

# January 2014

## Birding Observer



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

### Calendar

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- **Monday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 7pm:** Betsy Griffing will host the October board meeting at her office. The address is Axilon Law Group, 257 W Front St, Suite B in downtown Missoula.
- **Saturday January 11<sup>th</sup>, 9am:** Meet at Maclay Flats on Blue Mountain Road for a three-hour birdwalk led by Terry Toppins.
- **Monday, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 7:30pm:** Please join us at our January program meeting to hear Philip Ramsey, manager of MPG Ranch, talk about the natural history and wildlife of the ranch.
- **Wednesday, January 15<sup>th</sup>:** Submission deadline for the February edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, January 18<sup>th</sup>:** Beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.

### Conservation at MPG Ranch

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MPG ranch manager Philip Ramsey will discuss the natural history and wildlife of the ranch, which covers diverse habitats across more than 9,500 acres in the Sapphire Mountains. The presentation will explore the ranch's history, restoration efforts, plant monitoring, and wildlife use. This will be our annual joint meeting with the Native Plant Society. Join us Monday, January 13 at 7:30 p.m. in the Gallagher Business Building, room 123 on the University of Montana campus.

Philip is committed to protecting, preserving, and restoring western ecosystems. He studied ecology at the University of Montana as an undergraduate. In graduate school, he received training from professors all over the northwest in soil science and restoration and earned a Ph.D. in Microbiology in 2006 for a dissertation on the relationship between mine waste contamination and ecosystem functioning in the Clark Fork River Valley upstream of Missoula.

After graduate school Philip became an assistant professor in the Division of Biological Sciences at the University of Montana where he continued research on ecosystem processes. He also started a consulting company that sought to apply the best ecosystem research to restoration practice and to monitor restoration projects for the purpose of advancing our knowledge of ecosystem function. Philip's work was supported by the philanthropy of the owner of a conservation property in the Swan Valley, who in 2009 purchased the ranch and expanded its conservation goals. This created a unique opportunity for Philip; he left UM to manage these conservation properties full time and now oversees the ranch's operations and management.



**Peeps From The Board:  
Wildlife Watching in the Galapagos Islands**

By Beverly Orth Geoghegan

In September 2013, I had the good fortune to go on a week-long cruise in the Galapagos Islands with a friend. We travelled aboard one of Ecoventura's 20-passenger yachts. It was an ideal way to explore the Galapagos, because we did most of our sailing at night, which allowed us to explore a different island each day.

On day one, we landed on the island of San Cristobel. Our guide and naturalist, Pepe, met us at the airport in the early afternoon. After lunch and orientation, we explored one of San Cristobel's beaches. There we observed our first of many Galapagos Sea Lions. Sea lions are everywhere in the Galapagos. On that first day, I'm sure there were many birds and other critters to be seen, but I was so overcome by the size and number of sea lions that it was a little hard to pay attention to the birds. However, I can say for sure that I saw Sanderling; Yellow Warbler; Tree Finch; Brown Pelican; Great Frigatebird; White-vented Storm Petrel; and Brown Booby. We also saw Lava Lizards and various crabs.

The next morning, on day two, we explored the area of San Cristobel known as Isla Lobos. I was able to get over the initial excitement of sea lions enough to start checking birds off my *Birds of Galapagos* checklist. I observed the Lava Gull (a relative of the Laughing Gull, with a similar call), American Oystercatcher; Magnificent Frigatebird; Great Frigatebird; Great Blue Heron; Ruddy Turnstone; Yellow Warbler; Brown Noddy; Brown Pelicans; Whimbrel; Wandering Tattler; and Semi-palmated Plover. The highlights included watching a variety of bird species eating crabs and some regurgitated substance off the lava rocks and Yellow Warblers eating flies that swarmed the faces of sea lions. Sometimes the sea lions would growl to scare the warblers away, but the tiny birds wouldn't stray too far and would always come right back, much to the sea lions' dismay. Later that afternoon, I also saw my first Pacific Green Sea Turtles.

On day three, we found ourselves at Española Island, the oldest and most pristine island in the Galapagos. It was by far the most exciting island we visited because of the sheer numbers of species and numbers of individuals of each species. We were greeted by about two dozen Marine Iguanas sunning themselves on the rocks along the dock. Once we stepped foot on the beach, we watched mother sea lions and their cubs nursing and sleeping. After taking a thousand photos, we continued along the path up a slight



**A sea lion cub plays with a marine iguana.  
Photo by Rich Beattie**

hill. On the other side of the hill there were so many more iguanas and sea lions that it made us feel silly for all of the time we spent at the dock. The second group of iguanas contained between 100-150 individuals, all facing the sun. They are very colorful (red, green and black) and they spit. So don't get too close, like I did. Walking along a little further, a sea lion cub delighted us by playing with a smaller group of iguanas. The iguanas were surprisingly tolerant, even when the cub playfully opened his mouth over and onto an iguana's head. Along this beachy area, we saw Yellow-crowned Night Heron; Hood Mockingbird; Galapagos Dove; Galapagos Flycatcher; Red-billed Tropicbird; and two breeding pairs of Galapagos Hawk.

We walked inland, where we saw Waved Albatrosses in various stages of courtship and nesting. We saw three babies under a bush, which Pepe estimated to be about two months old. We watched several pairs doing a courtship performance that was as entertaining, if not more so, than any Broadway show. We saw dozens of Blue-footed Boobies both on the ground and in flight. While we were not there during the right time of year to see their famous dance, they amused us nonetheless by their goofy stares and obvious indifference to our presence. I also observed Masked Booby (Nazca Booby); Small Ground Finch; Sharp-billed Ground Finch; Cactus Finch; Warbler Finch; Lava Heron and Galapagos Mockingbird.

On day four, we visited the island of Floreana. We walked inland a short distance where we observed twelve Greater Flamingos and a mating pair of White-cheeked Pintails in a brackish lagoon. In the flora around the lagoon, I saw Small-beaked Ground Finch; Medium Tree Finch and the Australian Ladybug, a flightless insect. Back at the shore we

saw Great Blue Heron; Sanderling; Ruddy Turnstone; and Yellow Warbler. We also waded into the water knee deep and watched sting rays from a close distance. Later that day, my friend and I sat on the sun deck to read, but were pleasantly distracted by five Magnificent Frigate Birds soaring a mere 15 feet above us. We gleefully watched, as they travelled with our boat for a couple of hours.

On the fifth day of our journey, we visited the populated island of Santa Cruz. There we travelled by bus into the highlands where we peered into the depths of sink holes and lava tunnels. We also visited a locally-owned ranch, where we observed and photographed Giant Tortoises. Birds observed in the highlands included Cattle Egret; Common Stilt; Smooth-billed Ani (an invasive species); Small Tree Finch; and Large Cactus Finch. Later that day, we visited the Darwin Research Station to look at Giant Tortoises and Land Lizards in captivity. We got to see baby tortoises at various stages of development, and we saw the site where Lonesome George lived out his final days.

On day six, we visited the island of Bartholome, where we climbed to the top of a steep hill for the famous Pinnacle Rock Overlook. Along the trail, I spotted a Dark-Billed Cuckoo, which greatly excited Pepe. He said that he hadn't seen one in a couple of years. We also admired the geology of the landscape, which reminded me of Hollywood versions of Mars, yet surrounded by turquoise waters. At the top of the hill, we enjoyed the view from every direction and took many photos. I tried very hard to soak in as much as possible, knowing that it was our last full day of the trip. On our way back to the yacht, we took a little detour in the dingy to get a closer look at two pairs of Galapagos Penguins. They are quite small and super cute.

Before sunset that evening, my friend and I again sat up on the sun deck. This time we watched 20 Great Frigate birds flying above us. We laid out a bit too long and soaked up more sun than we should have, but it was worth it—a perfect end to a magical trip.



**Galapagos Crab**  
Photo by Rich Beattie

## **Mission Valley Field Trip by Jim Brown**

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Four people ventured forth at -5 degrees for a birding trip to the Mission Valley. It was the day after the Griz-Coastal Carolina game, which for those who went to the stadium, was plenty cold. So, with the unusually cold weather the number of participants was considerably fewer than a year ago when 20 birders took part. But, the birding was surprisingly good. As we left the Cenex Station in Ronan an immature Golden Eagle flew over the road. We then explored the Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area and Waterfowl Production areas, but the cold air seemed to put a lid on bird activity. So we took a short walk along a shelter belt and found an American Robin and Townsend's Solitaire sitting puffed up and motionless in a small tree. Nearby was a small flock of American Tree Sparrows, an arctic visitor that looked very much at home in the cold, frosty environment. At 1 degree above zero the raptors started moving and the birding became more interesting.

In all we tallied 31 species, some being Common Merganser, Common Goldeneye, Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagle (11), Northern Harrier (6), Sharp-shinned Hawk (1), Red-tailed hawk (21), Rough-legged Hawk (23), American Kestrel (5), Wilson's Snipe, Mourning Dove (15), Eurasian-collared Dove (27), and American Dipper.

About noon we stopped at the beautiful home of Dave and Ruth Ann Bunnell that overlooks the Ninepipe area. A special treat was in store, not found on our usual birding trips. Ruth Ann served homemade pumpkin and cranberry breads along with crackers and delicious dips. And the freshly brewed hot coffee really hit the spot. After lunch we continued birding west to the ice choked Flathead River and on into the Moiese Valley where several rufous morph Red-tailed hawks were viewed up close. Although it was a cold day the birding was fun and interesting and views of the Mission Mountains were spectacular.



**Blue-footed Boobies**  
Photo by Rich Beattie

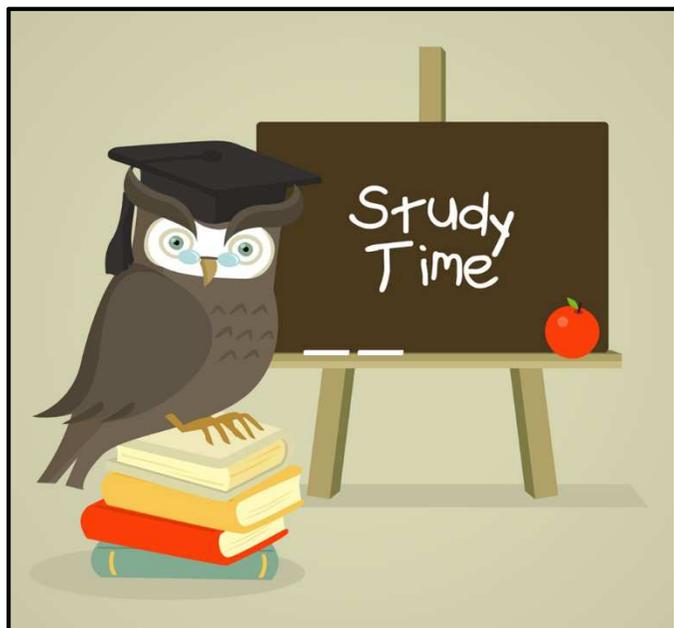
## Advanced Birding Workshop

by Larry Weeks

An advanced birding workshop has been scheduled for February and March 2014 that will include seven sessions on Thursday nights from 7pm – 9:30 pm at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Regional Office on Spurgin Road. Each session will be devoted to one bird group. The date, subject and presenter of each session are as follows:

Date	Bird Group	Presenter
Feb 13	Flycatchers	Christian Meny
Feb 20	Owls	Matt Larson
Feb 27	Raptors	Steve Hoffman
Mar 6	Shorebirds	Jim Brown
Mar 13	Forest Birds	Jim Sparks
Mar 20	Gulls	Terry McEneaney
Mar 27	Sparrows	Terry McEneaney

A person may decide to attend a single session, any combination of sessions or all 7 sessions. The cost will be \$15 per session or \$70 for all 7 sessions. To sign up, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or [bwsgenea@centric.net](mailto:bwsgenea@centric.net).



## Wings Across the Big Sky

June 6-8, 2014 Bozeman, Montana

The time has arrived! ... to begin planning and spreading the word that **Montana Audubon's Wings Across the Big Sky Festival**, co-hosted by **Sacajawea Audubon Society**, is June 6-8 in Bozeman. We anticipate a fantastic turnout, but as always, not without your help and enthusiasm. Invite your out-of-state and nearby friends, birders and non-birders alike, to visit the Gallatin Valley and surrounding areas where you can participate in abundant festival activities.

There will be approximately 20 field trips, including trips into Gallatin and Madison Valleys, grasslands, wetlands, forest and field, some local flair, with the excitement of seeing a varied array of species. We are also looking forward to festival artwork by Andrew Guttenberg, a local Bozemanite.

Festival headquarters will be located at the Best Western GranTree Inn at 1325 North 7<sup>th</sup> in Bozeman. Sacajawea Audubon has been working with us and the GranTree team on event logistics and service, and we are very pleased to know this venue is going to supply us with excellent opportunities to host an expanded display area, concurrent Saturday afternoon presentations, a fun Friday night festival kickoff event hosted by Sacajawea Audubon, our keynote speaker (see below), and a Saturday evening banquet dinner.

We are particularly pleased to announce that John Marzluff, Professor of Wildlife Science at the University of Washington, will be our keynote speaker on Saturday afternoon. His research on the social behavior and ecology of crows and ravens highlights the exceptional intelligence of this avian family known to recognize human faces. John is the author of more than 100 scientific papers, and his book written with Tony Angell, *In the Company of Crows and Ravens*, blends biology, conservation, and anthropology to suggest that human and crow cultures have co-evolved.

Each month we will continue to feature developing news on Bird Festival 2014. Stay tuned!

For more information contact Bird Festival Coordinator, Cathie Erickson at [cerickson@mtaudubon.org](mailto:cerickson@mtaudubon.org).

## Welcome to Our New Members

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Lisa Blazeovich	Larry Blazeovich
Rae Brown	Melodee Burreson
Jann Clouse	Jane Doherty
Jo Fix	Pamela Fraiser
Keith Graham	Lois Gigstad
Tracy Hardy	Karen J. Hertzog
Estelle Hetzler	Lesla Homer
Thomas Kallmeyer	Timberley Kelly
Catlin McGrew	Marian Miller
Cori Miranda	Mary Moylan
Susannah Murphy	Kelly Van Oppen
Rain Reynolds	Dan Ries
Tim Rose	Suzanne Schwartz
Diana Tackett	Chantell Thornsberry

## Go Green and Save !

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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](mailto:k7vk@arrl.net). You can also always find your current newsletter on the Five Valleys Audubon Society's website at: [www.fvaudubon.org](http://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 422250  
Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250



TO:

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