

June 2022

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

- **June 9th-12th:** Four-day field trip to Bowdoin. See details to the right.
- **June 12th:** Town Bound Birding Series at Fort Missoula and Quarry, 8-10AM. Go to <https://fvaudubon.org/event/> for details.
- **Sunday, June 19th:** Field trip and presentation at the Wild Skies Raptor Center in Potomac. Meet on site by 9:30am or at Missoula College at 8:30am to carpool. Details are on page 3.
- **Saturday, June 25th, 7:00am:** Field trip to the Lee Creek area. Note to participate in this trip, you will need a reservation. See details to the right.
- **Saturday, July 2nd:** All-day field trip along the Clearwater River above Seeley Lake. Meet at 7:00 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot. Participants can also meet the trip at the Seeley Lake Ranger Station at 8:00 am. The trip will include a 4.4-mile level hike with one potential wet spot.
- **July 7th- 10th:** Four-day field trip to Glacier Park. See details to the right.
- **July 17th:** Town Bound Birding Series at River Trail, 7:30-9:00PM. Go to <https://fvaudubon.org/event/> for details.
- **Saturday, July 30th:** All-day field trip to the Deer Lodge area to look for shorebirds. Meet at 7:00 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot. This trip will include some hiking on level ground.
- **Sunday, August 14th:** Town Bound Birding Series at Maclay Flat Nature Trail. 8-10AM. Go to <https://fvaudubon.org/event/> for details.
- **Sunday, August 21st:**
All-day field trip to Freezout Lake to look for shorebirds. Meet at 7:00 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot. Minimal hiking on level ground.



Lee Creek Area Field Trip Details

By Jean Duncan

Saturday, June 25th: All-day field trip to the Lee Creek area, this side of Lolo Pass. Because the parking lot at Lee Creek campground is small, the trip is limited to 18 people in 6 cars. Meet at 7am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot to carpool. Contact Jean Duncan (406-396-1171 or treasurer@FVAudubon.org) to reserve a spot. There will be 3 miles of hiking with a gain of 200 feet through a forested hillside trail above Lee Creek. Then we will head down to East Fork Road for a mile or so walk along the East Fork of Lolo Creek. Please wear a face mask while sharing a ride with others than your household members. Pack a lunch.

Upcoming Multi-day Field Trips

By Larry Weeks

A **4-day field trip to Malta and Bowdoin NWR** has been scheduled for June 9-12, 2022. We will camp at James Kipp the first night and the city park in Malta the next two nights. If someone wishes to stay in a motel, the recommended options are the Maltana (1-406-654-2610) and the Country Inn (1-866-925-4143). If you plan to go and stay in a motel, I recommend that you make your reservations now. Please contact Larry Weeks if you plan to attend, and he will coordinate carpooling and potluck dinners. Attendees should plan to arrive at James Kipp at or before 4:00 pm.

The **4-day field trip to Glacier Park** is scheduled for July 7-10, 2022. We will camp at Chewing Black Bones Campground on July 7th & 8th, and the Glacier Campground on July 9th. We have four vehicle passes to get into the park and that will limit the group to 8 people. I have seven people signed up to go so I only have room for one more. For all practical purposes, the 3-day pass is not available for this field trip currently. If you would like to go to Glacier Park, contact Larry Weeks. He will plan potluck dinners and carpooling. We will meet at 5:00 pm or earlier at the Chewing Black Bones Campground at campsites G-11 and G-12.

Peeps from The Board: San Juan River Adventure

Article and Artwork by Andrea Stierle

In February 2011, Don and I had the great good fortune to take a Master Naturalist Course at the Montana Natural History Center. Brian Williams was the lead instructor, and a great inspiration to those of us lucky enough to attend the 10-week series. One of the activities I enjoyed the most was journaling. During the Spring of 2011, I often spent 10-12 hours writing in my journal each week and vowed to maintain that practice in perpetuity. Unfortunately, despite my best intentions, I stopped journaling 2 weeks after the class ended, and have not written in my journal for over 10 years. Don and I had the great good fortune to float two spectacular desert rivers that spring, and I wrote and sketched about those adventures. I thought I would recapture our latest adventure on the San Juan and rekindle my interest in journaling in one Peep.



It is a long, 14-hour drive to the put-in from Missoula, which included a stop at Bear River Refuge in Utah. It was incredibly dry for this time of year, but we saw some great birds at the Refuge, including flocks of Sandhill Cranes, Osprey, Bald Eagles, and American Pelicans.

It was an amazing and challenging adventure. Don and I have floated this lovely desert river in southern Utah at least 20 times, from very low water to flood stage and everything in between. But this trip was special.



As we were gearing up on Monday, a small group from Bozeman arrived at the put-in and told us that weather reports had been updated. A huge weather event was due around 3 PM, with 50 mph upstream winds and wind gusts of 90 mph.

The river was exceptionally low - about 535 cubic feet/second (cfs). This time of year, the river should have been flowing 2,000 – 3,000 cfs, delightful flow levels that covered rocks and sand bars alike. Unfortunately, camps were scarce on river right, and river left required a Navajo permit. As the fateful hour approached and the winds began to rise, we knew there was only one campsite within the next three miles, and the Bozeman group was ahead of us. Fortunately, they let us share their space to weather the storm. They had two tents fail in 70 mph gusts. Our tent flattened but maintained its integrity. The temperature dropped to 20 F, and by early morning it began to snow. Our tent was full of sand and covered with snow. The wind blew hard all day Tuesday and well into Wednesday, upstream of course. The low flow level and minimal current provided no assistance in progressing downstream. Our camps were windy, but lovely. Great Blue Herons were among the most common birds. They nest in the great red rock walls towering over the river and stand like silent sentinels as we floated past.

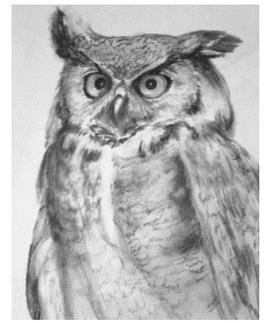


The one big rapid - Government Rapid - was VERY boney, to use boater jargon for a rock garden. We hung up on a rock and had to pull ourselves off, with Jon and Ed's help. Three other groups we talked to later had hung up on the same big rock - one of them was stuck for over 5 hours. We were tired of the constant wind and low water, but we were thrilled to see two large flocks of White-faced Ibis standing on silt bars in the middle of the river.





Our last night was at Grand Gulch, one of the most beautiful spots on the river. We all hiked up the rocky canyon, making our way around huge boulders, topped by enormous cottonwoods, strewn like kindling as we made our way along the creek. These were stark reminders of the power of flash floods that could appear with little warning in these desert side canyons. We had a kestrel fly over camp, and the fourth pair of Peregrine falcons circled our camp. As we settled down in our tents, I heard the distant call of a Great Horned Owl, and the surprising call of a Common Poorwill coming from across the river from where we were camped.



Friday was twelve miles of dodging silt bars and desperately trying to find the current in this final stretch of our journey. We left at 8 AM, and over the course of the day, we crossed the river 57 times to try to avoid silt bars, although our success rate was not 100%. We figure we oared about twenty miles Friday, despite what the map suggested. But despite the wind, the snow, and the ubiquitous silt bars, it was beautiful, and it was the San Juan River. We got back to Missoula late Saturday night, in a blizzard of course, and dreamed of the next river adventure on our horizon.

It is sad to see how the flow rates of these beautiful rivers have changed in the last 35 years. Although many factors can affect the amount of water in our rivers, a recent study published in the journal *Science** suggests that the change in stream flows annually over the past 30 years was primarily caused by climate change. These data suggest that we are on course to lose more and more water in rivers as climate change continues, which could seriously undermine our ability to maintain water supplies not just for recreation, but for drinking, food production, power generation, and to maintain thriving populations of birds and other wildlife.

* Gudmundsson, L. et al. Globally observed trends in mean and extreme river flow attributed to climate change. 2021 *Science* 371: 1159-1162.

Wild Skies Raptor Center Field Trip June 19, 2022

Presentation begins at 9:30am.

(See the May 2022 newsletter for more information.)

This is a trip for everyone! Bring the children and learn about the birds and the lifesaving work Brooke and Jesse dedicate their lives to.

We will meet at the Missoula College parking lot at 8:30am to carpool. Carpooling reduces the number of vehicles on-site and conserves resources. You can also meet us at 9:15am, a couple hundred yards along the Potomac Rd or on site.

Bring your portable chairs, water, and other food items you may need. Dress appropriately for the weather, rain, or shine, as the presentation will be outside.

Directions from Bonner exit: 200 E to Potomac, just past mm 16 and the Sinclair/Cully's take a Right on Potomac Rd, Right on Swanson Ln, Left on Camas (sign on tall stump, turns to gravel), Right on Spirit Trail, first driveway on Left 33634. Big blue barn and other outbuildings.

Contact Rose Stoudt with questions: 406-880-8060

Important Update on Avian Flu By Rose Leach

Many concerned community members have recently asked if they should continue to feed birds, given that we now have an avian flu outbreak in the area.

We recommend that folks do not feed birds during the spring and summer, because there is plenty of natural food available this time of year. Any time you feed birds, you increase the chance of creating a vector for disease spread. While songbirds will likely not get avian flu (they don't congregate as much as waterfowl, for example), they do get other diseases at feeders, especially conjunctivitis. You can still maintain your bird baths or water features (with frequent cleaning), if you want to provide this important component to support birds in your backyard.

You can also maintain your hummingbird feeders (again, with frequent cleaning), but you might need to take the feeders inside at night if you live in areas near where bears occur regularly—which would be most of Missoula.

For proper **cleaning**, use a **10-percent bleach solution**, which is one part bleach mixed with nine parts water, followed by a water rinse, then completely air-dry.

You can get more information on avian flu in Montana at the American Bird Conservancy website:
<https://abcbirds.org/article/avian-flu-outbreak-2022/>

Browns Lake Field Trip Summary

by Jim Brown

This was the 44th year for the Browns Lake field trip and it was a good one with 24 birders ranging in experience from very little to lots. The weather was pleasant with little wind until late in the day. At Clearwater Junction fishing access site, we had a super good view of a pair of Barrow's Goldeneyes that got cameras clicking and a displaying male Hooded Merganser. At a large pond south of Ovando we had good views of a few duck species and a not so good view of a strange looking duck having a Northern Shoveler bill and a cinnamon-colored body. It was a Northern Shoveler-Cinnamon Teal hybrid, likely the same bird we observed a year ago at a nearby pond.

We then traveled on to our favorite sapsucker patch. As soon as we got out of our cars Alex Kearney spotted a Williamson's Sapsucker that quickly flew off. But patience paid off as it came back giving everyone a close-up view of the attractive male. We also saw a completely different looking, flicker like female and a Red-naped Sapsucker. While enjoying the sapsuckers a Red-tailed Hawk flew out of a nearby tree pursued by four dive bombing Clark's Nutcrackers that hounded the hawk out of the area. But the most amazing find of the day happened when Alex Hughes spotted a raptor, just a speck, soaring high overhead. Steve Flood captured the speck on his camera and enlarged it to see that it was a migrating Broad-winged Hawk. This "Oh-my-gosh" bird was a first-time observation on the Browns Lake field trip. Most of the few records of this species in western Montana come from mountain high hawk watch locations.

Then on to Browns Lake where interesting birds kept appearing. We observed at least 16 Common Loons, Red-necked, Eared, Horned and Western Grebes; and about 100 Snow Geese. Two female Red-breasted Mergansers, an unusual occurrence here, flew in and landed close to shore for good views by everyone. We got fly-by looks at a White-faced Ibis and a flock of Marbled Godwits. Some folks saw Bonaparte's Gulls fly over the lake. Many Yellow-rumped Warblers (Audubon's) were foraging through the trees next to the boat ramp and attracted a lot of our attention. Moving on to the ponds south of Browns Lake we had more good views of waterfowl species as well as early migrant shorebirds including American Avocets, Lesser Yellowlegs and Wilson's Phalaropes. A Marsh Wren, defending its territory, was viewed close by giving photographers fun shooting opportunities. In all we observed or heard 81 species including 27 waterfowl species and 8 raptors species. Good birds, good weather and smiling birders made a fun day.

Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards, 2022

By Andrea Stierle

We are pleased to announce that this year, Five Valleys Audubon Society selected three projects to receive *Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards*. These prestigious awards honor the memory of Dr. Wright and his contributions to science and the community.



They provide support for continuing students undertaking research in the fields of ecology, wildlife biology, animal behavior, environmental biology, and conservation biology. This year's awardees are all University of Montana students and include the following:

- Taylor Coon, who will be working in Professor Victoria Dreit's lab to study ***Analysis of Prey Remains Identification Accuracy, Using Denali Merlins.***
- Lillian Krach, who will be working in Professor Creagh Bruner's lab with PhD candidate Bridger Creel to study ***Restoration of Heavy Metal Polluted Areas—Telomere Physiology in Songbirds.***
- Zane Roush, Hannah Hill, and Dylan Ritter, who will be working as a team in Professor Cara Nelson's lab to study ***To what Extent do Environmental Factors Impact Willow Growth and Recruitment?***

All of our awardees are expected to provide a brief written research summary and to make a short presentation at a monthly Five Valleys Audubon Society meeting, Spring, 2023. Best of luck to all our awardees, and we look forward to hearing about their research next spring.



Clark's Nutcrackers chasing the Red-tailed Hawk during the Browns Lake field trip, Photo by Gerhard Knudsen

Breeding Bird Surveys Need Volunteers

The Fort Missoula Ponds and surrounding land, formerly owned by Knife River, have been off limits to birders for years. Despite this lack of access and disturbances to the land, 227 species of birds have been found here. Now that the 77-acre parcel is in city ownership, the chapter is coordinating breeding bird surveys to support the city's broad data collection efforts. Data from these surveys will be used to determine future uses for the area. With habitat improvement the number of bird species utilizing this area may well increase.

Consequently, the chapter is looking for volunteers to help with these breeding bird surveys. If you're interested, please let Poody McLaughlin know if you're available on any of the suggested dates and indicate your preferred dates. We've tried to balance the survey dates between weekdays and weekends, but there are inevitable conflicts

with already scheduled field trips. Each survey will last two hours. The proposed survey schedule is Saturday June 4 (8 am), Saturday June 18, Thursday June 30, and Thursday July 14. The last three surveys will begin at 7 a.m.

If you wish to participate, logistical details including date, time, and location will be sent to you later as plans get firmed up. For now, let Poody know your preferred email address, phone number, and general availability by contacting her at poodymc@gmail.com or 406-360-8762.

Welcome to our New Members

Nancy Ball
Kathryn Lobdell
Billy Bagby
Leo Duperron
Amy Tykeson

David Spores
Diane Bodholt
Margie Grinnell
Roy Labarrer

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

\$ _____ \$15 FVAS membership, includes newsletter sent via email.

\$ _____ Phillip L. Wright Fund, small grants for student research.

\$ _____ \$25 FVAS membership, includes newsletter sent via USPS.

\$ _____ Legacy Fund, creating and supporting local urban bird habitats for citizen enjoyment without leaving the city.

\$ _____ Free for students, includes FVAS newsletter, sent via email.

\$ _____ Total contribution

\$ _____ 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.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: (Required to receive the newsletter and birding alerts via email.) _____

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. 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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