

February 2023

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

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

Saturday, February 11th, 9-11am: Town Bound Birding Series takes us to Tower Street Open Space. Explore this section of the Clark Fork floodplain to see numerous Bald Eagles and Belted Kingfishers along the river. There is even the possibility of a Northern Saw-whet Owl in the forest. Park and meet the group in the northern terminus of Tower Street. There will be a post birding hangout at Wheat Montana.

Monday, February 13th, 7pm: Dr. Erick Greene will present, "The Pribilof Islands: The "Galapagos" of the North" at our February meeting. The meeting will be held in Room 110 in the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building on the UM campus.

Saturday, February 18th, 10am -1pm: Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center. Approximately two miles of level hiking.

Sunday, February 19th: 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 field trip with frequent stops to look at birds. Be prepared for cold temperatures, wind, and snow.



Photo of Arctic Fox by Erick Greene

The Pribilof Islands

Please join us Monday, February 13, 2023, at 7pm to hear Dr. Erick Greene, present his fascinating talk on The Pribilof Islands: The "Galapagos" of the North.

The Pribilof Islands are remarkable islands in the Bering Sea north of the Aleutian Islands. For such small islands, they are jewels of biological diversity, with the largest northern fur seal colony in the world, incredibly diverse seabird populations, and many rare birds that get blown over from Siberia and Asia. They are also home to a fascinating population of Gray-crowned Rosy Finches, which were the focus of Dr. Greene's studies.

Erick Greene is Professor Emeritus in the Division of Biological Sciences and in the Wildlife Biology Program at The University of Montana. He grew up in Quebec, Canada, with twin passions for music and nature. Erick dropped out of high school and lived for a year in the Galapagos Islands, working as a researcher on Darwin's Finches. He then worked on seabirds 800 miles north of the Arctic Circle with the Canadian Wildlife Service. He returned for undergraduate studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he studied biology, music, and mathematics, and then received a PhD from Princeton University. He was the Director of UM's Bird Ecology Lab, and has broad interests in ecology, evolution, and conservation. Dr. Greene has spoken to Five Valleys Audubon many times and we are delighted to have him back.

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. Because our membership is largely older adults, masks are encouraged, but not required by the university. You may also watch the meeting over this zoom link: <https://umontana.zoom.us/j/91246956716>

Peeps from Your Treasurer, Jean Duncan

Put your numbers hat on, everyone! Here come the 2022 numbers from Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS).

Our operating income for the year was \$20,524 with expenses of \$14,154, netting \$6,370. At the end of 2022 FVAS had assets of \$171,698 of which \$90,892 is in the Phil L. Wright Endowment. This endowment provides scholarships for UM student's bird and habitat related research projects. Of the \$64,250 in our general fund, \$14,354 is restricted to habitat conservation and education.



Five Valleys Audubon donated a total of \$8,600 to Montana Audubon and several bird research and habitat protection nonprofits, as well as contributed to securing a conservation easement. We are continuing to participate in county and city discussions dealing with the future of important bird habitats in our valley, including the former Knife River gravel pit ponds located west of Fort Missoula Park. We anticipate making a significant monetary donation to this project to back up our active participation in the planning process.

Please direct any questions about the finances of FVAS to Jean Duncan, Treasurer@FVAudubon.org. We're looking forward to another year of supporting birds and their habitat in Montana with your help and involvement!

Important Field Trip Notice: Two Permits Required for Glacier Campout By Larry Weeks



The 4-day campout to Glacier Park is scheduled for July 10th – 13th. This year, participants will be required to obtain a 3-day permit to access the Going-to-the Sun Road and a 1-day permit to

access Many Glacier. These permits become available on March 1st at 8:00 AM MST by accessing Recreation.gov (Vehicle Reservations). Select the date of July 11th for the 3-day permit and July 11th for the 1-day permit. These permits are difficult to obtain later in the year, so if anyone is thinking about going to Glacier, you should get these permits on March 1st. The cost is \$2 per permit.

UM Student Seeks Volunteers

Hummingbirds are known for their daring dives and swift maneuvers, frequently when interacting with a potential mate or rival. **But how much energy does this cost this enigmatic taxon with the highest metabolic rate of any vertebrate?** For her PhD at the University of Montana, Rosalee Elting will research



the *within species* variation in aggression and morphology to see if there are predictable victors and use well-established methods to measure their energy consumption over a given day and during these bursts of high activity. Rosalee will conduct this work with Calliope Hummingbirds, *Selasphorus calliope*, in the greater Missoula area. **Do you have access to a location where you regularly see these types of fights?** Rosalee would love to include you in her project—recording these birds and learning to identify individuals to investigate social structure and flight dynamics of winners and losers. The procedures she will use are minimally impactful: primarily high-speed flight videography, trapping to mark with non-toxic small white dots of paint on their feathers, and inserting a small microchip (like the ones in our domestic pets) that we can read at feeders to see which individuals are using the feeders. Rosalee will be highly involved in the work and would love to discuss any questions you have about her work and the potential to use a site you may know to collect some or all these measures. You can review Rosalee's prior work at <https://rosaleeelsing.wixsite.com/mysite> and email her with questions at rosalee.elling@umontana.edu.

Three Little Birds By Bob Marley and the Wailers

*Rise up this mornin'
Smile with the risin' sun
Three little birds
Pitched by my doorstep
Singin' sweet songs
Of melodies pure and true
Sayin', "This is my message to you, whoo-hoo"*



*Singin', don't worry about a thing
'Cause every little thing, is gonna be all right
Singin', don't worry, don't worry 'bout a thing
'Cause every little thing, gonna be all right*



2022 Missoula Christmas Bird Count Summary

By Larry Weeks

The 2022 the Missoula Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was hampered by deep snow and fog. Despite the challenges, we ended up with 82 bird species and 6,853 total birds, which was about average. There were 78 people in the field and 22 feeder watchers. Jim Brown's group, who birded Grass Valley and

Charlie Deschamps' property, had the only Northern Pintails, Gadwalls, Ring-necked Ducks, Golden Eagles, and Short-eared Owl. Poody's group on Kelly Island had the only Common Redpolls and Lewis' Woodpecker. Andy Boyce, who led one of the field groups in LaValle Creek, had the only Horned Larks. Andy also found the only Northern Saw-whet Owl at the Tower St. Open Space. The author found the only Pacific Wren in the Charlotte Marbut Sanctuary along Grant Creek. Other groups were led by Will McDowell (McCauley Butte), Don Jones (Sleven's Island), Rose Leach (Mullan Rd.), Kristi DuBois (Flynn – Hiawatha – Cusker), Cindy Swidler (between Mullan Rd. and Kelly Island), Paul Hendricks (Marshall Canyon – Woods Gulch), Paul Loehnen (Council Grove – Kona Ranch), Steve Flood (upper LaValle Cr.), Vick Applegate (State Nursery – Tower St. Open Space), Brian Williams (Rattlesnake), Robin Anderson (UM – Greenough Park), Stan Senner (Farviews), Thomas Kallmeyer (Upper Butler Creek, North Hills), Elena Ulev (Moose Can Gully), Tom Brakefield (Crazy Canyon), Joy Earls (Snowdrift Ln), and Zack Schlanger (upper Clark Fork – Kim Williams Tr).

The feeder watchers contributed to the species count; Kay Lambert had the only Blue Jays and Mourning Doves, Cindy & Barry Swidler had the only Red-winged Blackbirds, and Cathy Regg had the only Harris' Sparrow and Long-eared Owl. The Long-eared Owl was a surprise since Denver Holt did not participate this year. Jim Brown birded some of the brushy draws on Charlie Deschamps' property to look for Long-eared Owls but only found a Short-eared Owl. Other interesting birds were White-throated Sparrows that were found at Andy Boyce's and Cathy Regg's feeders, Marsh Wrens that were found in Grass Valley and the Stout's slough and Snow Buntings were found in LaValle Creek and North Hills. The Count ended with a potluck at the author's home. My thanks to everyone who participated.

Missoula Christmas Bird Count 2022		
Great Blue Heron 19	Killdeer 18	White-breasted Nuthatch 33
Canada Goose 577	Wilson's Snipe 10	Pygmy Nuthatch 31
Green-winged Teal 23	Rock Pigeon 724	Brown Creeper 2
Mallard 394	Eurasian-collared Dove 234	Pacific Wren 1
Northern Pintail 4	Mourning Dove 2	Marsh Wren 2
Gadwall 2	Great Horned Owl 10	Golden-crowned Kinglet 10
Ring-necked Duck 30	Northern Pygmy-Owl 2	Townsend's Solitaire 38
Common Goldeneye 168	Long-eared Owl 1	American Robin 82
Barrow's Goldeneye 18	Short-eared Owl 1	Bohemian Waxwing 360
Bufflehead 15	Northern Saw-whet Owl 1	Cedar Waxwing 273
Hooded Merganser 14	Belted Kingfisher 11	Northern Shrike 3
Common Merganser 31	Lewis' Woodpecker 1	European Starling 59
Bald Eagle 32	Downy Woodpecker 42	American Tree Sparrow 17
Golden Eagle 2	Hairy Woodpecker 21	Song Sparrow 66
Northern Harrier 5	Northern Flicker 193	White-throated Sparrow 2
Sharp-shinned Hawk 9	Pileated Woodpecker 8	Harris' Sparrow 1
Cooper's Hawk 2	Horned Lark 50	Dark-eyed Junco 285
Red-tailed Hawk 39	Steller's Jay 8	Snow Bunting 27
Rough-legged Hawk 12	Blue Jay 2	Red-winged Blackbird 65
American Kestrel 6	Clark's Nutcracker 4	House Finch 325
Merlin 7	Black-billed Magpie 343	Red Crossbill 60
Prairie Falcon 3	American Crow 60	Common Redpoll 12
Gray Partridge 28	Common Raven 268	American Goldfinch 119
Ring-necked Pheasant 14	Black-capped Chickadee 413	Lesser Goldfinch 4
Ruffed Grouse 4	Mountain Chickadee 51	Evening Grosbeak CW
Wild Turkey 75	Red-breasted Nuthatch 220	House Sparrow 680
American Coot 3		
CW = Count Week	Total Birds =6853	Total Species = 78

Fort Missoula Ponds - An Opportunity

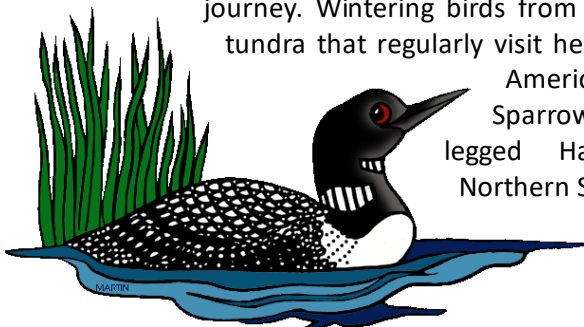
By Jim Brown

The Missoula community faces a new challenge and an exciting opportunity at Fort Missoula. An 87-acre parcel of land, formerly a Knife River gravel extraction operation, is now owned by the City of Missoula. Left behind the gravel operation are two deep water ponds, one about 10 acres and one 27 acres. Missoula now must consider what is the best use of these ponds and surrounding area.

The ponds lie next to the Bitterroot River and are bordered by University of Montana property at Fort Missoula containing undeveloped grassland. Nearby are Slevin's Island, the Bird Ecology Lab, and Native Plant Garden. The private land on the west is mostly protected by a conservation easement and includes McCauley Butte and the flood plain below. This largely undeveloped landscape has outstanding riparian values providing the Missoula Valley with a treasured resource that is vital to many plants and animals. Birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, insects, and aquatic invertebrates are found here. The ponds and adjoining lands are part of the Clark Fork River--Grass Valley Important Bird Area, recognized as having continental significance and is a Cornerstone Area in the City Open Space Plan.

The significant wildlife values of the ponds became apparent when disturbance caused by the gravel operation ceased. Since then, many different bird species appeared on the ponds. Just in the past five years 230 bird species have been reported for the eBird hotspot covering these Ponds including a number of species of conservation concern. The ponds are particularly sought by migrating waterfowl and other water birds. Some of the unusual observations include Common and Pacific Loons, Horned and Red-necked Grebes, American White Pelican, Black-crowned Night Heron, White-faced Ibis, Surf and White-winged Scoters, American Avocet, Sabine's Gull, Bewick's Wren, Magnolia Warbler, and Scarlet Tanager. During early spring large flocks of Snow Geese and ducks have been stopping off at the ponds to rest as they continue their journey. Wintering birds from the arctic tundra that regularly visit here include

American Tree Sparrow, Rough-legged Hawk and Northern Shrike.



These ponds are the only large water body in the greater Missoula Valley, a significant resource for migrating birds that need to stop, rest, and refuel to meet their high energy demands. These ponds provide an extraordinary opportunity for citizens to observe and enjoy the many varied forms of life that depend on wetlands. Managing the area for its natural values would provide a form of nature-based recreation that allows people of all ages to observe wildlife in a natural setting and provide a laboratory for environmental education. The only other comparable migration stopover habitats in west central Montana are Nine Pipes Reservoir and the wetlands at Lee Metcalf. The importance of these wetlands for wildlife is reflected by the fact that these are both National Wildlife Refuges. The Fort Missoula Ponds are on par with their significance for migratory waterfowl.

The City of Missoula must decide on how best to manage the ponds considering their natural values and recreational opportunities. A public involvement process is planned to determine how best to serve the interests of Missoula's citizens. Five Valleys Audubon, the Montana Natural History Center, and Clark Fork Coalition are advocating that the Fort Missoula Ponds be formerly established as a highly valued, sought-after natural area unique to the greater Missoula Valley. Your voice in support of a natural area that protects and enhances the critical wildlife resource for all citizens to enjoy will be needed as the public involvement process unfolds.

wings 
across the big sky

SAVE THE DATE!

Wings Across the Big Sky

An annual Montana birding festival,
organized by Montana Audubon,
in partnership with this year's local host chapter,
Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon.

June 9-11, 2023

Heritage Inn, Great Falls, Montana

More information to come!

www.mtaudubon.org

Welcome New Members

Mandy Elgin Jeffrey Crouch
Penny Orwick Robert Rajala
Susan Hewitt Jane McAllister
Kim Wade Laurie Stalling
Louise Weaver William Lawrence



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

\$ _____ \$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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