

April 2023

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

Saturday, April 1st, 4pm: Five-hour late day trip to the Ninepipes area to look for Short-eared Owls. Meet in the NW corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 4pm.

Monday, April 3rd, 6-8pm: The FVAS Board Meeting will be held at the Missoula Public Library in the Blackfoot Room (the large one).

Monday, April 10th, 7pm: Lee Silliman will present, "The Art of the Bird: An Historical Perspective on Avian Art." The meeting will be held in Room 110 in the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building on the UM campus.

Saturday, April 15th, 10 am – 1 pm: Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center. Expect approximately two miles of level hiking.

Saturday April 22nd, 8-10am: Celebrate Earth Day by attending the Town Bound Birding Series in Greenough Park. See details on page 3.

Saturday, April 29th: All-day field trip to Brown's Lake. Meet at the Missoula College parking lot at 8am.

Saturday, May 27th: Half-day field trip to the Bass Creek area to look for Bobolinks led by William Boggs. Meet at 8am in the WEST END OF THE WALMART PARKING LOT ON BROOKS-93 SOUTH.

The Art of the Bird

Join us Monday, April 10, 2023, at 7pm to hear Lee Silliman present "The Art of the Bird: An Historical Perspective on Avian Art." Lee's visually stunning lecture is an overview of 18th and 19th century avian artworks depicting birds throughout the world. During this period, Europeans were exploring the globe and bringing back detailed reports, rough illustrations, and natural



Spectacled Cormorant
Illustration by John Gerrard
Keulemans, 1905

history specimens for later scientific study, classification, and the edification of their citizenry. Artists made good use of these materials to create quality engravings and lithographs of the many wondrous species of birds that inhabit the planet. Lee will show us numerous examples of these pieces and attention will be given to Alexander Wilson's pioneering efforts in the early 1800s to illustrate his edition of American Ornithology. Books from the speaker's personal library will be available for viewing after the talk, as well as a bibliography handout.

Lee Silliman is a retired educator and museum employee living in Missoula. Since early childhood, he has nurtured a strong interest in the art and history of the frontier American West. He has published numerous articles and presented many conference lectures. Since 1988 Silliman has assembled numerous fine art exhibits drawn from the museum photography collection he superintended, from his personal collection of antique prints, and from his own photographic endeavors. Silliman holds BS and MS degrees from the University of Illinois.

Preceding Lee's presentations, PL Wright Award recipients will give presentations on their research. Hannah Hill and Dylan Ritter will present "To what Extent do Environmental Factors Impact Willow Growth and Recruitment?" and Taylor Coon will present "Prey Remain Identification Accuracy Using Denali Merlins."

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. Due to our membership being composed of many older adults, masks are encouraged, but not required by the university. You may also watch the meeting over zoom:

**FVAS General meeting via Zoom
Apr 10, 2023, 7pm Mtn Time**

<https://umontana.zoom.us/j/98841373833>

Peeps From the Board: Amazing Migration Athletes by Jim Brown

Spring bird migration is now underway. It is an amazing event as birds hurry to get to their breeding grounds. But the most amazing performance to me is the migration of shorebirds. They are without a doubt, long distance endurance athletes at the highest level. I became fascinated in the interesting life of shorebirds after reading the "The Wind Birds" a 1967 book by the well acclaimed nature writer Peter Matthiessen. Shorebirds do seem to fly like the wind. For example, The American Golden Plover flies up to 20,000 miles each year as it migrates in a circular route from its breeding grounds on the arctic tundra to grasslands of southern

South America. The Bar-tailed Godwit flew 8,435 miles nonstop for 11 days from Alaska where it breeds to the Australian Island of Tasmania where it winters. Research indicates that it manages to sleep by alternating between half of its brain at a time. Since this nonstop marvel was first discovered in the Bar-tailed Godwit, it has been shown that other shorebirds also have nonstop flight capability. About 20 shorebird species, including the small Semipalmated Sandpiper that stops off in western Montana both spring and fall, have been recorded making nonstop flights of longer than 3,100 miles-about the distance from Boston to San Francisco.

How do they do this? For one thing they have the right shape. They have long tapered wings allowing them to go at high speeds. They undergo astounding physiological changes. They increase their fat stores by as much as 50 percent of their weight in a short period of time. It would be like a human weighing 130 pounds bulking up to 195 pounds in one week. They build up their pectoral muscles, heart, and lungs. To help control weight they shrink their stomach and gizzard.

In western Montana most of the shorebirds we see are spring and fall migrants. But one of these distance marathoners that stops here to breed and stays for the summer is the Wilson's Phalarope. Its primary breeding range is on the prairies of the western United States and southwestern Canada. We see them in wetlands around Missoula. Besides being marvelous athletes, they display fascinating behavior. Females compete for males. The males then build the nest, incubate the eggs and care for

the young while the female seeks out other males to mate with. The phalaropes do an unusual water dance to attract food. They spin in tight circles on the water by kicking one foot harder than the other, creating upward jets that brings insects and crustaceans within reach.



Wilson's Phalarope
Photo by Daniel Glenn

Another amazing feature of the wind birds is their ability to fly as a single tightly packed group of individuals forming a unit. The flock bobs up and down and weaves around through the air. Somehow individual birds coordinate their wings to avoid collisions. Smaller sized shorebirds seem to be masters at coordinated flight. The Northern Phalarope can be identified at considerable distance simply by how tightly the group weaves and bobs through the air. Research on this phenomenon suggests that individuals are maintaining their position by reacting to movements of adjacent birds. This takes unbelievable or extraordinary eyes and reaction times.

Shorebirds face a growing number of challenges to maintain their populations. Since the 1970's the total shorebird population in North America has declined by almost 70 percent. Loss of habitat and a changing climate are probably the most significant issues. Years ago, market hunting in the United States greatly depleted larger shorebirds such as the Golden Plover and Red Knot largely to feed the growing human population on the east coast. Market hunting was made illegal long ago. However, hunting of shorebirds continues in some parts of the world. A United States Shorebird Conservation Partnership is actively pursuing conservation of shorebird habitat with the major habitat issue being water where human disturbance is limited. In the West providing water for wetlands is key and along coastal areas rising tides will require new beach areas to be established. Conservation efforts need our awareness and support so that these amazing Wind Birds can remain as a part of our complex world.

Attend Advanced Birding Workshops. There are 3 sessions remaining: April 6th (sparrows), April 13th (forest birds), and April 20th (owls). The sessions will be held at 7pm, at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks office on Spurgin Road. There is plenty of room, so you can just show up! The cost is \$15 per session.

Field Trip Summary

By Larry Weeks

Sunday, February 19th: It was a dreary, overcast day with occasional precipitation for the Mission Valley field trip. After meeting at the Cenex gas station in Ronan, we split up into two groups; Alex Kearney led one and the author led the other. The author's group went north while Alex's group started on Duck Road. This writeup will include the author's field trip which included James Dobson from KPAX. I wore a microphone for the trip and James did considerable videoing of the raptors. We drove west on Round Butte Road, right onto Cornelius and left onto Robertson. Our first stop on Robertson was very productive with Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks and Bald Eagles. As we progressed north, the number of raptors diminished. However, at the corner of Carbine and Cornelius, we had two Great Horned Owls, and one was setting on a small nest just above the cars. After a stop at the Town Pump in Polson, we searched the open water by the Polson docks. The birds on Flathead Lake included Common Merganser, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Trumpeter Swan, and Ring-billed Gulls. The search of a nearby habitat for Long-eared Owls was unsuccessful. We then drove south on Valley View Drive but there were very few raptors. However, there was a Great Horned Owl at a house where the resident had asked me to leave on the December field trip. This time, I looked from the road a short distance short of the house. A short distance south, there were two Great Horned Owls in a broken-down willow at a vacant house. As we worked our way towards the Crow Reservoir, there was a spectacular Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk with white streaks on the chest, a white throat and white spotting on the back. On Pedilue Road, my son Ron spotted a flying Prairie Falcon and followed it until it perched on a cross arm. However, before we could get a scope on it, a Rough-legged Hawk chased it away. Our raptor count for the day included 14 Bald Eagles, 25 Red-tailed Hawks, two Harlan's Red-tails, 18 Rough-legged Hawks, seven Great Horned Owls, two American Kestrels, one Prairie Falcon, and three Northern Harriers. There were 17 people on both field trips.



Prairie Falcon
Photo by Bill Bouton

Upcoming Town Bound Birding Events

By Jacob Glass

Earth Day
Saturday April 22nd
8-10am

The April Town Bound Birding Series takes us to Greenough Park.

Come celebrate Earth Day with the birds! Spring migration will be underway, so we should see Lesser Goldfinches, Spotted Towhees, and nesting American Dippers. This promises to be a good one! Park on Monroe Street, across from Locust Street. There will be a post birding hangout at The Patio at Rattlesnake Market.



Saturday May 13th
8-10am

The May Town Bound Birding Series takes us to Kelly Island. Kelly Island is a wonderful place to bird year-round. Spring regulars include Calliope Hummingbirds, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Bullock's Oriole, Lewis's Woodpeckers, & much more.

Five Valleys Audubon Society Membership, Board, & Bird Appreciation Event

World Migratory Bird Day
Saturday May 13th, 2023
3-4:30pm

Visit **Raptors of the Rockies**, in Florence, Montana, where Kate Davis will lead you on a walk around the property. Attendees will learn about Kate's lifelong contributions to raptor education, meet the current birds she houses, and see her artwork.

Afterwards, the group will drive to the Lee Metcalf Headquarters/Visitor Center (approximately 15 minutes south), where we will set up spotting scopes at the main pond. There will also be a social hour and informal potluck. Get to know and have fun with FVAS birders.

Those interested in attending should RSVP with the number in their party to Jacob Glass at jacobpglass@gmail.com

Sneed Collard III to Present at Wings Across the Big Sky 2023! Submitted by Montana Audubon

Wings Across the Big Sky is Montana's premier birding festival, organized by Montana Audubon. This year's local host chapter is the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon. The festival will take place June 9-11th. Registration will open in mid-April. Stay tuned for more information.



Our keynote speaker for the festival is acclaimed author, Sneed B. Collard III, who has written more than ninety books for young people. Sneed is a popular award-winning speaker and has spoken at numerous birding festivals and events.

Sneed will recount the entertaining adventures behind his humorous, award-winning memoir *Warblers and Woodpeckers: A Father-Son Big Year of Birding* (Mountaineers, 2018) and other bird books and articles. Along the way, participants will travel to some of America's best birding hotspots as well as South America, the Galápagos, and the Middle East. Sneed will share highlights of his son's and his "accidental Big Years" of 2022 starring Pinky, America's most famous flamingo.

Visit Sneed's websites at www.sneedcollardiii.com and www.FatherSonBirding.com.

Tips for Better Bird Watching Reprinted from *Bird Watcher's Digest Magazine*

1. Be quiet. Birds are easily startled by loud noises and will flee to cover. It is almost impossible to sneak up on a bird, because birds hear much better than humans. By minimizing noise, you can get much closer to a bird.



2. Avoid sudden movements. Just as loud noises startle birds, so does sudden movement. Getting close to a bird means moving slowly and deliberately. Sudden, jerky movement, even

when swinging your binoculars up to your eyes, can make a bird nervous enough to fly away.

3. Follow the crowd. In the nonbreeding season (the winter months) many small songbirds join flocks of mixed species for protection and to make finding food easier. These flocks are largely silent, but there will almost always be one or two birds making call notes. Following a solitary *chick-a-dee-dee* call may lead you to a mixed flock of chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches.

4. Study habitat. Each bird is specially adapted to a particular habitat. Meadowlarks prefer large open fields, woodpeckers need trees, sparrows favor thickets. What you see will depend on where you look.

5. Work the flocks. Your chance of finding an unusual bird is greater in a flock because you have more birds to look at. Banding studies have shown that when you think you have ten chickadees in your yard, there are probably 20, and when you think you have seen all 20 sparrows in the brush pile, there are probably 20 more.

6. Be patient. A sparrow hopping around in a bush will eventually move into a spot where you can get a good look. Bird watching is often about being patient and waiting for the birds to show themselves.



7. Get the sun at your back. It is not always possible, but moving around so that the sun is behind you will make it easier to see and identify birds. When the bird is between you and the sun, color disappears, and the bird you are trying to identify may be a black silhouette.

8. Avoid brightly colored clothes. Many birds have poor color vision, but bright clothes, like whites, will contrast with the surrounding environment and enhance the appearance of movement. Wear darker colors or earth tones to blend into the background. There is no evidence that actual camouflage clothing works better than neutral, dark clothing.

9. Look around. Many bird watchers, focused on the flock in the thicket, forget to look at the other habitats around them. In particular, they forget to look up and thus miss the flock of geese or the soaring hawk. Or, while studying the ducks on the lake, unaware bird watchers may ignore the flock of kinglets in the trees behind them and miss seeing a new bird.

Welcome New Members

Treasa Glinnwater
Faye Olsen
Lance Schelyan
Keith Graham
Doug Kikkert
Lance Schelvan

Regina Veitenheimer
Sharon Rose Thompson
Lucia Young
Adam Voorhees
Dana Archibald
Jeanne Rothenbuecher



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: <https://fvaudubon.org/make-a-donation/>

\$ _____ \$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. \$ _____ Total contribution
\$ _____ Donate to our General Fund to support our habitat protection work within Missoula County, nonprofit organizations that care for birds, and education on birds and birding. \$ _____ Free for students, includes FVAS newsletter via email.
_____ I would like to Volunteer. Please contact me.

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: <https://act.audubon.org/a/join>. 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: <https://mtaudubon.org/>. Please give generously to each organization. Although independent, we work together to protect what we all love.

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