

April, 2009

Birding Observer



Five Valleys Audubon Society

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Calendar

- * **Monday, April 6th, 7pm:** Larry Weeks will host the board meeting.
- * **Monday, April 13th, 7:30pm:** Jami Belt will give a presentation on Loons of Glacier Park at the April meeting.
- * **Friday, April 17th:** Deadline for submissions to the May *Birding Observer*.
- * **Saturday, April 25, 2009:** Full-day field trip to the Warm Springs Ponds led by Gary Swant. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 7:00 AM. PLEASE NOTE THE EARLIER START.
- * **Saturday, May 2, 2009:** Full-day field trip to Brown's Lake led by Jim Brown. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 8:00 AM.

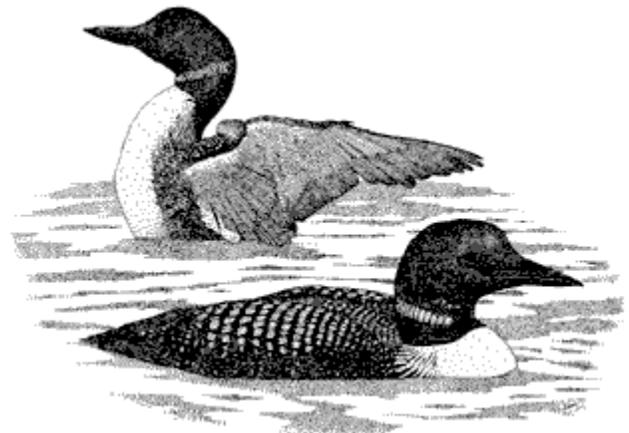
Workshop for Intermediate Birders

The Chapter is sponsoring a workshop for intermediate birders which will consist of three classroom sessions and one field trip. The classroom sessions are scheduled for Thursdays on April 9th, 16th and 23rd and will be held at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Regional Office at 3201 Spurgin Road starting at 7:00 PM and lasting until 9:30 PM. The field trip will be held at Smurfit-Stone on Saturday, April 11th. The program will include a full session on hawks, eagles and owls, a 60-minute session on waterfowl, and 30-minute sessions on woodpeckers, warblers, shorebirds, sparrows, and birding-by-ear. There will be a \$35 charge for the workshop and you can sign up by calling Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or email him at bwsgenea@onlinemt.com.

Common Loons and Citizen Science in Glacier National Park

Jami Belt from Glacier National Park will be featured at the April 13 meeting of the Five Valleys Audubon Society. She is the Citizen Science Program Coordinator/Biological Science Technician Park's Crown of the Continent Research Learning Center. The meeting will be held at 7:30 pm in the Gallagher Business Building Room L14 at the University of Montana. This program is free and open to the public.

Glacier National Park hosts 20 % of Montana's breeding Common Loons, yet annual Loon Day surveys conducted by volunteers since 1988 suggest that reproductive rates are lower than those in the rest of the state. Jami Belt will talk about the ecology and management of loons and what we have learned about Glacier's loon population. She will also discuss the results, rewards and challenges of using citizen science volunteers to collect research data about loons as well as other species of concern in Glacier (mountain goats, pikas and Clark's Nutcrackers.)



After returning from our formal birding tour of Australia, we went with our friends at their recommendation to Lord Howe Island. This was an experience that rivaled any other aspect of our Australian visit. Situated in the Pacific Ocean, 700 Km north-east of Sydney, we flew there. Because of its unique beauty and biodiversity it was recognized as a World Heritage site in 1982.



This island was discovered in 1788. It was uninhabited and subsequently used as a supply stop for whaling ships. Pigs and goats were brought ashore. This, along with the accidental introduction of the Black Rat in 1918 when a shipwreck

occurred adjacent to the island, has caused significant extinctions of endemic bird species.

The island is 6 miles long and one mile wide. There are very strict limitations to development. Only 350 residents live here permanently. Tourists are restricted to 400 at any one time. This is also the maximum number of tourist beds on the island, provided by 17 family-run accommodations. There are very few vehicles and the main form of transportation is by bicycle. A wonderful aspect of life on this island is that almost everything is by the "honor system": ride and park your bike anywhere, get snorkeling equipment from a shack on the beach and leave the appropriate fee in a box, pickup rental golf clubs, play golf on a wonderful 9 hole golf course and again leave the fee in a box, etc, etc.

Lord Howe was never part of a continent. It is an eroded remnant of a 7 million-year-old shield volcano. Its entire flora colonized the island from across the sea. Almost half of the island's native plants are endemic. One of the best known is *Howea*, an endemic genus of palms that are commonly known as kentia palms and make handsome house plants. Several million are exported annually providing the only major industry on the island apart from tourism.

Another endemic feature of the island is the glowing mushrooms, which can be seen after heavy rain. Found in the palm forests, they continue glowing for several days after being picked. There are 14 species of seabirds and 18 land birds that breed on the island, including an endemic, the Lord Howe Woodhen and three endemic subspecies, the Lord Howe Golden Whistler, the Lord Howe White-eye and the Lord Howe Currawong.

The story of the Lord Howe Woodhen is remarkable and inspiring. These birds are flightless and curious, and having never been hunted, they became a readily available source of food for visiting sailors. Their numbers declined until in the late 1970's, when surveys showed that the population had dropped to less than 30 birds, confined to difficult to access summit regions of the island's two mountains. A study determined that the cause of the decline was primarily due to feral pigs. The elimination of the pigs and other disruptive animals (goats) plus a captive breeding program allowed the Lord Howe Woodhen to recover its numbers. Today there are about 250 birds, which may be the optimal population size for the island. We had no trouble seeing these birds, even on the golf course.

All in all this unique island experience was really wonderful and a great end to our Australian adventure.

Mark Your Calendars! 2009 Montana Audubon Bird Festival

Montana Audubon, in conjunction with the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Society, will hold our annual bird festival in Great Falls, June 5-7, 2009.

For more information or to register visit www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival or call the Montana Audubon office at 406-443-3949.

* * Register by April 15 and have a chance to win two nights of lodging at the Holiday Inn during the festival! * *

"This bird alone convinced me that we were really in America"— Georg Steller

by Bill Gabriel

Two bird visitors in my yard in the last week of February caused me to reflect on the value of reading, and on the career of the first European naturalist to describe plants and animals in western North America. My visitors were an Eastern Blue Jay, only the second I have seen here, and a couple days later a Steller's Jay, the first to visit my feeders in the 23 years I have lived in the Bitter Root Valley.

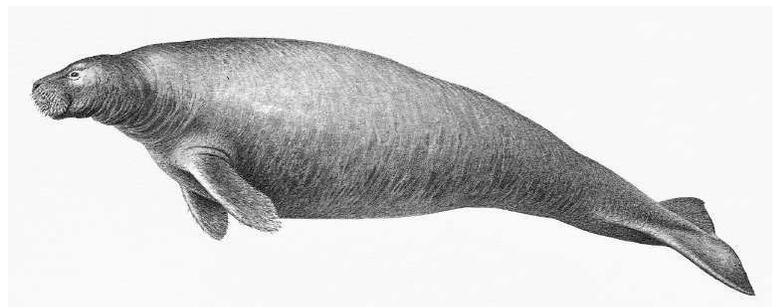
By coincidence, March 10 is the birthday of Georg Wilhelm Steller, a German professor of botany, born in 1709 and employed by the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences as a member of Vitus Bering's expedition to explore the west coast of North America in 1741. When, after seven weeks at sea, Steller stepped ashore, it was the sight of a dark blue bird with a crest that told him he had reached America because, back in St. Petersburg, he had seen an illustration of a nearly identical blue jay from Carolina and Florida in a 1731 book by the English naturalist Mark Catesby. Georg Steller landed at only two places in Alaska, but he was a keen observer who took detailed notes describing what would later be called Steller's Jay, Steller's Eider, Steller's Sea Eagle, Steller's sea lion, Steller's sea cow, the northern fur seal, the spectacled cormorant, and other species new to science. He was the only scientist to see the sea cow and the flightless cormorant because, within 15 years or so, both were hunted to extinction.

Some authors give Meriwether Lewis credit for first describing the Sitka spruce, the salmonberry, and other plants that were actually described by Steller years before Lewis was born. The Lewis and Clark expedition across the continent was a mere camping trip compared to what the members of Bering's expedition endured 64 years earlier. Consider this: Vitus Bering traveled overland 7,000 roadless miles by boat, wagon, pack horse, and dog sled while moving over 500 tons of food and equipment from St. Petersburg to the Sea of Okhotsk. There he built three ships to sail another 2,000 miles before sighting land in southeastern Alaska. One ship was wrecked and much of his food lost before they got out of the Sea of Okhotsk

and into the Pacific Ocean. The remaining two ships became separated in fog and continued on individually. Upon reaching Alaska, his second ship, the *Saint Paul*, sent a party ashore in a boat to contact the natives. When that party failed to return, a second boat was sent in search. It also failed to return, leaving the *Saint Paul* with no way to get ashore to refill its fresh water casks. They had been seven weeks at sea, the men were beginning to suffer from scurvy, and half their water was gone. Captain Chirikov turned west for Siberia and arrived with only two men left strong enough to steer.

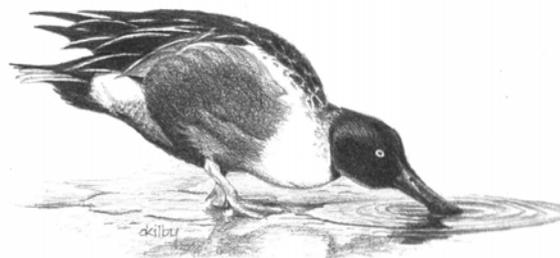
Meanwhile, the *Saint Peter*, with Bering and Steller aboard, had landed further north, refilled some of their water casks, and collected over 100 plants and one blue bird. Bering began working his way west, mapping the coast of the Gulf of Alaska, but his men were also succumbing to scurvy. Steller advised the captain and crew to eat greens, which he collected, to ward off the scurvy, but they refused. Eventually, 32 of 78 men aboard died from scurvy. Only Steller and two who helped him collect plants were unaffected. The desperately ill sailors were unable to make it back to Siberia before winter storms caught them and the *Saint Peter* was wrecked on treeless Bering Island where Vitus Bering and many of his men are buried.

In the spring of 1742 the resourceful survivors dismantled the wreck and built another ship half its size that they sailed to safety. Steller and his notebooks survived, but his carefully prepared specimens were left behind in a cache on Bering Island, never to be recovered.



Steller's sea cow

Saturday, February 28, 2009: It was a cold morning as 24 people gathered for the field trip at Smurfit-Stone. The ponds were still frozen but there was open water along the warm water discharge that attracted most species of waterfowl. The tour started at the South end of the property to allow more time for the atmosphere to warm and reduce the vapors coming off the warm water. After leaving the mill site, we ran into a few red-winged blackbirds and a northern shrike. However, the shrike was intimidated by the 8-car convoy and wouldn't perch long enough to get a scope on it. While I was looking for the shrike through my spotting scope, two mountain bluebirds flew into my view but kept flying and we never saw them again. Next, we stopped and looked at a bald eagle sitting on their nest as though she might be incubating eggs. There were about 5 immature bald eagles hanging around the bluff by Primrose. At the river, there was a large raft of common goldeneye that were feeding and doing their head-bobbing mating ritual. Returning to the ponds along the river, the northern shrike appeared one more time before disappearing completely. We then worked our way to a large pond that was flooded with warm water and completely ice-free. There was a good collection of Canada geese, buffleheads, American coots, common goldeneye, and one pair of Barrow's goldeneye that were sleeping. Rough-legged hawks were active in this area and there was at least one red-tailed hawk. At the wide spot in the warm water ditch, Wayne Tree spotted a northern shoveler which was the first of the year for him and would have been for me also if I had looked in the right spot before it flew. The New Wetlands was the final stop of the day and it had the best collection of waterfowl, which included a male canvasback, common and hooded mergansers, ring-necked ducks, lesser scaup, northern pintail, and others. There were at least 10 bald eagles perched in trees in about every direction we looked. I'm sure that the calving and resulting afterbirth was the attraction. We had 33 species for the field trip.



The Montana Outdoor Birding Group is a Yahoo Group that you can join to receive and share up-to-date information on bird sightings throughout Montana. It also provides a forum to share photos, identification problems and various other issues related to birding. Once a member, one can elect to receive batched or individual member emails. Members can also post messages and photos.



Find the Montana Outdoor Birding Group at:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MOB-Montana/>

Montana Audubon Offers Awards

Montana Audubon will be giving at least 4 awards away at its annual meeting this year. The awards acknowledge individuals who exemplify a commitment to birds, other wildlife and habitat conservation. This year awards will be given for Conservationist of the Year, Environmental Educator of the Year, Special Achievement, and Lifetime Achievement Award.

To nominate your candidate, please call the Montana Audubon office to request an award nomination form or download the form at <http://mtaudubon.org/about/awards.html>. To be considered for this year's award, nominations and all supporting material must be postmarked no later than May 8, 2009. All nominations and supporting material should be sent to Montana Audubon, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624, or by fax: (406) 443-7144. The award ceremony will take place on June 6 at MT Audubon's Bird Festival in Great Falls.

Welcome New Members:

Carol & Rusty Babington
Mr. And Mrs. John Carter
Lora R. Hall
John Holbrook
Ed & Cassie Morgan
Anna R. Taft



Thanks to Our Returning Members:

Cheryl C. Bregen
Shirley A. Chase
Richard Hutto
Carol Kinney
Pat & Kitte Robins
Alexis Volkerts

Alice Carroll
Dorothy M. Fawcett
Ashley Jensen
Virginia Moore
Steven Scott

Mary Carter
Roger & Linda Holtom
Robert Mc Kelvey
Rebecca Richter
Monte Turner

Go Green, Save Paper and Other Costs

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.

Join The National 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 an individual or family

\$15 for students and seniors

Please make the check payable to National Audubon Society and mail to: National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, PO Box 51001, Boulder, CO 80323-1003. **N53 7XCH**

Join The 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: _____

Email (optional): _____

\$15 is enclosed for Chapter 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.

FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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