

June 2023

# Birding Observer



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

## Calendar



- \* **June 3, 8 am:** Half-day field trip to the Erskine Fishing Access. Meet at the Missoula College parking lot. Approximately two miles of level hiking.
- \* **June 10, 8am:** The Town Bound Birding Series takes us to the Kim William Natural Area. Meet on the University side of the Van Buren ST footbridge. There will be a post birding hangout at Bernice's Bakery.
- \* **June 13–16:** Four-day trip to Bowdoin NWR. We will camp at James Kipp the first night and the city park in Malta the next two nights. Contact Larry Weeks if you plan to attend. He will coordinate carpooling and meals.
- \* **June 17, 10am–1pm:** Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge's Visitors Center. Expect two miles of level hiking.
- \* **June 17, 3-4:30pm:** Visit Raptors of the Rockies, in Florence, MT, where Kate Davis will lead you on a tour. If you wish to attend, RSVP with the number in their party to Jacob Glass at [jacobpglass@gmail.com](mailto:jacobpglass@gmail.com).
- \* **July 10 -13:** The four-day trip to Glacier is FULL.
- \* **July 15, 7am:** The Town Bound Birding Series takes us to the Milwaukee Trail. Meet in front of Bernice's Bakery. There will be a post birding hangout at the Gild.
- \* **July 15, 10am–1 pm:** Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the trip leader at the Refuge's Visitors Center. Expect two miles of level hiking.
- \* **July 28, 6am:** All-day field trip to Deer Lodge to visit a bird banding station and look for shorebirds. Due to parking restrictions at UM and Missoula College on weekdays, we will meet at the South Campus Park & Ride on South Avenue near the softball field.
- \* **August 19, 10am–1pm:** Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the trip leader at the Refuge's Visitor's Center. Expect two miles of level hiking.
- \* **August 26, 7am:** All-day field trip to Freezout Lake to look for shorebirds. Meet in the Adams Center parking lot. Expect one mile of level hiking.



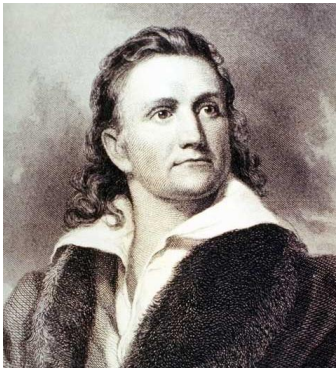
## Field Trip Summary

By Larry Weeks

**Saturday, April 29<sup>th</sup>:** The field trip to Brown's Lake started with a detour at Sunset Hill Road to look for a Loggerhead Shrike, which was seen earlier in the week. Unfortunately, the shrike was not located but we did find Wilson's Snipe, a Chipping Sparrow, both bluebirds, and a Bald Eagle. The Clearwater River stop had Hooded Mergansers, Common Goldeneye, Buffleheads, a Green-winged Teal, and a Red-naped Sapsucker. The first pond after Ovando had a diversity of ducks and both swans. After returning to the road, we saw two Long-billed Curlews. Then there was an immature Golden Eagle soaring over the road, and everyone got a satisfying look. Upon arrival at the aspen grove, we saw a Williamson Sapsucker flying around. When we played his drumming, he returned, and everyone got a scope view. We also found the female Williamson. Other birds at this location included a Peregrine Falcon, Evening Grosbeaks, Red Crossbills, Cassin's Finch, and a Clark's Nutcracker. We arrived at Brown's Lake, to find that 90% of it was covered by ice. The small amount of open water in the shallow bay had at least four Common Loons, large numbers of Northern Shovelers, Ruddy Ducks, and a few Red-necked Grebes. As we drove around the lake, there saw a flock of 80 Snow Geese, and they eventually landed on the ice. Scoping the flock from the picnic area, one Ross's Goose was identified. There was a group of Common Ravens and a couple of Bald Eagles that were feeding on something dead on the ice. Before we left, the Snow Geese flew off the lake and landed near the exit road, giving us our best look. Our best birding of the day was at the ponds by the Cutoff Road which were ice-free. Birds included Lesser Yellowlegs, American Avocets, one Marbled Godwit, Canvasbacks, Redheads, a Forster's Tern, Virginia Rail, singing Marsh Wrens, and another flock of 100 Snow Geese. Near the end of the trip, we had two Sandhill Cranes and four Long-billed Curlews. There were 24 people on the trip, and we had 70 species. It was a beautiful, warm day with no wind.

## Peeps From the Board: The Audubon Legacy, or What's in a Name By Andrea Stierle

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John James Audubon was an adventurer, naturalist, artist, woodsman, and storyteller. Most of us know him as a great champion of birds who traveled to North America in the early 19th century, with a determination to document all the birds living on this continent.

His legacy is preserved in the National Audubon Society, and in the birds that bear his name – Audubon's Shearwater and Audubon's Oriole. But Audubon was also a slaveholder, "a man of his time" as the argument goes, and disdainful of the abolitionist movements on both sides of the Atlantic.

After the National Audubon Society considered changing its name, on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023, they posted the following statement on their website: "The Board of Directors of the National Audubon Society (NAS) today announced that it has decided to retain the name of the organization, after a lengthy process to examine its name in light of the personal history of its namesake, John James Audubon. The decision was made taking into consideration many factors, including the complexity of John James Audubon's legacy and how the decision would impact NAS's mission to protect birds and the places they need long into the future. The organization will continue its non-partisan commitment to habitat conservation and climate action, its agenda-setting policy work, and community-building efforts to advance its mission."

Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS) is the Missoula chapter of the NAS. Our chapter formed in 1977 and is one of nine Audubon Society chapters in Montana. We promote the conservation of natural resources through our birding, education, and conservation activities. We are committed to our mission:

- Encouraging the enjoyment of wildlife and our natural heritage.
- Educating others about wildlife and the need to live in harmony with nature.
- Advocating actions that favor wildlife and environmentally sensitive uses of resources.

- Supporting research on wildlife and the environment.
- Sharing and supporting the values and objectives of the National Audubon.

Several FVAS Board members wrote thoughtful comments reflecting their views about changing the chapter's name. I compiled these comments for the Board to discuss at our April Board meeting. Some Board members believe we must change our name eventually, some members do not share that belief, and others are undecided. It is a critical issue to discuss, no matter what we ultimately decide. I have included comments from Board members in this article that reflect the issues and feelings expressed.

- "While the name has primarily been associated with birds and the beauty of birds for many decades, that just is not so anymore. As the full history of John James Audubon has come to light, the name is now associated with racism. While National Audubon and Montana Audubon have decided not to change their names, I think it is only a matter of time before they do. Our country is increasingly focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Let's not wait to change the Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS) name until we feel social pressure to do so. Let's be bold and proactive by coming up with new names that reflect the group's current values and that are respectful of the entire community.

Even if the Audubon name isn't deterring anyone from joining FVAS currently, it may in the future, especially as we continue efforts to attract more young people. Words matter. Our name matters. If even just a handful of people in Missoula associate the Audubon name with racism, why not take this simple step forward? By changing the FVAS name, we will demonstrate our commitment to building an inclusive birding and conservation community and our ability to meet the community's needs."



*Great Egret* by John James Audubon

- “It surprises me that NAS decided to keep the Audubon name while having recently developed programs targeted to young, urban populations (read ethnic minorities and people of color). My gut feeling is to gradually move towards changing our name, but to what? I like that Seattle Audubon has dropped the Audubon moniker, with a changed logo, while still working out an alternative name. This does seem like a process to undertake over time; in the meanwhile, it's best to learn facts and other background info.”



*White-headed Eagle* by John James Audubon

- “FVAS has the opportunity to support a welcoming and inclusive birding community in Missoula. Whether or not FVA decides to change the name of the chapter at this time, I think it’s important to prioritize considering what future generations of birders and environmental stewards look like and understand how we can encourage their participation in the organization in order to maintain the FVAS mission for years to come.”
- “I am of the opinion that we should start the process of changing our name, and I am looking forward to having a serious discussion about it.”
- “I submit the following thoughts concerning the question of changing our organization’s name:
  1. To do so would be to forfeit a substantial weight of goodwill, which in business accounting refers to the value of an organization’s patronage, reputation, and the like, beyond its tangible assets. In the case of the Audubon name, that value is considerable: over a century’s worth of instant recognition as the oldest, most reliable, most trustworthy, most focused organization exclusively devoted to the conservation and appreciation of birds.
  2. I suggest that after 110 years, the Audubon name in almost everyone’s mind has lost all reference to Audubon the man, and instead calls up for most of us the image of an organization of bird-lovers devoted whole-heartedly to birds, their beauty and their welfare. As with many names (such as Washington D.C., Washington State, etc), while the naming may have been originally intended to honor the namesake, over time it has lost virtually any reference at all to the historical person, and instead has evolved into the label for the entity named, and its characteristics and values.
  3. What problem would we be addressing with a name change? Slaveholding – the fault we find in

Audubon the man – is not the issue. The question of slavery in this country was settled 160 years ago – and not by any name-change, but by the deaths of 600,000 young men in the Civil War. Certainly, though, the vestiges of slavery remain. However, I don’t believe they taint our organization. In my experience, Five Valleys is as open and welcoming a group as anyone could wish. We almost beg people to join us. And I wonder if there is evidence that even one person, in this community or elsewhere, has been offended by our name during the nearly 50 years of our existence. If not, perhaps we ought to refrain from fixing what isn’t broken.

4. Are we nevertheless anxious about “affirming Audubon’s legacy?” A legacy refers to the primary inheritance we receive from a dead person, not to every aspect of his or her life. In Audubon’s case, that legacy is clear: his bird paintings and his prescient sense of the need for bird conservation. Accepting that legacy does not mean endorsing every aspect of the man’s life, whether it be his tendency toward excessive self-promotion, his profligate use of the shotgun, or his ownership of slaves in the 19th century.
  5. It’s unclear what changing our name would do for bird conservation, which is our mission. In that connection, I would suggest that our members pay their dues, and our donors direct their sometimes very substantial gifts to us in the expectation that we will use our resources to help birds—not engage in social commentary, or even social reform. Saving birds—and their (and our) earth—is becoming a gigantic, a nearly impossible, task. Let’s focus on that—as the many organizations going by the name of Audubon always have.”
- “I certainly condemn racism and the culture that allowed slavery to exist, as I think our Chapter should do as well. However, I don’t believe that

condemning individuals from the past by denying their name will significantly help in diminishing racism. We need to look to the present not the past in identifying and condemning institutions that allow and support racism. If we focus on individuals who in the past believed in slavery, we also need to do away with all mention of Washington and Jefferson who both held slaves. Five Valleys Audubon is a chapter of the National Audubon Society, a long-standing, well known conservation organization. I believe our Chapter's ability to accomplish conservation is greatly enhanced by the Audubon name. When we try to influence County and City leaders including elected officials our name containing Audubon gets more attention and respect because of the known conservation mission of the Audubon organization. I fear that eliminating Audubon from our chapter's name would greatly diminish our ability to promote and influence conservation. I believe it is wise to remain as a chapter of National Audubon and as long as they retain the name Audubon, we should do so also."

The Board discussion was passionate, but thoughtful. Heated at times, but respectful. I offer these comments and perspectives for our membership to read and consider. Do we follow the example of the National and Montana Audubon Societies and retain our name for the foreseeable future, or do we begin the process of changing our name, in the not too distant future?

## Help Wanted: Bluebird Preserve Bluebird Box Monitor



On April 22, the City of Missoula opened the 124-acre Bluebird Preserve Open Space near Grant Creek. Bluebird Preserve contains good grassland habitat for Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. Currently, the Preserve has no bluebird

boxes. In collaboration with the City of Missoula, we are seeking an individual interested in a long-term commitment to monitoring (about once/week April-August) and maintaining bluebird boxes in this new open space. If that individual is willing to join Mountain Bluebird Trails, we can provide 3 bluebird boxes and a monitoring guide. We can help with the placement of

boxes and give lots of free advice. Contact Kathy at [kjohnheff@gmail.com](mailto:kjohnheff@gmail.com) for more information.

## The Bluebirds of Waterworks Hill By Kathy Heffernan

The bluebirds of Missoula's North Hills continue to flourish in the 26th year since the initial placement of bluebird boxes on Waterworks Hill. In 2022, eighty-one bluebirds fledged from boxes in the North Hills. All fledglings were Western Bluebirds. Mountain Bluebirds attempted two nests but were not successful. Numerous Tree Swallows also used the boxes and successfully fledged young. Wrens and chickadees used two special boxes tucked away in Chokecherry Draw. Invasive House Sparrows were humanely discouraged from reproducing at three boxes.

The North Hills boxes are maintained, monitored, repaired, and replaced as needed by volunteers. These volunteers pay all costs of managing the boxes. In addition, Dr. Renee Duckworth of University of Arizona hires biologists and graduate students to band birds and assist with monitoring. Their work includes Waterworks and the North Hills, Mount Jumbo, Blue Mountain, and the Greenough/Ovando area.

The bluebird boxes are placed in proper habitat and spaced to allow for the bluebirds' territorial habits. Please note that bluebird boxes placed in town or near houses/barns attract House Sparrows, non-native invasive pests that compete with and kill native birds. Bluebird boxes should only be placed in grassland or open forest habitat, away from housing, House Sparrows, and roaming cats.

### ***Tree Swallow Slot Box – A Good Alternative***

Due to the prevalence of aggressive, invasive House Sparrows and wandering cats, bluebird boxes should NOT be placed in town or near houses.

Want a great bird box, but live in town? Consider a Tree Swallow slot box. These boxes will welcome Tree Swallows, Violet-Green Swallows, Chickadees, and Wrens! If sized properly, the slot (15/16" high by 2-1/4" wide) will prevent House Sparrows from entering. Monitor regularly however to be sure! House Sparrows are wily birds! Important: Roughen up the inside of the box by scoring with a nail. Swallows cannot cling to smooth surfaces and can get trapped inside box if the lumber is smooth. Email [kjohnheff@gmail.com](mailto:kjohnheff@gmail.com) for a copy of Tree Swallow Slot Box plans.

## Welcome New Members

William Birck  
Ralph Flockerzi  
Joel Karki  
Emma Trotter  
Jane Levy

Dave Chrismon  
John Herrlin  
Adara Panther  
Birdie Warnken



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.

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

(Please provide an email address below.)

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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