

# November 2013

## Birding Observer



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

### Calendar

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- **Monday, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 7pm:** Betsy Griffing will host the October board meeting at her office. The address is Axilon Law Group, 257 W Front St, Suite B in downtown Missoula.
- **Sunday, November 10<sup>th</sup>:** Half day field trip at Maclay Flat led by Carole and Terry Toppins. Meet at the Maclay Flat parking lot on Blue Mountain Road at 9:00am.
- **Monday, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 7:30pm:** Jay Sumner of the Montana Peregrine Institute will present on Peregrine Falcons at our November meeting.
- **Friday, November 15<sup>th</sup>:** Submission deadline for the December edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, November 16<sup>th</sup>:** Beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.
- **Sunday December 8<sup>th</sup>:** Full day field trip to the Mission Valley led by Jim Brown. Meet in the middle of the Adams Center parking lot at the UofM for departure at 8:00am or at the Cenex Station on the south end of Ronan at 9:00am. Dress warmly and bring your lunch.

### The Lives and Times of the Montana Peregrine Falcon

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Jay Sumner of the Montana Peregrine Institute will present our next program on Monday, November 11 at 7:30 p.m. in the Gallagher Business Building, room L14 (lower level) on the University of Montana campus. His talk will be on the population dynamics and life history of the Montana Peregrine Falcon.



Peregrine Falcon

Jay is the Executive Director of the Montana Peregrine Institute and has over 50 years of research experience with Montana raptors. After finding his first Peregrine Falcon eyrie in 1961 outside of Livingston,

Montana, he continued to study Montana raptors for the next five decades. He currently organizes and conducts the Montana Peregrine Falcon surveys through the Montana Peregrine Falcon working group. This group includes land and resource managers and biologists, private biologists, and interested citizens. Jay started the new and exciting "Project Peregrine Watch" which uses talented observers across Montana to help monitor the growing number of active Peregrine Falcon territories. "Peregrine Watch" will be the focus of this presentation. Jay earned an M.S. in Biology at Montana State University-Billings, and an M.S.T. (Masters of Science with a teaching emphasis) in Biology at the University of Montana.

### Christmas Bird Count By Larry Weeks

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The Missoula Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Sat., December 14, 2013. This is the earliest date that a Christmas Count can occur. The Missoula 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@centric.net](mailto:bwsgenea@centric.net). Feeder watchers also 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 Wed., Dec. 11<sup>th</sup> through Tue., Dec 17<sup>th</sup>. If you see an unusual bird species during Count week, be sure to report it to Larry.

The Count day will end with a potluck dinner. I am pleased to announce that Ruth & Russ Royter have agreed to host the potluck again this year. The Royters live at 520 Highland Park Dr. which is on the east side of the golf course. Potluck guests are welcome to arrive at 6:00 PM and the potluck will start 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, we will tabulate the results from the field count.

## Peeps From The Board: Eponymous Birds of Montana

By Clancy Cone

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This list is for those who are curious about eponyms, bird names that include a person's name. I know you are out there. Hopefully this will provide a little of the how and why some birds carry people's names.

1. **Ross's Goose** was named after Bernard Rogan Ross (1827-1874). Ornithologist John Cassin named the goose after Ross, an Irish fur trader for the Hudson Bay Company, who collected many bird specimens for the Smithsonian, including this goose.
2. **Barrow's Goldeneye** was named after Sir John Barrow (1764-1848). Ornithologist William John Swainson named this bird after Barrow, who founded the Royal Geographical Society.
3. **Clark's Grebe** was named after John Henry Clark (1830-1885), who conducted the Texas Boundary survey in 1860.
4. **Clark's Nutcracker** was named after Captain William Clark (1770-1838). After Captain Clark first observed the bird in the Salmon River Canyon, Thomas Jefferson sent a specimen to Naturalist Alexander Wilson, who gave the bird its name.
5. **Cooper's Hawk** was named after William C. Cooper (1798-1864), a founder of American Museum of Natural History, by French naturalist Charles Lucien Bonaparte.
6. **Swainson's Hawk and Swainson's Thrush** were named after William Swainson (1789-1855), a naturalist and bird illustrator from Liverpool, England. Mr. Bonaparte named the hawk, and naturalist, Thomas Nuttall named the thrush.
7. **Wilson's Phalarope, Wilson's Snipe and Wilson's Warbler** were named after Alexander Wilson (1766-1813), the father of American ornithology. Born in Scotland, Wilson wrote satire and was imprisoned for libel. He emigrated to the United States and wrote seven volumes of *American Ornithology*.
8. **Sabine's Gull** was named after Sir Edward Sabine (1788-1883), famous military general, physicist, astronomer, explorer, and president of the Royal Society, while on an expedition in 1818, in search of the Northwest Passage.
9. **Bonaparte's Gull** was named after Prince Charles Lucien Bonaparte (1803-1857), a zoologist and nephew of Napoleon. He attempted to catalogue every bird species in the world, and is considered the "father of systematic ornithology".
10. **Franklin's Grouse and Franklin's Gull** were named after Sir John Franklin (1786-1847). French ornithologist, Louis Jean Pierre Vieillot, named the birds after Franklin, a Royal Navy officer and arctic explorer,

who died on his last expedition. His remains revealed high arsenic levels shortly before his death. The only person with access to arsenic was the expedition doctor; likely the crew wanted to mutiny, and getting rid of Franklin was the course they took.

11. **Thayer's Gull** was named after Colonel John Eliot Thayer (1862-1933), an American ornithologist whose bird skin collection remains at Harvard University.
12. **Forster's Tern** was named after Johann Reinhold Forster (1729-1798), a clergyman from Danzig, who became a naturalist. Forster accompanied James Cook on his second voyage around the world from 1772-1773. Constant complainer and troublemaker, Forster refused to relinquish his notes, and they were not published until 50 years after his death.
13. **Vaux's Swift** was named after William Sanson Vaux (1811-1882), a mineralogist, archaeologist and President of the U.S. Zoological Society, from Philadelphia. Ornithologist and contemporary of Audubon, John K. Townsend named the bird after Vaux.
14. **Anna's Hummingbird** was named after Princess Anna de Belle Massena, wife of Francois V. Massena, the Duke of Rivoli. John James Audubon himself was charmed by her, but it was actually naturalist Rene Primevere Lesson who named the bird in her honor.
15. **Costa's Hummingbird** was named after Louis Marie Pantaleon Costa, Marquis de Beau-Regard (1806-1864), a Sardinian aristocrat and avid collector. A French hummingbird expert and collector, Jules Bourcier, named the bird in honor of Costa.
16. **Lewis' Woodpecker** was named after Captain Meriwether Lewis (1774-1809). He collected the bird near Helena; the specimen is now at Harvard. The bird was given its name by Alexander Wilson.
17. **Williamson's Sapsucker** was named after Robert Stockton Williamson (1825-1882), a lieutenant in the U.S. army, who led a survey of northern California and southern Oregon. The army surgeon, John Newberry, identified the bird in Oregon in 1857 and named it after Williamson. However, the bird was originally identified six years earlier by John Cassin.
18. **Hammond's Flycatcher** was named after Dr. William Alexander Hammond (1828-1900), a surgeon and army general. Zoologist, John Xantus de Vesey, named the bird after Hammond as a thank you for helping him get work as a collector for the Smithsonian Institution curator, Spencer Fullerton Baird.

Source material: Beolens, Bo and Watkins, Michael, *Whose Bird?*, published by Christopher Helm, 2003, London.

## Feeding Birds Responsibly in Bear Country

By Pat Little, President



This is the time of year when the bears are feeding, prior to hibernation. They visit back yards looking for food, and if they find it they may become problem bears. As the saying goes, "a fed bear is a dead bear."

Five Valleys Audubon Society has published a leaflet with advice for bird lovers who want to feed the birds while helping keep the bears safe. It contains tips on how to keep the bird food out of reach of bears, by season and by time of day, as well as advice on preventing birds flying into windows. We've also posted the tips on our web site—[fvaudubon.org](http://fvaudubon.org)—in the current bird of the month article.

We'd like to get a copy of this leaflet into the hands of everyone who feeds birds in Missoula. Can you help distribute the leaflets in your neighborhood? All it takes is to walk or bike around and see who has feeders out, then place a leaflet by their front door. If you're interested in helping, please email us at [info@fvaudubon.org](mailto:info@fvaudubon.org) for more information.

## West Missoula Birding

By Terry Toppins

On Sunday, September 15th, ten people joined Carole and I for a birding trip to some West Missoula locations. Certainly one of the highlights was walking one trail with more than 60 Turkey Vultures in two trees overhead. When we returned back down the dike, they all took to the air and seemed to be joined by others making two large kettles of over 80 Turkey Vultures circling overhead. We were treated to many Gray Catbirds, a Swainson's Thrush, a Pileated Woodpecker, White-crowned Sparrows, an Eared Grebe on the Clark Fork River, American Kestrel, Bald Eagle, Pygmy Nuthatch, Wilson's Warbler, MacGillivray's Warbler, and a male American Redstart ending with a total of 32 species. The weather was perfect and the American Redstart was a record late sighting for Montana.

## Wanted: Support for Audubon Adventures

By Barbara Ross

You may have noticed on the back of this newsletter under Committees: AUDUBON ADVENTURES, and maybe some of you have wondered 'What's that?'

AUDUBON ADVENTURES is an educational program on the natural world, developed by National Audubon for students in grades 3-5. Each teacher receives a classroom kit containing 4 SETS of 32 magazinettes.

This year's topic is near and dear to our hearts, SHARING OUR WORLD WITH BIRDS. The magazinettes are titled: RAPTORS, HUMMINGBIRDS, SEABIRDS, and KIDS CARING FOR OUR PLANET.

In addition, teachers who opt to use this curriculum receive: lesson plans with hands-on activities, including (new this year) an ONLINE component; and Audubon membership, including local chapter, and subscription to AUDUBON MAGAZINE.

For more than ten years our chapter has offered this program free to Missoula students and schools in the surrounding areas, as far as Potomac, Seeley Lake, St. Regis, Charlo and Arlee (and most schools in between). Last year and this, 29 teachers have chosen to teach with Audubon Adventures, reaching over 600 students. Some teacher comments include:

"I love to teach children using the Audubon Adventures! The kids eat them up! I think they are so well done and I have used them for years. Thank you for giving my class another opportunity to use them. Kids learn so much from them."

~ Melodee Burreson, Target Range

The classroom kits cost \$46 each. Over the years we have Rocky and Suzi Healy to thank for obtaining a grant from Walmart of \$1000 per year toward funding this program. Additional donations are always needed and welcome. One suggestion is to sponsor your child's or grandchild's classroom kit. If you'd like to take this opportunity to encourage, develop, foster the love of nature in kids send your donation to Five Valleys Audubon Society, PO Box 8425, Missoula 59807, or call Barbara Ross 552-0500 with any questions.

For more information, please visit:

<http://education.audubon.org/special-section-audubon-chapter-leader>

## Say What? A Natural History of Snags

by Bill Gabriel

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A snag is a standing dead tree—usually one that has lost its leaves, twigs, branches, many of its limbs, and some of its bark. Whether a dead tree remains standing long enough to become a snag depends upon the species of tree, its location, its size, and vagaries of weather and human actions. Trees with shallow root systems, or decaying roots or boles, may be blown down before becoming snags. A dead tree cut for firewood or a cabin log will not become a snag.

Occasional dead trees are common constituents of a forest, but large numbers of dead trees in a landscape remain as mute witnesses to a past forest fire or an insect epidemic like the mountain pine bark beetle infestation that has killed so many lodgepole pines in western Montana. On its way to becoming a snag, a dead lodgepole pine deteriorates in stages more-or-less as follows:

1. The crown changes color as needles fade (sorrel-top), die (red-top), and fall off (black-top). Within weeks of beginning to fade, all the needles are dead and a tree reaches the red-top stage. It is a feeding site for woodpeckers, nuthatches and creepers. Dead needles may remain on the tree for another year or two, but eventually:
2. The dead tree stands with needles gone, but dark bark remaining. As it gradually sheds twigs and smaller branches for two to eight years, woodpeckers excavate nest cavities that later become homes for flying squirrels, owls, chickadees, nuthatches, and wrens. Loose bark may shelter roosting bats.
3. The bark gradually falls off, as do the rest of the branches and some limbs. It serves as a perch for hawks and owls. The tallest snags are favorite perches of the olive-sided flycatcher, from whence he can call “quick, three beers” between dashes after flying insects.
4. Finally, five to ten years after its death, the snag stands naked and bleached gray-white, a ghost of its former self, and what some call a buckskin. A nest cavity excavated by a flicker, and used once, may then serve a family of kestrels for many years. There are other nest cavities—harder to see—tiny round entrance holes made by the larvae of long-horned beetles as they tunneled from the bark into the wood of the dying tree, and larger holes where they emerge. The tunnels, when vacated by beetles,

become nest sites for solitary bees that pollinate plants invading the burned-over sites.

How long a snag stands depends greatly on its size. Larger trees are more firmly anchored by extensive root systems and will outlast smaller trees. In ten years or so half the dead trees will have dropped off the rolls of snagdom, and many fall before they become buckskins, but those that remain upright can be with us for many more years, standing like tombstones in a graveyard of downed trees, before crashing to the ground, decaying, and being recycled into new forest growth.

The larger fallen trees take decades—even hundreds of years—to decay, fall apart, and disappear while releasing the minerals they accumulated when alive. In that time, some downed trees become seats for hikers or stages for the drumming performance of ruffed grouse. Others, hollow, provide dens for mammals like martens, skunks, and weasels. Many kinds of insects and reptiles also take up residence within the logs and provide food for birds and bears, who tear the rotting wood apart looking for snacks. So, the recent death of so many trees is not an unmitigated disaster.

Many ponderosa pines have also been killed by fires and beetles in recent years, and big old ponderosas sometimes host colonies of large black carpenter ants that mine the dead interior of the bole after it has been softened by a decaying fungus. In some mysterious way—maybe they get visual clues from ants outside the tree, or maybe they can hear the insects working within the tree (carpenter ants do make a distinct double-knock on their gallery walls)—pileated woodpeckers find the ant infested pines and excavate large rectangular feeding cavities in the trunks to dine on ant eggs and larvae. Those cavities may then become homes for pine martens, raccoons, owls, or honeybees.

Knowing something of the natural history of a snag, an observer can estimate past losses from bark beetles (beetle galleries lightly engraved on the surface) or fire (no evidence of beetle galleries, but maybe charcoal), and evaluate the present utility of snags as homes for insects, birds, and mammals versus their liability as potential lightning attracters and wildfire ignition points, or their hazard as falling objects.



**Welcome New Members**

Lisa Autio  
Richard J. Field  
Phillip A. Hamilton  
Monte Logan  
Todd Murdock  
Jeannine Shriner

Anthony Boote  
Loreen Folsom  
Gilbert Johnson  
Honey Marsh  
Katrina Schopp  
Larry & Susan Toder

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**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.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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

\$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**

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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, and I may participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues are shared between NAS and my local Chapter.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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Please make the check payable to National Audubon Society and mail to:

**National Audubon Society  
PO Box 422250  
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TO:

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