

January 2012

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

* **Monday, January 2nd:** Char Murray will host the January board meeting.

* **Monday, January 9th:** Using native plants to attract birds to your yard will be the subject of our January program meeting.

* **Sunday, January 15th:** Submission deadline for the February edition of the *Birding Observer*.

* **Saturday, January 15th:** Monthly 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 any level are welcome!



Bringing birds to your yard with native plants

What does your backyard have that attracts birds? Looking at residential landscapes from a birds-eye perspective will be the topic of Five Valleys' next program, our annual joint meeting with the Native Plant Society. The meeting is Monday, January 9 at 7:30 p.m. in the Gallagher Business Building, room 123, on the UM campus (note the different room). Madeline Mazurski and Poody McLaughlin will discuss the merits of native plants in attracting birds to the home landscape and how to design for both birds and people.

Madeline has a BS in Botany and a BLA and MLA in Landscape Architecture from Utah State University. Since 1995 her landscape design firm, Montana Native Landscapes, has specialized in residential design using native and water-wise plants. She is currently co-president of the Clark Fork Chapter of the Montana Native Plant Society. Poody is approaching her 30th anniversary as a member of Five Valleys Audubon. Her BA in English from UM dovetails well with her current position as Publicity Chair. The house that she and her husband built has led to her ongoing curiosity and development of a home landscape that attracts birds.

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@arrl.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.



It's January in Montana. It's cold outside, there's snow on the ground, and most of our birds have gone south for the winter.

Or have they? We say birds fly south "for the winter," but

in many cases, when they get to where they're going, it will be summer there too. January in Argentina is summer for the Swainson's hawks that share our Montana summer in July. They get two summers each year. With the help of modern technology we can track where such long-distance migrants go and understand a little more about their lives.

Scientists can attach a GPS backpack transmitter that sends the bird's position up to a satellite. To keep the weight down there's a trade-off between the number of data points that can be transmitted, and how many months before the batteries run down. The smallest GPS units have solar panels (the size of your thumb nail) to recharge the batteries, but even these units weigh 100 grams or so, and you can't put that on a small bird.

But now there are really tiny geolocators that weigh a mere 1.6 grams and can be attached to a bird's leg. Geolocators record the time of sunrise and sunset each day, and the interval between the two can be used to calculate the bird's location. But they don't transmit the information, they store it internally (for up to 20 years!) so the researcher has to go find the bird, when it returns to its nest site, and remove the geocator in order to get the data out and do the calculations.

Arctic terns breed in the Arctic and travel to the Antarctic and back each year. This is the longest known migration – the round-trip distance is roughly 44,000 miles. An international team of researchers attached geolocators to 60 arctic terns and analyzed their migrations, from Greenland to the far South Atlantic and back. After leaving the breeding grounds the terns congregate for about 25 days in a small patch of the N. Atlantic (opposite Newfoundland, or approximately 80° due east of Missoula!), then head south again to the

Cape Verde Islands off the coast of Africa. From there most of them continue along the African coast, but a few cross the Atlantic again and fly down the coast of South America. They all converge in the Weddell Sea for the "winter" (read: summer). The southbound migration takes 3 months, and the journey back north is 40 days. Details of the migration routes and the lightweight geolocators can be found on the web at www.arctictern.info

Sooty shearwaters also migrate huge distances, about 40,000 miles round trip, but in the opposite direction. They breed on the coast of New Zealand (October thru March) and travel north "for the winter", as it were, to the coasts of Japan, California, and Alaska – and spend another summer there. Scientists at UC Santa Cruz attached 6-gram geolocators to 33 birds and retrieved 19 of them. They discovered that the shearwaters tour the whole expanse of the Pacific Ocean in a huge figure 8, and they are on migration for about 200 days each year. The longest distance traveled in one day is about 550 miles. For more information, there's an interesting article about this in the UCSC magazine at: <http://currents.ucsc.edu/06-07/08-14/shearwaters.asp>.

The Falcon Research Group, from near Seattle, put GPS transmitters on a dozen peregrine falcons in Chile and tracked their migration to the high arctic. These units transmit positions three times a day, potentially for years. One bird – they named her "Island Girl" – just recently completed her third migration cycle, nesting on Baffin Island in NE Canada, at 63°N, and returning each year to the same beach where she was tagged, at 34°S. On her northbound journey this year she covered 9,500 miles in 55 days, the longest day's flight being about 300 miles. The FRG web site www.frg.org has interactive maps for each of the peregrines they tagged - you can see their position every day, and where they roost each night.

These three species migrate intermittently, stopping along the way. By contrast, some species fly huge distances non-stop. The grand prize goes to bar-tailed godwits that nest in Alaska. Researchers from USGS and Massey University fitted GPS transmitters to 16 bar-tailed godwits in New Zealand, hoping to find out details of their journeys. The batteries were expected to last a couple of months at the most, but one unit transmitted long enough to cover the migration in both

directions. This particular bird flew from NZ (19°S) to China in a single flight of 6,340 miles, and after a few weeks there she continued on to her breeding grounds in Alaska. In late August she left Alaska (59°N) and flew non-stop back to New Zealand, covering 7,100 miles in a little over 8 days. She returned to the same mud flat she had left from 5 months earlier. For more details visit: www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=1774

Birds are amazing!



Photo of Horned Lark was submitted by Gerhard Knudsen.

Field Trip by Larry Weeks

Sunday, December 5, 2011: Twelve people joined Jim Brown for the Mission Valley field trip. This particular field trip is scheduled on a Sunday because the Grizzly football team may host a playoff game, which actually happened this year. Missoula had over 2 inches of fresh snow overnight, but as we worked our way north to Polson, the amount of snow decreased to just a dusting. We had sunshine for most of the day, and the Mission Mountains were spectacular. After meeting some additional participants in Ronan, we headed West on Round Butte Road and then North on Leighton. The raptors going north were almost exclusively red-tailed hawks. As always, there was plenty of variation and we did see one Harlan's red-tail. Later in the day, we found a striking pale red-tail and a chocolate-colored dark phase red-tail. There was some wind and there were many raptors riding the wind currents near the hill tops and ridges, and appeared to be having fun rather than hunting. We had 8 species of ducks at the Polson sewage ponds which included about 30 Barrow's goldeneyes and 30 common goldeneyes. The sewage ponds had the only ring-billed gull of the trip. When we entered Valley View, we started to see more rough legged hawks. A search for a snowy owl that had been seen near River Breaks and Valley View Drive was unsuccessful. However, we did find some horned larks while looking for the owl. Other noteworthy birds included several American kestrels, bald eagles and northern harriers, one great horned owl, and some American tree sparrows. We saw 32 species in total.

2012 Field Trip Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location/Description</u>	<u>Leader</u>	<u>Meet</u>
Saturday, February 25	Mission Valley	Terry McEneaney	8AM at UM
Saturday, March 24	Lee Metcalf	Terry McEneaney	8AM at UM
Saturday, April 21	Warm Springs Ponds	Gary Swant	7AM at UM
Saturday, May 5	Brown's Lake	Jim Brown	8AM at UM
May 19-20	Freezout Lake	Joe Elliott	
Saturday, May 26	Bandy Ranch or Potomac Ranches	Jim Brown	8AM at UM
June 16-17	Bannack/Clark Canyon	Cynthia Hudson	
Saturday, June 23	Clearwater Lakes	Donna Love	8AM at UM
Saturday, July 21	Boyer Properties	Cynthia Hudson	8AM at Frenchtown
Saturday, September 8	Ninepipes	Jim Brown	8AM at UM
Saturday, October 6	Flesher Pass	Cynthia Hudson	6AM at UM
Saturday, November 3	Maclay Flat	Paul Loehnen	10AM at Maclay
Sunday, December 2	Mission Valley	Jim Brown	8AM at UM



Join us for **Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, this year co-hosted by Flathead Audubon Society, June 8–10 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Kalispell.**

However, while birders and outdoor enthusiasts

planned for summer, raptor experts kept track of spectacular fall migrations, and are now crunching the numbers from those counts. **Peter Sherrington is one of those experts, and we're thrilled to have him as our keynote speaker this year!** Peter is a geologist/paleontologist who in 1992 gave up a career in the oil industry to study Golden Eagle migration in Alberta's Rocky Mountains. He is the founder and Research Director of the Rocky Mountain Eagle Research Foundation. He lives in the hamlet of Beaver Mines, Alberta. After Saturday morning's field trips you will want to join us for Peter's lunchtime keynote, "Twenty Years of Golden Eagle Migration Studies in the Alberta Rockies: the Big Picture Begins to Emerge."

In addition to our keynote topic, we are keeping with our theme, "Birding and Conservation: The Crown of the Continent," by featuring two pre-festival workshops on Friday, June 8th. Also, we have **28 field trips planned**—14 each on Saturday and Sunday—guided by knowledgeable birders and naturalists familiar with the species and their habitats in the Flathead Valley, Glacier National Park and the surrounding area. Here is just a brief sampling of some of those trips to contemplate as you look forward to the upcoming Bird Festival:

In **Glacier National Park** we'll focus on neotropicals and the spectacular Harlequin Duck, exploring various habitats on the west side of GNP from lush riparian areas to dense forest, from meadows to rushing streams. We'll walk along McDonald Creek looking and listening for warblers, vireos, flycatchers and ducks including Townsend's Warblers, Warbling Vireos and possibly a Pileated Woodpecker.

Biking and Birding on the Rails to Trails to Somers.

Dan Casey, of the American Bird Conservancy, will lead a level 15-mile round trip on the new Rails to Trails system from the conference hotel. You'll encounter riparian shrublands, wetlands, grasslands, and forest, with target species including Clay-Colored Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, Nashville Warbler, Willow Flycatcher, Calliope Hummingbird and more. A pastry shop stop in Somers will refuel the return trip to Kalispell.

A Walk through the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area

will be a pleasant morning wander through this 442-acre undisturbed riparian forest habitat on the Flathead River managed by Flathead Audubon, where over 80 species of birds can be seen, including Red-eyed and Warbling Vireos, Bullock's Oriole, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Calliope Hummingbird. Along the river we may see Wood Duck, Common Goldeneye, Spotted Sandpiper, Bank Swallow and Great Blue Heron.

Bison, Birds and Blooms of the National Bison Range.

This tour of grasslands, uplands, and streamside thickets of the Bison Range will reveal abundant wildflowers and a remarkable diversity of birds, from Bullock's Orioles to Golden Eagles, from Rock Wrens to Western Wood-Pewees, and from Lazuli Buntings to Lewis's Woodpeckers. We will also get to see bison calves frolicking in the meadows. We will walk along the trails in the picnic area and along the Jocko River. The panoramic view from the top of the Bison Range encompasses the Mission Valley to the north, the magnificent Mission Mountains to the east, and a long view of the Flathead River to the south.

Birding by Ear on the Way to Tally Lake.

Explore a wide variety of habitats on the way to Tally Lake, Montana's deepest lake. At the campground one can see every warbler species found in northwestern Montana. Neotropical migrants such as American Redstarts, Wilson's Warblers, Northern Waterthrush, and Fox Sparrows inhabit the streamside thickets. Townsend's Warblers and Western Tanagers sing in thick conifer stands nearby, and Common Loons and Bald Eagles breed along the shore. This trip will focus on both bird identification in the field and birding by ear.

Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge. Formally a working ranch, being restored to its original habitat, is one of the best places to see grassland and riparian birds up close. The road through the Refuge wanders along wet meadows where Wilson's Snipe, Brewer's Blackbirds, and Vesper Sparrows sit on fence posts next to the road. The abundant songs and calls of various warblers and flycatchers can be heard from thickets along the road. Dahl Lake, a large shallow lake on the Refuge, has breeding populations of Ruddy Ducks, Grebes—Red-necked, Pied-billed, Horned, and Eared—and Sandhill Cranes. Overhead we are likely to see Golden and Bald Eagles soaring on the wind as both species breed here.

For more information please contact Montana Audubon Bird Festival Coordinator, Larissa Berry at lberry@mtaudubon.org or 406-443-3949, or any Board Member of Flathead Audubon Society.

Welcome New Members:

Nancy L. Crosby Charlie & Barb Fabisch Allisen Justma Carol Morlock Janet Newman



Thanks to our Returning Members:

Vivian Aylesworth	Liz Bradley	Nancy Braun	Ed Brunsvold
Bob & Judy Bungarz	Louise Cameron	Gladys & Barney Considine	Shirley Day
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John M. Hoar	Toni Julian	Helena S. Koelle	Caroline Kurtz
Rosemary Leach	Zona Lindemann	Beth & Paul Loehhen	Forrest Madden
Mansfield Lib-Serials	Missoula Public Library	Parker-McClain Family	Scott Morgan
John Rimel	Bob Rolfson	David L. Schmidt	Megan Schuknecht
Jeannie Siegler	Robin Paul Silverstein	Guy Smith	Kit Stevens
Bill Thomas	Jean & Bill Woessner	Dr. Hans Zuuring	

**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 OZ**

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

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