

# October 2021

## Birding Observer



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

### Calendar

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- **Monday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 6:00-7:45 pm:** Please join us at the Missoula Public Library for the Five Valleys Audubon Society Board Meeting.
- **Monday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 7:00pm:** Come hear Doug Bonham discuss, "Smart Cameras and Tracking Devices for Wildlife Research." We will meet in Room 110 of the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building (ISB) on the University of Montana campus. Masks are required, per UM mask policy.
- **Saturday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>:** All-day field trip to Brown's Lake to look for loons and scoters. Meet at 9:00 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot. No hiking will be involved.
- **Saturday, November 6<sup>th</sup>:** All-day field trip to the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet at 9:00 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot. There will be 2 miles of level hiking.
- **Sunday, December 5<sup>th</sup>:** All-day field trip to the Mission Valley to look for raptors. Meet at 8:00 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot or at the Cenex gas station in Ronan at 9:00 am.

### Smart Cameras and Tracking Devices for Wildlife Research

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Attend our chapter meeting on Monday, October 11<sup>th</sup> at 7pm to hear Doug Bonham present: "Smart Cameras and Tracking Devices for Wildlife Research."

Doug will recap a brief history of tracking technologies for wildlife research, including the ground-breaking work

by Missoula's own John and Frank Craighead. From there Doug will describe the myriad of current wildlife tracking technologies, including the ones he designed for species ranging from eagles and owls in Montana to marine mammals to tree kangaroos in Papua New Guinea. Doug's current research grants leave invasive and attached devices behind in favor of non-invasive smart cameras and LiDAR technologies. He hopes to recruit some Montana Audubon volunteers to deploy some instrumented chickadee boxes in suburban Missoula and Kalispell.

Doug is President of Field Data Technologies. He started birding in Maryland in 1966 with Chan Robbins. Chan had the audacity to publish a bird field guide to compete with what was then the only bird field guide - Roger Tory Peterson's Field Guide to Birds. Doug had to navigate the dramatic split in the birding community between those remaining loyal to Roger Tory and the renegades using Chan's new book. When Doug arrived in Montana in 1975, he ran straight from the airport to Dr. Philip Wright's office to ask where the local Audubon chapter meets. Dr. Wright said there wasn't one, so he started one with a lot of invaluable help from Rose Leach and Jim Brown. After earning degrees in Wildlife Biology and Electronic Engineering, he worked alternately as a biologist and engineer. His custom tracking devices have been used on dozens of critical wildlife species around the world. Doug retired last month from designing Microsoft Surface Pro Devices to work full time on his research grants for designing automated smart cameras for wildlife research.

**PLEASE NOTE: We will meet in the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building (ISB) in Room 110.** The building lies on the south end of campus on Beckwith Avenue between Maurice and Mansfield avenues. Please refer to the campus map at <https://map.umt.edu>.

We will continue to meet in-person unless increasing COVID numbers require us to switch to a virtual meeting. Please check your email regularly and monitor our website ([www.fvaudubon.org/](http://www.fvaudubon.org/)) for updates. Masks will continue to be required, and social distancing will be practiced.

## Peeps from the Board:

### Black Birders Week

By Jeff Ipsen

There have been two Black Birders Weeks (BBW) thus far. The first was in 2020 from May 31st to June 5th. The second was in 2021 from May 30th through June 5th. They were largely online events, spawned by the incident in 2020 in



NYC's Central Park, involving a Black birder, Christian Cooper, and a White woman, walking her dog. Mr. Cooper asked the woman to leash her dog, per park rules, and she called the police to report that he had assaulted her. The incident was caught on video, went viral, and inspired the first BBW, a reaction to the traumatic experience and an affirmation that Black birders exist. The second BBW was more about encouraging participation and sharing tips and stories. One day focused on honoring and highlighting LGBTQIA+. The events were largely livestreams and Q&A sessions, but in 2021 there were bird walks in Chicago and NYC, one of the walks co-led by Christian Cooper. Participants could also livestream a film: *The Falconers*.

Many birding websites have posted about BBW, including Cornell, Audubon, and Wilderness.org. BirdNote's two-minute podcasts are dedicated to related subjects during the week. NPR's Shortwave, which can be accessed at <https://www.npr.org/2021/06/15/1006844081/-blackbirdersweek-2021-celebrating-the-joy-of-birds>, featured an interview with Deja Perkins, one of the organizers. A lot of the organizers are women, but the best source of information is from BlackAFinSTEM Collective ([www.blackafinstem.com](http://www.blackafinstem.com)), the organizer of the events.

So, check out some of the information. Be aware. Two things that inhibit participation in birding by people of color, especially young people, are access to binoculars and access to safe spaces to bird. Think about donating your unused binoculars. Not a lot you can do about the latter, but if you do come across a Black birder, engage with them, talk to them, ask them what they've seen. According to a study by FWP, 93% of birders nationally are White. That number is certainly higher in Montana.

Think about what it would be like to be a Black birder. I don't feel comfortable looking into someone's yard with binoculars, or close to someone's boat on a lake, but think about being Black and doing that. Drew Lanham's book

*The Home Place* has a chapter titled 'Birding While Black'. He relates a time he was doing a Breeding Bird Survey in Laurel Falls, South Carolina. That is where you drive a designated route, stopping every half mile to record every bird you can hear or see in three minutes. On one of the stops, on a dead-end dirt road, there was a Confederate flag displayed on the house he had to check out. That was a long three-minute stop for him.

Check out Black Birders Week next year. And here's hoping that in the future a sighting of a Black birder won't be the rarest sighting of the day.

## Field Trip Summary

By Larry Weeks

**Sunday, August 22nd:** This field trip ended up going to Freezout Lake because the water level in Canyon Ferry was about 20 feet below normal which would leave the habitat at Rye Creek high and dry. When we arrived at Freezout Lake, it was obvious that wind was going to be a negative factor. The first stop at the dike south of the first outhouse had very few shorebirds and they were tucked in behind a row of bullrushes. An attempt to get closer resulted in an encounter with gumbo which left everyone with mud on their shoes. One of the participants did spot a Black-crowned Night-Heron that briefly lifted above the bullrushes and back down again before anyone else had a chance to see it. There were several Black-necked Stilts at the "neck" along with an American Avocet, a Greater Yellowlegs, a Sanderling, and Least Sandpipers. We had our best shorebirding at the second outhouse at the end of the concrete sidewalk. The shorebirds were flying back and forth along the edge of the lake, and we stood and waited for them to land in front of us. The shorebirds at that location included Pectoral, Baird's, Least, and Semipalmated Sandpipers. At Pond 1, we had a Common Tern, a Bonaparte's Gull and about 10 Black Terns, which were in their winter plumage. On the return trip on highway 434, we had several ducks and grebes at Bean Lake and another pond. There were eight people on the trip, and we had 40 species.



Black-crowned night heron

## Advanced Birding Workshop

By Larry Weeks

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We have scheduled four (4) classes to complete the Advanced Birding Workshop that was interrupted by Covid in March 2020. The classes will be held on Thursday evenings from 7:00 – 9:00 pm at the FWP's new meeting room which is adjacent to the old meeting room. The date and subject for each session are as follows.

- Oct. 28 – raptors
- Nov. 4 – sparrows
- Nov. 11 – forest birds
- Nov. 18 – shorebirds

The cost will be \$15 per session or \$40 for all 4 sessions. UM students can attend at half price. To sign up, please contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or [bwsgenea@gmail.com](mailto:bwsgenea@gmail.com).



## Christmas Bird Count

By Larry Weeks

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# Audubon

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The Missoula Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 18, 2021. Due to the continuing pandemic, face masks are recommended for carpooling and social distancing should be practiced in the field. Last year, some of the group leaders split up their participants by groups and areas, which resulted in a more complete coverage. I suggest that the same approach be followed where appropriate this year. A decision to hold an in-person potluck gathering to tabulate the results will be made in December. If you would like to take part in the field count or be a feeder watcher, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 (540-3064 cell) or [bwsgenea@gmail.com](mailto:bwsgenea@gmail.com).

## AUTUMN BIRDS

by John Clare

*The wild duck startles like a sudden thought,  
And heron slow as if it might be caught.  
The flopping crows on weary wings go by  
And grey beard jackdaws noising as they fly.  
The crowds of starnels whizz and hurry by,  
And darken like a clod the evening sky.  
The larks like thunder rise and suthy round,  
Then drop and nestle in the stubble ground.  
The wild swan hurries height and noises loud  
With white neck peering to the evening cloud.  
The weary rooks to distant woods are gone.  
With lengths of tail the magpie winnows on  
To neighboring tree, and leaves the distant crow  
While small birds nestle in the edge below.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John Clare (1793-1864) was an English poet, the son of a farm laborer, who came to be known for his celebratory representations of the English countryside and his lamentation of its disruption. His poetry underwent a major re-evaluation in the late 20th century, and he is often now considered to be among the most important 19th-century poets. His biographer Jonathan Bate states that Clare was “the greatest labouring-class poet that England has ever produced. No one has ever written more powerfully of nature, of a rural childhood, and of the alienated and unstable self.”



## BirdSleuth's Top 9 Spooky Birds

Reprinted from: [www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu)

**American Crow:** A hoarse cry echoes across the sky, tracing chills down your spine: Caw! Caw! Caw! Eerily, a large group of crows is called a "murder." However, there's nothing truly scary about this wonderful species. Crows are very intelligent, family-oriented birds that are rarely seen alone. This all-black bird (even the insides of its mouth are black) could easily sneak up on you in the pitch-dark night... but alas, they are diurnal! While they do often eat meat, their diet is broad and consists of whatever they can forage: insects, eggs, berries, seeds, even garbage!

**Common Raven:** "Quoth the raven, `Nevermore.'" This bird is the bringer of devils and death in *The Raven*, by Edgar Allen Poe. It's no surprise the bird said, "nevermore" as ravens are notorious mimickers, known even to copy human speech! They are incredibly smart, solving puzzles and using sophisticated tools for foraging. Due to their intellect and fondness for carrion, mythology hails them as otherworldly harbingers of war and death! One term for a group of ravens is an "unkindness." With black feathers, ebony eyes, and a beak capable of tearing open animal flesh, the raven is indeed an intimidating creature. Add in its throaty cr-r-ruck cry, and the raven adopts a supernatural eeriness perfect for Halloween.

**Barn Owl:** Silent but deadly nocturnal hunters: owls have been associated with magic, evil, and death for thousands of years. The Barn owl is a trifecta of spookiness: unearthly hoots and hisses, a tendency to roost in abandoned attics, and a ghostly white face! This bird's soft feathers allow for quiet ambush on any unsuspecting prey, especially her favorite feast: mice and voles. Also, there's no escape, barn owls are found on all continents except Antarctica. This species could surely give trick-or-treaters a fright that they won't hear coming!



**Turkey Vulture:** Vultures have long been scorned and sometimes feared as scavengers that feed on the dead. Indeed, they have an unnerving knack for rapidly amassing at the site of a carcass. In ancient Greece, the birds were considered bad luck, and according to Persian lore, a pair of vultures guard the gates of Hell.

Large, dark, and hulking, the Turkey vulture has a huge 6-foot wingspan and distinctive bald red head (the bare head

keeps the birds from getting soiled when eating carrion). Turkey vultures soar alone or in groups, holding their wings in a V-shape and rocking back and forth. They use their excellent sense of smell to detect rotting flesh (their next meal), so Halloween zombies beware.

**Harpy Eagle:** With a hooked beak, pitch dark eyes, and formidable 7-foot wingspan, you wouldn't want to run into the Harpy eagle when it's hungry. The Harpy eagle is considered the most formidable eagle in the world, regularly feeding on monkeys and sloths. Its menacing talons comparable to the grizzly bear's claws. Harpy eagles are found in the rainforests of Central America, and, fortunately for us, they prefer to avoid humans.

**Great Potoo:** Chances are you've never seen one, and without a keen eye, never will. This camouflaged, neotropical bird is recognized best for its nighttime growl, "paaaaaawwww!" (Listen here). Potoos remain motionless during the day, mimicking the tree branches so as to disappear from predators. With nightfall, they come alive to devour insects and small bats. Unless you visit in the rainforests of Central and South America, where Great potoos are native, you don't have to worry about any trees suddenly springing to life in a flurry of feathers.

**Kookaburra:** "Hahaha," it's the Kookaburra! These large, Australian kingfishers aren't just fishermen. They also eat frogs, rodents, and snakes. Their crepuscular cry has fascinated people for its similarity to human hysterics. Though the chances you'll see one this Halloween are slim, always remember who gets the last laugh.

**Marabou Stork:** This African stork feeds on every manner of putrid animal matter, including carrion and garbage! With a five-foot figure, the "undertaker bird" is elegant, yet unsightly. Its splotchy, balding head allows it to dive into carcasses while staying clean, and the sagging pouch on its front is a courtship tool. When the Marabou stork isn't silent, it utters guttural grunts and rattles its bill.

**Vampire Finch:** The Galapagos Islands are crawling with vampires. They take the form of small black finches with razor sharp beaks. The Vampire finch pecks at the base of other seabirds' flight-feathers until it opens a wound, then laps up the blood with its tongue. In its resource-poor habitat, this finch has found a clever way to survive.



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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)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ \$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: \_\_\_\_\_

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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](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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