vary by species and location. VulPro is a non-profit organization in South Africa dedicated to



saving Africa's vultures. The VulPro vulture center, which currently houses over 250 non-releasable birds, is leading the way with captive breeding for reintroductions, rehabilitation, research, and education. This presentation will highlight the issues African vultures face today, VulPro's work to advocate for these misunderstood creatures, and some insights learned after working with VulPro over several years.

Maggie always dreamed of life in Africa. While studying for her undergraduate degree in animal behavior at Indiana University, she managed a chimpanzee research project in Uganda. Later, in Kenya, she studied blue monkey social dynamics in a forest facing increasing human encroachment. For three years she lived at VulPro's vulture facility, while undertaking her zoology MSc research with their Cape Vulture captive breeding program. Her thesis through Rhodes University (South Africa) followed several captive-bred chicks, starting with their parents' copulations and ending with the chicks' social integration into the wild. She helped develop soft release protocols for the endangered species' reintroduction program which now includes a release enclosure on top of a wild colony cliff in the Magaliesberg Mountains. She currently lives in Florence, Montana, where she works for MPG Ranch conducting monarch butterfly research in summer and mountain lion tracking in winter. She remains involved with VulPro by contributing to research publications and acting as representative to the American Zoological Association's African Vulture SAFE Program. She visits VulPro often to volunteer with rehabilitation and research on-site.

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. We will continue to meet in-person unless increasing COVID numbers require us to switch to a virtual meeting. Please check your email regularly and monitor our website for updates. Masks continue to be required based on university policy and social distancing will be practiced. **(ATTENTION: To attend the meeting virtually, see Zoom details on page 6.)**

Peeps from The President

By Rose Leach

Happy New Year! Because January is when our annual report to National Audubon is due, I am happy to report that I finished it on time, which is an enormous relief. We had some highlights this year, despite Covid dampening our in-person meetings until recently.

First, I want to recognize the herculean efforts from Jim Brown, Poody McLaughlin, Gerhard Knudsen, our student intern Clint Whittle-Frazier, Lena Viall, and our other partners and collaborators who collectively finalized our updated Grass Valley Important Bird Area (IBA) brochure and map. Having accurate information about land ownership and conservation lands in map form helps us when we offer testimony on local planning (which we do often throughout the year) and when we apply for grant funding. Hard copies of the brochure are available now, and you can download a copy of the IBA from our website: <https://fvaudubon.org/conservation/habitat-protection/important-bird-area/>. Thanks to everyone who made this years-long-effort possible.



Chapter volunteers have spent more than 3,000 hours on various project this year. One such project is the ongoing planning for the Fort Missoula Natural Area, aka the Gravel Pit ponds behind the soccer fields. The site is a true gem for our city, where open grassland habitat on McCauley Butte meets the Bitterroot River's riparian habitat, and both are adjacent to two fairly large-sized open water habitats. The result of the close proximity of these diverse habitats is excellent bird and wildlife habitat in an easily accessible site. The current bird count for the ponds and some adjacent forested area is a whopping 224 species (<https://ebird.org/mt/hotspot/L4510807>). For context, that is slightly more than half of the entire bird list for our very large and diverse state (442 species!). The official state list of Montana birds is available here: <https://www.montanabirdadvocacy.org/state-list>.

The two ponds host significant numbers of migrating waterfowl, in part because they are relatively large and secure from roads, dogs, and other human disturbance during important migration seasons. This fall alone, the north pond had a Long-tailed Duck from November 12th until the ponds froze over in mid-December. This is a large sea duck not often found in Missoula County. The south pond had another sea duck—a Black Scoter (a female or first winter bird) for at least a day, as well as a late-season Common Loon, who also hung around till the ponds froze over. None of these species would be found and viewable

in the Missoula area without the habitat and viewing opportunities afforded by these former gravel pit ponds.

Speaking of McCauley Butte, our Chapter has been working hard to provide meaningful input into a proposed subdivision on the north-facing slope of the butte. We have gathered data from eBird as well as our night-flight recorder system to help with our analysis. The area provides habitat as part of a larger migration corridor connecting the Bitterroot and Clark Fork valleys. Stay tuned for more on this effort.

The Chapter provided letters of support for a variety of planning and granting opportunities this year, as we have since our inception. One of the most consequential was our support of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' proposed management of the National Bison Range, which came to fruition this year. We received a nice thank-you from Council Chairwoman Shelly Fyant for our efforts, which is always great to hear.

The Chapter again partnered with Five Valleys Land Trust (FVLT) to do bird surveys on some of their lands of conservation importance. We often contribute dollars to the purchase of conservation easements through this partnership, which helps in their securing conservation grant funds. This year, they received an astounding 3.7-million-dollar grant for agriculture conservation in the Flint Creek Valley, where we have helped in bird and habitat surveys. We are proud and so pleased to help our conservation partner successfully obtain and implement this grant funding. If you would like to be involved in these surveys, keep an eye on the newsletter, or contact board member and FVAS founding father Jim Brown for more details. Partnering with others really gives us more bang for our conservation efforts.

Speaking of grants, we recently sent a letter of support to the Clark Fork Coalition to help them apply for funding for the proposed Grant Creek Restoration project, focusing on the part of the creek that flows through town, downstream of I-90 and down to the river. Imagine the benefits to our city with this successful project! Stay tuned for more on this topic, and thanks to our member and partner Will McDowell for connecting us to this project.

Now that I think of it, there are even more projects we have worked on, so much so that I will need another PEEPs to cover it all. In listing all that we have accomplished, I am so grateful for all our hard-working members and conservation partners in our wonderful community. Who knew that the drudgery of compiling our annual report would lead to this warm feeling? Happy late winter to all our readers and members, and we will see you in the coming field season for more conservation success stories.

Peeps from The Treasurer By Jean Duncan

Here's to a birdyfull 2022! Our operating income for the year was \$18,268, with expenses of \$12,280, netting \$5,987.



At the end of 2021 FVAS had assets of \$197,041 of which \$109,371 is in the Phil L. Wright Endowment. This endowment provides grants for UM student's bird and habitat related research projects. Of the \$77,313 in our general fund, \$16,670 is restricted to habitat conservation and education.

Five Valleys Audubon Society donated \$5,200 to several bird research and habitat protection nonprofits, including Montana Audubon. We are participating in on-going planning meetings about the former Knife River gravel pit ponds, located west of Fort Missoula Park, which are an important bird habitat area in the valley. We anticipate making a significant monetary donation to this project to back up our active participation in the planning process.

Please direct any questions about the finances of FVAS to Jean Duncan, Treasurer@FVAudubon.org. We're looking forward to another year of supporting birds and their habitat in Montana with your help and involvement!

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 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-to-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. There will be a \$35 charge for the workshop. To sign up, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 (549-3064 cell) or bwsgenea@gmail.com.



A singing bird for winter days: Townsend's Solitaire By Poody McLaughlin

What has brightened these gray winter days for me has been a nondescript gray bird. A permanent resident in most of Montana that sings even in winter, the Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) can now be found by just about any juniper tree. "So strong is its reliance on juniper fruits outside the breeding season that it would be an accomplishment to find a Townsend's Solitaire in midwinter that was not in or near a cone-laden juniper tree." (*Birds of Montana*, 2016)



Townsend's Solitaire
Illustration by David Allen Sibley

This reliance on juniper berries as a food source leads both sexes to defend territories in winter against all interlopers. Many times, I've watched a flock of waxwings descend on a juniper stand, prompting the solitaire to staunchly (and fruitlessly) defend its territory against overwhelming odds.

Although I've only occasionally heard solitaires singing this winter, their call seems ubiquitous in the Missoula Valley. Described as a "clear, soft, whistled "heeh" by Sibley, the Cornell Lab describes this year-round call as a "high-pitched clear ringing note: tew." Solitaires can "tew" about 30 times per minute to defend their territories.

Solitaires migrate vertically. In winter they are found in lower-elevation woodlands that contain junipers. In summer they move up to montane conifer forests and inhabit pine, fir, and spruce forests with sparse shrub layers.

At first glance, a solitaire looks like a slimmed down robin, an elegant look with its long tail and upright posture. They are cousins in the family Turdidae along with bluebirds, Veery, and Swainson's and Hermit Thrushes, among others. The solitaire has a tail with white outer tail feathers, a white eye ring, and a bold, buffy wing stripe. Otherwise, it is of course, gray.

Walking out my front door I usually hear their 'tew' call from across the street. This solitaire has alerted me to juniper trees I didn't realize were there. Conversely, to locate a solitaire, you can plant yourself by a berry-laden juniper tree and wait — eventually you'll see one!

Montana Audubon Has a New Citizen Science Project: Rosy-Finch Monitoring Project

Montana Audubon is looking for citizen scientists interested in helping them survey two of North America's least studied and understood species: the Black Rosy-Finch and the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch. Dedicating 20 minutes of your time once a month from December to April is all it takes, but incidental reports are also appreciated!

Rosy-Finches are alpine specialists that breed and thrive around cliffs, snowfields, and glaciers at the highest elevations across the mountain west. It is challenging to monitor Rosy-Finch populations throughout their alpine summer range. Their nests are usually only found by biologists with rock-climbing experience. As a result, relatively little is known about this species' population trends and life history. The silver lining is that it's much easier to encounter and monitor Rosy-Finches in the winter when harsh alpine conditions drive large flocks to lower elevation valleys, foothills, open spaces, and even urban areas! While winter Rosy-Finch flocks are somewhat irregular, it is not uncommon for them to periodically swarm feeders, especially during inclement weather. This is where YOU come in. Below are links to help you prepare for the project.

* **Rosy-Finch feeder counts training webinar:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTXGDbyvJ-o&t=844s>

* **Please visit MT Audubon's website for more details:**
<https://mtaudubon.org/birds-science/citizen-science-opportunities/species-specific-projects/>

2022 Five Valleys Audubon Field Trip Schedule	
Date	Description
February 26 th	Mission Valley
March 26 th	Lee Metcalf NWR
April 2 nd	Ninepipes – Short-eared Owls
April 30 th	Brown's Lake
May 28th - 29th	Freezeout Lake/Rocky Mtn Front
June 9 th -12 th	Bowdoin NWR
June 19 th	Wild Skies Raptor Center
June 25 th	Lee Creek
July 2 nd	Clearwater
July 7 th - 10 th	Glacier National Park
July 30 th	Deer Lodge
August 21 st	Freezout Lake
September 11 th	Pablo/Ninepipes
October 22 nd	Brown's Lake
November 13 th	Metcalf NWR
December 4 th	Mission Valley

Missoula Christmas Bird Count Summary By Larry Weeks



Despite Covid and the cold temperatures, the 2021 Christmas Bird Count, which was held on December 18th, was very successful. The highlights of the Count were 89 bird species, 10,844 total birds and 9 Count Week birds. There were 105 people in the field and there were 20 feeder watchers. It was

unfortunate that the cold temperatures arrived just 3 days before the Count because we missed counting 4 birds seen December 15th on the open water at the gravel pit ponds but disappeared when the ice formed: a Long-tailed Duck, a Common Loon, a Western Grebe, and several Barrow's Goldeneyes. Will McDowell's group, who birded Macauley Butte, did find the only Gadwalls sitting on the ice at the gravel pit ponds. Will's group also found the only Pied-billed Grebe on the Bitterroot River. Will Sebern, who was birding independently on the 18th by the gravel pit ponds, also saw the Pied-billed Grebe, but more importantly he found a Horned Grebe and a Trumpeter/Tundra Swan which added to the species list. Rose Leach, who birded along Mullan Road, had the only Ring-necked Ducks, Blue Jay and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Jim Brown, who birded Grass Valley and Mallard Way, had the only American Coot. Denver Holt, who birded the brushy draws west of the airport, had the only Long-eared and Short-eared Owls. Poody's group on Kelly Island had the only Lewis's Woodpecker and Rusty Blackbird. Jacob Glass's group, who birded Maclay Flat, had the only Great Gray Owl and Varied Thrush. Steve Flood, who birded upper LaValle Creek, had the only Clark's Nutcrackers. Paul Hendricks had tendonitis in his right Achilles tendon, and couldn't hike the Marshall Canyon to Woods Gulch, but his wife Lisa hiked up Marshall Canyon and found 5 Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches. Brian Williams and his group hiked 10 miles in the Rattlesnake and had the only Canada Jays. Other group leaders included Boo Curry (Council Grove and Kona Ranch), Don Jones (Slevens Island and Target Range), Andy Boyce (lower LaValle Creek), Vick Applegate (State Nursery and Tower St. Open Space), Robin Anderson (UM and Greenough Park), Kristi DuBois (Flynn-Hiawatha-Custer), Cindy Swidler (between Mullan Rd. and Kelly Island), Terry Toppins (Big Flat), Rose Stoudt (upper Clark Fork and Kim Williams trail), Elena Ulev (Moose Can Gully), Thomas Kallmeyer (Butler Creek and North Hills), Stan Senner (Farviews), Bob Petty (lower Rattlesnake), and the author (Grant Creek).

Other interesting birds were 3 Anna's Hummingbirds (Andy Boyce had one and Tom Javins had two), 4 Harris' Sparrows, 7 Merlins, 9 Northern Shrikes, 690 Bohemian Waxwings, and 105 Common Redpolls. The feeder watchers also contributed to the species count; Kay Lambert had the only Cassin's Finches, Cindy Swidler had the only White-crowned Sparrow, Judith Kiely had the only Lesser Goldfinches, and Stuart Pickens had the only Evening Grosbeak. The Count ended with a potluck at the author's home. My thanks to everyone who made it a successful Count.



Missoula Christmas Bird Count 2021		
Common Loon CW	Wild Turkey 98	Brown Creeper 8
Pied-billed Grebe 1	American Coot 1	Pacific Wren CW
Horned Grebe 1	Killdeer 37	Marsh Wren 3
Western Grebe CW	Wilson's Snipe 23	American Dipper 6
Great Blue Heron 29	Rock Pigeon 545	Golden-crowned Kinglet 21
Trumpeter/Tundra Swan 1	Eurasian-collared Dove 369	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1
Canada Goose 1229	Mourning Dove 13	Townsend's Solitaire 64
Cackling Goose CW	Great Horned Owl 11	American Robin 45
Long-tailed Duck CW	Northern Pygmy Owl 2	Varied Thrush 1
Green-winged Teal 64	Barred Owl CW	Bohemian Waxwing 690
Mallard 756	Great Gray Owl 1	Cedar Waxwing 312
Northern Pintail 10	Long-eared Owl 3	Northern Shrike 9
Gadwall 10	Short-eared Owl 1	Gray Catbird CW
American Wigeon 5	Northern Saw-whet Owl 2	European Starling 57
Ring-necked Duck 43	Belted Kingfisher 26	American Tree Sparrow 54
Common Goldeneye 304	Anna's Hummingbird 3	Song Sparrow 85
Barrow's Goldeneye CW	Lewis's Woodpecker 1	White-crowned Sparrow 1
Bufflehead 41	Downy Woodpecker 41	Harris' Sparrow 4
Hooded Merganser 13	Hairy Woodpecker 22	Dark-eyed Junco 279
Common Merganser 61	Northern Flicker 308	Red-winged Blackbird 405
Bald Eagle 40	Pileated Woodpecker 13	Rusty Blackbird 1
Northern Harrier 9	Canada Jay 3	Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch 5
Sharp-shinned Hawk 3	Steller's Jay 8	Pine Grosbeak 7
Cooper's Hawk 2	Blue Jay 1	Cassin's Finch 3
Red-tailed Hawk 74	Clark's Nutcracker 9	House Finch 781
Rough-legged Hawk 17	Black-billed Magpie 432	Red Crossbill 295
American Kestrel 9	American Crow 102	Common Redpoll 105
Merlin 7	Common Raven 273	Pine Siskin 68
Peregrine Falcon CW	Black-capped Chickadee 568	American Goldfinch 184
Prairie Falcon 2	Mountain Chickadee 35	Lesser Goldfinch 6
Gray Partridge 8	Red-breasted Nuthatch 174	Evening Grosbeak 1
Ring-necked Pheasant 23	White-breasted Nuthatch 41	House Sparrow 1323
Ruffed Grouse 2	Pygmy Nuthatch 21	
CW = Count Week	Total Birds = 10844	89 species

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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@FVAudubon.org or to Scott at sjkluever@gmail.com and ask for our newsletter via email. Thank you!

**Five Valleys Audubon Society
Requests proposals for the
Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Award 2022**

Philip L. Wright was a professor of zoology at the University of Montana who taught mammalogy and ornithology and established the zoological museum that bears his name. Dr. Wright's infectious enthusiasm and his passion for the natural world inspired thousands of students during his tenure and encouraged them in their research endeavors.



In remembrance of Dr. Wright and his contributions to science and the community, the Five Valleys Audubon Society established the annual Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards. These awards provide support for continuing students undertaking research in the fields of ecology, wildlife biology, animal behavior, environmental biology, and conservation biology.

Research awards have been in the range of \$200 to \$1,200. Previous awards have gone to high school, university undergraduate and graduate students. Preference is given to small projects to be completed in a few months. Accordingly, PhD research is excluded. Eligible expenses include 1) direct costs of travel, meals, and lodging; and 2) consumable supplies and services used for the sole purpose of the project. Non-eligible expenses include wages and durable equipment (like binoculars) with a life longer than the project.

Interested students should consult with Dr. Chad Bishop, Wildlife Biology Program, about the content of their application before applying.

To apply for a 2022 award, please submit a brief proposal in the following format:

- I. Title of proposed research. Date of proposal.
- II. Name of applicant, a proper mail address and phone number (not a university department), and e-mail address.
- III. Institution and status of the applicant (e.g. sophomore at the University of Montana, junior at Hellgate High, etc.)
- IV. Body of proposal (no more than 3 pages) must contain the following:
 - Statement of the problem or the question to be addressed (2-3 sentences).
 - Introduction and background (1/2 page).

- Purpose of proposed research (1-3 sentences).
 - Significance of the proposed research (1/ 2 page).
 - Methods and time frame (1/2 to 1 page).
 - Anticipated results (1/2 page).
 - Appropriate literature references
 - Budget and Justification (1/2 page).
 - Current funding and/or other funding anticipated by applicant (1-2 sentences).
- V. Name, address, and phone number of an academic reference (teacher, faculty, or research advisor).
 - VI. Brief resume (no more than 1/2 to 2/3 pages) with name of applicant, address, phone, e-mail.

Successful applicants will be expected to provide a brief written research summary and make a short presentation (15 minutes) at a monthly meeting of the Five Valleys Audubon Society Spring of 2023.

Applications are due by 5PM, Friday, March 18, 2022. Awards will be announced in April. Email applications to Professor Chad Bishop (chad.bishop@umontana.edu) and cc Taylor Haas (Taylor.haas@umontana.edu), when submitting your application.

Vultures of Africa

To attend the February 14th meeting and hear Maggie Hirschauer's presentation on Vultures of Africa, note the Zoom details below.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://umontana.zoom.us/j/96972383072>

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A Warm Welcome to our New Members

Paul Aleksic	Richard Armerding	Jean & Dexter Aspevig
Nancy Ball	Lanor Bordner	William E. Bray
Jane Byard	Jann Clouse	Darline Crawford
Jill Dahl	Charles Dumke	Carol Egelston
Rachelle Elliott	Susan M. Falsey	Dorothy Fauver
Larry Ficks	Donna Finstad	Kelly Glendening
Dale Horton	Greysen Jakes	Trish Krier
Gloria Langstaff	Susan Lenenstein	Josh Lisbon
Pauline Logan	Brigette Murray	Gregory Oliver
Rosemary Polichio	Brandon Reel	Rachel Robinson
Cherie Russell	Patricia K. Senner	Carol Serviss
Gregg Shafter	Molly Shepherd	Kristen Von Doersten
Stacey Wheeler		



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.

Five Valleys Audubon Society
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