

MARCH 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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- \* **Monday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 7pm:** Vick & Jean Applegate will host the board meeting.
- \* **Monday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 7:30pm:** Nongame wildlife biologist, Kristi DuBois will tell us about the new wildlife management areas that were recently acquired by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the March program meeting.
- \* **Tuesday, March 15<sup>th</sup>:** Submission deadline for the April edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- \* **Saturday, March 19<sup>th</sup>:** Monthly beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet field trip leader Kate Stone 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. Binoculars provided if needed. Families with children and birders of any level are welcome! Co-sponsored by Five Valleys Audubon Society, Bitterroot Audubon Society and Lee Metcalf NWR.
- \* **Saturday, March 26<sup>th</sup>:** All-day field trip to the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet at 8:00 AM in the middle of the UM field house parking lot or at the Metcalf Visitor's Center at 9:00 AM.
- \* **March, Various Dates:** Advanced Birding Workshop – sessions held throughout the month. See page 4 for details.

## Birding and Botanizing: Fescue, Fen, and Fir on new FWP Lands

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Three new wildlife management areas (WMA) were recently acquired by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) in Region 2. These three areas, Spotted Dog WMA, Marshall Creek WMA, and Fish Creek WMA (and state park), protect a wide variety of habitats including shortgrass prairie, shrub-steppe, conifer forest, riparian, and wetlands. As a result, they will provide some unique and interesting birding and other outdoor opportunities. Join Kristi DuBois, Nongame Wildlife Biologist for Montana FWP, as she presents the program on Monday, March 14 at 7:30 p.m. in the Gallagher Business Building, room 123 (note different location) on the University of Montana campus. Kristi will introduce us to these areas with pictures, maps, and information about the wildlife resources and birding opportunities they will provide. She will also talk about some of the other nongame wildlife work FWP will be doing in western Montana, and

explain how the public can help FWP collect information on birds and other wildlife to help manage and protect wildlife for the future.



Kristi DuBois is the Nongame Wildlife Biologist for Montana FWP in Missoula. She worked for Montana FWP in Ashland, Choteau, Kalispell, and Great Falls before coming to Missoula in 2002. She has also worked for the The Nature Conservancy in Montana, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Montana and Utah.

Following Kristi's presentation, Mark Henspeter, a recipient of a 2010 Philip L. Wright memorial research award, will tell us what he learned on his study titled "The influence of climate change on collared pika in Interior Alaska." He is a junior at UM studying wildlife biology.



One of the real joys of my life is watching birds at our birdfeeder. Yesterday morning when I opened the curtain a Downy Woodpecker was perched just above the suet and a Red-breasted Nuthatch just below. Neither was eating; they appeared to be resting, and they allowed me to observe them for a few minutes before they flew away. It was a peaceful start to my busy day. If you are reading this, I suspect you too enjoy watching our native birds and chances are you too have a feeder. We are lucky to have such a variety of birds to see and feed through the year in Missoula.

But with feeding comes responsibility. Here in the Rattlesnake, we have to outsmart raccoons, squirrels and bears, and we have to do our part to keep birds healthy by supplying nutritious snacks and keeping our feeders clean. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology recommends cleaning seed feeders every two weeks to prevent the growth of fungus and bacteria and prevent diseases in birds. Scrub the feeder in hot, soapy water and soak in one part bleach and nine parts water. Be sure to rinse the feeder thoroughly after using soap and bleach. The ground under the feeder needs to be cleaned also. Rake up shells and seeds before they get moldy and affect ground-feeding birds. Bird baths need to be cleaned regularly too. Scrub with the diluted bleach solution and rinse well before refilling.

The most common disease birds carry are salmonella infections which are passed by feces and spread at birdfeeders. Another is House Finch disease, a mycoplasmal conjunctivitis, which presents as runny, swollen or crusty eyes and leads to death of the bird. This also affects Pine Siskins, American Goldfinch, Evening Grosbeaks and Downy Woodpeckers in our area. If you notice a sick bird at your feeder, it is recommended that you clean your feeder right away. If you see more than one sick bird, take the feeder down for a week to disperse the birds. Clean it well before putting it back up. Because some bird diseases are transmittable to humans it is recommended that gloves and a dust mask be worn while cleaning feeders. While West Nile Disease is more frequently in the news, it is not a feeder disease, as it is spread by mosquitoes and fortunately it has not been found in our area.

Hummingbirds are enjoying warmer climes right now, but their feeders require very special care. Wash the

feeders at least once a week with hot water, scrubbing the feeding tubes and other parts with a small brush. Dip in the dilute bleach solution (one part bleach and nine parts water) and rinse thoroughly. Air-dry completely before refilling. To prevent mold or fermentation hummingbird nectar should be changed every 3-5 days, more frequently in hot weather.

Keep your feeders clean and enjoy the birds even more, knowing you've done your part to keep them healthy.

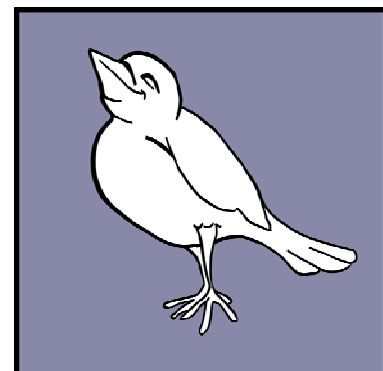
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### **Call for Montana Audubon Award Nominations!**

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We are now seeking nominations for 4 awards that will be given away at Montana Audubon's 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 from our website 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 16, 2011. All nominations and supporting material should be sent to Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624, or by fax: (406) 443-7144. The award ceremony will take place on June 4 at Montana Audubon's Bird Festival in Glasgow. Questions? Contact Janet Ellis at 406-443-3949 or <[jellis@mtaudubon.org](mailto:jellis@mtaudubon.org)>.



**Saturday, January 15, 2011:** The author led a beginning birders walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. This is part of a year-round field trip program proposed by Lynn Tennefoss and sponsored by Five Valleys Audubon, Bitterroot Audubon and the Metcalf Refuge. It will take place from 10am-noon, on the 3rd Saturday of every month, except December.

The warm, rainy weather for the January walk was a mixed blessing. The warmer temperatures made it more comfortable for the participants but it melted the snow and exposed the ice on all the trails. It was impossible to walk safely on the trails without cleats so we had to walk off the trails. There was some open water on the first large pond on the Denali Trail (pond 8) that contained a nice collection of waterfowl. In addition to the expected Canada geese, mallards, green-winged teal, and common goldeneye, there were a few northern pintails and large numbers of hooded and common mergansers. One lone swan was sleeping on the ice which never raised its head. There were also a couple of great blue herons in the area. The group also did a little birding at the Wildlife Viewing Area and found black-capped chickadees and all three species of nuthatches. We also looked unsuccessfully for a great horned owl in some Ponderosa pines south of the Wildlife Viewing parking lot. One of the houses along Waterfowl Lane is feeding a flock of wild turkeys but they weren't present when we drove by. Raptors included a brief look at a northern harrier, and red-tailed and rough-legged hawks were sitting on power poles along the Eastside highway. The field trip had a great turnout of 13 people, including 2 children. I documented 20 species total.



**Subdivision Impacts**  
by Jim Brown

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Five years ago our Chapter began reviewing subdivision proposals in Clark Fork River-Grass Valley Important Bird Area for impacts on birds and other wildlife. Our factually-based opinions were respected by the City-County Office of Planning & Grants. This effort quickly grew to reviewing all subdivision proposals in Missoula County. In the past four years, we reviewed 38

proposals and submitted comments on 12 of those; and on about half of those we provided testimony at County Commissioner hearings. As a recent example, in January a 59-unit subdivision near Clearwater Junction was denied by the County Commissioners. In our testimony we recommended that 12 lots adjacent to a riparian area be eliminated. The Commissioners went further and denied the entire subdivision.

Recently, we participated in Missoula County Listening Sessions aimed at revising and improving subdivision regulations. Gary Knudsen and I offered suggestions for improving how birds and other wildlife are evaluated in the review process. Our key points included:

- Require more specific information about wildlife than is provided by the currently used generalized vegetation type-wildlife occurrence reference.
- Species of Conservation Concern should be better defined for developers and planners.
- Riparian area setback distances for vegetated buffers and buildings need to be adopted that realistically reflect disturbance impacts to birds and other wildlife and effects on water quality.
- Accumulative impacts of individual subdivisions should be evaluated by the Office of Planning and Grants and the Planning Board for consideration by the County Commissioners.
- Wildlife impacts, esp. related to appropriate setbacks, should be addressed by developers earlier in the planning process such as during the Pre-application phase. (One developer told us: "If we had known about these wildlife concerns earlier, we would have designed it differently.")
- Require evaluation of wildlife impacts in "Minor Subdivisions."

Currently, Janet Ellis of Montana Audubon is participating on a statewide technical committee to draft model subdivision regulations that improve consideration of wildlife and water quality. Their efforts should be helpful to Missoula County. Our Chapter and State Audubon organizations are working to help assure that impacts on birds and other wildlife due to land developments are adequately evaluated by developers and planners, which as we all know, is critically important due to pressures of an expanding human population and related development.



Once upon a time there was a bird in North America that flew in flocks so large as to dim the sunlight beneath them. The birds frequently landed in

such numbers that limbs broke out of trees, and their droppings accumulated to a depth that killed trees, leaving openings in the forest. In some locations the birds were as significant as fires in forest change. People killed those abundant birds by the wagon-load and sold them in butcher shops in the northeastern states. Then Passenger Pigeon numbers declined until the great flocks disappeared, and the last Passenger Pigeon died in a zoo in 1914.

But Passenger Pigeons did not succumb to hunting. Loss of habitat and loss of food pulled the rug from under Passenger Pigeons who depended upon acorns and other seeds and nuts of the eastern broadleaf deciduous forests—food that wildlifers call mast. Those forests were once so extensive that, in the 1750s when the first settlers crossed the Blue Ridge into the Appalachians, it was said a squirrel could travel all the way to the Mississippi River without once touching ground. Broadleaf deciduous forests were good habitats for squirrels, and turkeys, and Indians, and passenger pigeons, all of whom ate mast. Yet within 150 years the forests were gone—and so were the Indian way of life, the pigeons, and most of the turkeys—to be replaced by farms, towns, and cities. Nearly as destructive as the settler’s axes were their hogs, let run loose in the forest where they vacuumed up acorns and other seeds and nuts to deprive pigeons, turkeys, and others of the mast resource.

Later, after WWII, as people moved off the farms and into cities, and hogs were fenced in, forests grew back and wildlife managers were able to restore turkeys to much of their former range. But there was no surviving passenger pigeon population from which to make transplants of that species.

Out here in the West, Sage Grouse, at three to six pounds each, were large enough to be a staple food item of Indians and early settlers, who sometimes killed

them by the wagon-load and took them to market. Everywhere European-Americans settled, grouse numbers were greatly reduced, and in many places Sage Grouse populations were wiped out. Hunting regulations eventually protected the birds from disappearing before man’s gun, but nothing yet protects their habitat from sagebrush eradication. Sage Grouse cannot exist without sagebrush for food and shelter, and some research on their habitat requirements indicates a minimum of 450 sagebrush plants per acre seems necessary. Whenever man eradicates sagebrush to grow hay and other crops—including crops of houses in scenic locations—he also destroys the home of the Sage Grouse. It is 150 years since settlers began clearing Sage Grouse habitat, half is gone now, and the Sage Grouse is threatened with extinction because man is still destroying the only habitats in which it can live and strut in the pale light of a frosty dawn.

Will Sage Grouse go the way of the Passenger Pigeon?



### Advanced Birding Workshop

It's not too late to sign up for the classes that will be held in March. The dates, subjects and presenters of the March sessions are as follows.

Date	Bird Group	Presenters
March 3	flycatchers	Kristina Smucker
March 10	forest birds	Jim Sparks
March 17	raptors	Kristi DuBois
March 24	sparrows	Terry McEneaney
March 31	gulls	Terry McEneaney

The sessions will be held at the FWP's Regional Office on Spurgin Road from 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM. The cost will be \$15 per session. To sign up, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or [bwsgenea@onlinemt.com](mailto:bwsgenea@onlinemt.com).

**Welcome New Members:**

Jim Bullock	Mary Gunderson	Lou Herritt
Katherine J. Kahl	Amy & Andrew Martin	Calvin Servheen
Lake Duane Shinn	Brian Campbell & Kim Smolt	Laura Taylor



**Thanks to our Returning Members:**

Janet Allison	Terry Bechard	Audrey & Michael Bechard	James R. Beery
Will Butler	John Caratti	Amy Cilimburg	Bill DeCou
John Duffield	John E. Dunkum	Ann Mary Dussault	Catherine B. Everingham
Bruce R. Farling	Robin Foster	Sue Furey	Kathy & John Gardner
John M. Hoar	Michael Hoffer	Mitch Jones	Mary Langenderfer
Mr. Keith A. Lee	Karla Long	Genvieve Marsh	Debra Mathson
Robert Mc Kelvey	Christian F. Miller	Margaret Moffatt	Roseann Moffatt
Elton J. Nutman	Judith & Byron Olson	Sheldon Reagan	Ruth Richards
Janet A. Scott	Mary & Tom Steenberg	Pat & Sharon Sweeney	Jo Van Demark
Timm Vogelsberg	Patty Watson	Shirley Weaver	Philip Weber
Gerome Weinand	Roberta J. Whitcomb	Lyn Wicks	Margaret R. Yobst

**Hi Friends! Go Green!**

View your *Birding Observer* newsletter even sooner, only **on-line**.  
 Just send us an email request with your name to Vick Applegate at [k7vk@arri.net](mailto: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.fvamisoula.org/>

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

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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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