

May 2010

Birding Observer



Five Valleys Audubon Society

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Calendar

- * **Saturday, May 1st:** 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.
- * **Monday, May 3rd, 7pm:** Paul Loehnen will host the board meeting.
- * **Sunday, May 9th:** Full-day field trip to Smurfit-Stone. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 8:00 AM or at the pulp mill at 8:30 AM.
- * **Monday, May 10th, 7:30pm:** Come to the May program meeting to learn about birds of Australia.
- * **Friday, May 14th:** Submission deadline for the June edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- * **Saturday, May 29th:** Half-day field trip to Spring Gulch. Meet at the Rattlesnake trailhead at 8:00 AM.
- * **June 4th-6th:** Montana Audubon's Bird Festival will be held in Missoula.

The Birds of Australia

Travel down under to Australia to learn about cassowaries, rheas, parrots, and other endemic species. Paul Loehnen, current chapter president, will present the next program on Monday, May 10 at 7:30 p.m. in the Gallagher Business Building, room L14 (lower level) on the University of Montana campus.

A retired physician originally from South Africa, Paul has been an active birder for 10 years. He and his wife, Beth, love to travel and bird. They recently spent 6 weeks in Australia and extensively traveled that vast country with Wings Birding Tours.

Bird Festival Update

The Montana Audubon Bird Festival is coming to a town near you. Well, if you have not heard, it will be here in Missoula the first week-end in June. Planning has been underway for several months. Please start thinking about **volunteering** a few hours and **donating** items for the Silent Auction.

New to the Silent Auction is the opportunity to bid on the services of one of our experienced trip leaders for a personal full day tour. Successful bidders will be able to choose tours in various parts of the State and target specific birds.

Experienced trip leaders are being asked to donate one day. For further information, please contact Jerry Dirnberger at 542-7043 or Larry Weeks at 549-5632.

Now let's talk money. From past experience, the Festival is requesting checks be used by the successful bidders of the auction items (and other purchases) as it speeds up the process since MT Audubon does not have the ability to do on-line credit/debit card processing at the Festival. Another request is to mail in your registration with a check, if possible, in order to avoid the cost of on-line processing. Your co-operation is appreciated.



Peeps from the Prez

In February I was the lucky recipient of a raffle prize trip to the Whooping Crane Festival in Port Aransas, Texas (thanks to Barbara Janquith). There I learned the incredible saga of the fight to bring the Whooping Crane back from the brink of extinction. It still remains the most endangered crane in the world.

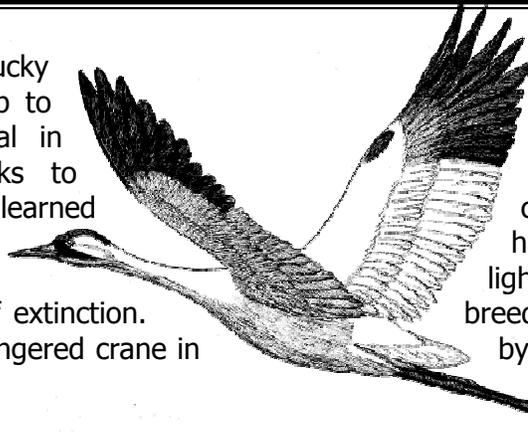
The whooping crane is endangered mainly due to habitat loss. At one time, the range for these birds extended throughout Midwestern North America. In 1941, the wild population consisted of 16 birds. Since then the population has increased to about 270 in the wild and another 145 in captivity.

Until the early 1970's it was not known where these birds bred. As a result of a fire in the remote Wood Buffalo National park in northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories, a scouting plane was sent to review the damage. They noted some large white birds which proved to be the only known breeding area of the whooping Crane.

The cranes lay two eggs a few days apart. Usually because of competition for food only one chick survives. Scientists have thus removed the second egg and started a captive breeding program. One project by the USFWS and the Canadian Wildlife Service was initiated in 1975, and involved the cross-fostering with Sandhill Cranes to establish a second self-sustaining flock. Although 85 chicks from 289 Whooping Cranes eggs transplanted into Sandhill Crane nests learned to migrate, the Whooping Cranes failed to mate with other Whooping Cranes due to imprinting on their Sandhill foster parent. This effort ended in 1989.

A second project involved the establishment of a non-migratory population in Florida but high mortality (Bobcats) and lack of reproduction (swarms of black flies chase parents off their nests) resulted in discontinuation of this project.

A third attempt has involved reintroducing the Whooping Crane to a new flyway established east of the Mississippi river. This project uses isolation



rearing of young whooping cranes and trains them to follow ultra light aircraft, a method of re-establishing migration routes. The cranes are costume reared from hatchlings, taught to follow their ultra light aircraft, fledged over their future breeding grounds in Wisconsin, and then led by ultra light on their first migration from Wisconsin to Florida; the birds

learn the migratory route, and then return, on their own, the following spring. This began in 2001 and is succeeding. However their status is still tenuous with barges carrying toxic chemicals travelling through their wintering grounds in the Aransas refuge. Another threat is weather, such as a disastrous storm that killed all of the 2006 yearlings after their arrival in Florida.

This remarkable saga of the whooping crane is inspiring and shows how with dedicated people a beautiful bird close to extinction has been saved.

Whooping Crane Facts

- Whooping cranes live 22-24 years.
- It is the tallest North American bird, with an average height of five feet tall, and their average wingspan is seven and a half feet wide.
- Whooping cranes are omnivores; they feed on insects, frogs, rodents, small birds, minnows, crabs, clams, snails, berries, acorns, and marsh plants.
- They perform elaborate displays to attract mates. Both males and females jump up and down, bob their heads, flap their wings, and call loudly.
- Their call is a loud, trumpeting bugle.
- Whooping cranes are monogamous and form life-long pair bonds, but will find a new mate following the death of a mate.

Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards

by Bill Gabriel

The P. L. Wright Memorial Research Awards are offered as a means of encouraging younger and less experienced students to get started in field research. The awards committee received seven proposals for funding of small projects in 2010, and all were from University of Montana students. Four undergraduate and three graduate students proposed studies of birds, mammals, and insects. We made the following awards:

- Mark Henspeter, a sophomore, \$700 to study the influence of climate change on collared pika at two sites in Alaska.
- Luke Stappler, a junior, \$650 to determine the distribution and relative abundance of beavers in the upper Clark Fork River drainage in Montana.
- Edith Dooley, M.S. student, \$650 to study the effects of tree host species and fungal symbionts on mountain pine beetle productivity in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

In accordance with established tradition, the recipients will report the results of their studies to the FVAS membership early in 2011. In the 24 year history of these research grants, Five Valleys Audubon has awarded \$21,587.50 to 52 recipients, and we are hearing back from some of those people about how the awards influenced their career choices. More on that later.

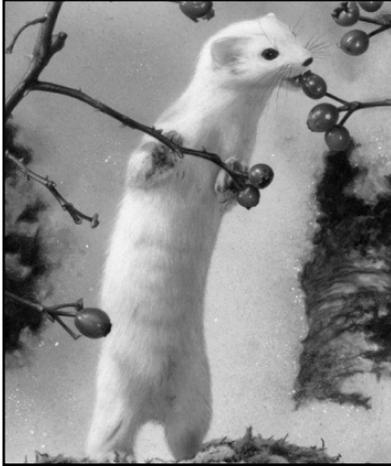
Field Trip by Larry Weeks

Saturday, March 13, 2010: Fifteen people assembled in Rosauer's parking lot at 4:00 PM and then drove to Lolo Pass for an evening cross-country ski trip. Due to the low snowpack, the ski trails lacked a track and were quite icy. At the beginning, we stayed on the road to avoid the big hill on the ski trail. At the far end of Packer Meadow, we got back on the road and skied to the 3-mile marker before getting back onto the ski trail. We waited until it got dark and listened for anything that sounded like an owl. We played the taped calls of boreal and barred owls before starting the return trip. There is quite a bit of downhill ski trail before you get back to the elevation of Packer Meadow, which is quite exciting

at night. Although I suffered 3 falls during the trip, I did manage to stay upright during the downhill section. We stopped several times to listen for owls and to play the owl tapes, but we heard nothing. The conditions should have been favorable because there were snow showers during the day and it cleared off as it got dark. This is the third time that I have made this trip without any satisfactory success. On the return drive to Missoula, we decided to make 2 stops and listen for owls. However, the Fort Fizzle stop was occupied by a group of young people around a big fire. We then assembled at Maclay Flat and played the tapes of a northern saw-whet owl and a great horned owl. We did not hear any confirmed responses from either owl. That is when a member of our group informed me that he had heard an owl earlier in the evening. He had been lagging behind the group when he heard the owl. He described the call and when we played the tapes, it was the barred owl that he had heard. The only other birds identified on the trip were a dusky (blue) grouse and a black-capped chickadee.

Beginning Birders Workshop by Larry Weeks

The workshop for beginning birders was held in March and there were 19 participants. It consisted of two classroom sessions and a field trip to the Lee Metcalf NWR. My assistants in the classroom sessions were Jim Sparks who did bird anatomy, Pat Little who covered the birds in the conifer forests, Whitney Schwab who covered the birds of the ponds and wetlands, and Bill Gabriel who covered optics. Paul Loehnen and Terry Toppins assisted on the field trip. The field trip was a sunny day but cold in the morning. Most of the expected waterfowl was present which included a trumpeter swan in Pond 5. The marsh wrens were very active and we saw tree swallows for the first time this year. The refuge was celebrating Welcome Back Waterfowl and display tables and treats were set up on the dike between Ponds 5 and 6. Judy Hoy showed live flammulated and northern saw-whet owls for everyone's enjoyment. Everyone who participated in the workshop indicated that they enjoyed the sessions.



I am the newest Five Valleys Audubon board member. My love of nature brought me to Audubon. I grew up on a New Jersey dairy farm-turned-poultry farm, gone bust in the 1950's. My father passed his love of nature on to me. His primary

interests were weather and birds, but I developed a love for many other animals, landforms and geology, as well as birds and weather.

I remember going to the Jersey Shore in the 1950's after hurricanes to see what nature had done and to look for 'accidental' birds sometimes seen after major storms. Other significant weather events were a brief blizzard in Missoula around 1982, the volcanic ash that fell in Missoula in 1980 from Mount St. Helens, a severe thunderstorm while camping at 11,000 foot elevation in the Himalayas in 1992 and an Antarctic Ocean storm witnessed from a ship in 2003. The storm had 80 mph winds and 30ft seas, while the ship was underway in an area with numerous small icebergs.

Mammal experiences have been seeing an ermine hunt mice during winter in the Colorado Rockies, watching elk calves play in June, coyotes hunting mice and a bull elk scraping velvet off his antlers on a tree in Yellowstone.

I remember Dad taking us out in the hay field as youngsters to see day-old Killdeer chicks, while the mother Killdeer faked a broken wing. We saw hundreds, if not thousands, of Ruddy turnstones feasting on horseshoe crab eggs in the Delaware Bay. Last Spring, for the first time, I heard a ruffed grouse with its peculiar put-put sounds, like an engine that won't start at Red Rock Lakes. About seven years ago, my wife and I were lucky enough

to hear the croaking of an Elegant Trogon. We followed it to its source in southeastern Arizona. And locally, I count myself very lucky to have seen seven Snowy Owls in a single binocular view at a potato field near Ronan.

Seeing California Condors soaring only a few feet above and hearing the noise from their wings above the Grand Canyon was an unexpected treat in 2003.

Human accomplishments pale in comparison to nature while humans can adapt to nature, nature is never defeated. Future generations deserve the chance to experience all of nature's wonders. And Audubon does what it can to ensure that possibility.



Birds



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beak

crane

cuckoo bird

eagle

egg
feather

hawk

humming bird

kiwi

nest

ostrich

owl

parrot

pelican

penguin

pigeon

seagull

sparrow

woodpecker



The bluebirds are back on Waterworks Hill!

Submitted by Kathy Heffernan

Visit City Open Space to view Western Bluebird and Mountain Bluebirds pairing up. Pairs will nest and lay first clutches in April. Second clutches are usually laid in June.

The bluebird recovery project on Waterworks Hill started by Elizabeth Johnston 12 years ago and now managed by Kathy Heffernan and other volunteers could use your help! If you enjoy hiking and bird-watching, please consider being a volunteer monitor. It's easy! All you need to do is observe activity at any of the project's bluebird boxes, noting species and type of activity, then report this by email or phone. Volunteers are also invited to join us on box-opening, nestling-counting trips if they wish. Call Kathy Heffernan 543-4097 for more information.

During December-February, three bluebird boxes were stolen from the Sunlight addition Open Space land (accessible from trailhead on North Duncan Drive). Two of the bird boxes had been hosting bluebirds for the last 2 years. They fledged 21 baby bluebirds in 2009 alone! A third box was a new addition made by Sentinel High School students. All of the boxes were placed with the permission of

open space land managers. If you have any information on the stolen boxes, please call Kathy @ 543-4097.

And finally, if you would like to start your own bluebird trail, please remember these tips:

- * Follow a North American Bluebird Society plan. Bluebirds prefer 5"x5" floor space. Mountain Bluebirds need 1-9/16" holes.
- * NEVER use treated lumber. This kills birds!
- * Boxes need to be SPACED as bluebirds are territorial. Never put your box up within sight of someone else's. Recommended spacing is 150 yards. While our experience is that boxes can be spaced closer than this, we know that boxes too close result in bluebirds wasting energy on conflicts rather than expending it on raising young.
- * Do not place bluebird boxes near buildings. They will only be used by House Sparrows which are classified by USDA as pests and kill native birds. Bluebirds like open grasslands (pastures, cemeteries, organic orchards, forest burns).
- * Find additional information by googling North American Bluebird Society or Mountain Bluebirds Trails.

Notice

Over the winter, three bluebird boxes were stolen from the Sunlight Addition Open Space Land off North Duncan Drive. One was a new box; the other two had been hosting bluebirds for two years. In the photo, second-graders Kate and Maya helped replace one of the stolen boxes. The original box had fledged twenty Western Bluebird babies. This new box has already been claimed by a Western Bluebird couple.

It is not necessary to hike into Open Space Land to steal bluebird boxes!! Get your own brand-new bluebird boxes by joining Mountain Bluebird Trails! Up to three free boxes are provided with membership or renewal. MBT just asks that you place them in appropriate habitat. Call Kathy Heffernan @ 543-4097.



While waiting my turn to speak during Larry Weeks' class for beginning birders in March, I heard another instructor talking about birds of ponds and wetlands. When she said that coots were in the order Gruiformes with the cranes and rails, it made me think of the latest (2008) *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America* that places the cranes with the waders, 28 pages ahead of coots and rails. In fact, in the new Peterson many birds are no longer in their accustomed places and we will have to get used to a new sequence as other field guides are revised. The swans, geese, and ducks have flown up to the front of the book, to be followed by the upland game birds, landing ahead of the loons and grebes that previously had primacy.

I bought my first bird identification book in 1948, and have since accumulated books to fill five shelves. That collection illustrates how names for birds have changed over time, as has the sequence in which they are arranged, when ornithologists learn more about the evolution of birds and which orders, families, and genera are more primitive. In North America the arbiter of such things is the American Ornithologists' Union that, from time to time, publishes a *Checklist of North American Birds*, with annual supplements to keep it up to date. The latest checklist names 2,055 bird species known from the AOU checklist area. Here is a summary of the present organization of orders and families at the front of the list:

- Tinamiformes: tinamous
- Anseriformes: swans, geese, ducks
- Galliformes: chachalacas, guineafowl, quail, pheasants, grouse, turkeys
- Gaviiformes: loons
- Podicipediformes: grebes
- Phoenicopteriformes: American flamingo
- Procellariiformes: albatrosses, fulmars, petrels
- Pelecaniformes: tropicbirds, boobys, pelicans, cormorants, anhinga, frigatebirds
- Falconiformes: vultures, osprey, kites, eagles, hawks, falcons, caracaras
- Gruiformes: rails, gallinules, coots, limpkin, cranes
- Charadriiformes: lapwings, plovers, oystercatchers, stilts, jacanas, sandpipers, curlews, phalaropes, gulls, terns, murre, puffins



More change is coming that will create new orders, families, genera, and revise the linear sequence of species. For instance: the accipiters may be removed from Falconiformes and given an order of their own, and the osprey may be elevated to family status. For more details go to www.aou.org/checklist

Hi Friends! 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.

You can find the Five Valleys Audubon web site at: <http://www.fvamisoula.org/index.htm>

Welcome New Members:

Dian Adams
Jo M. Corkle
Flightner
Ray Hoffman
Jody Miller
Dorothy Whitehead

F. J. Bischoff
Kristen Crandell
Kate Crouch Goodwin
Lisa Lenard
Lake Duane Shinn

D. E. Collins Jr
Casey Erickson
Betty L. Csorosz
Tad Lubinski
June J. Siple

Jolene Cooper
James & Maureen
Dan & Darlene Hjelmseth
Ora MacKie
Denise Trosclair

Thanks to our Returning Members:

Susan Appett
Cheryl Carroll
Larry Evans
Kathy Heffernan
John Lamma
Mary Mc Court
Joyce Nave
Sheldon Reagan
Norman Smyers

Mr. & Mrs. William Ballard
Shirley Day
Gerry Geske
J. R. Hoem
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Note To Members: Please Check The Mailing Label For Expiration Of Your Membership.

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 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. **COZ N53 OZ**

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:** _____

Phone: _____

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

PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807

<http://www.fvamisoula.org>

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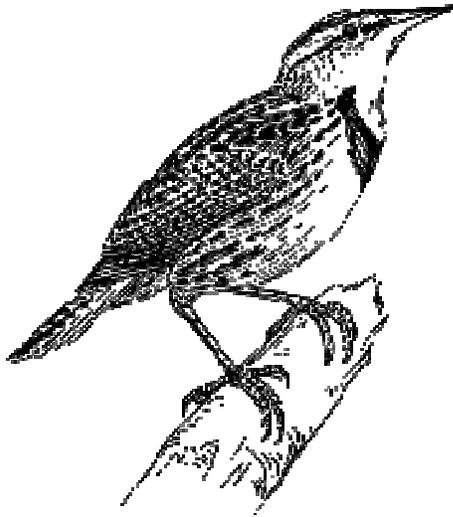
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