

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

* **Saturday, June 18th**: Monthly beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet field trip leader John Ormiston at the Refuge Visitor's Center. Learn basic skills for bird identification, including use of binoculars and field guides, key field marks, and much more. Families with children and birders of any level are welcome!

* **June 23-26, 2011**: Four-day field trip to Red Rock Lakes. See write-up in right-hand column.

* **July 7-10, 2011**: Four-day field trip to Glacier Park. See write-up in right-hand column.

* **Saturday, July 19th**: Monthly beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet field trip leader Bob Petty at the Refuge Visitor's Center.

* **Monday, August 15th**: Submission deadline for the September edition of the *Birding Observer*.

* **Saturday, August 20th**: All-day field trip to Ninepipes and surrounding area. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 8:00 AM.

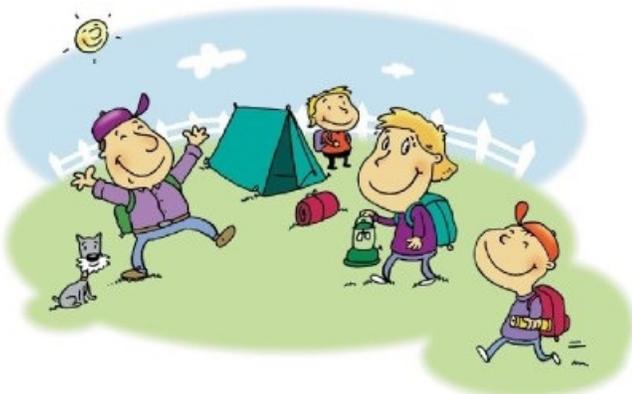
* **Saturday, August 20th**: Monthly beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet field trip leader Lynn Tennefoss at the Refuge Visitor's Center.

* **Tuesday, September 6th**: Paul Loehnen will host the September board meeting.

Upcoming Multi-day Field Trips by Larry Weeks

The **4-day field trip to Red Rock Lakes** is scheduled for **June 23rd, 24th, 25th, and 26th**. We will camp at Upper Red Rock Lake Campground all 3 nights. We will bird the refuge on Friday and Saturday, and then bird the Bannack area on Sunday on the return trip. If you are planning to go to Red Rocks, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or email him at bwsgenea@onlinemt.com. The trip will be limited to 20 people. Larry will be planning for potluck dinners. We plan to meet at 5:00 PM at the URRL Campground on June 23rd. Just a reminder, the elevation is 6600 feet, so plan for cool weather.

The **4-day field trip to Glacier Park** is scheduled for **July 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th**. The plan is to camp at St. Mary Campground on July 7th and 8th and at the Fish Creek Campground on July 9th. To make reservations at both St. Mary and Fish Creek, call 1-800-365-2267 or go online at www.recreation.gov and enter Montana, St. Mary Campground, the date of arrival (July 7th), and the length of stay (2). Pick a campsite from the group C107-C112 in Loop C so we will be together. Use the same procedure for the Fish Creek Campground; enter Montana, Fish Creek Campground, date of arrival (July 9th), and length of stay (1). Pick a campsite from A2 – A7. If you have a Golden Passport, the rate is reduced by 50%. You will be asked for your Golden Passport number. We can have up to 8 people per campsite, so not everyone has to make a reservation. We will bird the Red Eagle Lake trail on Friday, hike to Piegan Pass on Saturday, and bird the Camas Creek and Howe Lake trails on Sunday. If you are planning to go to Glacier, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or email him at bwsgenea@onlinemt.com. The trip will be limited to 20 people. Larry will be planning potluck dinners. We plan to meet at 5PM at the St. Mary Campground on July 7th.



Peeps from the Board: Birding Opportunities on the Flathead Indian Reservation

By Joyce Nave

Snow lingers where new shoots of green grass should be. Canada Geese walk tentatively on icy ponds, and Trumpeter Swans fold their sleek necks against a harsh March wind. A trio of juvenile Bald Eagles sits patiently, waiting for the skwala hatch which promises to usher in the season of rising trout. The Ospreys have not yet arrived to occupy their lofty nest of sticks and baling twine, but a flock of early migrating Pintails quickly disappears amidst last season's dried tules. Two Western Blue Birds ruffle their feathers trying to shake off the chill in the air, wondering if they have not arrived too early. Winter is hanging on this year; yet ancient instincts persist, and the birds begin to move north. There is no better place to observe these natural rhythms than in a wetland, be it a marsh, a prairie pothole, or a streamside.

My first birding experiences were in the marshes of San Francisco Bay, the winter home to hundreds of Marbled Godwits, Willets, and Whimbrels as well as Canvas Back, Wigeon and Northern Pintail. What a sight to see the whole marsh spring to flight when a Northern Harrier passed by. What a sight to also see this same marsh drained and filled to create a brand new city, home to 30,000 new "wintering" residents. Wetlands are crucial habitats. Like a giant sponge, they act to purify water, to soak up pollutants and filter sediments. They cycle nutrients and provide a safe haven for resting and nesting migratory birds. They are essential habitats for the birdwatcher. Nationwide it is estimated that over 50% of our wetlands have been lost to agriculture, development, and degradation. Fortunately, in Montana we have only lost 27% of our historical wetlands, and thanks to the efforts of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, new wetlands are being created very close to Missoula.



My favorite is Curlew Marsh. It is located on Highway 200 west of Dixon at Bench Road. There is space to park, and walk in access is welcome. The marsh was created some four years ago with mitigation funds from the Kerr Dam settlement and in partnership with Ducks Unlimited. Adjacent to the Flathead River, the marsh is managed for shallow water depressions which attract a variety of nesting dabblers. Water is regulated seasonally to maintain the low elevation sponge effect of the wetland. River otters frequent the area, and to the delight of Dale Becker, Tribal Wildlife Program Manager, Trumpeter Swans successfully have bred and raised cygnets for the past two years.

On Moiese Valley Road just opposite the National Bison Range another mitigation project holds great promise for the birdwatcher. A wetland is being reconstructed, and the stream banks and meanders of Mission Creek are being restored. While the land has been heavily grazed, it also has been the recipient of waste water runoff from two irrigation canals that flow through the property to dump their sediment loads and pollutants directly into Mission Creek. The main objective of this project is to cleanse this water.

According to Barry Hansen, Fisheries Biologist, this will be accomplished by diverting the water into large ponds where the silt will settle. The water will then flow into the wetlands where the nutrients will be filtered out, and the resulting clean water will flow back into Mission Creek. This is an ambitious undertaking that will provide great habitat for migrating and resident birds. The soon to be wetland is already a busy place. On an early April morning, a mixed flock of waxwings lands in a western juniper choosing not to sample last season's berries but to forage on the explosion of March Brown mayflies at creek's edge. A Red-tailed Hawk sits on a branch opposite an old nest watching as 30 mallards rise from what seems to be a mere puddle. The shrill notes of the Killdeer's call warn the Belted Kingfisher an intruder is nearby. What promise this wetland holds.

Just north of Arlee 5.8 miles there is a railroad crossing sign. Turn left and go across the tracks and Spring Creek. Follow the dirt road a short distance and turn right at the green gate. Parking and access are available. When you enter this property, you are entering the Sque-que Reach, a part of the Jocko River

Restoration project. Referred to as a scrub-shrub wetland, it is a community in transition from emergent wetlands to woodland; however, it has been extensively altered by a long history of grazing and agriculture. As a result of the ARCO settlement, the land is now rededicated to conservation purposes. The aim is to restore the riparian habitat. Ponderosa pine, black cottonwood, red-osier dogwood, alder, willow, sedge and rush are being planted while drainage ditches are plugged, levies removed, and the river is once again reconnected to its floodplain.

Water abounds on the property. Of special interest is the spring brook, which according to Craig Barfoot, Fisheries Biologist, is an old meander scar. Ground water upwelling flowing through alluvial gravels keeps the plumbing alive. It is unique and referred to as a gaining reach. To visit Sque-que Reach in late April is akin to stepping into nature's nursery. It is a time for quiet observation. A Great Horned Owl peers down from her stick nest high in a ponderosa pine, while a Ring-necked Pheasant beckons with his vociferous crowing. A Ruffed Grouse bolts through the leafless vegetation unable to hold her cover a moment longer. The river flows swiftly, muddied by yesterday's rain; yet the Great Blue Herons pay no heed, taking refuge in their colony of woven platform nests. A short distance away, a Bald Eagle reluctantly leaves her eyrie to discourage an intruding Red-tailed Hawk. A pair of Black-capped Chickadees flies to and fro bringing cottony fibers and spider webs to line their newly excavated nest. Extra warmth will surely be needed this cool, damp spring along the Jocko River.

Summer will soon be upon us, and Montana wetlands will beckon. It is time to pick up a Flathead Reservation Conservation Permit (\$15) at Bob Ward and Sons, Wholesale Sports or the regional office of FWP, pack up the spotting scope, and head for Curlew Marsh. I wonder if those Western Bluebirds decided to stay.

For giving me a better understanding of wetland processes, I thank Dale Becker, Craig Barfoot, and Barry Hansen of the Natural Resource Department, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.



Field Trip by Larry Weeks

April 23, 2011: Fifteen people joined the author for a field trip to the Warm Springs Ponds. These ponds were originally constructed by the Anaconda Company at the beginning of the 20th century to hold and treat the contaminants from the mining operations upstream. Silver Bow Creek is diverted into the ponds where lime is added to precipitate the heavy metals and the cleansed flow is returned to the Clark Fork River. The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks manages the wildlife and recreation at the ponds and Atlantic Richfield Company operates the water treatment system. Atlantic Richfield wants to discontinue their operation and eliminate the ponds. Hopefully, some entity will continue to manage this impressive wildlife habitat and recreation area. When our group arrived at the largest upstream pond, there was a cold wind blowing which tested the resolve of the bird watchers. However, there was good bird diversity and large quantities of American coots and ruddy ducks. It was interesting to see great blue herons nesting in the willows just above the level of the water. Canvasbacks, scaups, northern shovelers, teal, 4 species of grebes, California and ring-billed gulls, and common loons were all present at this stop. We then drove to the end of the pond and walked out a dike to access Pond 2 where there was a large concentration of gulls. Mixed in with the gulls was one Ross' goose and some of the participants got to see a flock of American avocets. Two sandhill cranes were walking along one of the dikes. There were bald eagles on a nest in an old cottonwood tree which used to be the blue heron rockery. We then visited the Job Corps Ponds where we found one greater and one lesser yellowlegs. To everyone's enjoyment, they ended up side-by-side where the size difference is quite dramatic. We also found a small group of American pipits. The last area we visited was the Trout Unlimited Ponds which are on the West side of I-90. The water level was down in the ponds and the bird life was limited. However, when we went to the end of the road, there were 33 sandhill cranes and a long-billed curlew in a large grassy field. By this time of the the day, the weather had warmed up and the raptors were soaring over the valley. These raptors included golden eagle, Swainson's and red-tailed hawks, and northern harriers. There were 2 more curlews that were flying around and rising quite high at times. It was a nice ending to a very pleasant day. We had 55 species for the day.

On April 25th, eleven people assembled in Harlingen, TX and joined tour leaders Brian Williams and Darcy Vallant for a 6-day field trip of South Texas. The participants included Rose Leach and her sister Peggy Allen from Indiana, Cynthia Hudson and her husband Bob Zirl, Bill & Nancy DeCou, Carolyn Goren, Jim Oates and Raylene Wall from Polson, and the author and his son Ron from Lake Jackson, TX. The whole state of Texas is in a drought and there were several fires burning in the central part of the state. Even though the South Texas area had the least amount of drought, the habitat was showing some obvious stress. On Tuesday, April 26th, the group met Tom Langschied at the King Ranch headquarters and he guided us on a visit to a ranch called LaCopita and the South Gerturdis section of the King Ranch. Tom established the birding tours for the ranch about 15 years ago and led the tours until Brian took over for 2 years. Although Tom does not work for the King Ranch anymore, he continues to be involved with some of the birding tours. Brian described Tom as one of the best birders he has ever worked with. Tom has an excellent sense of humor and one time when we were communicating between the vans with radios, Brian asked Tom if he could hear him, and Tom responded that "unfortunately he could". This caused an immediate outburst of laughter from Brian's van. In addition to finding birds for us, Tom described some of the ranch's operation and how the ranch was purchased by Captain King who started out as a captain of a river boat on the Rio Grande River. The income for the ranch comes from 3 main sources; cattle, oil and the hunting of whitetail deer and nei gui (exotic antelope from India). Very little income is derived from birding tours. The group tallied over 100 species for the first day. Half of the birds were not common to Western Montana. Some of the more unusual birds were Harris' and white-tailed hawks, crested caracara, purple gullinule, white-tipped dove, grove-billed ani, green jay, cave swallow, olive sparrow, pyrrhuloxia, dickcissel, and Altamira oriole. We also got to see the mating display of the bronzed cowbird where the male would fluff up its neck feathers and hover over a female. On Wednesday, Brian and Ron lead the group to Rockport and then South on the barrier island to Corpus Christi. The first stop was at the H.E.B. Grocery store where we got tropical kingbird which was breeding in the parking lot trees. We then went to the Connie Hagar Sanctuary and Rockport Beach Park where the dominate feature



was a large nesting colony of black skimmers. Laughing gulls were also present in large numbers. Great, snowy and reddish egrets, great blue, little blue and tricolored herons, and roseate spoonbills were also present. Three ostercatchers flew by as we were leaving. As we drove South, we had a common loon in winter plumage at Aransas Pass. We crossed to Mustang Island via the ferry and visited Paradise Pond at Port Aransas. We caught part of the migration and got 19 species of warblers and 3 species of vireos. The warbler viewing was close-range at a water drip and the warblers included blue-winged, chestnut-sided, black-throated green, blackburnian, black & white, blackpoll, mourning, and Canada. The vireos included white-eyed and blue-headed. There was a 15-foot alligator at the nearby Birding Center. The Molly Beattie Sanctuary had a great mix of shorebirds which included black-bellied, snowy, Wilson's, and piping plovers, whimbrel, marbled godwit, ruddy turnstone, sanderling, and short-billed and long-billed dowitchers. Our last stop for the day was Blucher Park in Corpus Christi. The best birds here were chuck-will's-widow, Kentucky, magnolia and mourning warblers, ovenbird, and lesser goldfinch. Total birds for the day was over 140. On Thursday, Tom led the group to the Norias section of the King Ranch. The first stop was at a location of a nest box for the ferruginous pygmy owl. As we approached the site, the owl flew up on a bare branch that allowed excellent views for everyone. A bathroom stop produced a barn owl that was in a cupola in a barn. Botteri's sparrow was the next specialty bird for the King Ranch. A pair of white-tailed kites were hunting in a field and doing their peculiar kiting flight. In the process of trying to call in a northern beardless tynannulet (flycatcher), another ferruginous pygmy owl responded, and we also found a second owl peering out of a cavity. Ron heard an eastern screech owl at the same location and Tom was able to locate the cavity it was calling from. At one of the stops, we had 3 Audubon's orioles responding to a

taped call. The remainder of the day was devoted to locating a tropical parula. At the last stop, Tom located a northern parula before the tropical parula showed itself. We then drove to McAllen where we spent the next 3 days. On Friday, we started at Santa Ana NWR. Blue and rose-breasted grosbeaks got the morning off to a good start. Some of the best viewing was from a tower which was above the tree canopy. A flock of about 50 Mississippi kites flew by and formed a kettle. Long-billed thrasher, Couch's kingbird, lesser goldfinch, and even plain chachalaca were in the tops of the trees. We found the only northern beardless tyrannulet at Santa Ana. The next stop was Bentsen State Park with good looks at roadrunner, grooved-billed ani, and black phoebe. Some of the people had a gray hawk along the Rio Grande River. The Estero Llano Grande had the best habitat of the day in terms of water and lush vegetation. We had a common pauraque nesting on the ground, a large concentration of stilt sandpipers, the only semipalmated sandpiper of the trip, and a clay-colored thrush (robin). We spent a great deal of time getting everyone satisfying looks at the robin because it was a target bird for several participants. We ended up at Bentsen State Park for some night owling. We heard eastern screech and elf owls, and found a tarantula in the middle of the road. On Saturday, we drove up-river to Salineno where we got red-billed pigeon and green kingfisher along the Rio Grande. Later that day, we found a flock of about 100 green parakeets in McAllen. Our last day included visits to Sabal Palms and South Padre Island. At Sabal Palms, we got excellent looks at chestnut-sided warblers and another green kingfisher. We hit the jackpot on South Padre Island with large numbers of warblers, shorebirds, terns, and orioles. We had 13 species of warblers which included Cape May, magnolia, bay-breasted, black & white, and blackpoll. Shorebirds included willet, ruddy turnstone, sanderling, and the only western sandpiper for the trip. There were a large numbers of common terns, and a few royal, sandwich, least, and black terns. There were also 2 least bitterns which were very cooperative. We then visited a chain-link fence on Sheepshead St. where someone was placing half-oranges and grapefruits on the top of the fence. There were up to 9 orioles at one time lined up on the fruit. The orioles included orchard, Bullock's, Baltimore, and the 8th documented sighting in the U.S. for black-vented oriole. We ended up with 227 species for the 6-day trip.

Browns Lake Field Trip by Jim Brown

Although the weather on Saturday was mostly cloudy and cool, it was much improved from the cold, wintry blast that blanketed the area on Friday. So the 15 folks who ventured forth had a fun and interesting day afield. One view that produced several gulps heard on the radios was of a Great Blue Heron standing about 50 feet from our vehicles. The heron had just caught a 10-inch trout, which after being maneuvered into position slid down its throat in one big swallow. That swallow amounted to about 5 percent of the heron's body weight going down the hatch in one gulp. Melting of the heavy winter's snow left most of the potholes brim full of water. We were on the early side of migration compared to many previous years at this date. Large numbers of American Coots were present. It was exciting to see several flocks of migrating Tree Swallows, Mountain Bluebirds and American Pipits. Sandhill Cranes were observed and heard echoing their prehistoric sounding calls at a number of locations. Observing a large flock of Bonaparte's gulls feeding on the water among many ducks was an unusual find. In all we observed 65 species including five species of grebes, 16 species of ducks, 20 or more Common Loons, 4 Long-billed Curlews, several Golden Eagles and a stunning male Williamson's Sapsucker.

The next edition of the
Birding Observer will be
published in September.

Until then,

Five Valleys Audubon Society

Wishes You A Happy Summer

And Happy Birding !

Why Do Bird Eggs Vary In Shape and Color?

Posted on Tuesday, May 17, 2011 by eNature

Ever wonder why birds lay eggs of different colors and shapes? There's a good reason for just about everything we encounter in nature and, as you'd expect, eggs are no exception.

While we tend to not talk much about bird nests at eNature.com because we just don't want to encourage folks to disturb nesting birds, bird nests and the eggs in them are full of interesting stories.

Why aren't all bird eggs white? Birds' eggs are colored for protective reasons. The parent birds that incubate them are not always on the nest covering them, and at those times, the eggs are exposed to predators. The color, speckles or spots on them are camouflage. That explains why birds that nest in cavities often lay all white eggs. They can't be seen even when the parent birds are not sitting on them.

Why are birds eggs shaped differently? Again, to protect them. Birds that nest on cliffs, such as many seabirds, tend to have eggs that are smaller at one end than at the other. This is to make them roll in a circle and less likely to fall off the cliff. Birds with round eggs, usually build deep nests that keep them from rolling out.

How do baby birds hatch? They have a so-called "egg tooth" on the top of their upper mandible, which cuts through the egg shell when it is time for them to come out. The egg tooth falls off soon after hatching.

Why do the eggs in a nest often all hatch at about the same time? Because most birds lay an egg a day, but do not begin incubating them until the last egg is laid. One notable exception is the barn owl, which begins incubation with the laying of the first egg. That's why the youngsters in a brood range in size and age from the oldest to the youngest.

Bird Word Search

W	G	H	U	K	E	P	P	H	X	E	D	M	W	X
C	D	C	V	M	C	E	P	U	A	R	L	C	K	C
R	U	I	U	M	H	L	N	E	A	W	K	G	C	B
O	N	R	V	W	C	I	S	L	N	S	K	W	A	E
W	L	T	N	S	T	C	L	L	H	G	O	P	J	E
H	V	S	I	A	U	A	V	U	L	T	U	R	E	H
T	S	O	B	V	M	N	E	D	W	F	U	I	C	N
U	G	O	O	S	E	Z	G	Z	F	G	J	N	N	W
X	M	Z	R	N	Z	N	M	I	M	P	I	F	B	A
Y	E	K	R	U	T	M	N	L	Z	F	L	W	O	V
Q	I	P	H	J	W	V	M	W	T	J	O	Q	K	R
U	N	K	A	D	U	Y	M	Q	P	S	U	Y	M	C
V	T	L	F	V	B	X	T	M	F	G	T	R	H	I
Q	Z	A	N	L	X	M	Q	P	Z	O	O	R	M	E
S	K	Y	D	B	B	J	A	C	Z	L	K	M	O	Z

CROW

FINCH

MALLARD

PELICAN

ROBIN

EAGLE

GOOSE

OSTRICH

PENGUIN

TURKEY

EMU

HAWK

OWL

PUFFIN

VULTURE



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Charles Carpenter	Les & Jo Carpenter
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Ray Hoffman	Dan McCaffery
Donna M. Moses	John Rimel
Donna Taggart	



Thanks to our Returning Members:

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Barbara Farrell	Rene Foehl	Betsy Griffing	Dorothy Hebert
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 Just send us an email request with your name to Vick Applegate at k7vk@arri.net.
 We will alert you each month when the newsletter becomes available on-line.
 You can find the Five Valleys Audubon web site at: <http://www.fvamissoula.org/>

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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 0Z**

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.

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