

December 2011

# Birding Observer



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

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## Calendar

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\* **Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup>**: Full-day field trip to the Mission Valley led by Jim Brown. Meet in the middle of the field house parking lot at 8:00 AM or at the Cenex Gas Station in Ronan at 9:00 AM.

\* **Monday, December 5<sup>th</sup>**: Char Murray will host the December board meeting.

\* **Monday, December 12<sup>th</sup>**: Kate Stone will discuss the birds of MPG Ranch at the December program meeting.

\* **Thursday, December 15<sup>th</sup>**: Submission deadline for the January 2012 edition of *Birding Observer*.

\* **Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup>**: Missoula Christmas Bird Count. See details below.

## Missoula Christmas Bird Count

By Larry Weeks

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The Missoula Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 17, 2011. If you would like to participate in the field count, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or [bwsgenea@onlinemt.com](mailto:bwsgenea@onlinemt.com). If you are interested in being a feeder watcher, contact Elizabeth Johnston at 327-1525 or [birder@bigsky.net](mailto:birder@bigsky.net). The count day will end with a potluck dinner at the home of Ruth & Russ Royter, 520 Highland Park Dr. (telephone # 728-7984). 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 count results.



## Private Lands Conservation: A Case Study on the MPG Ranch

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December's program will introduce the MPG Ranch, a private conservation property in the northern Bitterroot Valley with over 8,000 acres. The MPG Ranch is home to many interesting bird species, partially because it encompasses a broad range of habitats, including river bottom forest, native and nonnative grasslands, bitterbrush, sagebrush, open woodlands, shrubby draws, and conifer forests.

We'll meet on Monday, December 12 at 7:30 p.m. in the Gallagher Business Building, room L14, on the UM campus. Kate Stone will discuss bird research on the MPG Ranch. As coordinator of bird research, her work includes original research and the facilitation of projects with outside research partners. In her talk, Kate will describe the conservation goals of the property, highlight some of the bird research being conducted there, and discuss how research and bird observation on private lands fit in to the larger context of bird conservation in Montana. She will also talk about how members of Five Valleys Audubon and the general public can participate in activities on the MPG Ranch.

Kate received her B.A. in Conservation Biology from Middlebury College in 2000 and an M.S. in Forestry from the University of Montana in 2003. She was introduced to birding in 2003, when offered a job by UM's Avian Science Center to do bird surveys in eastern Montana. She never turned back. Most recently she has worked as a writer for the Fire Sciences Laboratory in Missoula. Kate began working at the MPG Ranch in 2010. She also serves as the field trip coordinator and web mistress for Bitterroot Audubon.

**Peeps from the Board: Fiscal Year 2011  
Financial Update by FVAS Treasurer, Alex Taft**

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As treasurer, I am charged with providing your board with sound financial facts and advice that will allow us to fulfill our mission: to promote birds and birding in the five valley region of Missoula, MT. This mission has four goals: protect bird habitat, provide stewardship for bird habitat, educate people about birds and nature, and provide chapter resources to achieve the mission.

Our financial activities to support our mission include a five year financial plan, an annual budget, and monthly income and expenditure reports. Over the next five years we will expend funds on programs, using our current \$36,474 in available funds, and retaining a \$12,000 reserve for new bird habitat activities and a \$5,000 rainy day fund. The expenditures are for Important Bird Areas, land conservation in the area, and research on birds and other natural species. These expenditures are in addition to our annual expenditures.

In the last fiscal year ending on June 30, 2011 our annual expenditures were supported by income from the following sources: membership fees (\$1,560); contributions to our "Audubon Adventures" in-school program (\$1,500); our "Birdathon" survey (\$12,104); other contributions to the Society (\$2,397); bird class fees (\$1,300); our share of National Audubon Society memberships in the area (\$1,857); trip fees (\$300); contributions to research awards (\$900); and other sources (\$159). The "Birdathon" accounted for over one-half of our \$22,077 annual revenue.

Last fiscal year these annual funds were used to support our programs and activities: the "Audubon Adventures" in-school program (\$1,460); the "Community Naturalist Program" supporting youth education about birds (\$2,639); contributions to bird research organizations such as the Owl Institute and Raptors of the Rockies (\$2,315); contributions to the Montana Audubon Society for legislative advocacy, educational activity and bird habitat support (\$3,000); our monthly newsletter (\$2,985); "Phil Wright Fund" research awards to college and high school students (\$2,000); and other expenses (\$217). Our total annual expenses (\$14,616) were exceeded by our income, giving us a net income for fiscal 2011 of \$7,461.

Every month we track our progress in attaining our income and expending our funds via a treasurer's report to the board at our monthly meeting. Before the end of our fiscal year in June, we adopt a new budget for the upcoming year.

Your Society is blessed with a solid asset base, having \$5,692 in liquid funds and \$29,502 in long-term investments as of September 30th of this year.

I hope this explanation of how we garner funds and implement programs assures you that your contributions to Five Valleys Audubon are used wisely.

**Field Trip by Larry Weeks**

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**November 5, 2011:** Twenty participants joined the author for the field trip at Maclay Flat. The weather was cool with light snow showers. Scouting ahead of the trip indicated that the birds were scarce, and we had to work for the few birds that we found. The habitat along the river east of the boat ramp was the most productive. Birds included northern flickers, downy woodpeckers, red-breasted and white-breasted nuthatches, and a flock of black-capped chickadees. An adult bald eagle flew up the river and we saw it later near a suspected carcass on the other side of the river. One of the participants spotted a hovering belted kingfisher before it flew around a bend in the river. The hi-light of the trip was a fly-over by 5 tundra swans that were going down stream. A search for a great horned owl was unsuccessful. We ended up with 14 species for the trip.



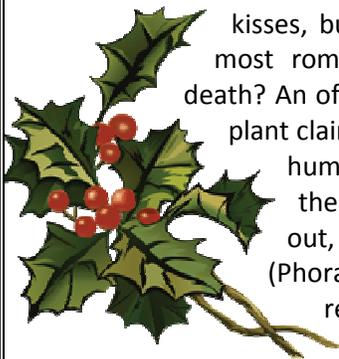
## Update on Waterworks Hill Bluebird Project

On October 26 and 27<sup>th</sup>, two groups of Sentinel High School biology students worked to maintain bluebird houses on Waterworks Hill. The students replaced boxes on metal poles with boxes on sturdier wooden posts, re-painted numbers, and added informational signs to the sides of the boxes. They also relocated two



boxes on the south side of Waterworks Hill. While they did not see any bluebirds on this trip, the students are looking forward to monitoring the boxes in the spring when they will count eggs and nestlings.

## Is Mistletoe the "Kiss of Death?"



Mistletoe is synonymous with holiday kisses, but can ingesting the season's most romantic plant cause a kiss of death? An often-repeated myth about the plant claims that it is so poisonous that humans can be killed if they eat the leaves or berries. As it turns out, American Mistletoe (*Phoradendron* species) was recently studied at length, and The American Association of Poison Control Centers found 1,754 reports of exposure over a seven-year period. Curiously, no one had died of mistletoe poisoning, and in the majority of the cases, the patient experienced no effects at all. Those who did have effects suffered only extremely mild discomfort.

Most mistletoe ingestion is reported in children under two, and results find that such exposure is not dangerous. Doctors still suggest, however, that parents call their local poison control center and follow the advice given. Causing at most only minor discomfort, American Mistletoe certainly doesn't seem to have earned its dangerous reputation, and should be enjoyed without fear for its romantic purpose during the holiday season.

## Is your backyard for the birds? A Call for Photos

Birds, as well as vegetation, can make our yards come alive. By using native plants we can provide birds with the food, flowers, and cover with which they have evolved. Our yards can become microcosms of the natural habitats and systems gracing western Montana.

The chapter's January meeting will be held jointly with the Native Plant Society and will focus on how native plants attract birds to our yards. **We want to use as many local photos as we can. Perhaps you have photos from your yard that illustrate:**

- Yard settings, preferably with native vegetation, perhaps displaying a resplendent mix of trees, shrubs, and flowers in bloom.
- Water features such as bird baths, water gardens, streams, or ponds. Photos of birds drinking or bathing are a plus.
- Western Montana bird species such as wrens, sparrows, chickadees, or thrushes in a native shrub or tree, *or* woodpeckers or nuthatches on a tree.
- Hummingbirds. How could we not discuss these compelling birds?
- Bird feeders with birds, and preferably, again, with surrounding vegetation

We are not necessarily looking for professional-level photos (ala National Audubon or National Geographic), but we do want photos of birds in the context of vegetation, their preferred habitat — and preferably local birds. Local birds include permanent residents, migrants, nesting species, and winter visitors.

**Please consider sending us some of your photos.** We would love to use as many local photos as we can. Please send them to [pmcregan@bresnan.net](mailto:pmcregan@bresnan.net) or call Poody with questions at 543-4860.



## Montana Audubon Tours in 2012

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It's time to start planning the upcoming Montana Audubon tour season! Our tour schedule this past year was filled with amazing adventures and took us to places as diverse as South Texas, Alaska, the African Gambia, and northeastern and southwestern Montana. People saw Green Parrots, Ancient Murrelets, Horned Puffins, a Black Swift, Short-eared Owl, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, and a Gray-cheeked Thrush, just to name a few.

You'll be receiving our 2012 tour flyer with dates and details very soon, but here are some tours we are considering:

- Greater Sage-grouse Lek Tour in Montana: March/April
- South Texas Birding: April
- Post-Bird Festival Tour in northwestern Montana: June
- Raptor Weekend in Montana: September

## Birds & Wildlife of Peru: Sept 19-29

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Peru is one of the greatest destinations in the world for bird and wildlife viewing. Montana Audubon is partnering with the Environmental Adventure Company of Livingston, Montana to lead our group. We will visit Paracas National Reserve, home to the endangered Humboldt Penguin, South American fur seal and sea lion, as well as 63 migrant bird species; the Ballestas Islands, hosting the largest and richest concentrations of seabirds to be found anywhere in the world; the Andean cloud forests to see breeding displays of the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock; and the Manu area to view several species of large parrots and macaws. Steve Hoffman will be your Montana Audubon guide. The cost is \$3,995 per person and includes double occupancy lodging, meals, and transportation from Lima, Peru.



## A Message from Montana Audubon: Searching for Vampires

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The word "vampire" usually conjures up images of long-toothed individuals prowling dark streets in search of fleshy meals. But for MT Audubon staff this word has new meaning. "Vampire Power" refers to the electricity consumed by appliances while they're switched off or in stand-by mode.

These energy vampires lurk around every corner of our buildings, constantly sucking up power and raising our monthly electricity bills. Obvious offenders include digital clocks on DVD players, as well as coffee makers and other appliances that are "on" even when not being used. Along with raising electricity costs, it's estimated that they eat up about 52 billion kilowatt hours of electricity annually in the U.S. alone, the equivalent of 26 average-sized power plants. Now that's scary, especially considering most of Montana's electricity still comes from the burning of non-renewable fossil fuels, like coal, that contribute to global climate change.

In an effort to be more sustainable, MT Audubon is now tracking our energy use and developing an emissions reduction strategy. The goal is to be a carbon-neutral organization with the first steps happening right in our offices. This summer we purchased inexpensive devices called "kill-a-watts" to find the power-sucking vampires. At the Audubon Center in Billings we discovered that it cost more than \$50 a year to keep the water dispenser plugged in. A greener and more economical solution is simply stocking the refrigerator with refillable water bottles. These bottles not only keep water cold, but also act as reservoirs to retain the cool air refrigerator fans pump out, thereby helping it run more efficiently—a double payback. Eventually we would like our Audubon Center to rely on renewable electricity—anyone know of any great deals on solar panels for our Center?

In Helena, we are connecting "smart" power strips to our computers that automatically shut down peripherals when not in use. Staff has also begun to track our transportation choices. We are making efforts to walk or ride bikes instead of commuting by car, and to carpool to meetings and retreats.

Please join us in reducing energy use and advocating for policies that improve efficiency and help develop renewable energy systems that are safe for wildlife. We welcome your ideas!

**Welcome New Members:**

Richard Adams	Patricia Clements
Jim Critchlow	Catherine Hoveland
Sheryl Noethe	Gwen Norment
Angela Sandberg	Dan Stein
Rodger Thompson	



**Thanks to our Returning Members:**

Rosanna Akland	Dianne Barnes	Dawn Duncan	Ann Mary Dussault
Jim Bullock	Les & Jo Carpenter	Sue Furey	Ashley Jensen
Shirley Day	Ben Deeble	Carol Mc Quade	Janet McMillan
Clara & Ron Erickson	Patricia K. Forsberg	Rosemary Oechsli	Sally Phillips
Gary R. Lancaster	Mary Mc Court	Patricia Stice	Ginny Therriault
A Eugene-Myrtle Miller	Vicki Montejano		
Freda Rodgers	Lance Schelvan		
Kathy Tonnessen	Beth Wright		

**Hi Friends! Go Green!**

Save paper and postage by **viewing your *Birding Observer* newsletter online**. Five Valleys Audubon Society now gives members two different options to view the newsletter electronically. We can email you once a month, letting you know when the latest edition is **available on our web site ([www.fvamisoula.org](http://www.fvamisoula.org))**, or we can **email the newsletter directly to you** – it’s your choice. Just send an email request with your name to Vick Applegate at [k7vk@arrl.net](mailto:k7vk@arrl.net), and let us know you if you wish to be added to one of the lists. We do not share our email lists with others. Please keep us updated with your email address changes.

**Join National Audubon Society  
and 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. **C1Z N53 OZ**

**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 (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

\$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.

# Five Valleys Audubon Society

PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807

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