

# June 2021

## Birding Observer



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

### Calendar

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- **June 10th – 13th:** Four-day field trip to Bowdoin. Please note, this field trip is full.
- **July 8th – 11th:** The 4-day trip to Glacier has room for one more couple. Contact Larry for details.
- **Saturday, July 31st:** All day field trip to Deer Lodge to look for shorebirds. Meet at 7:00 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot. There will be two miles of level hiking.
- **Sunday, August 15<sup>th</sup>:** Deadline for submissions to the September 2021 Birding Observer.
- **Sunday, August 22nd:** All-day field trip to Freezout Lake or Canyon Ferry Reservoir to look for shorebirds. Meet at 7:00 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot. One mile of level hiking involved.

### Montana Audubon Photo Contest Call for Submissions!

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To celebrate Montana Audubon's 2021 Birdathon campaign, they are holding their first-ever photography contest. They invite photographers of all levels to submit a photo for consideration. The contest will open June 1st and submissions will be accepted until June 15<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm MST.



Three incredible photographers are serving as volunteer judges: Bob Martinka of Helena, Mimi Falivene of Hamilton, and Mike Daniels of Hamilton.

The top TWO photos will be featured in Montana Audubon's upcoming Fall Newsletter and Birdathon Report. Also, the top two photographers will receive a gift card to The Base Camp, a Montana owned outdoor store and outfitter with locations in Helena and Billings. Thanks to The Base Camp for their generous support!

#### Contest Rules:

- All photos must be of an avian species.
- Photo must have been taken within the last calendar year (May 1, 2020-June 2021)
- Photo must have been taken in Montana.
- Photo must be submitted with the bird identified.
- No purchase necessary for participation. Not everyone who enters will win.
- By submitting you are consenting to posting your photo in Montana Audubon's Fall Newsletter, social media, and their Birdathon report. Photographer retains all rights to the photo.

#### Guidelines for Submission:

- Submit one photo per person by June 15th at 11:59pm to Danielle at [ddowden@mtaudubon.org](mailto:ddowden@mtaudubon.org).
- Email submission of the photo must be in a jpeg or png format file.
- Information that must be included with the submission: name of photographer, email address & phone number of photographer, date taken, approximate location (near Missoula, for example), photograph title, and bird species.

Photos will be judged on Creativity & Originality; Color, Lighting, Exposure & Focus; Composition; and Visual Appeal.

Email Angela with questions at [angela@mtaudubon.org](mailto:angela@mtaudubon.org).

## Peeps from the Board: Big Bend National Park Birding Highlights By Scott Kluever

If you are a consumer of public television, which I would guess many of you are, it is likely you recently watched the new Nature program titled, Big Bend: The Wild Frontier of Texas. As a birder, it is also likely you felt a twinge of sorrow in your heart as that mean (albeit really hungry) black bear went tearing through the Acorn Woodpecker's winter cache of acorns. My wife and I decided to go to Big Bend National Park in March to see how that woodpecker made out after a cold Texas winter. But getting there isn't easy. Big Bend National Park is remote. It is not 'on the way' to anything. And yet, nearly 400,000 visitors come to



**Pyrrhuloxia**  
Photo by Scott Kluever

the park annually. Obviously, the classiest visitors to the park are the birders. Birders come from far and wide in search of birds, both the exotic and the banal. Migrators make up most of the park's 450 bird species. Only 56 rugged species choose the extended stay option and make Big Bend their year-round homes.

My favorite trail for hiking and birding in the park gains about 2,000 feet above the Chisos Basin. It is a 10-mile loop that takes walkers through a variety of bird habitats. It was there, amongst the Mesquite and Pinyon Pine trees, when we heard it... the Colima Warbler! The Colima Warbler, a migratory ninja, is a huge draw for birders. Big Bend is the only place in the United States within its breeding range. And it was somewhere right in front of us! I would love to show you a picture of that little bird, I really would! Alas, this tiny migrator had no intention of posing for a photo. We had to be content with listening to it for nearly 10 minutes as it flitted through the spiny foliage.

During one of our many snack breaks on the trail, we were completely caught off guard when three Yellow-eyed Juncos decided to entertain us with some wonderful singing. Their eerily spooky eyes were mesmerizing. It was not until we were back at the ranger station that we learned how fortunate we were to see these extremely rare visitors. They should not be anywhere near Big Bend National Park.

Back in our camp, a Common Black Hawk pair was diligently building a new nest. One of only 300 known

nesting pairs, this dedicated male painstakingly chose, plucked, and delivered twig after twig to his mate on the top of an ancient Cottonwood tree. Coffee, muffin, binoculars, and Black Hawks made for a perfect breakfast.

At the Santa Elena access on the Rio Grande River, we watched a pair of Black Phoebes for thirty minutes. They showed quite a bit of bravado as they bullied swallows and flycatchers for the best perching spots. The bird's antics were so loud and frenzied, a squadron of Javelina had had enough and ran off from the area for quieter parts of the park. (Running Javelinas are funny by the way.)



**Curve-Billed Thrasher**  
Photo by Scott Kluever

We were lucky enough to add many new birds to our life list on this trip. Here are my top picks and why they made the list. The Crissal Thrasher came in at number one for its beautiful song which never seemed to repeat itself. Next is the Golden-Fronted Woodpecker for its ability to nab a sausage off my plate before I ever knew it was there. The Vermilion Flycatcher made the list because... well... if you have ever seen one, you will know why. The Acorn Woodpecker made the list in part due to its tenacity in making and filling those acorn storage units we found in the dead trees of Chisos. (And because it is a PBS movie star.) The Cactus Wren is on the list for posing so nicely in an actual cactus for its photo and not just sitting in the parking lot. And finally, the tiny Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher is on my list for exhibiting circus-like agility in the prickliest bushes imaginable.



**Vermilion Flycatcher**  
Photo by Scott Kluever

We never saw the problematic black bear featured in the Nature program during our trip to Big Bend. (If we had I was ready to give him a piece of my mind.) But the Mountain Lion that ran across our path about 50 feet in front of us sure got the heart pumping! That will be a story for another day. Big Bend is big, and we were only able to see a small part of it no matter how hard we tried. Obviously, a future trip will need to be planned.

## Field Trip

By Larry Weeks



**April 24, 2021:** Fourteen people visited the Deer Lodge Valley to look for waterfowl and migrating shorebirds. Leah Lipka and her parents from Fairbanks were among the participants. The first stop was at the Racetrack pond. Outstanding birds included three Red-breasted Mergansers, a

White-faced Ibis and a large flock of Marbled Godwits that joined two other godwits on the shoreline. Other birds at that location included Western Grebes, Eared Grebes, and two Common Loons. The next stop was at Pond 3 of the Warm Springs Ponds where there were thousands of birds; mostly Northern Shovelers and American Coots. Upon searching through the mass of birds, we were able to spot a male Wood Duck, an American Avocet, and a Blue-winged Teal. While we were at that location, several Yellow-rumped Warblers and an Orange-crowned Warbler migrated by. At the lower end of the pond, there were Red-necked Grebes, Greater Scaup and another Red-breasted Merganser.

We then went to the Job Corps Ponds which provided some shorebird high lights. At one location, there were 34 Black-necked Stilts, 15 Marbled Godwits and a Willet. Three Greater Yellowlegs and 2 American Avocets were in another pond. A large flock of Snow Geese that were foraging on the other side of the valley got up, flew towards the ponds, and landed on the lower end of the ponds. We were able to approach the flock and look them over for a Ross's Goose, but we couldn't find one.

Behind the Warm Springs Hospital, we found a large flock of Sandhill Cranes that were estimated to be 65 birds. They were trying to dance but our presence made them a little nervous. A couple of cranes joined the flock by parachuting in from high in the sky. Some of the participants briefly spotted an immature Golden Eagle. We had 68 species for the trip.



Photo of Caspian Tern  
Taken by Alex Kearney on  
the Browns Lake Field Trip

## Browns Lake Field Trip

by Jim Brown

On May 1<sup>st</sup>, we held our first official, Chapter-sponsored field trip since they were suspended last fall due to the pandemic. Seventeen people joined the field trip to Browns Lake and vicinity, the 46th consecutive year for this field trip. We had been grappling with how to manage appropriate safety protocols in view of Covid concerns. Turned out everyone had been fully vaccinated, which simplified carpooling and being together as a group outdoors to enjoy birding. It was a windy spring day, but luckily temperatures were mild so being outside was pleasant--just had to hold on to your hat. Our first exciting find was a pair of Long-billed Curlews spotted by Rose Leach just a short distance from the road. The female showed a longer bill than the male, typical of curlews, which led to some discussion of who of the pair was in charge. Probably the most exciting bird of the day was a rusty sided duck rarely observed, a Cinnamon Teal-Northern Shoveler hybrid. The prominent white crescent on the face of the duck prompted a debate about whether the cross was a Cinnamon Teal with a Blue-winged Teal or a Northern Shoveler. Luckily, a male Cinnamon Teal was standing next to the hybrid, which allowed everyone to see that the larger bill of the hybrid made the shoveler cross the logical identification.

Continuing on we observed lots of Mountain Bluebirds on our way to the "sapsucker patch". As soon as we got out of our cars and started scanning for birds, Jill Davis spotted a female Williamson's Sapsucker as it flew away from an aspen snag. She was looking in the right place and is the only one who saw it. We all had good views of A Red-naped Sapsucker. At Browns Lake, three Caspian Terns circled us several time for good views. This was only the 2nd sighting of that species at Browns Lake in 46 field trips. We had super good views of Red-necked Grebes and a Horned Grebe. Other well seen species at the Lake included Western Grebe, Eared Grebe, eight Common Loons, Canvasback, and Ruddy Duck. South of Browns Lake along a series of potholes we had more good views of waterfowl. We spotted a single Greater Yellowlegs that was a bit puzzling as it apparently was still molting into its full breeding plumage. Alex Kearney photographed a Lincoln's Sparrow, which was an unexpected species and first-time record for this trip. In all we observed 65 species including 25 species of waterfowl, 16 being duck species. We observed several Sandhill Cranes, and six raptor species including one far away Golden Eagle and a Northern Harrier that we flushed off of an American Coot, which it was trying to subdue for a meal. The coot happily escaped.

## Which Birds Sing All Summer Long?

By Trevor Attenberg

Reprinted from Audubon.org, July 2019

There is currently a somber hush to the summer air that makes you think, “where are the birds?” Some long-distance migrators do start moving south as early as July, but most of the species you saw back in June loafing near parks and feeders should still be around. They may be hunkered down, conserving energy like any other animal or person on a stifling day. Some are probably nesting or finishing rearing their young, and don’t feel urgency to call attention to themselves through song.

That is not to say that the skies are completely silent. In much of North America, birds continue to sing their territorial songs into late July or early August; so you may still hear a Northern Cardinal, Wood Thrush, or House Wren on the hottest days. These species will tamp down or pause their singing as they covertly attend to their young—but will start up again once their chicks have fledged, hoping to begin a new brood. This also exposes young birds to the languages and tunes they will need to emulate once they hit breeding age.

Other species may pipe up when it’s cooler, such as in early mornings or after a rain. You will be hard-pressed to hear a Northern Waterthrush or Canada Warbler beyond early July, but Red-eyed Vireos will persist with their unobtrusive cheerio, cheery song. In fact, they’re among the most plentiful birds in North America, where they inhabit mostly broad-leaf woods in the Eastern United States and across southern Canada. (Other vireos such as Warbling and Bell’s also continue singing until their pre-migration molt.) The long cicada-like trill of a Chipping



American Goldfinch  
Photo by Christopher Cove

Sparrow is another overlooked summer track in parks, farms, and open woods through most of the continent. And don’t forget the Gray Catbird, an abundant songster in gardens and shrubby woodland edges. You can pick up its deceptive kitty call throughout the day, or even run into a young bird mimicking a garble of sounds.

Believe it or not, some birds even prefer the hottest days of the year over all others to warble. These include the musically and visually striking goldfinches: the widespread American Goldfinch and the Lesser Goldfinch of Western states. July, August, and September days are often filled with their bright, musical twitters as they fly over fields and suburban yards, looking for just-emerged thistle seeds to feed to their young.

Out of the fields and into the forest, you may experience the cry of a lonely Eastern Wood-Pewee. It’s simple, eponymous pee-wee! is unforgettable, as is the buzzy sound of the Western Wood-Pewee. Fortunately for us, these otherwise drab flycatchers continue to call their name until they finally take their tropical departure in September and October.

Of course, not all birds make sounds that fit into the melodic, complex category of “songs.” Gregarious species like swifts, swallows, jays, crows, and waterfowl use other vocalizations to signal to each other in daily interactions. The songs of Veeries, Hermit Thrushes, Swainson’s Thrushes, and Wood Thrushes—some of the most beautiful music of any land—fade in August, but they still make frequent contact calls around dawn and dusk. These include the loud “wit wit wit wit” of the Wood Thrush, the froggy peep of the Swainson’s Thrush, and the harsh veer of the Veery. It helps to learn to recognize these less charismatic notes when the chatter of other birds subsides in the summer woods.



Veery in song  
Photo by William Leaman/Alamy

As your body wilts in the harshness of the season, it’s good to keep the senses sharp by paying attention to the birds around, even if they themselves don’t want to be found.



Wood Thrush Photo by Greg Lavaty

# Welcome New Members

Eric Bindseil  
David Marsolek  
Melanie Mellgren  
Susan Miks  
Paula Morin  
Wally Small

Patrick Freeborn  
F.J. (Mike) McMichael  
Nancy Menning  
Alexia Moran  
Maureen Neff



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## 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](http://fvaudubon.org/join)

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| \$ _____ \$15 FVAS membership only, includes newsletter sent via email.                     | \$ _____ Legacy Fund, creating and supporting local urban bird habitats for citizen enjoyment without leaving the city. |
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| \$ _____ 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.                     |
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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
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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](http://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.

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