

April 2024

# Birding Observer

Newsletter of the Five Valleys Audubon Society



## CALENDAR

**Monday, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 6:00-7:45pm:**

The board meeting will be held in the Blackfoot Room of the Missoula Public Library.

**Saturday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 4:00pm:**

Five-hour late-day field trip to the Ninepipes area to look for Short-eared Owls. Meet in the Missoula College parking lot at 4:00 pm. Look for a light blue Toyota RAV4.

**Monday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 7:00pm:** Our April program meeting will focus on Peregrine Falcons in Montana. See details to the right.

**Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 10:00am:**

Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the field trip leader at the Visitor's Center and expect two miles of level hiking.

**April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 8:00 am:** This month's Town Bound Birding Series will celebrate Earth Day! We will bird the loop trail through Greenough Municipal Park. Expect early Spring migrants like American Dippers, woodpeckers, and more! Park on Monroe Street, across from Locust Street.

**Saturday, April 27<sup>th</sup>, 8:00am:**

Full-day field trip to Brown's Lake led by Jim Brown. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 8:00 am. Minimal hiking will be involved.

## Montana Peregrine Falcon Populations

Please join us on Monday, April 8, 2024, at 7:00 PM for our monthly chapter meeting when our speaker, Jay Sumner, will present his talk: Montana Peregrine Falcon Populations.



The Peregrine Falcon, considered by most authorities to be the fastest animal on earth, was almost extinct in Montana in the early 1980s. Over the course of several years, The Peregrine Fund, in conjunction with federal, state, and private organizations, introduced over 600 young peregrines into Montana, which kick-started the falcon's recovery. In 1999, Jay Sumner and Ralph Rogers brought their combined raptor research experience of over 80 years, along with federal and state biologists, to initiate intensive surveys of the Montana peregrine population. Jay will share with us stories gathered through his decades of experience working to study and protect these apexes and at-risk predators. He last spoke to Five Valleys Audubon in 2017, and we are very excited to hear updates on the status of Peregrine Falcons in Montana.

Jay Sumner is the Executive Director of the Montana Peregrine Institute. A Wildlife Biologist, he has a B.S. in biology from Montana State University-Billings and an M.S. in biology from the University of Montana. Jay has been studying Peregrine Falcons and other raptors for over 50 years. He has coordinated the Montana Peregrine Falcon survey for close to 25 years. He has also worked on grizzly bear population studies in Yellowstone Park, the Scapegoat wilderness, and the Bob Marshall wilderness. He enjoys hiking, rafting, fishing, and falconry.

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/99173579749>

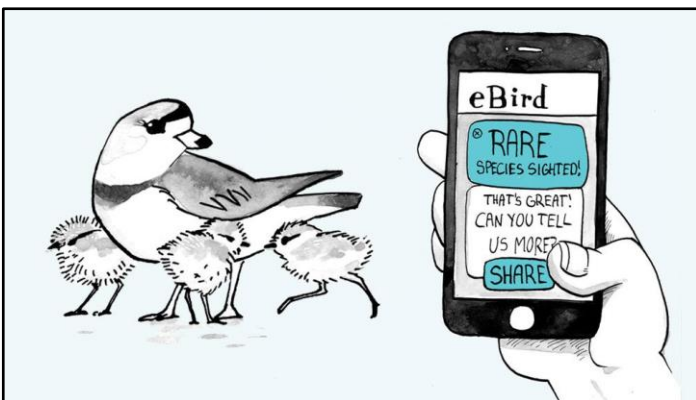
## Peeps From Your Board: The Human Factor By Thomas Kallmeyer

Technology. It's changed every aspect of our life since the first simple machine was created, at an ever-increasing rate. The last two decades have seen the rise of connectivity and placed incredibly powerful machines in the palms of our hands. Some have chosen to apply that connectivity and computing power to monitor avian populations on planet Earth and, in the process, have fundamentally changed the way in which the majority of us approach the pastime of birding.

It began with word of mouth, then the telegraph and telephone were invented. Then the answering machine, followed by the digital message board, and then the digital group. Each advancement has been adopted by birders and birding groups to get the word out.

Enter the present. News of a rare bird or extraordinary sighting can be broadcast almost instantaneously across multiple platforms: eBirders receive notifications about birds reported within a time frame and geographic area that they are able to specify, instant messaging and texting keep groups and searchers in contact. All with the object of enjoying the company of birds, whether they're rare, common or somewhere in between.

The single constant factor in this evolution of the hobby, obsession, or whatever you prefer to call the activity of observing birds is the human factor: the birder in the field. Whether a casual hobbyist, nature lover, citizen scientist, devoted birder or crazed twitcher, it comes down to the individual to make observations and report data. And the more accurate that data, the more valuable it is.



The popularity of birding has also skyrocketed along with this increase in technology as more people discover the delights of observing birds in the wild and the increased ease of finding rare or desired species. It's also become more competitive for those who indulge in that aspect of birding, with the rise of eBird and the ability to see multiple aspects of other birder's lists. The abundant resources available online make learning, getting advice, accessing locations for birding, attending events, and joining organizations that support the welfare of birds easier than it has ever been.

This recent rise in popularity does have a downside, which is increased pressure on bird populations. And that is where individuals and organizations can make a difference. By following and promoting good ethics, such as those set by the American Birding Association, we can mitigate this pressure to preserve that which we most enjoy. As birders it is up to us to make the choice to make a difference and keep the human factor in birding.

You can review the American Birding Association's code of ethics on Five Valleys Audubon's website: <https://fvaudubon.org/birding/>

### Today By Billy Collins

If ever there were a spring day so perfect,  
so uplifted by a warm intermittent breeze  
that it made you want to throw  
open all the windows in the house  
and unlatch the door to the canary's cage,  
indeed, rip the little door from its jamb,  
a day when the cool brick paths  
and the garden bursting with peonies  
seemed so etched in sunlight  
that you felt like taking  
a hammer to the glass paperweight  
on the living room end table,  
releasing the inhabitants  
from their snow-covered cottage  
so they could walk out,  
holding hands and squinting  
into this larger dome of blue and white,  
well, today is just that kind of day.

## Lee Metcalf NWR Field Trip Summary By Larry Weeks

### Saturday, February 17<sup>th</sup>:

Twelve people attended the Beginning Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge. Due to some recent cold temperatures, there was no open water in Pond 5 and very little open water in Pond 6 which is next to the Visitor's Center.

However, the Red-winged Blackbirds were singing which made it feel like spring. The bird that attracted my



Northern Flicker  
Photo by Dawn Key

attention was a female Great-tailed Grackle that was perched on the island in Pond 6. It was very cooperative and allowed everyone to get a scope view. Other birds in the open water included Gadwall, Mallards, Northern Pintails, Green-winged Teal, and a Ring-necked Duck. There were several swans on the ice and some incoming swans were trumpeting. Alex Kearney took photos of the incoming Trumpeter Swans and one of them had yellow legs and feet which is a leucistic characteristic. A Wilson's Snipe was spotted but it flew before everyone got to see it. There were two Wilson's Snipes when we returned. On the short hike to Pond 8, we had Song Sparrows, an American Robin, and two Bald Eagles. There was considerable open water in Pond 8 which had an estimated 80 Mallards, three Hooded Mergansers, two American Coots, and a Ruddy Duck. A Northern Shrike was perched in a shrub next to Pond 8. Additional hiking along the Kenai Trail produced three American Goldfinches, a flock of California Quail, and we heard a Virginia Rail. There were more swans on the ice in Pond 8. The field trip then moved to the Wildlife Viewing Area where we looked for a Great Horned Owl but didn't find one. I have no explanation for why I failed to scope the cavity nest. Except for three Bald Eagles and a Northern Flicker, the Wildlife Viewing Area was quiet. When we returned to the parking lot, a gentleman informed us that there was an owl in the cavity nest. I went back and found that the entire head of the Great Horned Owl was visible. We had 30 species for the trip.

## Workshop for Beginning & Intermediate Birders By Larry Weeks

The Five Valleys Audubon Society is offering a workshop for beginning and intermediate birders. It will consist of four classroom sessions, which are scheduled on Thursday evenings from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. Three of the sessions are still available on April 4<sup>th</sup>, April 11<sup>th</sup>, and April 18<sup>th</sup>. The sessions will be held in the meeting room at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Regional Office at 3201 Spurgin Road. The topics for the three remaining sessions are as follows:

On Thursday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, we will cover Migration (30 min), Warblers (30 min), and Shorebirds (30 min).

On Thursday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, we will cover Woodpeckers (30 min), Sparrows (30 min), and Birding-by-ear (30 min).

On Thursday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, we will cover Raptors (2 hrs).

The cost is \$10 per session, and you can just show up.

## Mission Valley Field Trip Summary By Thomas Kallmeyer



**Saturday, February 24<sup>th</sup>:** Seventeen participants braved the gray winter skies and an impending cold front to explore the back roads of the Mission Valley in search of wintering and resident bird species. We observed a female Northern Harrier being mobbed by Common Ravens, then dive-bombed by a Prairie Falcon, all the while keeping a tight grip on her prey. The Prairie Falcon circled around us, then engaged with a male Northern Harrier for an enjoyable acrobatic display that lasted several minutes. Cody Lane spotted a Yellow-headed Blackbird in a large flock of Red-winged Blackbirds, a great bird for the location and date. Two owl species were observed, Great Horned Owl and Long-eared Owl, as well as 2 Blue Jays in Polson. Other species of note were Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Shrike, and Townsend's Solitaire. Thank you to all who attended!

While raptor numbers were below normal and not many birds were active, we tallied 41 individual raptors of six species and 1,373 individual birds of 25 species.

View eBird trip report:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/207094>

## Upcoming Glacier National Park Trip By Thomas Kallmeyer

**June 24-27:** Join Five Valleys Audubon for four days and three nights of birding in and around Glacier National Park with two nights at Chewing Blackbones Campground close to the Many Glacier entrance and a night at Fish Creek Campground on the West side of the park. We'll search for Boreal Chickadees, White-tailed Ptarmigans, Harlequin Ducks, and many more and enjoy the impressive scenery and wildlife that the Crown of the Continent has to offer.

Vehicle passes are not required for the Many Glacier or Saint Mary's entrances during this time, the North Fork and Going to the Sun (West) entrances do require vehicle permits from 06:00-15:00. Entrance passes are required for all vehicles entering the park.

As always, participation is limited to 14 people for this outing, so please reserve your place as soon as possible. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Andrea Stierle ([andrea.stierle@mso.umt.edu](mailto:andrea.stierle@mso.umt.edu)) or Jean Duncan ([Treasurer@FVAudubon.org](mailto:Treasurer@FVAudubon.org)) to reserve your spot. Dinners will be potlucks. Fees to be announced when the roster is filled and will include a \$10.00 donation to the chapter as is standard for multi-day field trips and camping fees to be split among the group.



Harlequin Duck  
Photo by Thomas Kallmeyer

*"Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity."*

~ John Muir, *Our National Parks*

## News from Montana Audubon

### Wings Across the Big Sky Registration Open!

Visit the Montana Audubon website to learn more and to register online. Along with Last Chance Audubon, we've put together a fantastic lineup of trips, speakers, and more- you won't want to miss it!



If you're on our mailing list, check your mail for the registration brochure, or visit our website (<https://mtaudubon.org/events/wings/>) to view & download the brochure. Register online -and early! -for the best field trip availability. You can also register via mail. If you have any questions or issues, please email the Montana Audubon office ([info@mtaudubon.org](mailto:info@mtaudubon.org)) or call us at 406-443-3949.

### Long-billed Curlew Surveys

Spring is here, and with it comes the familiar "cur-leeec" call of the Long-Billed Curlew, an icon of America's prairies. These birds depend on Montana's grasslands for breeding and continue to decline across their range due to the loss of this habitat due to development. With this decline, more research is needed to assess the health and conservation needs of the population- so we need your help!



Join Montana Audubon's Long-billed Curlew surveys this summer! There are two survey windows: April 8th - May 7th, and May 8th - May 31st. The training session is on March 26th at 6:30 pm on Zoom, and the recording will be available online afterward.

Interested in participating, or want more info? Email Gwynne at [gwynne@mtaudubon.org](mailto:gwynne@mtaudubon.org) and visit the Long-Billed Curlew Survey page on our website: <https://www.montanabirdsurveys.com/long-billed-curlew.html>

## Welcome New Members

Shoni Card-Wilson  
Vernon Grund  
Keith & Deborah Beldon  
Lori Mathews  
Amy Sugeno

Jeannine Flaten  
Michael Mason  
Gretchen Hooker  
Peggy Ames Nerud



**Be an environmental and fiscal champion.**

**If you are able, please sign up for emailed newsletters rather than hard copies.**

**If you subscribe to Audubon through National Audubon, we may not have your email address. To receive our newsletter and other birding news by email, saving trees and reducing 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).**

### Join Five Valleys Audubon Society

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.)

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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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