

November 2012

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

- **Saturday, November 3rd:** Half-day field trip at Maclay Flat. Meet at the Maclay Flat parking lot at 10:00 AM.
- **Monday, November 5th:** Betsy Griffing will host the November board meeting at her office. The address is Axilon Law Group, 257 West Front Street, Suite B, Missoula, MT.
- **Monday, November 12th:** Montana Audubon Executive Director, Steve Hoffman will give a presentation on raptor migration at the November program meeting.
- **Thursday, November 15th:** Submission deadline for the December edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, November 17th:** Beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10AM-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.
- **Sunday, December 2nd:** All-day field trip to the Mission Valley led by Jim Brown. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 8:00 AM or at the Cenex Gas Station in Ronan at 9:00 AM.

Raptor Migration in the West: Natural History and Ecology



Swainson's Hawk

What have we learned about the status and trends of raptor populations in the West based on migration counts taken during the past 20+ years? How did an eastern hawk watcher come to discover so many western raptor migration flyways? Steve Hoffman, Executive Director of Montana Audubon, will answer those questions and more at our program on November 12 at 7:30 p.m. in the Gallagher Business Building, room L14 (lower level), on the University of Montana campus.

Steve will also address how eastern and western North American raptor migrations differ; where raptors breed and overwinter; why they use different routes in both spring and fall; how often they stop to hunt; and whether they deposit "pre-migratory fat" before they initiate their migration. Steve will describe how environmental changes are impacting the health of raptor populations, including the booming oil and gas development across the West and climate change.

Steve has been the Executive Director of Montana Audubon since 2006 and has dedicated his entire 32-year career to wildlife conservation. He began as a Wildlife Biologist for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in southern Arizona, and later worked for the US Fish & Wildlife Service in Albuquerque as an Endangered Species Specialist. After 10 years of government service Steve launched HawkWatch International (HWI), a not-for-profit focused on the study and conservation of hawks, eagles and other birds of prey. After 12 years with HWI, Steve returned to his birth state to become Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon Pennsylvania. In 2004 Steve moved to Bozeman to serve as Director for Predator Conservation Alliance. Steve has authored more than 30 scientific papers on raptor biology and conservation, endangered species management, and coyote ecology, and has given hundreds of presentations on various wildlife conservation and bird identification topics to varied audiences across the U.S. Steve earned his M.S. degree in Wildlife Ecology from Utah State University in 1979.

Peeps from the Board

Conservation Accomplishments by Jim Brown

When one thinks about the enormity and complexity of environmental problems facing the world, such as global warming and unsustainable use of natural resources, solutions seem beyond most of us. But at a local level we can make a difference. I thought it would be timely to provide an update about what our Chapter has been doing to meet its conservation goals. Unfortunately conservation and solving environmental problems have received far too little attention in national political circles due to the economy and a stymied political system. Lets hope that changes soon.

Our Chapter's efforts are closely aligned with the strategic plan of Montana Audubon, which directs top priority work at protecting wetland/riparian and native grassland habitats. The reason is that most bird species of conservation concern are found in those habitats. Wetland/riparian areas are critically important because less than 4 percent of Montana is occupied by wetland/riparian habitat yet about 55 percent of all species found in Montana nest there and approximately 80 percent of species utilize this habitat at some time in their life cycle. Most of our efforts have been to protect bird habitats in the Clark Fork River--Grass Valley Important Bird Area (IBA) and to review and recommend desirable vegetated setback buffers on all proposed subdivisions in Missoula County.

Five Valleys Land Trust recently announced a conservation easement on the Joe Boyer ranch west of Frenchtown that protects 1,000 acres of ranchland including excellent wetland habitat and a Great Blue Heron rookery. Our Chapter played an important role by documenting birds and other wildlife occurring on the ranch, which helped secure \$412,000 of grant money. We also contributed a relatively small amount of funds toward purchase of the easement. The fact that a small grass roots organization was willing to go to bat for conservation helped convince granting organizations to fund the project. A land trust can make conservation happen on the landscape. We have learned that our Chapter can play a useful role in achieving conservation by documenting and explaining the wildlife resource to land owners, professional land planners and conservation organizations such as land trusts. An exciting conservation project, which we hope to help with indirectly, is the protection of the

confluence of Rock Creek and the Clark Fork River. This project involves purchase of 200 acres by Five Valleys Land Trust of land bordering Rock Creek and the Clark Fork River. The property supports riparian habitat, grassland and mixed cottonwood-pine forest. Importantly, it will result in over 1,000 acres including adjacent properties being protected where Rock Creek meets the Clark Fork River.



Great Blue Heron

We continue to explore with other interested parties ways of retaining wetlands on the Smurfit-Stone mill site. One possibility being discussed is utilizing the mill wastewater ponds for tertiary treatment of effluent from Missoula's sewage treatment plant. This could involve creation of a wetland frequented by birds and other wildlife. Currently, we are waiting to learn what clean up may be necessary to deal with toxic residues from the pulping process. This is a challenging and complicated opportunity that will require a long-term effort but could potentially result in significant wetland habitat being created and protected in the IBA.

For several years we have been reviewing all subdivision proposals in Missoula County with an eye to protecting important bird habitat and species of conservation concern. We usually make a site visit if riparian or wetland areas are involved to evaluate what would be an appropriate vegetated buffer. Based on the site visit and the science behind disturbance and successful nesting we recommend to the County a no build setback distance from the riparian or wetland zone. Occasionally we testify at County Commissioner hearings to explain our recommendations. This past year our recommendations resulted in setbacks approved by the County being increased from 25 to 100 feet on a property in the IBA and from 50 to 100 feet on a property in the Swan Valley.

Even though these accomplishments are not solving the big world problems, they do help protect bird habitat and Montana's natural heritage for future generations.

Field Trip to Jewel Basin hawk watch by Pat Little

Dan Casey has been conducting a hawk watch from a ridge overlooking Jewel Basin in the Swan Range, NE of Bigfork, since 2008. Every year, his team has counted over 2,000 migrating hawks of up to 17 species, so it seemed like a good place for a Five Valleys Audubon field trip. The last week in September is usually the peak of the migration, so I set up a trip for Sunday the 23rd. Five of us carpooled from Missoula to the trailhead, where we met two friends of mine from Seattle. Then we all hiked up to the observations site and met up with Dan. The flight was slow getting started, and smoke from the Condon Mountain fire reduced visibility a little, but pretty soon we were seeing birds. Early on we got a nice look at a peregrine that came straight towards the owl (a plastic great horned owl decoy, mounted on a pole, that is set up to lure the hawks in) and veered off at the last second just above us. Not all the birds were that close, but most were flying along our ridge and flew by near enough for good looks and discussion of the finer points of ID (sharpie vs. coopers, bald vs. golden).

In all, 63 migrating hawks were counted that day, which included 2 peregrines, 2 merlins, 2 prairie falcons, 3 northern harriers, 4 red-tailed hawks, 6 kestrels, 7 Cooper's hawks, 8 golden eagles, and 24 sharp-shinned hawks. Also, there were a few "local" redtails, harriers, and golden eagles that entertained us during the day - the redtails often stooping on each other from a great height. We also saw some noteworthy non-raptors - flocks of pine siskins, mountain bluebirds, and Clark's nutcrackers, and a couple of yellow-rumped warblers.

We sat on nice soft beargrass tussocks, and could position ourselves in or out of the wind to maintain just the right temperature. And part way through the



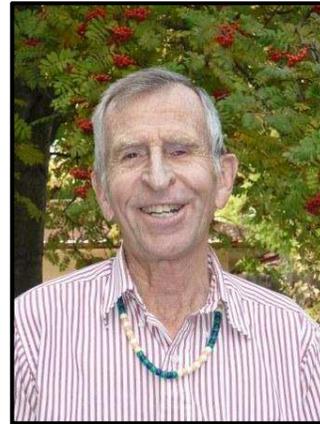
Counting Hawks with Mountain Goats
Photo by Jeff Compton

morning we were joined by 3 mountain goats that stayed with us the rest of the day! The highlight of the day, from my point of view, was a merlin that grabbed a butterfly, and ate it, while circling over our heads! And we had a fun dinner on

the way home, at a cool little cafe in Bigfork with foosball and ping pong tables.

Check out more photos in the "Field trip to Jewel Basin hawk watch" album on our Facebook Page: www.facebook.com/fvamisoula.

Meet the Board



Larry Weeks

Larry Weeks was born in Cooperstown, NY and was raised on a small dairy farm in upstate New York. He attended Syracuse University where he earned BS and MS degrees in Pulp & Paper Technology. He went to work at the pulp & paper mill near Frenchtown in January 1963 and worked there for 32 years before retiring in 1994. He held

the position of technical director during most of his working career. The duties of that position included quality control of the finished product (linerboard), monitoring and reporting air and water emissions, and process troubleshooting. Larry has been married to Beverly for 29 years. He has two sons from a previous marriage. Ron, the oldest son, works for Dow Chemical in Lake Jackson, TX and is a hard-core birder. Jim is an assistant principal at a high school in Portland, OR. Larry acquired his interest in birds from Ron.

Since joining the Chapter, he has organized the field trip program for 14 years, headed the Community Naturalist Program (CNP) for 10 years, compiled the Missoula Christmas Bird Count for 11 years, and led a Birdathon team for 10 years. Larry has skinned 200 birds over the past 9 years which are used for the CNP classroom presentations. He has also worked on habitat restoration at the pulp mill and this work has continued even after the mill closed in early 2010. He hopes to lead occasional field trips to the old mill site in the future.

In the photo, you can see Larry is wearing a necklace that his six-year-old, step-great-grandson made for him; he wears it every day.

Missoula Christmas Bird Count by Larry Weeks

The Missoula Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 15, 2012. The count area is a circle with a 7.5 mile radius which is centered at the intersection of Reserve St. and I-90. The circle will be divided up and covered by individuals and small groups. You can participate by being a feeder watcher or joining a group in the field. If you would like to participate, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or bwsgenea@onlinemt.com. Feeder watchers that used to communicate with Elizabeth Johnston need to contact Larry. We also tally unusual birds not reported on count day that are seen during count week. This year, count week runs from Wednesday, December 12th through Tuesday, December 18th. If you see an unusual bird during count week, be sure to report it to Larry. A short bird identification session will be held at the December Chapter meeting.

The count day will end with a potluck dinner that will be held at the home of Ruth & Russ Royter, 520 Highland Park Dr. (telephone # 728-7984). This location is on Farviews on the east side of the golf course. Potluck guests are welcome to arrive at the Royter's starting at 6:00 PM. Dinner will commence at 6:30 PM. Please bring your favorite potluck offering, or A-L, bring a salad or dessert, and M-Z, a hot dish. After the potluck dinner, we will tabulate the results from the field count.

Audubon will no longer charge the \$5.00 fee of field participants. American Birds will no longer be printed on paper and mailed to participants, and Audubon will move to an online delivery of the summary results of the CBC.



New Osprey Nest Pole by Jim brown

Last spring Bruce Hall, Executive Director of the Bonner Development Group (BDG), called to see if someone from our Chapter would come to their Two Rivers Community Park and recommend what could be done to improve the bird habitat. Two Rivers Community Park is a 26 acre park just south of Bonner along the



Bonner Development Group erects an Osprey pole

Clark Fork River. Our work with the BDG began in 1998, when our Chapter assisted the BDG in designing a bird friendly park and developed a bird and mammal checklist for the Milltown Pond area. Since then the area was declared a super fund site that led to removal of the Milltown Dam, removal of contaminated soils and restoration of the river channel and its flood plain. Because some of the Two Rivers Community Park was included in the clean up and restoration project, it had to be redesigned. How to make it bird friendly again was the question on Bruce Hall's mind.

To help answer this question Rebecca Sills and I visited the site. We suggested putting up an Osprey nest pole and sought the advice of Erick Greene and Heiko Langner from the University of Montana. They visited the site and agreed that it was a good location for an Osprey nest and suggested what kind of a pole and where to put it. Bruce Hall explained the project to the Missoula Electric Coop. They became enthused about the project and under Bart Peterson's leadership kindly donated and installed a 55-foot pole in the Park as a community service. So as of September 26, Osprey have a new nest site to consider. Now we just have to hope that they like it.

Two Rivers Community Park will open in 2014, and will offer an opportunity for students to learn about the natural environment and how altered landscapes can be restored to benefit wildlife and the lives of people.

Board Update

- Sue Reel has joined the board as Vice President. Welcome Sue!
- Bill DeCou has resigned from the board. Thank you, Bill, for all your contributions to the chapter.
- Jackie Alford is unable to continue her work on Audubon Adventures. Thank you Jackie for your dedication to Audubon and to the children.
- Barbara Ross is our new Audubon Adventures Chair - a job she has done in the past. Welcome back Barbara!
- We are seeking volunteers to fill the following positions: Secretary, Director, Newsletter Distribution Chair, Membership Promotion Chair

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. 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/>



Welcome New Members:

Ernest Bargmeyer	Angie Stephens
Renie Cyr	Nadia White
M. A. Parmeter	Joe Woodworth

Special note to our members: The Five Valleys Audubon Society board has decided to print only the names of new members from now on.

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: _____

_____ \$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 & 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 0Z**

NOVEMBER



TO:

FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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