

June 2012

# Birding Observer



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

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## Calendar

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\* **June 8-10:** Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, Wings Across the Big Sky, will be held in Kalispell, MT. Visit [www.mtaudubon.org](http://www.mtaudubon.org) for details and registration.

\* **Saturday, June 16<sup>th</sup>:** Beginning birdwalk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.

\* **June 16-17:** Two-Day Field Trip to Bannack/Clark Canyon. See write-up to the right for details.

\* **Saturday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>:** All-day field trip to Seeley Lake and the Clearwater Lakes led by Donna Love. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 8:00AM.

\* **Saturday, July 21<sup>th</sup>:** All-day field trip to the Boyer Properties near Frenchtown led by Cynthia Hudson. Meet at 8:00 AM at the Frenchtown Conoco.

\* **Saturday, July 21<sup>th</sup>:** Beginning birdwalk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.

\* **Wednesday, August 15<sup>th</sup>:** Submission deadline for the September edition of the *Birding Observer*.

\* **Saturday, August 18<sup>th</sup>:** Beginning birdwalk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.

\* **Tuesday, September 4<sup>th</sup>:** Bill Gabriel will host the September board meeting.

\* **Saturday, September 8<sup>th</sup>:** All-day trip to Ninepipes and surrounding area led by Jim Brown. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 8am.



## Join Us For A Field Trip to Bannack/Clark Canyon

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**June 16-17:** A **two-day** field trip to Bannack & Clark Canyon has been scheduled for June 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> which will be led by Cynthia Hudson and Nate Kohler. Cynthia will leave Missoula at 7:30 AM on the 16<sup>th</sup> and will meet Nate in Melrose at 10:00 AM. Cynthia and Nate will bird the area around Melrose and end up in Dillon. The group will be staying overnight in Dillon at the Best Western Paradise Inn, 650 No. Montana St. (1-406-683-4214). Participants will need to make their reservations in advance and can stay at another motel if they choose. On Sunday, the tour will go to Bannack and end up at Clark Canyon Reservoir. Contact Cynthia at 722-0016 to sign up and to facilitate car-pooling. There is a \$10 charge per individual on multi-day field trips.

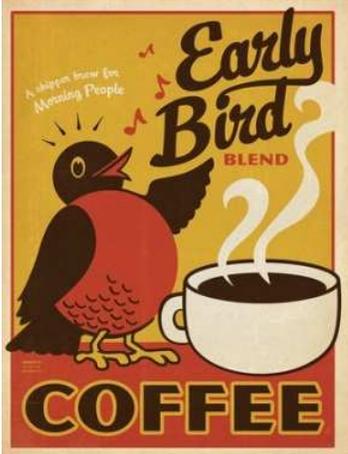
## Beginning Birdwalks at Lee Metcalf

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Monthly beginning bird walks will continue at Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge this summer on the third Saturday of each month from 10am-Noon. Designed specifically for new or beginning birders, participants will learn the basics of bird identification in a fun, supportive and relaxed setting. Binoculars, scopes and bird books are available if you don't have your own, and refreshments are also provided. Families with children and birders of any level are welcome.

No RSVP is necessary – just meet at 10 am at the Refuge Headquarters off the Eastside Highway, about 25 miles south of Missoula.

**Note:** The next edition of the *Birding Observer* will be published in September. Until then, Five Valleys Audubon Society wishes you a happy summer and happy birding!



These two teams of birders will soon be vying for the honor of seeing the most birds during an all day, dawn to dark, competitive Birdathon. This fun event is Five Valleys Audubon's annual fund raiser to support our conservation and education efforts. We seek pledges from Chapter members of so

much per species observed or whatever contributors wish to donate. After the full day of birding is completed and weary eyes have recovered we mail out a reminder of your pledge and a list of species seen by the team you supported. The teams begin by searching varied habitats in the Missoula Valley then usually go to other localities that remain secret until the birding is done. About 100 species will be observed depending on weather and luck.

Your tax deductible contributions are used to support these Chapter activities:

- Phil Wright Research Awards granted to qualifying high school and college wildlife biology students
- Audubon Adventures, a quarterly newsletter and lesson guide for teaching environmental education in elementary grades (3-6)
- Community Naturalist Program--Chapter volunteers provide classroom presentations and field trip learning experiences
- Wildlife habitat conservation projects that protect habitat in Missoula County particularly in the Clark Fork River--Grass Valley Important Bird Area. We inform Missoula citizens, land-owners, developers and city/county planners of the special importance of habitat in this area for birds and other wildlife. We review all subdivision proposals in Missoula County and testify at hearings in favor of adequate protection of riparian areas.

If we miss you by phone or letter please consider a contribution to FVAS and we will mail a species list to you. We certainly appreciate your support.

Springtime in the Rockies sometimes brings cold, windy weather with numerous rain, snow and graupel showers. That is exactly what 18 of us experienced on this year's birding trip to the Browns Lake area. Huge white caps on Browns Lake and wind-shaken scopes handicapped our search for waterfowl, but the nearby caragana shrub hedge held a mini fallout of Yellow-rumped Warblers providing good views of both Audubon and Myrtle races. In spite of the chilly weather the birding was excellent. We tallied 84 species, an all-time high for the Browns Lake trip. An exciting and completely unexpected find was a Great Gray Owl, spotted by Terry Toppins that sat patiently for everyone to enjoy. We observed 17 duck and 4 grebe species. An unusual Tawny Duck was discovered that took some careful scope work to convince everyone that it was actually a hen Mallard decoy. But in the same pond Terry McEaney got a brief look at a strange appearing duck that had characteristics of a Ring-necked Duck and Tufted Duck, possibly it was a hybrid. Unfortunately, it swam out of site before we could study or photograph it. We saw many raptors including several Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, Golden and Bald Eagles, Northern Harriers, American Kestrels, Red-tailed Hawks and a late migrating Rough-legged Hawk. We watched an immature Bald Eagle dine on an unlucky coot. We observed about 50 Sandhill Cranes mostly in one non breeding flock. Several cranes put on spectacular soaring flights as though they enjoyed playing in the strong winds. The changing sky and scenery provided an exciting backdrop for a day of great birding.

### Hi Friends! Go Green!

View your *Birding Observer* newsletter even sooner, only on-line. Just send us an email request with your name to Vick Applegate at [k7vk@arrl.net](mailto:k7vk@arrl.net).

We will alert you each month when the newsletter becomes available on-line.

You can find the Five Valleys Audubon web site at: <http://www.fvamisoula.org/>



**Saturday, April 21, 2012:** Whenever a field trip is scheduled near Butte, you have to watch the weather. However, the trip to the Warm Springs Ponds was blessed with sunshine, very little wind and temperatures near 70 degrees. Fifteen people left Missoula at 7:00 AM and met Gary Swant in Deer Lodge. Gary provided some background on the Warm Springs Wildlife Management Area, which includes 21 wildlife ponds. Gary is conducting weekly bird surveys from April to October to document the importance of the area for birds, so that Fish, Wildlife & Parks can justify management of the complex after the Atlantic Richfield Company fulfills their environmental obligations. He distributed handouts, detailing his last bird survey on April 19<sup>th</sup>. It contained 57 species and 15,791 total birds. His April 12<sup>th</sup> survey had 30,510 birds. The tour started at Pond 3, which is the largest. The surface was swarming with ducks, grebes, gulls, and especially coots. Gary explained that the great blue herons and double-crested cormorants used to nest in the willows on this pond, but last year's high water flooded them out. They have since moved to a different area. The gulls on "gull island" got disrupted by some nesting bald eagles and moved to the islands in Pond 3. The ring-billed gulls have since returned to gull island, but the California gulls have remained in Pond 3. There were a couple of common loons in Pond 3 and the car that stopped for the outdoor toilet had a great look at one of the loons at a distance of about 200 feet. As we progressed downstream to Ponds 1 and 2, Gary pointed out 2 great blue heron nests with a great horned owl nest in between. The owl only started nesting two weeks ago, which is a late for a great horned owl. At the Job Corps Ponds, we found lesser and greater yellowlegs and a flock of about 30 American avocets. Gary showed us the only Eurasian wigeon he found and a flock of about 20 snow geese. In the grasslands on the west side of the interstate, we had a flock of 17 sandhill cranes that contained both lesser and greater subspecies. We also observed a golden eagle and a long-billed curlew there. Near the hospital, we had a Virginia rail approach within a few feet of the group by playing a recording of its call. It swam across a small ditch twice and gave everyone an unobstructed view of the rail. Near the end of the tour, Terry McEaney identified a Swainson's hawk. We stopped at the Race Track Pond and found a couple of marbled godwits and

flushed a red-breasted merganser. Total species for the field trip was 63.

**Sunday, April 29, 2012:** I led a field trip along the Kim Williams Trail for Bike Walk Bus Week, which was organized and promoted by Rebecca Sills. The group gathered at the base of the M-trail and I started off by playing a recording of a Nashville warbler. Initially, we didn't get a response, but as we were leaving the area, some people could hear the warbler singing. I played the recording again in a slightly different area and we got an immediate response. After everyone got a look at the warbler, I explained that we might as well go home because I wouldn't be able to top that bird. However, we continued walking by the football stadium to access the river channel on the south side of Jacob's Island. Birds observed at that location included white-crowned and song sparrows, red-winged and Brewer's blackbirds, mallard, pine siskin, and great blue heron. Then someone saw a common raven attack a rock pigeon inside the stadium fence and everyone got to watch the raven devour the pigeon. In a very short time, it consumed most of the pigeon. As it flew away with the leftovers, the raven was pursued by 3 American crows. The tour continued up the trail passed the water fall where we saw a second Nashville warbler. On the return trip, we saw the osprey at the platform nest with the camera. There were 20 adults and 5 children on the trip.

**Saturday, May 12, 2012:** A field trip to Maclay Flat was scheduled for International Migratory Bird Day. Eight people joined Larry Weeks and Scott Hampton for a 3-hour tour of the 2-mile circle trail. The highlight of the trip was two juvenile great horned owls sitting together on a cottonwood branch. After the juvenile owls leave the nest, they begin "branching" which what these two were doing. These owls were in the same location where an adult great horned owl had been seen on a previous field trip. International migrating birds that were seen included yellow, yellow-rumped and orange-crowned warblers. We saw several common mergansers which included a female with 9 juveniles. Other birds included pileated woodpecker, red-naped sapsucker, wood ducks, and evening grosbeaks. We had 45 species for the trip.

**Elizabeth N. Johnston**  
**1931-2012**



Elizabeth Johnston, a woman with many interests and many friends, died peacefully at home on April 25, 2012. Somewhere I read that death occurs in three stages: when a person's last breath is exhaled, when their name is last spoken, and finally when their name is no longer remembered. Elizabeth will be remembered here as an avid birder who enjoyed keeping tabs on the bluebirds of Waterworks Hill behind her apartment. She will be remembered as a long-time member of Five Valleys Audubon, where she served as publicity chair and as the smiling greeter who asked everyone to sign the roster at monthly meetings. Elizabeth participated in the Birdathon each summer with the Coffee Swallows team, and said that she and Jim Brown, between them, made one good birder because she had excellent hearing and he had excellent vision.

Elizabeth loved birding field trips and will be remembered for her enthusiastic participation and for almost always bringing home-made zucchini bread to share. Aside from the snacks, she was the one carrying the fine Zeiss 7x42 binoculars that she couldn't stand to have hanging from her neck, so she always carried them in-hand, and sometimes dropped them. Every now and then the binoculars had to go back to Zeiss for repairs.

Elizabeth's life-long enjoyment of hiking and cross-country skiing found an outlet here in the women's Tuesday Hikers group, but long before that she had participated in Appalachian Trail Club activities back East and received a Silver Service Award from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

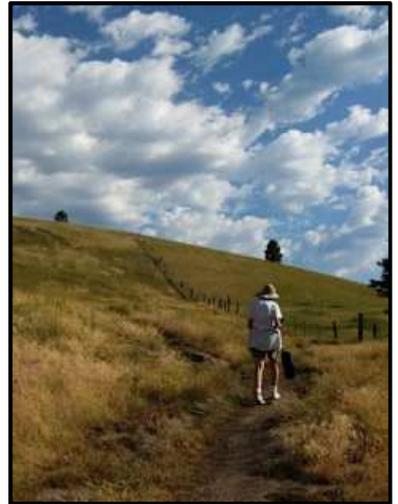
A graduate of Harris Teacher's College in St. Louis, where she was born, Elizabeth Johnston went to Japan to teach English at a girl's school for three years, and met her husband there. She later got an M.A. in reading from James Madison University in Virginia and spent 25 years teaching in Pennsylvania. After she retired and moved to Missoula, Elizabeth volunteered to help children learn to read at three elementary schools and at her church preschool. She loved reading, and read widely, preferring biographies of strong, intelligent women active in women's rights, or those who led adventurous lives.

Elizabeth kept a birding journal for years, recording the birds seen each day in a small notebook, and her daughter, Kathy Heffernan, told us, "Today I discovered her birding journal for 2012 and turned to April 25<sup>th</sup>. On the last day of her life, my mom saw these birds: Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, Vesper Sparrow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Western Bluebird, Mountain Bluebird, Meadowlark, Robin, Flicker, Raven, Crow, Cowbird. She added A and G notations after each, which I take to mean "apartment" and "gulch." Mom hiked up Cherry Gulch on the last day of her life and enjoyed the birds and wildflowers in one of her favorite places. She spoke about this in our last conversation around 9 that night. I hope that all of us have such a pleasant last day."

I read somewhere that when a friend dies, a little of them may go on with you, and it may be a material bit to keep their name alive. Kathy Heffernan donated some of her mother's books and other birding mementos to FVAS and each of us at the May board meeting saved something by which to remember Elizabeth.

She loved children, birds, reading, and dancing, and her family will hold a celebration of Elizabeth's life in July. For those so inclined, they suggest memorial donations to Five Valleys Audubon Society, University Congregational Children's Center Preschool, Missoula Food Bank, or, simply to buy a book for a child.

—Bill Gabriel



## **Birding on Waterworks Hill\*** by Elizabeth Johnston

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For those living in or visiting Missoula, the Waterworks Hill circuit makes a pleasant morning walk, and May, June and July are excellent times for viewing. The entrance is a short gravel road located off Greenough Drive. I like to start my hike by taking the Cherry Gulch Trail, the lower trail to the right, which circles up the hill via two switch-backs and then turns downhill back to the parking area. As you enter the short bushy and wooded area, you may see a Calliope Hummingbird perched on a tall brush proclaiming his rights to the area. I've seen male Lazuli Buntings fight over territory in this area. In the taller trees the Bullock Orioles hang their nest and hunt in the grasslands for food. In the underbrush the Spotted Towhees scratch and nest. On the edge of this area you may hear a Killdeer call. The Chipping Sparrows like the Ponderosa Pine.

All of the birds like the insect bounty the grasslands produce. Unless the day is wet and windy, Western and Mountain Bluebirds will be seen. The bright blue males like to sit on the fence lines near their nest boxes. The Western Bluebirds prefer the gulch area, which has scattered trees; while the Mountain Bluebirds find the top of the ridge more appealing. Bluebirds often double clutch in this productive area. Tree Swallows use many of the extra bluebird houses that the bluebirds reject. The Bluebirds like to feed close to the ground, while the swallows catch their prey on the wing. The Cliff Swallows that live under the Missoula bridges join in the flying insect hunt with their cousins, the Tree Swallows. The Eastern Kingbirds like to sit on the fences. Their cousins the Western Kingbirds come a little later and like to nest high up on the telephone poles. You will hear a chorus of Meadow Larks and Vesper Sparrows claiming their grassland territory. In midsummer, you are likely to see a tiny Vesper Sparrow running like little mouse upon the trail in front of you. And of course there are Red-tailed hawks. The Red Hawks are prominent as they sit on telephone poles or soar through the air searching for ground squirrels. The American Kestrels join in the hunt for grasshoppers and an occasional Cooper's Hawk feasts on small birds. One winter day the area seemed devoid of birds until a Merlin was discovered lurking about. It was also bird watching. This is just a few of the over sixty species I have observed on the Hill over the years. Take a walk on Waterworks Hill and discover it for yourself.

**\* Reprinted from May 2011 *Birding Observer***

## **Board Highlights**

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- We approved the Chapter's budget for 2012-13. It includes \$15,400 of income and \$11,586 of expense. Our account balances as of April 30<sup>th</sup> were \$32,867 in the chapter accounts, and \$63,939 in the P.L. Wright Endowment accounts.
- Working with Rebecca Sills, of National Audubon (who lives in Missoula) we have been trying new ways to engage younger people in the chapter. We now have a Facebook page and we're learning how to use social media to improve our outreach. Rebecca has organized field trips to see the snowy owls, to Maclay Flat, and along the Kim Williams trail, and she also orchestrated our Earth Day booth and (in conjunction with MT Natural History Center and UM) the Bird Party. These activities have been popular, with over 400 adults and about 175 children participating in or learning about our chapter's activities since January. 15 new members signed up at these events.
- We have vacancies for Vice President, Secretary, and Newsletter Distribution Chair.

## **Report Osprey and Lewis's Woodpecker Observations**

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The Avian Science Center is interested in learning more about the distribution of ospreys and Lewis's woodpeckers within the Bitterroot, Clark Fork, and Flathead Rivers and tributaries within western Montana. If you anticipate observing either of these species and would like to participate as a contributing citizen scientist, please email Dr. Dick Hutto at <hutto@mso.umd.edu> for more information.



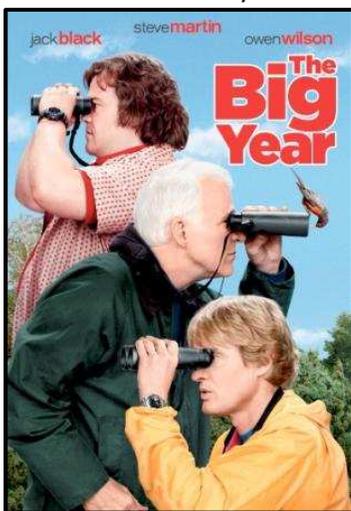
## Review of the Film: THE BIG YEAR by Ted Geoghegan

The 2011 comedy THE BIG YEAR came and went from theaters so quickly, it's no surprise that most moviegoers missed it entirely. It might come as a shock, however, that the film is actually a genuinely endearing piece of cinema, headlined by a charming cast and a plot that would make any birding fans jump for joy.

Brad Harris (Jack Black) is an amateur birder who dreams of traveling across North America in an attempt to spot more birds than anyone else in one calendar year: an informal competition amongst birders known as a "Big Year." Stu Preissler (Steve Martin), a multimillionaire CEO in Manhattan, speaks fondly to his colleagues about birding and decides that he, too, will participate in a "Big Year." Elsewhere in the country, current record-holder Kenny Bostick (Owen Wilson) springs the news on his wife that he's also planning on doing another "Big Year" – fearing that his previous record of 732 sightings might be outdone.

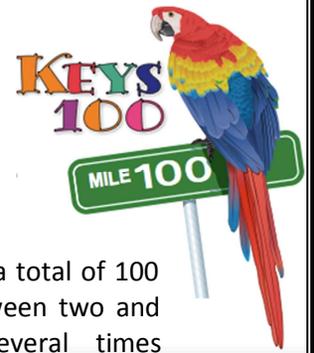
As the year begins, the trio runs into each other at a number of sightings across America, and it soon becomes clear to Brad that if he's going to outdo the obsessed Kenny, he'll need to team up with the goodhearted CEO. The trio is wonderful, with Black holding back his usual over-the-top antics in favor of restrained charm. Martin is charming and warm, while Wilson's unstoppable Bostwick thankfully never comes off as a villain.

The film is loosely based on Mark Obmascik's book *The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession*, and, although names and dates have changed (the events actually occurred in 1998), the film's birds and locations remain true to the story – with breathtaking scenes filmed everywhere from Coos Bay, Oregon to Alaska's snowswept Attu Island. And while some historians may already know who won, it's endearing – and overwhelming – to see photos of all 755 of the champion's birds over the film's end credits.



## Ultramarathon Birding by Beverly Orth Geoghegan

On May 19<sup>th</sup>, I participated in the Keys100, a two-day ultramarathon that includes 50- and 100-mile solo runs and 100-mile relays, starting in Key Largo and ending in Key West. I was a member of a six-person relay team. Combined, we ran a total of 100 miles. Since each leg was between two and three miles long, I ran several times throughout the day. Although my main objective was to run, I couldn't help but to do a little birding along the way. I spotted many different species of birds and other animals and kept a list in the team van. I also kept a book of Florida birds handy to help me identify those species that I couldn't positively identify on first sight.



Since I was observing with the naked eye and constantly on the move, I wasn't able to identify all of the species I saw, but here are a few that I could positively identify, in no particular order: Anhinga; Red-winged Blackbird; Eurasian Collared-Dove; Mourning Dove; Common Grackle; Boat-tailed Grackle; Red-shouldered Hawk; Northern Mockingbird; Great Egret; Double-crested Cormorant; White Ibis; Laughing Gull; Ring-billed Gull; Osprey; Bald Eagle; Belted Kingfisher; Red-tailed Hawk; Brown Pelican; Semipalmated Sandpiper; Loggerhead Shrike; and Gypsy Chickens. I also saw numerous Marsh Rabbits; Blue Crabs; Hermit Crabs; Fiddler Crabs; Great Land Crabs; Key Deer and Green Iguanas.

Once in Key West, I saw countless feral, non-native roosters, chickens, and their chicks. Known as the Key West Gypsy Chickens, they've been roaming the island for nearly 200 years, but their numbers didn't really start to grow until the 1950's, when Cubans fleeing their country found new residence in Key West. Many of them brought their own chickens, for eggs, meat and cockfighting. Over time, many of these birds escaped or were released by their owners and bred with the other wild chickens. With few predators on the island, they have thrived on insects, worms, lizards, and handouts from humans. Though the chickens are an invasive species and considered a nuisance by many locals, they are protected. They provide a source of food for raptors and raccoons, and they are credited by Key West locals for keeping cockroach and scorpion populations under control. And for many, they are part of the color and charm of the island.

**Welcome New Members:**

Roberta Chapman	George Dilger
Becky Douglas	Barbara S. Griffith
Paul and Mary Hayes	Sarah & Siam La Font
Robert Lukes	Shirley McLaughlin
Edward Monnig	Ralph & Betty Thisted

**Thanks to our Returning Members:**

Charles K. Allen	Beth Beringer
Virginia L. Bolten	Robin Childers
Betty L. Csorosz	Bill DeCou
Philip D. Difani	Susan Doores
Lillian A. Dove	William Elison
Kevin & Judy Fredenberg	Catherine Goodman
E. G. Grimley	Dorothy Hebert
Pamela Kloote	Shirley F. Maloney
Billy Merila	Margaret Moffatt
Sheldon Reagan	Norman Smyers
Debbie & Marc Steinberg	Tom & Mary Thompson
Elaine Williams	Richard & Adele Wolff
Hedwig Wright	



**Field Trip Leader Larry Weeks, with young birders on the Kim Williams Trail in spring 2012.**



**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.

**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**

# Five Valleys Audubon Society

PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807

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**TO:**

## FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Vice President	Vacant			
Secretary	Vacant			
Treasurer	Kit Stevens	230 Bickford St., Missoula 59801	721 - 3530	dogmakit@yahoo.com

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2012-2015	Clancy Cone	5604 Bridger Court #2, Missoula, MT 59803	544-1802	ccone3668@gmail.com
2012-2015	Betsy Griffing	257 W Front St, Ste. B, Missoula, MT 59802	529-3106	betsygriffing.griffing@gmail.com

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Archivist	Shirley Holden	2319 Valley Dr, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 5706	
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Christmas Bird Count	Larry Weeks	2428 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801	549 – 5632	bwsgenea@onlinemt.com
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Honorary Member	Elizabeth Johnston			

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