

May 2023

# Birding Observer



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

### Calendar

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**May 1<sup>st</sup>, 6-8pm:** The FVAS Board Meeting will be held at the home of our President, Rose Leach: 4600 Edgewood Dr, Missoula, just past E. Missoula, 3rd house on right.

**May 8<sup>th</sup>, 7pm:** UM Flight Lab doctoral student, Rosalee Elting, will present on hummingbirds at our May meeting in Room 110 of the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building on the UM campus.

**May 13<sup>th</sup>, 8-10am:** The May Town Bound Birding Series takes us to Kelly Island, where we may see Calliope Hummingbirds, Black-headed Grosbeaks, Bullock's Oriole, Lewis's Woodpeckers, & much more. Directions: Take Spurgin Road off Clements Road (heading west), and then take a right about 1 mile later onto Lena Lane. There will be a Post birding hangout at The Trough.

**May 20<sup>th</sup>, 10am-1pm:** Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center. Expect two miles of level hiking.

**May 27<sup>th</sup>, 8am:** 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.

**May 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup>:** Two-day trip to Freezout Lake. See details in the writeup on page 3.

**June 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>:** Four-day field trip to Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge. See details in the writeup on page 3.

### The Glory of Hummingbirds

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Rufous Hummingbird

Please join us for our final chapter meeting before the summer break on Monday, May 8<sup>th</sup> at 7pm to hear Rosalee Elting present her talk: **"The Edge of Glory: Bold Behaviors and Energetic Constraints in Hummingbirds."**

Rosalee is passionate about understanding how hummingbirds—a taxon hosting the world's smallest bird, the highest metabolic rate of any vertebrate, intense coloration, and sexual displays—can even survive! As a first-year doctoral student in the University of Montana Flight Lab, Rosalee explores how some individuals are better than others at fighting and maintaining food resources. In work conducted across 17 species in both hemispheres of the Americas, she asked how diluted nectars can be before they no longer meet the extreme energetic demands of hummingbirds. In her most recent exploration of the bold, colorful, and confusing life of a hummingbird, she is investigating behaviors we see every year at our feeders—daring dives, chases, and fights! She proposes that small morphological differences between individuals might be responsible for differences in flight performance, energetic budgets, and dominance hierarchies. Rosalee will tell us about her work and the work that is happening in our own back yards. She is using metabolic measures and high-speed videography on private land through the Bitterroot and Rattlesnake Valleys.

Rosalee grew up on a farm in Oregon. She received a Bachelors in Ecology and Field Biology from George Fox University. In her spare time, she loves birding, trail running, cross-country skiing, baking desserts, and reading at local breweries.

Preceding Rosalee's talk, PL Wright Award recipient Lillian Krach will present, "Restoration of Heavy Metal Polluted Areas—Telomere Physiology in Songbirds."

The meeting will be held in Room 110 of the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building (ISB) on the UM campus. The building is located 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: <https://umontana.zoom.us/j/97305811010>

## Field Trip Summaries

By Larry Weeks

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# Field Trips!

**Saturday, March 25<sup>th</sup>:** The early spring field trip to the Lee Metcalf NWR was on the cool side but we didn't have any precipitation. Ponds 5 and 6 had a good collection of ducks which included Barrow's Goldeneyes and a single Canvasback. As we started hiking the Kenai Trail, we encountered American Tree Sparrows at the first bridge. At Pond 8, we had Buffleheads, a Spotted Towhee that was foraging in the leaf litter and heard a Virginia Rail. Pond 10 had the first Double-crested Cormorant of the year and several Lesser Scaup. On the return trip from Pond 10, there were eight Trumpeter Swans flying up and down the valley, and eventually landed on Pond 5. Tree Swallows were also observed for the first time this year. A Turkey Vulture and an immature Bald Eagle were soaring neat the Visitor's Center. At the Wildlife Viewing Area, the male Great Horned Owl was found in his usual roosting tree near the cavity nest, but the female was not visible in the nest. Other birds included two Belted Kingfishers and both Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches. There were 10 people on the field trip, and we had 41 species.

**Saturday April 1<sup>st</sup>:** Eight people left the U of M at 4:00pm and were joined by eight more people at the intersection of Dublin Gulch Road and highway 93. Our first stop was on West Post Creek Road where a Great Horned Owl was on a nest in a cottonwood tree. We continued east on West Post Creek Road and then north on Logan Road where we encountered two juvenile and one adult Bald Eagles in the air. The adult landed on a large cross arm next to the cars. Then one of the juveniles landed on the other end of the cross arm and the adult immediately chased it away. In the distance there was another adult Bald Eagle sitting on a large nest. A little further up Logan Road, we witnessed a conflict between a Rough-legged Hawk and a Northern Harrier. One of the birds was carrying prey and the other bird was trying to steal it. Eventually the prey was dropped to the ground. Most of the water in the Mission Valley was iced over except for a pond just north of Olsen Road which had a good collection of waterfowl. There were large quantities of Canvasbacks, Lesser Scaup, American Wigeons, and Northern Pintails plus smaller numbers of Redheads, Buffleheads and Ring-necked Ducks. We then went to Duck Road to look for Short-eared Owls, but it was very windy, and we didn't have any luck. We then proceeded

south on Ninepipes Road to just south of Olsen Road. It was approaching 7:00pm, the sun was setting, and the wind had diminished a little. Finally, we started to see Short-eared Owls flying high and occasionally dropping doing their mating flight. It was estimated that there were five owls in the area. Don and Andrea Stirele went back to Duck Road and had five Short-eared owls and seven Snow Geese. We ended up with 27 species.

## Peeps From the Board: Beginning Bird Walks By Larry Weeks

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The Beginning Bird Walks at the Lee Metcalf NWR are held on the third Saturday of each month except for December. The third Saturday in December conflicts with the Missoula Christmas Bird Count except for those when the CBC can be held on December 14th. The bird walks start at 10:00 am at the Visitor's Center and lasts for about three hours. The first half of the trip included a short hike on the Kenai Trail and then moves to the Wildlife Viewing Area.

The average attendance for the past year was 14 people, with a high of 26 and a low of three. The low occurred in November when the temperature was 0 degrees F. On that trip we saw a Northern Goshawk on the Kenai Trail. When it flew south, Alex Kearney photographed the bird. The photo showed that it was wearing "jess" which falconers use to recapture their birds. We found out later that it was a falconry bird that had been lost in the Bitterroot. We heard Virginia Rail on every trip. It has got to be a tough bird to survive the winter. Trumpeter Swan were recorded on eight trips, Great Horned Owls on seven trips and porcupines were seen on five trips. There were 100 species seen during the past year. Some of the more unusual birds included Horned Grebe, White Pelican, Ross's Goose, Barrow's Goldeneyes, Swainson's Hawk, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, Black-chinned Hummingbird, Lewis's Woodpecker, and American Tree Sparrow.

I am looking for someone to replace Rose Stoudt who assisted me for several years until she moved to Seattle. An ideal person would be knowledgeable about local birds and enjoy helping novice birders on how to identify the birds. Having a spotting scope would be nice because much of the viewing is waterfowl on the ponds. Please contact me if you are interested.



## How Do Cooper's and Sharp-Shinned Hawks Coexist In Backyards?

By Marc Devokaitis

Reprinted from *allaboutbirds.org* (April 5, 2023)

A new study using Project FeederWatch data showed why Cooper's Hawks and Sharp-shinned Hawks can share the same backyard when hunting at bird feeders.

The research, published in August 2022 in the *Journal of Avian Biology*, analyzed over 1,000 observations of accipiter predation from Project FeederWatch, a



Cooper's Hawk  
Photo by Bryan Calk

partnership between the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada, which collects data from people across the U.S. and Canada who count birds at their feeders each winter. The study results revealed which birds are on the menu for the two well-known feeder stalkers.

Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks are North America's most common accipiters—the group of hawks that specializes in hunting birds on the wing. Their ranges overlap widely, and researchers wanted to know if differences in prey preferences might be one reason that these similar species are able to share the same space.

Cooper's Hawks are much larger than sharpies (on average, they weigh twice as much and are 50% longer), but the research team found that small songbirds—especially finches and sparrows—were top menu items for both Cooper's and sharpies. The overall favorite: Dark-eyed Juncos.



Sharp-shinned Hawk  
By Vickie Anderson

"Juncos are like the popcorn of the avian world," says lead author Eliot Miller, a postdoctoral fellow at the Cornell Lab. He says juncos' intense ground-feeding habits make them easy marks.

While the petite Sharp-shinned Hawks heavily favored these smaller species, the bulkier Cooper's Hawks went

for both the popcorn and the hot dogs. Along with taking their share of small birds, Cooper's Hawks frequently targeted medium-sized birds such as doves, starlings, and blackbirds.

"The smaller birds are much more abundant across different habitats," says Miller, "so it makes sense that both hawk species would exploit that resource."

Doves and starlings are often concentrated in urban areas, and Miller thinks that could be one reason that Cooper's Hawks have moved into cities.

The FeederWatch data also showed that many of the most-preyed-upon bird species shared a tendency to forage and feed on the ground. On the contrary, small songbirds such as chickadees and nuthatches—which abscond to a safe perch after quickly plucking seed from a feeder—became hawk food much less frequently.

## Upcoming Multi-day Field Trips By Larry Weeks

### May 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup>:

The two-day field trip to Freezout Lake and Benton Lake is scheduled for May 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup>. The plan is to leave Missoula at 7:00 am on May 27th and drive to Freezout Lake. We will spend the night in Choteau and stay at the



Stage Stop Inn (406-466-5900). Participants are asked to make reservations in advance. Plan to take lunches for 2 days. We will eat dinner together at a local restaurant. Breakfast is provided by the motel. We will drive to Benton Lake on May 28th. Please contact Larry Weeks if you plan to attend, and he will coordinate carpooling. There is a \$10 charge for multi-day field trips. Expect about one half mile of level hiking at Freezout Lake.

**June 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>:** A four-day field trip to Malta and Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge has been scheduled for June 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>. We will camp at James Kipp the first night and the city park in Malta the next two nights. Please contact Larry Weeks if you plan to attend and he will coordinate carpooling and meals. There is a \$10 charge for multi-day field trips. There maybe be one mile of level hiking.

## Citizen Science: Save These Dates! By Montana Audubon

Two great state-wide citizen science projects take place across the state this spring, and we don't want you to miss out!

**Great Blue Heron citizen science surveys occur from May 1st - June 15th, and Audubon's Climate Watch runs from May 15th - June 15th.**



Both projects will take you to beautiful locations across the state and have great resources for simple data collection.

Our partnership with the Montana Natural Heritage Program continues to help us deliver on our Great Blue Heron project. We even have a slick app that allows in-field data collection to run smoothly on any smartphone, adding to your enjoyment observing colonies, or rookeries, where herons are found, rather than wrestling with paper data.

The data is so important! Findings from the nationwide Breeding Bird Survey indicate that populations of Great Blue Heron have declined every year from 1966 to 2015. Several factors may be to blame, including the loss of riparian cottonwood stands, increased urban sprawl, human disturbance, and changing waterway conditions. Due to these changes, herons commonly abandon their nests and move to better locations, often to more remote and undisturbed areas, making population monitoring difficult.



Great Blue Heron

That's where you come in. If you are interested in becoming a citizen scientist or have any questions, please email Amy Seaman at [aseaman@mtaudubon.org](mailto:aseaman@mtaudubon.org) or visit our Citizen Science webpage: <https://mtaudubon.org/birds-science/citizen-science-opportunities/>.

## Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) By Montana Audubon

We are delighted to share that the bipartisan Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) was formally reintroduced in the U.S. Senate in early April.

If passed, this act will:

- Fund conservation efforts for more than 12,000 species in need of assistance by providing \$1.4 billion in dedicated annual funding for proactive, on-the-ground efforts across the country
- Provide Tribal nations \$97.5 million annually to fund proactive wildlife conservation efforts on roughly 140 million acres of land
- Ensure wildlife recovery efforts will be guided by the Congressionally-mandated State Wildlife Action Plans, which identify specific strategies to restore the populations of species of greatest conservation need
- Accelerate the recovery of approximately 1,600 U.S. species already listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act
- Include improvements to ensure funds are appropriately targeted to the areas of greatest need and facilitate additional investments in protecting at-risk plant species

Montana Audubon is proud to be leading the coalition in our state!



# Welcome New Members

Vickie Born Ropp  
Christine Jewett  
Cinda Sweeney  
Kenneth Wisherd  
Lori Cummings  
Linda Krieg  
Warren Midyett

Pam Carlton  
Janet Stevens  
Matt T. Trentman  
Stephen Bert  
Norman Jacobson  
William McDowell  
Richard & Kathrin Newman



## 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](mailto:treasurer@FVAudubon.org) or Membership Promotion Chair, Thomas Kallmeyer at [thomas@tarns.net](mailto:thomas@tarns.net).

## Five Valleys Audubon Society Membership Application

Please support Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS). There are several ways to donate. All options include the *Birding Observer* newsletter and allow you to 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

\$\_\_\_\_\_ Free for students, includes FVAS newsletter via email.

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to Volunteer. Please contact me.  
(Please provide an email address below.)  
\_\_\_\_\_

\$\_\_\_\_\_ 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.

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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