

May 2017

Birding Observer



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

Calendar of Events

- **Monday, May 1st, 6:45-8:45pm:** The May board meeting will be held in the board room at the Missoula Public Library.
- **Monday, May 8th, 7:30pm:** Photographer and biologist, John Ashley, will present on Harlequin ducks at our May program meeting. Join us in the UM Gallagher Business Building, Room L14.
- **Saturday, May 13th:** All-day field trip to the Bandy Ranch which is in the Ovando Valley. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 7:50 am.
- **Monday, May 15th:** The deadline for the June edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, May 20th:** Bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10:00am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.
- **May 20th & 21st:** Two-day field trip to Freezout Lake and Rocky Mountain Front. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 7:00 am. See write-up.
- **June 3rd & 4th:** Two-day field trip to Bannack area. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 7:00 am. See write-up.



May Meeting: A Harlequin Romance 25 Years of Leaky Waders

The chapter's last meeting before the summer break will be on Monday, May 8th at 7:30 p.m. in Gallagher Business Building in room L14 on the UM campus. We will join professional photographer and biologist John Ashley as he follows Montana's mysterious Harlequin Ducks through their annual cycle, from coastal saltwater habitats to Montana's mountain streams and back again to the ocean. Where do "Montana's" harlequins spend the rest of their lives when they're not nesting here? How do breeding adults know where Montana is at? How do juvenile harlequins born in Montana know where the coast is at? How do pairs find each other when they reunite on the coast? And how did we learn what we know about this rare and secretive native duck? We'll explore all of these questions and more through story-telling with 25 years' worth of video and photos, a soggy set of waders and a dry sense of humor.

In 1977, John's grandmother gave him \$200 to start his college fund. Instead, John used the money to buy his first 35mm camera, which he then used the camera to put himself through college. He earned a biology degree from the University of Montana, and became an award-winning photojournalist at newspapers in Florida and Montana. But the frantic, deadline-driven lifestyle lost out to the more humble call of the natural world. Along this path, John worked as a field biologist for many years, working to conserve California Condors, Bald Eagles, and his favorite -- Harlequin Ducks -- which he has studied for 25 years.

John completed the circle by combining both of his passions, photography and conservation, in the form of fine art photography. Through his lens, John hopes to remind you of the natural beauty and humor that is inherent in wild places and wild critters. He lives with his wife and business partner, Tracy, and their two dogs at the end of the road, just a little ways past the "town" of Kila, in northwestern Montana. You can see some of his work at <http://www.johnashleyfineart.com>.

Peeps From The Board: Chasing Rare Birds

By Larry Weeks

Chasing rare birds is a phenomenon characteristic of hard-core birders. In this case, Rose Leach was closing in on 700 American Birding Association (ABA) birds which is a birder milestone. An ABA bird is one found in North America north of the US-Mexico border. A rare Eurasian bird called a Red-flanked Blue-tail showed up south of Lewiston shortly after Christmas. Cole Wolf, a local birder who is a graduate student in botany at the UM, drove Highway 12 in snow storms both ways to see the Bluetail. Rose then suggested that we go after the bird which we did on December 29th. The bird was staying in a small brushy habitat along the Snake River at Hell Gate Park. There were several birders present when we arrived so the exact location was obvious. The bird was very secretive but it was moving back and forth in a section of habitat that was only about 100 yards long. The best strategy was to stand in one place and wait for the bird to come by and hope for a view. I was able to get the bird in my scope twice and I also got a super look through my binoculars. Rose was also successful in seeing the bird several times. Bird # 695. As a result of a tip from some local birders, we also got to see a Barn Owl and a Western Screech-Owl that were roosting in the park. Highway 12 was in good shape and we made the trip in 12 hours.



Red-flanked Bluetail

The next trip was to the Lake County Landfill on January 7th to look for an Iceland Gull. We watched for gulls flying from Flathead Lake to the landfill from the parking lot of a restaurant on highway 93. It was very cold (5 degrees F) and we stood in the parking lot for 4 hours. The Iceland Gull has white wing tips but all of the the nearly 100 gulls we looked at had black wing tips. Eric Rasmussen joined us during the search. Finally, we were able to enter the landfill and we found 2 large groups of gulls sitting on the ground. In the second group of Ring-billed and Herring Gulls, Rose was able to locate the Iceland Gull. Eric was able to get several photos of the gull which verified the ID. Bird #696.

The next chase was after a Common Pochard in northern California which is a duck that looks similar to a Canvasback. We stayed with Rose's friends in Corvallis, OR the evening of January 13th. The second day, we drove to the Freshwater Lagoon by Orick which is south of Crescent City. When we

arrived, we were disappointed that none of the birders present had seen the Pochard that day. We spent the night at the lagoon and looked the following day. There was a large flock of Canvasbacks on the lagoon until a duck hunter in a boat starting shooting. We gave up our search and drove to Portland to stay with my son's family. This was the time that Portland had been hit with a 17 inch snowfall and the driving conditions around his house were terrible. The Gorge on Interstate 84 was icy on both trips and the Gorge was closed before our trip and the day after we returned to Missoula. It turned out that the last day that the Pochard was seen was the day before we arrived. Not every chase is successful. Rose has subsequently reached 700 ABA birds on a trip to Arizona.

On February 20th, a Redwing (Eurasian bird) showed up in Victoria, BC for the second year in a row. I had to wait for 3 weeks to receive my passport card to allow travel to Canada. On March 17th, Rose and I drove to Victoria. The next day, we spent 8 hours at the location where the Redwing had been seen most often, but we didn't see the bird. It was quite windy which probably kept the bird hunkered down. It was sunny and calm on March 19th and after 5 hours, we got to see the Redwing. It was a spectacular and clear look at 30 feet while the bird foraged in the leaf litter. We got to study the bird for at least 1 minute. Bird 701. We also saw some Eurasian Skylarks.

Please Join Us:

Upcoming Multi-Day Field Trips

By Larry Weeks

The two-day field trip to Freezout Lake and the Rocky Mountain Front is scheduled for May 20 and 21, 2017.

The plan is to leave Missoula at 7:00 am on May 20th and drive to Freezout Lake. The group will bird Freezout on Saturday and the Rocky Mountain Front on Sunday. We will



spend the night in Choteau and the motel options include the Stage Stop Inn (1-888-466-5900), Bella Vista Motel (1-406-466-5711), Gunther Motel (1-406-466-5444), and Big Sky Motel (1-406-466-5318). Participants are asked to make reservations in advance. Most of the participants will be staying at the Stage Stop Inn. Please call Larry Weeks if you wish to attend and he will coordinate carpooling. Plan to bring lunches for both days. There is a \$10 charge for multi-day field trips.

A 2-day field trip to Bannack and Clark Canyon has been scheduled for June 3rd and 4th. We will meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 7:00 am on June 3rd. We will be staying at the Super 8 Dillon, 550 No. Montana St., Dillon (1-800-536-1211). Participants need to make reservations for June 3rd in advance. We will bird the Salmon Fly Fishing Access and Camp Creek at Melrose on Saturday and Bannack and Clark Canyon Reservoir on Sunday. Target birds include Rock Wren, Canyon Wren, Yellow-breasted Chat, Say's Phoebe, Green-tailed Towhee, Gray Flycatcher, Sage Thrasher, Loggerhead Shrike, and Sage-brush Sparrow. Call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or 540-3064, or email him at bwsgenea@gmail.com to sign up and to facilitate car-pooling. There is a \$10 charge per individual on multi-day field trips.



The 4-day campout to Glacier Park is scheduled for July 13, 14, 15, and 16. We will camp at St. Mary Campground on July 13th and 14th and Fish Creek on July 15th. I have reserved 3 campsites at each campground which

will allow up to 6 cars and 24 people. We will bird Many Glacier on Friday, the Red Eagle Lake trail on Saturday, and Howe Lake and Camas Creek trails on Sunday. If you are planning on going to Glacier, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or 540-3064 or email him at bwsgenea@gmail.com. Larry will be planning potluck dinners. We will meet at 5:00 pm at the St. Mary campground on July 13th; campsites C101, C102 and C103. There is a \$10 charge per individual on multi-day field trips that goes to the Chapter.

Summary of Spring Field Trips by Larry Weeks

Saturday, March 25th: When the field trip arrived at the Lee Metcalf Visitors Center, we were greeted with the prehistoric call of the Sandhill Crane. And then a large flock of Tree Swallows fly overhead. Both were welcoming signs that spring had finally arrived. Ponds 5, 6 and 8 had a good collection of waterfowl but we did not see a Cinnamon Teal or a Ruddy Duck. We hiked the Kenai Trail to the Potato Cellar Pond. A male Northern Harrier was perched on a snag for most of our hike. There were several swans on Otter Pond but they were too far away to identify. We listened for a Marsh Wren but did not see or hear. We got scope views of an American Tree Sparrow which was foraging in the trail and a California Quail that was sitting on a branch of a fallen limb. On the drive to the parking lot at the Wildlife Viewing Area, we found a flock of 15 Snow Geese that included 1 blue-phase goose. Several hikers told us that they had heard an owl on the trail that goes directly to the river. We also heard the owl and we searched the pine trees until we finally found a Great Horned Owl. We had 2 Pileated Woodpeckers, a Townsend's Solitaire, a pair of Common Mergansers, and an American Kestrel on the Wildlife Viewing trail. We stopped at the northern edge of the refuge along the east side highway and found 4 Trumpeter Swans, a Wood Duck and a Bald Eagle. There were 9 people on the trip and we had 49 species.

Saturday, April 8th: It was raining when the field trip left Missoula at 4:00 pm but the weather improved as we drove north to the Ninepipes area. Three other people met the group on Duck Road and everyone hiked into a shelter belt. We flushed a Great Horned Owl immediately and then Jeff Ipsen spotted a Long-eared Owl roosting in a thick juniper tree. All the participants got a scope view of the Long-eared Owl. We then returned to the cars and drove further west on Duck Road where we found 2 Long-billed Curlews. Then it started to rain but we were able to find 3 Short-eared Owls. One of the owls was displaying. The trip turned south on Piedalue Road where we looked at a Great Horned Owl that had taken over a Red-tailed Hawk's nest. Denver Holt has a camera on the nest. We then went to Ninepipes Road just south of the Maintenance Shop where Kristi DuBois had several Short-eared Owls displaying at 3:00 pm. There was one owl on the ground which was difficult to get into the scope. The last stop was further south on Ninepipes Road where we had good viewing in 2016. We saw at least 4 owls at this location and even though the rain had increased, there was one owl that put on a great aerial display and landed on metal post along the road several times. We ended up with a trifecta of owls. Fifteen people participated on the field trip.

Do more for birds!

Help us save \$3,700 per year, by signing up for email delivery of our newsletter.

Please email Vick at k7vk@arrl.net and give him your email address.

We promise – we don't share emails with anyone except Montana Audubon.

June 9-11, 2017 - Great Falls, Montana

Montana Audubon will conclude the marking of its 40th Anniversary year with a “birthday celebration” at the June Bird Festival. Join us and learn how Montana Audubon began as a fledgling organization and hear highlights from four decades of conservation successes! David Ringer, Chief Network Officer with National Audubon, will share insights on bird protection and how he engages people with practical conservation solutions in his keynote address, “Protecting Birds and the Places they Need: Today and Tomorrow.”

Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon (UMBA) has worked steadfastly to bring extra fun to this year’s festival with a Bird Calling contest, local vendors and great custom field trips. There will be many beautiful and creative desserts to choose from for our Dessert Auction, so come prepared to bid on one to enjoy at the banquet.

UMBA has also put together a diverse roster of field trips – but they are filling up fast, so please register as soon as possible. You can do so by mail, or online at www.mtaudubon.org. Also—if staying overnight, be sure to reserve your rooms at the Best Western Plus Heritage Inn by calling 1-406-761-1900 or 1-800-548-8256. (Please mention that you are part of the Montana Audubon Bird Festival to get the group rate.)

Contact Montana Audubon at (406) 443-3949 if you have any questions about the festival or registration.

Black Swift Volunteers Needed

Do you enjoy bird-adventures? Willing to hike and gaze at waterfalls? Enjoy scrutinizing wet cliff faces for obscure moss nests? Enjoy birding at dawn and dusk? If you're like the majority of birders in Montana, you've never seen a black swift. THIS SUMMER COULD CHANGE THAT!!

Montana Audubon has funding this year to expand on our citizen science effort to look for additional swift nests in Montana—including potential sites in the Bitterroot. Amy Seaman will be putting on two trainings this summer – 1 in Glacier National Park, and 1 outside the park. Both will be held in mid-July and will be limited to 12 people. And, she even has a little bit of funding for mileage and stipend for those of you who are able to complete a training, and then commit to doing one survey.

If you'd like to participate in this project, please contact Amy (aseaman@mtaudubon.org). Join the echelon of cool birders out there who tell others that they are "going swifting" and remember that “swifting” is not for the faint of heart. Surveying for this bird requires long hikes, tremendous patience, and difficult terrain navigation even at night. But it sure is fun!

For a taste of what "swifting" can be like - check out our website and blogposts from the last few years' surveys!
<http://mtaudubon.org/?s=black+swift>



IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Recognize Your Peers!

Each year Montana Audubon recognizes individuals who work for the conservation and protection of birds and other wildlife by presenting Awards at the Saturday evening Bird Festival banquet. We are currently seeking nominations in the following categories: Lifetime Achievement Award, Educator of the Year, Conservationist of the Year, Citizen Scientist of the Year, and Special Achievement Award. To make a nomination, download a nomination form from www.mtaudubon.org/about/awards/. Nominations are due by May 19, 2017. Mail completed forms to Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena MT 59624.

Montana Audubon Seeks a New Executive Director

The position posting is on the Montana Audubon website (<http://mtaudubon.org/>).

If interested, please contact Megan Lewis, Senior Associate, at Kittleman and Associates at mlewis@kittlemansearch.com.

Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards

By Bill Gabriel



On April 4, 2017, the awards committee of Chad Bishop, Kerry Foresman, Bill Gabriel, Terry McEaney, and Andrea Stearle made the following three awards to University of Montana students:

- Sarah Gaulke, \$500, to investigate how bats use talus slopes and cliff faces in western Montana.
- Cedar Mathers-Winn, \$990, to study how forest gaps disrupt communications among birds.
- Carly F. Muench, \$1,000, to evaluate long-term turnover of northern goshawks within the Minidoka Ranger District of the Sawtooth National Forest.

The recipients have been invited to report how they used the grants, and the results of their investigations, at a Five Valleys Audubon meeting early in 2018.

In 37 years of small research grants, FVAS has awarded \$41,166.50 to 83 students, of which 55% were male and 45% were female.

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 only, includes newsletter sent via email.

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

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

\$_____ 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.

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

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

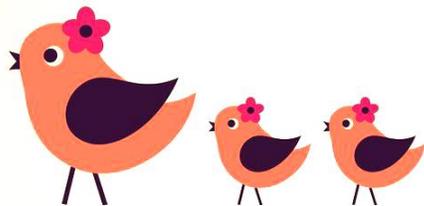
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

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!

To become a new member, renew a lapsed membership or renew a current membership of National Audubon Society (NAS) and receive Audubon magazine, go to this website: fvaudubon.org/nas. This will ensure that FVAS receives a \$20 one-time credit for your membership. All NAS members become members of FVAS. The other financial support we receive from NAS is \$1,300 annually for being a chapter in good standing. Montana Audubon (MTA) is an independent organization and receives no financial support from NAS. MTA is responsible for its own fundraising and FVAS donates \$3,000 to MTA annually. There are various tax advantages for donating to MTA, you may contact them through their website: <http://mtaudubon.org/>. Please give generously to each organization, as we work collaboratively to protect what we all love.

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