

December 2022

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

Sunday, December 4th: All-day field trip to the Mission Valley to look for raptors. Meet at 8AM in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot or at 9AM at the Cenex gas station in Ronan. This is a driving trip with frequent stops to look at birds. We will spend some time outside the car, so be prepared for cold temperatures, wind and snow or rain.

Monday, December 5th, 6-8pm: The FVAS Board Meeting will be held at the Missoula Public Library in the Blackfoot Room (the large one).

Saturday, December 10th, 9-11am: The December Town Bound Birding Series will take us to the Milwaukee Trail. Meet the group at Bernice's Bakery no later than 9AM.

Monday, December 12th, 7pm: Ursula "Uschi" Carpenter will talk about how she captures the beauty of birds in photography and poetry. The meeting will be in Rm 110 in the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building at UM.

Saturday, December 17th: Christmas Bird Count. See details on page 4. **PLEASE NOTE that there will be no Beginning Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf due to the conflict with the Christmas Bird Count.

The Beauty of Birds in Photos & Poetry



Cedar Waxwing Namaste
Photo By Uschi

Please join us at our monthly chapter meeting on December 12th at 7:00 PM to hear our speaker, Ursula "Uschi" Carpenter. Her presentation, "Bird Medicine – The Joy of Looking - The Art of Seeing," will take us on a journey, exploring the beauty of birds in her photography and celebrating their healing in her poetry. Ursula "Uschi" Carpenter is a nature, wildlife, and fine arts photographer living in Missoula, Montana. She received a master's degree in German and English literature and

linguistics from the University of the Saarland in Germany and studied at the University of Bradford in Great Britain and the University of California at Berkeley, California. Her careers in teaching and international relations took her on a path from rural Montana to the upper political echelons of Washington, D.C. But it is in the art of capturing the beauty of the wild in both words and images that Uschi found her true calling. After initially focusing on landscape photography, Uschi developed a passion for photographing birds, which has transformed her into a seeker of magic, equilibrium, and soul in those feathered relatives we call "birds." Her photography is said to carry a certain "gravitas," which is reflected in the poetry that is often paired with her images. Uschi's hope is that she can help humans see birds as fellow creatures co-inhabiting our planet, and once people appreciate the beauty of birds, they will care about protecting them.

The meeting will be held in Room 110 in the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building (ISB) on the University of Montana campus. The building lies on the south end of campus on Beckwith Avenue between Maurice and Mansfield avenues. Due to our membership being composed of many older adults, masks are encouraged, but not required by the university. Room 110 is large enough that social distancing should not be a problem, but you also have the option of watching the meeting over the zoom link listed below, until you feel comfortable attending.

Topic: FVAS General Meeting
Time: Dec 12, 2022, at 7pm Mountain Time

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://umontana.zoom.us/j/92848103308>

Meeting ID: 928 4810 3308
One tap mobile
+13462487799,,92848103308# US (Houston)
+16694449171,,92848103308# US

Find your local number:
<https://umontana.zoom.us/j/abQMtQRcuU>

Peeps from The Board: A Complexity of Ravens By Edward Monnig

I am ambivalent about ravens.

There is much to admire: their intelligence, their survival skills, their capacity to adapt to a variety of habitats. The Common Raven is known to winter in the total darkness of the arctic above the Arctic Circle. In his book *North to the Night*, Alvah Simon describes his struggles overwintering on a small boat in months of arctic darkness. He speaks in awe of an indomitable raven companion.

The raven's intelligence and problem-solving skills are renowned. A search of "ravens problem solving" on the YouTube website provides remarkable videos of ravens deciphering unique challenges. John Marzluff, a researcher at the University of Washington, reviews his work on corvid intelligence in several books including *In the Company of Crows and Ravens*. Beyond science he reflects on corvid similarities to human perceptions and emotions.

And thus, you might ask:
"What is *your* problem? Why
ambivalence?"

Here to tell.

When I first moved to the University area of Missoula 40 years ago, I had a neighbor who had carefully observed the changes in the neighborhood wildlife in the miniature refuge he had created in his yard over the 30 years prior to my arrival. He shared the excitement of visits from a great blue heron who ate all the fish in his very small koi pond. He noted the arrival of different songbird species in the spring. He also observed the ever-increasing populations of crows and ravens. He became aware of the fascinating personalities of individual birds. He also reflected on their effects on other species and the seeming decline of species like robins, whose nests they expertly raided.

Of course, we cannot overreact to the ebb and flow of species abundance in small areas. Predator/prey relationships are a necessary part of our ecosystems despite the carnage that predators impose on our empathetic human instincts.

Across larger landscapes, ravens pose more challenging questions. In many areas ravens have adapted well to the human presence. Some biologists have described them as "human-facilitated predators." Even in large open rangeland areas our human additions to the landscapes

have made life easier for ravens. We have added perch sites across the range with our construction of powerlines. We have laced the landscape with thousands of miles of fence lines and millions of fence posts from which ravens can easily survey for ground nesting birds. We have provided year-round food sources in road kills, ranch bone yards, and other garbage dumps that sustain these birds in times of scarcity. We subdivide the land which brings pets and other food sources and amenities that ravens intelligently configure for their purposes.

The listing of the Greater Sage-Grouse as threatened under the Endangered Species Act has focused attention on the health of rangeland ecosystems. Multiple threats to these systems are intertwined. Long term monitoring by the US Fish and Wildlife Service has shown simultaneous increases in raven populations and decreases in grouse populations.¹

To clarify this relationship Federal agencies directly reduced raven populations for several years in areas of prime grouse habitat using poisoned eggs in artificial nests.² In treated areas, raven populations were reduced by 51% while populations increased by 42% in untreated areas. In treated areas adult male grouse populations on lek sites increased significantly.

The studies referenced above clearly indicate that ravens can have an outsize effect on rangeland species. Would a large-scale program of raven control benefit the long-term viability of grouse species? What are the ethical implications of such severe intervention?

Some would say that humans must take an active role to rectify a dysfunctional ecosystem. Others counter that we don't have a raven problem, we have a people problem. Humans created the conditions that have put our ecosystems out of balance.

Aside from the ethical considerations of direct action, there is the question of the practicality of such a massive intervention. How much? How often? Where? Such a program could be the ultimate test of raven intelligence. How long before ravens learn to distinguish real from artificial nests and communicate this knowledge to peers and offspring?



Regardless of the prospect of direct intervention, we must make our rangelands less hospitable to ravens in our myriad of enterprises from the placement of oil and gas drilling rigs to infrastructure projects and vegetation management. Ensuring sage grouse survival is a human responsibility, but sadly, this responsibility is erratically accepted.

Perhaps my introductory ambivalence is misplaced. Not ravens, but humans: so clever; altruistic yet vigilant of self-interest; adaptive, gracious, and demanding. As I stand on the steppes east of the continental divide, a lone raven coursing the windy sage, I ponder the human course. We do not alter easily. In that challenge, I recall the sentiments of Robert Frost: “yet another vexing provocation in a long-standing lover’s quarrel with the world.”

References

1. <https://www.usgs.gov/news/research-spotlight-human-enterprise-brings-more-ravens-great-basin-threatening-greater-sage>
2. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319235246_Adult_sage-grouse_numbers_rise_following_raven_removal_or_an_increase_in_precipitation

It Sifts from Leaden Sieves A poem by Emily Dickinson



*It sifts from Leaden Sieves -
It powders all the Wood.
It fills with Alabaster Wool
The Wrinkles of the Road -*



*It makes an even Face
Of Mountain, and of Plain -
Unbroken Forehead from the East
Unto the East again -*



*It reaches to the Fence -
It wraps it Rail by Rail
Till it is lost in Fleeces -
It deals Celestial Vail*



*To Stump, and Stack - and Stem -
A Summer’s empty Room -
Acres of Joints, where Harvests were,
Recordless, but for them -*

*It Ruffles Wrists of Posts
As Ankles of a Queen -
Then stills its Artisans - like Ghosts -
Denying they have been -*

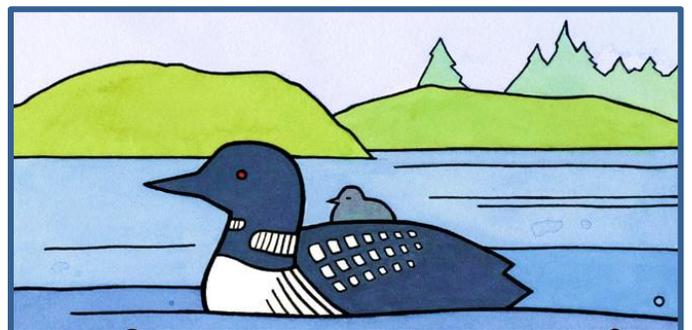
ATTENTION FRIENDS

THE FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON SOCIETY HAS A NEW WEBSITE. IT’S FASTER AND MORE USER FRIENDLY, WITH LOTS OF EYE CANDY. CHECK IT OUT!

[HTTPS://WWW.FVAUDUBON.ORG](https://www.fvaudubon.org)

Field Trip Summary By Larry Weeks

Saturday, October 22nd: The weather forecast obviously impacted the attendance for the Brown's Lake field trip. Only 5 people participated. It was raining lightly when we left Missoula and it turned to snow shortly after we arrived at the lake. At the shallow bay on Brown's Lake, we were trying to decide if the grebes were Horned or Eared when a Surf Scoter landed in front of us. The Scoter only stayed for a brief time, but everyone got a good look. We decided that they were Eared Grebes. Then we spotted a Northern Shrike in a scrub across the bay. After leaving its perch, a Townsend's Solitaire appeared at the top of a juniper and was quickly replaced by the Shrike. As we progressed along the lake shore, we encountered a small flock of American Tree Sparrows, a Yellow-rumped Warbler, several Hooded Mergansers, and 2 Common Loons. Under challenging conditions at the picnic area, we found more Common Loons, Western Grebes, Pied-billed Grebes, and more American Tree Sparrows. On the muddy road south of the lake, we saw a small herd of mule deer with a nice 4-point buck. Since the hunting season was open, the buck's days were numbered. The ponds along the Cut-Off Road had a good diversity of ducks, 3 Wilson's Snipes and a Killdeer. Raptors seen on the trip included Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk and Northern Harrier. We recorded 31 species.



History of the Christmas Bird Count

Reprinted from www.audubon.org



How the CBC Helps Protect Species and Their Habitat

The data collected by observers over the past century allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years.

The long-term perspective is vital for conservationists. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well.

Christmas Bird Count

By Larry Weeks

The Missoula CBC will take place on Saturday, December 17th. If you want to participate in the field count or to be a feeder watcher, contact Larry Weeks at bwsgenea@gmail.com, 406-549-5632 or 406-540-3064 (cell). Larry will provide different options for you to choose from or instructions on how to be a feeder watcher. The Count Day will end with a potluck dinner at the home of Larry Weeks, 2428 West Kent, which is near Rosauers. Potluck guests are welcome to arrive at 6:00 pm. Dinner will commence at 6:30 pm. Please bring your favorite potluck dish, or A-L, bring a salad or dessert, and M-Z, a hot dish. After the potluck, we will tabulate the results of the field count.



How the Count Started

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns—whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won.

Conservation was in its beginning stages in that era, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then-nascent Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them.



So began the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to the inspiration of Chapman and the enthusiasm of 27 dedicated birders, 25 Christmas Bird Counts were held that day. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove, California with

most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied around 90 species on all the counts combined.

CBC in the Modern Era

Each November, birders interesting in participating in the CBC can sign up and join in through the Audubon website.

From December 14 through January 5 each year tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas brave snow, wind, or rain, and take part in the effort. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this long-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations, and to help guide conservation action.



**A Warm Welcome to
Our New Members:**

Rosalie Buzzas	Cynthia Ford
Erick Greene	Joel Mobley
Philip Ramsey	Gordon Reese
Stephen Speckart	Fred Westereng
Alex Schiwal	Bruce Wetherby



Please sign up for emailed newsletters!

If you subscribed to Audubon through National Audubon, we may not have your email address. To receive our newsletter and other bird news by email, and to help us save trees and reduce FVAS newsletter expenses, please send your email address to Treasurer, Jean Duncan at treasurer@FVAudubon.org or Membership Promotion Chair, Thomas Kallmeyer at thomas@tarns.net.

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

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| \$ _____ \$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 manages 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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