

October 2023

Birding Observer



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

Calendar



- **October 7th:** The field trip to Roger's Pass for raptor banding is full. Contact Larry Weeks if you want to join the waitlist, in case of cancellations.
- **October 9th, 5:30-6:30pm:** The board meeting will precede the program meeting, in Room 110 in the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building at UM.
- **October 9th, 7pm:** Our program meeting will be led by Joshua Lisbon, Education Director of MPG Ranch, who will present on Mountain Lions of the Northern Sapphire Mountains.
- **Saturday, October 21st, 10am:** Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the field trip leader at the Visitor's Center at 10 am and expect approximately two miles of level hiking.
- **Sunday, October 22nd, 9am:** All-day field trip to Brown's Lake to look for Loons and Scoters. Meet at 9 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot. No hiking will be involved.

Roaring into Fall with an Exciting Program

Please join us on October 9th at 7:00 PM for our monthly chapter meeting to hear our speaker, Joshua Lisbon, regale us with tales of fascinating felines during his talk, Mountain Lions of the Northern Sapphire Mountains.

Joshua's presentation will briefly discuss the history and methods of MPG Ranch's Northern Sapphire Mountain Lion Research Project, a long-term population study. The bulk of Joshua's talk will focus on the findings of the study, specifically as to cougar social organization and unique behavioral interactions. We will also delve into the life story of particular individuals and watch fascinating video clips captured over the decade-long project and from Joshua's and filmmaker Colin Ruggiero's award-winning film, *Tracking Notes: The Secret World of Mountain Lions*.

Joshua Lisbon is the Education Director for MPG Ranch, a private conservation organization that stewards over 15,000 acres in the Bitterroot Valley. Since 2012, Joshua has led a winter mountain lion population study on MPG Ranch and surrounding public lands. The project is non-invasive, meaning cats are never collared or handled. The project tracks the resident population and the relatedness of those individuals over time through field study and DNA sampling. Recently, this research led to documentary film work with MPG and PBS.

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. Because our membership consists of many older adults, masks are encouraged, but not required by the university. You also have the option of watching the meeting over the zoom link listed below.



Mountain Lion
Film still by Colin Ruggiero

<https://umontana.zoom.us/j/97183736368>

Peeps From the Board: Fort Missoula Commons By Andrea Stierle

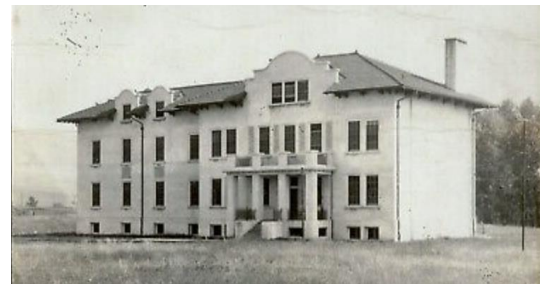
I have been a longtime advocate of the preservation and restoration of historical buildings and properties. In 1994 I was one of four founding members of *Butte Citizens for Preservation and Revitalization* (CPR), dedicated to the thoughtful repurposing of some of the great old buildings of Butte, while protecting their historical character. I was also a member of the Butte Planning Board, and it was my mission to make sure that developers honored wetlands and other ecologically sensitive areas in Butte – sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

The current debate surrounding the Fort Missoula Commons Project, which purports to “rehabilitate” the Old Post Hospital in Fort Missoula, is an important one. It forces Missoulians to weigh the comparative values of “historic preservation” – with concomitant rezoning to allow commercial and residential construction in an area zoned for open space – along with the protection of critical riparian habitat along the Bitterroot River. There is no question in my mind which I value more. “Paving paradise to put up a parking lot” has never been my idea of appropriate development.

The Fort Missoula Commons Project involves a developer who purchased the Old Post Hospital in Fort Missoula in 2019. His proposal to rehabilitate the Hospital requires rezoning several acres of Fort Missoula from open space to commercial/residential to facilitate the construction of two commercial buildings and 16 housing units to fund his endeavor. Unfortunately, several of these houses would be built next to and within the riparian zone along the Bitterroot River, one of the most valuable wetlands in the Missoula Valley.

Riparian zones occur along the edges of rivers, streams, lakes, and other water bodies. They provide habitat (including migration routes and habitat connectors) for a diversity of wildlife. They stabilize stream banks and help maintain water quality. The rich vegetation in riparian habitats helps shade streams, which can reduce water temperatures for fish, a growing concern as warming temperatures threaten the health of many fish species, including native trout.

Here in Missoula, the Bitterroot River corridor supports a unique array of riparian and wetland wildlife. The riverbank is one of the most valuable, bird-rich locations



The Old Post Hospital

in the Missoula Valley. It provides essential habitat for a significant number of migrant and breeding bird species. This *connectivity*, all the way from Buckhouse Bridge to Maclay Flat, is an essential component of its value as wildlife habitat. This corridor is part of the Clark Fork River-Grass Valley Important Bird Area (IBA), which is formally recognized as a cornerstone in the Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan. Damage to this corridor would have a permanent detrimental impact on migrant and breeding birds. Disregard of these sensitive habitats is the major reason for the alarming population loss experienced by many bird species in North America.

On May 3, 2023, the Historic Preservation Commission voted to deny the historic preservation permit for the Fort Missoula Commons project. The developer appealed that decision to the Missoula City Council.

This development would require rezoning. The current Fort Missoula zoning protects the buildings, historic landscape, and open space. The residential development would reduce an area with approximately 90% open space down to 40%. Members of the Commission said the project was “incompatible” with the site. Residential living units do not belong in Fort Missoula. The natural and historic values in Fort Missoula should be protected for all citizens to enjoy now and into the future.

The Old Post Hospital can be stabilized without commercial and residential development using historic grants, historic tax credits, community, and organizational support. But once these historic open spaces and natural habitats are zoned out of existence, they are gone forever. Please visit: <https://fvaudubon.org/historic-fort-missoula-coalition/> for more information about this proposal and the Historic Fort Missoula Coalition (including FVAS) that has formed to oppose the rezoning and construction that threaten this lovely riparian zone.

Important dates:

- Thursday, September 28 by 5pm: This is the deadline for public comment to be included in the report to City Council for the October 2 hearing.



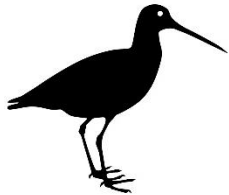
- Monday, October 2 at 6pm: The Missoula City Council will hold a public hearing about this issue.
- Thursday, October 19 at 9am: The Missoula City Council will hold a special session to decide the appeal.

Public comments can be submitted electronically to fortmissoulacommons@ci.missoula.mt.us or by mail to City Clerk, 435 Ryman, Missoula, MT 59802.

After the September 28 comment deadline, you may still contact the Missoula City Council and your City Council Ward members to express your concerns about this project to influence their decisions in the October 2 and October 19 meetings. If you care about the preservation of this important riparian zone, please contact the Missoula City Council at council@ci.missoula.mt.us or call 406-552-6012. You can also contact the Council members for your ward at this site:

<https://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/Directory.aspx?did=13>

Field Trip Summary By Larry Weeks



Saturday, August 26th: The August field trip was to Freezout Lake with a focus on shorebirds. After a pit stop at the outhouse near the headquarters, we travelled south to a dike that extends out into the lake. Unfortunately, the area that is usually mud was completely dry, and there were no shorebirds. We did flush an American Bittern from the bullrushes at the edge of the dike. The next stop was at the “neck” where we had both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, a Baird’s Sandpiper and a Sanderling. There were Western Grebes at that location, and the rocky islands had Double-crested Cormorants and White Pelicans. At the second outhouse, the shoreline along the paved sidewalk had the best shorebirds. There were Semipalmated Plovers, Killdeer, Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers, and the best bird, a Dunlin. We heard a Sora, saw a Common Tern and lots of Franklin’s Gulls at that location. We then went to Pond 4, which had a little habitat but few shorebirds. Pond 1 had a single Snow Goose that had been there all summer. We stopped at some shade at the Duffy place and found Eastern and Western Kingbirds and a Western Wood Pewee. Then half of the group started back to Missoula, and the other half went back to the areas we had shorebirds at Freezout. We flushed a second American Bittern near the second outhouse and found a Spotted Sandpiper in winter plumage. There were 10 people on the trip, and we had 45 species.

Birds of Passage (1858)

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Black shadows fall
From the lindens tall,
That lift aloft their massive wall
Against the southern sky;



And from the realms
Of the shadowy elms
A tide-like darkness overwhelms
The fields that round us lie.

But the night is fair,
And everywhere
A warm, soft vapor fills the air,
And distant sounds seem near,



And above, in the light
Of the star-lit night,
Swift birds of passage wing their flight
Through the dewy atmosphere.

I hear the beat
Of their pinions fleet,
As from the land of snow and sleet
They seek a southern lea.



I hear the cry
Of their voices high
Falling dreamily through the sky,
But their forms I cannot see.

O, say not so!
Those sounds that flow
In murmurs of delight and woe
Come not from wings of birds.



They are the throngs
Of the poet’s songs,
Murmurs of pleasures, and pains, and wrongs,
The sound of winged words.

This is the cry
Of souls, that high
On toiling, beating pinions, fly,
Seeking a warmer clime,

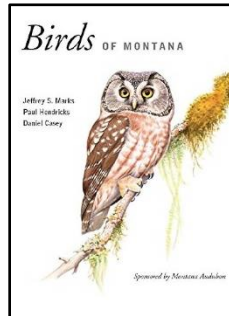


From their distant flight
Through realms of light
It falls into our world of night,
With the murmuring sound of rhyme.

A Short List of Montana-Specific Bird Books Reprinted from Montana Audubon

Birds of Montana by Marks, Hendricks & Casey.
Buteo Books, Hardcover, 672 pp, 2016.

Birds of Montana is the first comprehensive reference on the state's birds since Saunders published A Distributional List of the Birds of Montana in 1921, and it is the only work that provides a thorough review of the status, distribution, relative abundance, ecology, and conservation of the 433 bird species that have been found in the state since Montana entered the Union.

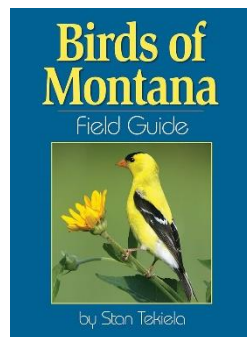


Montana Birds by Caleb Putnam and Gregory Kennedy.
Lone Pine Publishing, Paperback, 176 pp, 2005.

This compact guide profiles 150 of Montana's most abundant or notable bird species, illustrated in color. You'll also find range maps, a quick reference guide that is organized into color-coded family groupings and a map of the state's best birding sites.

Birds of Montana Field Guide by Stan Tekiela.

Adventure Publications (MN), Paperback, 353pp, 2004. With Stan Tekiela's famous field guide, bird identification is simple and informative. This book features 136 species of Montana birds, organized by color for ease of use. Do you see a yellow bird and don't know what it is? Go to the yellow section to find out.



Birding Montana by Terry McEneaney.

Globe Pequot Press, Paperback, 316pp, 1998.
The staff ornithologist for Yellowstone National Park, this book takes you on a tour of the best birding sites from the west slope of the Rock Mountains to the eastern prairies, including Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks.

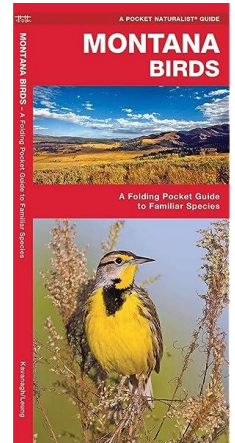
Birding Trail: Montana: 240 Birding Locations Across the Big Sky State by Chuck Robbins.

Wilderness Adventures Press, 508pp, 2014.
Chuck has divided the state into six regions: Glacier Country, Southwest Montana, Central Montana, Yellowstone Country, Missouri River Country, and Southeast Montana. Chuck describes each of the birding

locations, the key birds, the best seasons for birding, and the area description along with driving directions and GPS coordinates. There are six regional maps showing the birding locations in each region, along with over 70 maps of individual locations.

Montana Birds: A pocket folding Guide to Familiar Species by James R Kavanagh & Raymond Leung. Waterford Press. 12pp, 2001.

This beautifully illustrated guide highlights over 140 familiar and unique species and includes an ecoregion map featuring prominent bird-viewing areas. Laminated for durability, this lightweight, pocket-sized folding guide is an excellent source of portable information and ideal for field use by visitors and residents alike.



Great Places: Montana. A Recreational Guide to Montana's Public Lands and Historical Places for Birding, Hiking, photography, Fishing, Hunting, Camping by Chuck Robbins.

Wilderness Adventures Press. 406pp, 2008.
Special emphasis on bird-watching, with bird lists for each site, and times of day and year to find them. Camping, trails, driving accessibility. This comprehensive guide details Montana's vast areas of public lands, including wildlife refuges, state parks, Glacier National Park, and many other places that everyone is welcome to explore.

**Happy
Halloween
From
Your
Friends
At
Five
Valleys
Audubon
Society
!!**



Welcome New Members

Mary Denevi Brook Lenox
Rustem Medora Barbara Rudio
Frederick Skinner Lauren Smith
Janet Sticht



Thanks to Wendy Ford, for her donation in memory of our dear friend Carole Toppins.

Please sign up for emailed newsletters!

If you subscribed to through National Audubon, we may not have your email address. To receive our newsletter and other bird news by email, and to help save trees and reduce 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. 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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