

November 2023

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

- **November 6th, 6:00-7:45pm:** The board meeting will be held in the Blackfoot Room of the Missoula Public Library.
- **Saturday, November 11th, 9:00am:** Half-day field trip to Maclay Flat. Meet at 9:00 am in the Maclay Flat parking lot. Expect two miles of level hiking.
- **November 13th, 7:00pm:** Our program meeting will be led by Ben Deeble, who will present his talk on Sharp-tailed Grouse Restoration in Western Montana.
- **Saturday, November 18th, 10:00am:** Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the field trip leader at the Visitor's Center and expect approximately two miles of level hiking.
- **Sunday, December 3rd, 8:00am:** All-day field trip to the Mission Valley to look for raptors. Meet at 8:00 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot.

Sharp-tailed Grouse Restoration

Join us at our monthly chapter meeting on Monday, November 13, 2023, at 7:00 PM when our speaker, Ben Deeble, will present his talk on Sharp-tailed Grouse Restoration in Western Montana.



Sharp-tailed Grouse disappeared from western Montana in 2000. With the restoration of Trumpeter Swans and the natural recolonization of Sandhill Cranes, these grouse represent the only historically common breeding

bird in western Montana entirely absent for over two decades. An ambitious plan was finalized in 2017 by a Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Montana State University - Bozeman, landowners, and an upland conservation group. After genetic analysis of historic samples, the first sharp-tails were transplanted from southeast Montana to private lands in the Blackfoot and Bitterroot Valleys in 2021, and the transplants have continued annually ever since. Nearly 300 birds have been transplanted, new breeding leks have been established by the birds of Western Montana, and successful breeding has been documented.

Ben Deeble is a consultant with BD Upland Services and President of Big Sky Upland Bird Association. He completed a M.S. Degree at the University of Montana in 1996 analyzing the conservation of Sharp-tailed Grouse in the western U.S., while monitoring a remnant population of grouse in the Blackfoot Valley. He subsequently shifted his attention to the conservation of Greater Sage-Grouse for a dozen years, first in seasonal positions with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the Bureau of Land Management, then while on the Missoula staff of the National Wildlife Federation and Montana Audubon. In 2020, he contracted with a public/private team to attempt restoration of Sharp-tailed Grouse to western Montana.

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 also have the option of watching the meeting over the zoom link listed below.

<https://umontana.zoom.us/j/98835729009>

Peeps From the Board: 5 Tips for Beginning Birders By Margo Stoney

As our fast-paced culture continues to demand more and more from us daily, we find reprieve in activities like birding that help us disconnect from technology and remind us of our greater purpose to care for nature and our planet. Regardless of your age, gender, race or background, birding is for you and there's never a bad time to learn! I'm a novice birder, and I'm excited to share some tips for wherever you are in your birding journey.



1. **Embrace Being a Beginner:** Learning a new skill is a humbling experience. Naturally, we just want to be good at that thing right away; it's easy to forget that the journey of being a beginner is actually half the fun. One thing that's easy to forget is that **birding is NOT just about being able to identify the most birds.** We all bird for different reasons: mental health, connecting with nature, promoting conservation, the list could go on. **Birding is what you want it to be.** Enjoy where you are in your journey, and don't take yourself too seriously.
2. **Use Available Resources:** Good news beginners, there are so many great resources out there for birders to make learning to identify birds fun and easy for everyone!

There's a lot of new technology available to help us identify birds. One of the most popular and accurate resources is Cornell Lab of Ornithology's **Merlin Bird ID app**. The app is easy-to-use and can aid in identifying birds by visual ID, sound ID or photo ID. The app is free to download.

Having a go-to bird guidebook is great for bird ID in the field but it's also a nice tool to have at home to help study birds between outings. Some favorites are **Sibley Guides, Peterson Guides, and Audubon Guides**. I personally like the approachable, simplified **Birds of Montana Field Guide**.

Missoula has a lot of opportunities for getting out with other birders. Five Valleys Audubon Society hosts **free Beginning Bird Walks** once a month. To

see a full list of upcoming FVAS birding events, visit fvadubon.org/calendar or follow FVAS on Facebook at facebook.com/fvamisoula.

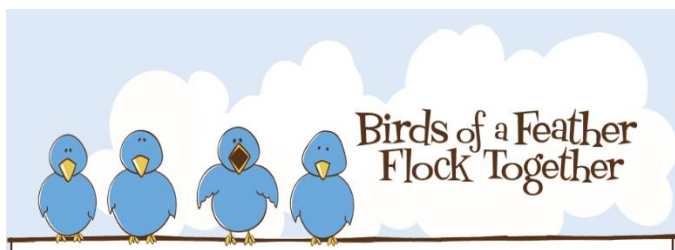
If you like learning in a classroom setting, Elena Ulev teaches **Birdwatching for Beginners** class and a **Continuing Birdwatching** class at the **Lifelong Learning Center** in Missoula several times a year. Classes include an in-person classroom session and a field day. You can see upcoming classes at missoulaclass.com.

No binoculars? No problem! The **Missoula Public Library** has binoculars and birding backpacks that can be checked out for free with your library card. Visit the library or call 406-721-2665 for more information.

3. **Take Baby Steps:** Once I was sharing with someone how overwhelming it felt to learn the names and attributes of all the birds I saw; their advice to me was to **just focus on learning and remembering a few birds at a time.** I found this helpful because now I'm okay with seeing a bird and not knowing what it is.

Get started by getting to know your backyard birds – the shape of their beak, any memorable markings, what they look like when they fly, the sounds they make, where they like to hang out. Become an expert on three or four birds in your backyard and then move on to learning the next handful of birds.





Field Trip Summary

By Larry Weeks

Saturday, September 23rd: The field trip to the Pablo Reservoir was disappointing due to the lack of shorebirds. I had scouted the reservoir four days earlier and had seven species of shorebirds. But two days of wet, cool weather caused most of the birds to continue their migration south. We ended up with 3 Killdeer, 2 Greater Yellowlegs, 2 Baird's Sandpipers, and 2 unidentified peeps. We did find a Peregrine Falcon which is notorious for chasing shorebirds and was probably a factor in the lack of birds. There were large quantities of ducks, American Coots, Ring-billed Gulls, and American Pipits. Other raptors included Red-tailed Hawks, Bald Eagles, Northern Harriers, and Osprey. A stop by a small pond bordered by willows produced a Yellow Warbler, a Clay-colored Sparrow, American Goldfinches, and several White-crowned Sparrows that were taking a bath in some small puddles.

We also had a flock of at least 15 Sandhill Cranes that were walking around on the mud flats of the drawn down reservoir. There were 12 people on the field trip, and I recorded 37 species.



Saturday, October 7th: I led four people to the raptor banding site at Rogers Pass which is operated by Rob Domenech's Raptor View Research Institute. The participants included Al & Michelle Jensen, Jami FitzGerald and Kari Altenhofen. After spending the first two hours without a catch, an immature Golden Eagle made a pass at the pigeon and then flew behind the blind. After a few seconds, it returned to attack the pigeon and it was trapped. While the eagle was being processed in the tent, Chloe Hernandez (Raptor View assistant) caught an immature Red-tailed Hawk. During the ensuing three hours, the trapping crew caught 4 Sharp-shinned Hawks and a Merlin. Other birds that made passes at the lure included an adult Red-tailed Hawk, a Northern Harrier, an American Kestrel, and several Sharp-shinned Hawks. There was a minimal flight of 7 Golden Eagles, so they were lucky to catch one. The eagle catch was redemption for Jamie and Kari who had participated in an October 14, 2018, showy trip in which the bow net failed with an eagle on the pigeon.

4. **Find Birding Buddies:** Birding with an expert is obviously beneficial because they can help you identify new birds and be a resource for answering questions and confirming sightings. While an expert birder may seem intimidating, most of them are more than happy to share their knowledge and excitement about birds. On the other end of the spectrum, there's something fun about birding with other beginners. Some of my favorite birding experiences have been with other beginner birders, learning together while casually passing around a set of binoculars and trying to decide if that bird soaring over our campsite is a juvenile Bald Eagle or a Red-tailed Hawk.

5. **Practice Good Birding Etiquette:** Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird site shares these ethical birding guidelines.

- Stay at a distance where you are not agitating birds or modifying their behavior, especially near nests.
- Leave dogs at home or on a leash if in an area with ground nesting birds. Shorebirds, such as Snowy Plovers, that nest on beaches are especially vulnerable to loose dogs.
- Limit use of phishing (imitating birds) and playback — Do not use in heavily birded areas or for sensitive species.
- Stay on designated trails; do not trample vegetation.
- Respect private property rights; only enter with express permission.
- Follow all traffic rules, drive the speed limit, don't park on the road, keep eyes on the road.
- Always be polite and courteous to non-birders you encounter; share your knowledge when appropriate.
- If birding with others, be respectful of the ability of all group members, and be encouraging and share your knowledge with beginners.



Missoula Christmas Bird Count

By Larry Weeks



The Missoula Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will take place on Saturday, December 16, 2023. The Count is a circle with a 7.5-mile radius, centered at the intersection of Reserve St. and I-90. The area within the circle will be covered by small groups and individuals. These areas will be assigned ahead of the Count Day. You can participate by joining a group in the field or by being a feeder watcher. If you would like to take part in the field Count, contact Larry Weeks at bwsgenea@gmail.com, 406-549-5632 (land line) or 406-540-3064 (cell). Larry will provide different options for you to choose from. Also contact Larry if you want to be a feeder watcher. We also tally unusual birds not seen on Count Day that are seen during Count Week. Count Week includes the three days before and three days after Count Day.

The Count Day will end with a potluck dinner at the home of Larry Weeks, 2428 Wet Kent, which is near Rosauers. Potluck guests are welcome to arrive at 6:00 pm. Dinner will commence at 6:30 pm. Please bring your favorite potluck offering, or A-L, bring a salad or dessert, and M-Z, a hot dish. After the potluck, we will tabulate the results of the field Count.

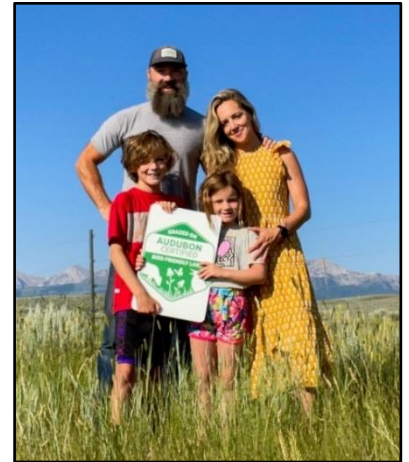


Bald Eagle photo by Janice Miller

News from Montana Audubon

North Bridger Bison becomes the 1st Audubon Certified bison ranch in Montana!

North Bridger Bison, located in Wilsall (about 30 miles north of Livingston), is the first Audubon Certified bison ranch in Montana! This means that North Bridger Bison can now use the Audubon Certified bird-friendly seal, a product label that lets consumers know that these products come from bison that grazed on ranches managed for birds and biodiversity.



The Skoglund family on their ranch, holding a sign with the Audubon Certified seal. Photo courtesy of Matt Skoglund

Learn more about the Audubon Conservation Ranching program in Montana and North Bridger Bison in this short video from Kyle Dudgeon Creative (the link takes to you the Montana Audubon website, and you'll need to scroll to the bottom of the page to see the video).

<https://mtaudubon.org/audubon-and-partners-announce-first-bird-friendly-certified-bison-ranch-in-montana/>

Save the date for the 2024 Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival

Though next summer seems far away, we are already hard at work planning the next Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival!

The festival will be held in Helena, May 31 – June 2, 2024. Montana Audubon is partnering with Last Chance Audubon, and we are working to put together some fantastic field trips. We are excited to share those details as soon as they are finalized! We are also going to have multiple hotel options, including a budget-friendly option to stay at Carroll College, our main festival location.

More information is coming soon!

Welcome New Members

Carolyn Bell
William H. Clarke
Chris La Tray

*Gratitude Unlocks
the Fullness of Life.*

~ Melody Beattie



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.
(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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