

June 2013

# Birding Observer



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

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## Summer 2013 - Calendar of Events

- **Saturday, June 1<sup>st</sup>:** Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area & Seeley Lake area - Meet in the middle of the UM Adams Center parking lot at 8am to carpool. FW&P Wildlife Biologist Kristi DuBois will lead the field trip to look at birds, butterflies and wetlands. Please dress appropriately and bring a lunch. The group will depart UM promptly at 8am and return around 4pm. For more info call Terry Toppins at 214-1194.
- **Tuesday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 7pm:** Trumpeter Swan Reintroduction Talk (Polson) - Dale Becker, the Tribal Wildlife Manager for the Consolidated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, will give a presentation on the reintroduction and restoration of trumpeter swans in northwestern Montana. The talk will be at the Best Western KwaTaqNuk Resort in Polson.
- **June 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>:** Montana Audubon's 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Wings Across the Big Sky Festival in Lewistown, MT. Visit <http://mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival.html> for details.
- **Saturday, June 15<sup>th</sup>:** Beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.
- **Saturday June 15<sup>th</sup>, 3pm-5pm:** Missoula's Pollinator Party - Join the Clark Fork chapter of the Montana Native Plant Society, Lolo National Forest, and Five Valleys Audubon, to celebrate our native pollinators. See page 3 for details.
- **Saturday June 22<sup>nd</sup> & Sunday June 23<sup>rd</sup>:** Two day birding trip to Melrose, Bannack and Clark Canyon Reservoir. See page 3 for details.
- **Saturday July 6<sup>th</sup>:** Birding and the Corps of Discovery from Lolo to Lolo Pass, led by Radd Icenoggle. Meet in the middle of the UM Adams Center parking lot to depart at 7am for carpooling for a day-long trip looking for birds seen by the Lewis and Clark Expedition, returning to Missoula about 4pm. Bring a lunch, sunscreen and insect repellent. For more information call Radd at 406-600-9688.
- **Saturday July 20<sup>th</sup>:** Join Dragonfly and bird enthusiasts Nate Kohler and Bob Martinka for a day of dragonflies and birds in the Seeley Lake Area. See page 3 for details.
- **Saturday, July 20<sup>th</sup>:** Beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.
- **Thursday, August 15<sup>th</sup>:** Submission deadline for the September edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, August 17<sup>th</sup>:** Beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.
- **Saturday, August 24<sup>th</sup>:** Half-day field trip to the former Smurfit-Stone Pulp Mill led by Larry Weeks. Meet in the middle of the UM Adams Center parking lot for carpooling to depart at 8:30am or at the mill on Mullan Road at 9am. For more information call Terry Toppins at 406-214-1194.
- **Tuesday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7pm:** Betsy Griffing will host the September board meeting at Axilon Law Group, 257 W Front St, Suite B in Missoula.
- **Sunday September 15<sup>th</sup>:** Birding Missoula's West End led by Carole and Terry Toppins. Meet in the middle of the UM Adams Center Parking Lot for carpooling to depart at 8am for a half day trip taking advantage of some of Missoula's open spaces. For more information call Terry Toppins at 406-214-1194.



## Peeps from the Board: A Peep at a Potoo

By Carolyn Goren



**Potoo**

Photo by Gerhard Knudsen

It was dusk, and an unanticipated flash of light caught my eye, and then a sudden movement in the air just in front and to the left of our boat. We had already seen a variety of water birds, Common Black Hawks, Bare-Throated Tiger Herons, Boat-billed Herons, Green Kingfishers, and a Mangrove Warbler. This was something different. And there it was again. Our local guide's flashlight illuminated an elongated shadow a bit wider than the top of a branch overlooking the water. The shape was overly yellow from the bright light. It suddenly darted up into the darkening evening sky, then flew ahead to a new perch, becoming essentially invisible. Often they return to the same perch. Another introduction to another life-bird for most of us: the Northern Potoo. Back home, this unusual bird continued to intrigue me and I searched for more information and watched amazing on-line videos of Potoos and some of their related bird families. Here is some of what I learned.

The Northern Potoo is one of seven species of Potoo. They are solitary, nocturnal flycatching birds that live in Mexico, Central America, and South America. Potoos belong to the order Caprimulgiformes, or "Goatsuckers", of which there are two sub-orders: the Steatonithes, consisting of one family, the Oilbirds; and the Caprimulgi, comprised of four families: the Owllet-Nightjars, the Frogmouths, the Potoos (Nyctibiidae), and Nightjars. It was once thought that "Goatsuckers" drank milk from goats at night, but now we know they were only chasing the insects around the goats.

Potoos range in size from 21 to 58 cm. The Northern Potoo is about 41 cm, or 16 inches. It is found in

tropical lowland forests, humid and dry woodlands, parks, farmland, and even golf courses, in Mexico and Central America, West Indies, and Hispaniola. A fossil leg bone found in France suggests a wider distribution in the past. By day, Potoos are almost motionless for hours at a time, appearing to be part of the tree-branch or stump on which they are perched. But between dusk and dawn the Potoo becomes an active hunter of insects. The Potoo's cryptic brown and grey feathers look very much like tree bark, providing perfect camouflage. It has few, if any, predators.

Potoos maintain an upright posture while perched, unlike Nightjars, Oilbirds, Frogmouths and Owllet-Nightjars that are almost always horizontal on a perch or ground. They have large heads, and huge yellow eyes which are often closed, but they are still able to see through slits in their closed eyelids. Their bodies are small and so are their legs and feet. Their bill is small and delicate-appearing, with a wide gape. They sing and hunt from exposed perches. Even a young Potoo chick is capable of sitting motionless.

They will fly up to catch an insect, but won't follow it down to the ground if it drops. They have two basic postures, both upright: the resting or hunting posture, and a concealment posture when threatened, in which they elongate and extend their heads with bill up in the air, moving very slowly to do so, and merge further into the tree branch shape.

We don't know much about the lives of Potoos. They do move about their territories, and they spend a lot of time in the canopy. Locals say they sleep in the mountains and come to the lowlands to hunt in the evening. They do not migrate. They are monogamous. They do not build nests, but utilize a natural shallow hollow in a tree or branch in which the female lays a single egg. Both sexes incubate the egg for 30-35 days, and both feed the young. Chicks fledge in 40-51 days. In some areas, breeding occurs throughout the year, but in other areas, April-June. They hunt from snags and fence posts. A Potoo's diet consists of flying insects of all types and sizes and includes beetles, moths, mosquitoes, termites, grasshopper-like insects, and rarely the larger Potoos might swallow a small bird or bat. A White-collared Seedeater was found in the stomach of a Northern Potoo.

## Special Events

The Potoo's vocalizations include call notes for contact, and songs that advertise territory. The Common (Grey) Potoo and Northern Potoo are so much alike in appearance that their vocalizations are the best way to differentiate them. Potoos sing most on bright moonlit nights, and at twilight. Both males and females sing. The Common Potoo's song is often characterized as "Poor me, one" or "Poor me, all alone".

Superstitions and folklore about Potoos abound, largely due to the Potoo's songs, which are described variably as deep, harsh, guttural, unmusical, haunting, eerie calls, or wails. In Brazil, the Grey Potoo's song is believed to be the sad lament from reincarnation of one of a pair of separated, widowed, or unrequited lovers. Other beliefs, similar to the folklore about owls, are of bad luck or impending death.

The conservation status of Potoos is poorly known. The birds are hard to see, and numbers are hard to pinpoint. They are considered to be rare to fairly common, and not globally threatened. But in some parts of El Salvador, and Brazil, some species are in danger of local extinction. Forest destruction is their major threat.

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Thanks to Jeff Marks for leading this Montana Audubon trip to Mexico several years ago, and thanks to Gerhard Knudson for his Potoo photo.



**Saturday June 15<sup>th</sup>, 3pm-5pm:** Learn about our native pollinators and pick up tips on how to turn your back yard into a haven for pollinators. Join Five Valleys Audubon Society, Lolo National Forest, and the Clark Fork chapter of the Montana Native Plant Society for a tea and reception at the Fort Missoula Native Plant Garden (the reception follows the Native Plant Society's tour of gardens earlier that day). Get directions, a list of exhibitors, and other details on the pollinator party's web site - [pollinatorparty.org](http://pollinatorparty.org).

**Saturday June 22<sup>nd</sup> and Sunday June 23<sup>rd</sup>:** Two day birding trip to Melrose, Bannack and Clark Canyon Reservoir led by Nate Kohler. Saturday will be spent birding around Melrose and working toward Dillon. The group will stay Saturday night at the Best Western Paradise Inn, 650 N Montana St. in Dillon (1-406-683-4214). Participants must make their own reservations in advance or can stay at another motel of their choosing. Sunday, the tour will go to the Bannack area and then Clark Canyon Reservoir, finishing early in the afternoon south of Dillon. Plan on bringing lunches for both days and sunscreen - many of the areas birded are not shaded. Cost of 10 dollars per participant is required. The group will meet and depart from Missoula from the East Broadway Park and Ride at 1122 East Broadway at 7:30am on Saturday. Contact Cynthia Hudson at [bobcyn@live.com](mailto:bobcyn@live.com) or call 406-830-5424 to sign up and facilitate car pooling.

**Saturday July 20<sup>th</sup>:** Join Dragonfly and bird enthusiasts Nate Kohler and Bob Martinka for a day of dragonflies and birds in the Seeley Lake Area. Meet in the middle of the Adams Center Parking Lot at the UM for carpooling departing at 7:30am. These fascinating insects prefer wet places, so muck boots are highly encouraged: also bring binoculars, field guides, collecting nets (if you have them), insect repellent, sunscreen, and a lunch. Recommended field guides include: *Dragonflies & Damselflies of the Rocky Mountains* by Robert Dubois, and *Dragonflies & Damselflies of the West* by Dennis Paulson. For more information call Terry Toppins at 406-214-1194.

Please 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!

## Browns Lake Field Trip

By Jim Brown

Thirteen birders enjoyed cool but pleasant weather for our annual trip to Browns Lake and the birding was outstanding. We tallied 74 species and for the most part we had some fabulous views of many species. For some lucky reason the waterfowl were observed fairly close up and in good light, which doesn't always happen. For example, two different Horned Grebes dove and surfaced close to us. We observed 18 species of ducks and 5 grebes and had great views of most of them. We thought that we were going to miss seeing the Blue-winged Teal until the very last minute when Rose Leach spotted a pair. A surprising number of Common Loons, about 15, were scattered across the Lake in spite of many boats being present too. A small late migrating flock of Snow Geese fed nearby so even their characteristic grinning patch was readily visible. A flock of about 50 Ring-billed Gulls also fed and rested close by. Thanks to Terry McEaney's careful eye, the exciting thing, however not an easy identification, was a first winter plumage California Gull and Herring Gull mixed in with the other gulls.



Yellow-headed blackbird

Away from the water we were rewarded with a Williamson's Sapsucker and Red-naped Sapsucker sitting right above us in the same aspen tree. A Peregrine Falcon and Prairie Falcon made brief flights by us but unfortunately they came and went in a

hurry. A number of Bald Eagles and two Golden Eagles were observed. A small flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers, one being a Myrtle race, were present at the main boat landing. Several flocks of all male Yellow-headed Blackbirds were observed and one of the flocks flew by us so close that people were ducking to avoid a collision. We identified more shorebirds than we usually do including Black-necked Stilt, Long-billed Curlew, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper and Semipalmated Sandpiper.

## Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards

By Bill Gabriel

In 1987 Five Valleys Audubon Society began a program of awarding small amounts of money to fund small research projects as a means of giving younger and less experienced students a way to get started in field research. Originally called the Field Biology Research Awards, in 1992 the name of the program was changed to the Philip L. Wright Research Awards in recognition of Dr. Wright's contributions to science, Montana, and Missoula. In 27 years, 62 university and high school students have received a total of \$28,293 from the program. The amount per award has ranged from \$100 to \$1,180, and the average is \$456.

Subjects of the research have been distributed as follows: birds 26, plants and habitats 12, mammals 10, amphibians 7, insects 6, fish 2. And, while most of these small studies have been carried out within Montana, some have been as far afield as Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Central America, and Southeast Asia.

The awards committee received eight proposals in 2013. Six undergraduates and two graduate students proposed studies of birds (3), mammals (2), insects (1), fish (1), and plants (1). We made the following awards:

**Kari Eneas**, a senior, \$875 to survey the Mission Valley for the presence of Barn Owls and analyze their pellets.

**James Goerz**, a senior, \$875 to make a comparison of the vegetational structure of snowshoe hare mortality and survival sites in western Montana. **Cody Rasmussen-Ivey**, a senior, \$875 for assessing the catalytic effects of climate change: the transitive influence of mountain pine beetle epidemics on high elevation stream production in western Montana.

In accordance with established tradition, the recipients have been invited to report how they used the grants and the results of their investigations at a Five Valleys Audubon meeting during the coming winter.

This month we say good bye to Prof. Dan Pletscher who is retiring from the University of Montana on June 28. Dan has served on the Philip L. Wright Awards Committee since January 2005 and provided valuable insight and advice to the rest of us about the student proposals. Thank you Dan.

**Welcome New Members:**

Sam Hines  
Sigrun Uefner

Betty L. Limes  
Martin Vanmil

Teagen Turner



**Go Green and Save !**



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.

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*Please note: The newsletter will be delivered electronically unless requested otherwise.*

\_\_\_ \$15 is enclosed for Chapter-only membership

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Please make check payable to the Five Valleys Audubon Society and mail to:

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\_\_\_ \$20 for a 1-year individual or family membership

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TO:

Five Valleys Audubon Society Board of Directors

**OFFICERS:**

President	Pat Little	1710 34th St., Missoula, MT 59801	493 – 7115	roughleg@gmail.com
Vice President	Sue Reel	3707 Creekwood Rd, Missoula, MT 59802	543 – 4827	reelhutto@gmail.com
Secretary	Andrea Stierle	4703 Larch Lane, Missoula, MT 59802	782 – 6419	andrea.stierle@mso.umt.edu
Treasurer	Kit Stevens	230 Bickford St., Missoula, MT 59801	721 - 3530	dogmakit@yahoo.com

**DIRECTORS:**

2011-2014	Carolyn Goren	PO Box 7189, Missoula, MT 59807		carolyngoren@gmail.com
2011-2014	Gerhard Knudsen	4400 Scott Allen Dr, Missoula, MT 59803		gmk@bresnan.net
2011-2014	Lynn Tennefoss	8850 O'Brien Creek Rd, Missoula, MT 59804		ltennefoss@audubon.org
2012-2015	Clancy Cone	5604 Bridger Court #2, Missoula, MT 59803		
2012-2015	Betsy Griffing	257 W Front St, Ste. B, Missoula, MT 59802		
2013-2016	Ed Monnig	950 Rankin Road, Missoula, MT 59808	549 – 0580	emonnig01@gmail.com

**COMMITTEES:**

Member Records	Vick Applegate	303 Rimrock Way, Missoula, MT 59803	549 – 0027	k7vk@arrl.net
Membership Promotion Program	Vacant			
Conservation Advocacy	Carolyn Goren	PO Box 7189, Missoula, MT 59807		carolyngoren@gmail.com
Habitat Protection & Restore	Terry McEneaney	1215 Lolo Rd, Missoula, MT 59802	493 – 1438	ravenology@bresnan.net
Field Activities	Jim Brown	1504 Woods Gulch Rd, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 8052	brownjs2@bresnan.net
Publicity	Terry Toppins	1210 Tower St, Missoula, MT 59804	214 – 1194	tertop@aol.com
Education	Poody McLaughlin	1629 Douglas Dr., Missoula, MT 59808	543 – 4860	pmcregan@bresnan.net
PL Wright Endowment	Larry Weeks	2428 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801	549 – 5632	bwsgenea@onlinemt.com
University Liaison	Bill Gabriel	PO Box 520, Florence, MT 59833		biograf@earthlink.net
Newsletter Editor	Vacant			
Newsletter Circulation	Bev Orth Geoghegan	310 W. 73 <sup>rd</sup> St., Apt. 1A, New York, NY 10023	(406) 750-0149	orthbev@hotmail.com
Web Site	Sarah Tarka Baer	1039 Palmer Street, Missoula, MT 59802	(717) 422-3453	sarah.tarka@gmail.com
Archivist	Pat Little	1710 34th St., Missoula, MT 59801	493 – 7115	roughleg@gmail.com
Audubon Adventures	Shirley Holden	2319 Valley Dr, Missoula, MT 59802		
Christmas Bird Count	Barbara Ross	215 Florence St, Missoula, MT 59801	552 – 0500	bjmross@gmail.com
Past President	Larry Weeks	2428 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801	549 – 5632	bwsgenea@onlinemt.com
	Paul Loehnen	11556 Bench Road, Missoula, MT 59808	721 – 7517	ploehnen@gmail.com

Montana Audubon: PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624  
 (406) 443-3949 [www.mtaudubon.org](http://www.mtaudubon.org)  
 Steve Hoffman, Executive Director: [shoffman@mtaudubon.org](mailto:shoffman@mtaudubon.org)  
 Janet Ellis, Program Director: [jellis@mtaudubon.org](mailto:jellis@mtaudubon.org)  
 Norane Freistadt, Development Director: [norane@mtaudubon.org](mailto:norane@mtaudubon.org)  
 Amy Cilimburg, Director of Bird Conservation: [amy@mtaudubon.org](mailto:amy@mtaudubon.org)

Darcie Vallant, Center Director: [dvallant@mtaudubon.org](mailto:dvallant@mtaudubon.org)  
 Mihail Kennedy, Land Stewardship Coordinator: [mkenedy@mtaudubon.org](mailto:mkenedy@mtaudubon.org)  
 Heather Bilden, Education Director: [heather@mtaudubon.org](mailto:heather@mtaudubon.org)  
 Nat Forcier, Office Manager: [natalie@mtaudubon.org](mailto:natalie@mtaudubon.org)  
 Dan Sullivan, Board President